



# Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

Volume 21, No. 1 2019

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## Executive Director's Column

It was placed high on the wall, but not too high, at the end of the room, between other paintings, but not in competition with them, for the others neither commanded the attention or the respect that The Bones Player does, at least for me.

The first thing that strikes you is the size, some 3 feet across and 4 feet down, that familiar figure, and yet not familiar so large portrait of this unknown bone player. His eyes seem to follow you, and reach out to you, as if to acknowledge your presence, and assure you that you two have a connection. His clothes, clearly of a by gone era, and yet so fashionable, and complementary, making one wish they

could be duplicated, and would they look so good if you were the one wearing them?

And then there's the hands, holding those pure white bones, with the fingers just like Percy showed me, low those 40 something years ago, and yet a fraction of the time when the bones player played, when the bones player learned, when he was in his time.

Then a thousand questions enter your head, Who was he? Where did he learn? What kind of music did he play? Did the people of his generation feel the same reverence for him as we who play his instrument (Continued on Page 3)

## Darryl 'Spike Bones' Muhrer

One of the most entertaining members of the Rhythm Bones Society is Darryl Muhrer. Here he described himself in a recent biography in a Bones Fest program booklet.

"My first performance was as Dr. Spike in June 1978, and inspired by Percy Danforth from whom I learned to play rhythm bones, I soon changed my stage name to Spike Bones. I gather my performance 'vits' and pieces from the period 1840-1940, an era I call pre-TV entertainment. I have developed a lot of my character and material as a street performer in Chicago and New Orleans. Although I have played with a lot of Irish, Old-Time, Folk and Jazz bands, I consider myself as much a dancer as a musician. A nineteen year old membership with RBS has provided me with great inspiration, friendships, and rhythm bones insight into the art and history of rhythm bones."

Darryl 'Spike Bones' Muhrer was born in Columbia, MO on December 15, 1943, and went to high school and college there. He earned a Master's Degree in Education from Northwestern University, and later studied educational technology and video production. He served in the Army, taught broadcasting at Northeast Missouri State University and led classes in creativity and organizational change for the Department of Energy. He has been an artist in residence and substitute teacher with the Chicago Public Schools. He has two sons and three grandkids. He returned to Columbia in 2010 to look after him mom, Madaline, who passed in 2015. She loved

attending Bones Fests.

While in Chicago, Spike put on a show in Lincoln Park Zoo performing on weekends near the lion house. For over 20 yeas he did his 'Bones Show' accompanied by a pianist at 240 schools across the Midwest. For a long time he wanted to convert this show to a theater piece, and he described that effort later in this article.

Spike says, "Something I learned from Bones Fests as well as the fabulous musicians I play the rhythm bones with every Sunday in Columbia, Missouri is....I'm not a musician. I am a performing artist (Continued on Page 4)



Darryl 'Spike Bones' Muhrer inspired RBS member Art Sands to edit Spike into this creative photograph.

## Editorial

This issue on Page 1 continues member profiles with Darryl ‘Spike Bones’ Muhrer. Spike first entertained us at Bones Fest III when our society was organized with Spike a Founding Member. He will be at the Blues Bones Fest to continue that tradition.

At Bones Fest XXII last year, we heard about a New Hampshire rhythm bones player named Cecil Rivers who claimed a record as the fastest rhythm bones player at 18.9 beats per second or 1134 beats per minute, the 18.9 being calculated as 1134/60. The record has been claimed a Guinness World Record, but this could not be proven. However, this might suggest that some sort of a competition existed that RBS needs to know about. So if you are in the Boston or New Hampshire area, there is an opportunity for some research.

Also at last year’s Bones Fest was Tom Connolly from Ireland who brings us a story of Steve Throp from the UK whose grandfather entertained troops in the trenches during World War I. Thanks, Tom for a touching story.

I am practicing daily for the Blues Bones Fest (see Page 3 for an update), and finally called to reserve my Shack Up Inn room. I have a few ‘Blues’ CDs that I practice with, and I hope I learn enough at the Blues Bones Fest to feel comfortable playing with live blues musicians.

## Letters to the Editor

Enjoyed reading “A Set of Presentation Minstrel Bones” in the newsletter. The Yale University article identifies them as “possibly rosewood,” but the wood appears to be padauk (aka vermilion). See for yourself--

Padauk (aka vermilion) Google search [https://www.google.com/search?q=padauk&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewj5vL-WHp83eAhVMRKwKHb9UAXYQ\\_AUIEigB&biw=1210&bih=1285&dpr=2](https://www.google.com/search?q=padauk&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewj5vL-WHp83eAhVMRKwKHb9UAXYQ_AUIEigB&biw=1210&bih=1285&dpr=2)

*Scott Miller.* For reference--<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B015TJ3CDS/>

Many thanks for keeping this lapsed & former member on the email list.

It occurs to me that you might be interested in my personal connection with Percy Danforth. Years ago I lived in Ann Arbor MI and knew absolutely zilch about The Bones or Percy D., but as it happened our daughter was taking piano lessons from Fran (Mrs. Percy) Danforth. One evening I caught a performance of the Gemini (a couple of local lads, identical twins, who entertained and performed on quite a number of folk instruments, including The Bones, and in the course of the show they got old Percy up on stage to hold forth; quite a show and I was vastly impressed. My wife mentioned that Percy was Fran’s husband.

I took over the weekly transportation detail and while our daughter pounded away upstairs I introduced myself to Percy downstairs, asked all the right questions, and he taught me how to manage the bones. Over the ensuing weeks & months Percy & I became good friends and remained so until he left us in 1991, I think it was.

Did you know that, in addition to his solo shows and appearances with other musicians, he used to perform with the University of Michigan’s Percussion Ensemble? Wife Fran, herself a professional teacher of music and composer, always seemed a little embarrassed by Percy’s musical exploits until his collaboration with the Percussion Ensemble which in her eyes evidently conferred a measure of dignity and legitimacy, and she quit rolling her eyes when the subject of ‘The Bones’ arose.

Anyhow, I thought that you and maybe others might be interested in this tenuous connection to one of the more illustrious figures in our field of interest. I still have a set of hickory bones (now a little shopworn) that he signed and gave to me. Best regards, *Robert Lindy*

David “Doctor Hamfat” Marin – I have been a harmonica player for 50 years and during that time I also played washboard. I partnered many years with Jimmie Stagger and accompanied or partnered with musicians ranging from Honeyboy Edwards to Lazy Lester to Bo Diddley to Bukka White to Buddy Guy and dozens more famous or unknown good national

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The Rhythm Bones Players welcomes letters to the Editor and article on any aspect of bones playing. All material submitted for consideration is subject to editing and condensation.

Rhythm Bones Central web site: [rhythmbones.org](http://rhythmbones.org)

acts and bad bar bands than I can recall or you would recognize. About 30 years ago I was given a pair of maple bones and after long effort I learned to play a triplet. My friend of over 30 years, the great orchestral percussionist, Bill Vits, has been my inspiration in recent years to get more serious about hand drums and bones. I am a wood carver/sculptor and make bones out of anything that “has a set of them” in it. I also have some “real ones” from Steve Brown and Sandor Slo-movitz. I prefer to play Irish style - one handed - most of the time, occasionally with a harp in a rack. *David Marin*

## Bones Calendar

**Bones Fest XXIII, the Blues Fest.,  
May 2-5, 2019, Clarksdale, MS, Randy Seppala, host.**

**NTCMA Bones Contest.** October 3-4-5-6, 2019, Fremont, Nebraska. Bones

(Continued from Page 1)

today? Just being in front of him is returning to an old friend, and I greet him, the way he greets me, with silent knowing that there is meaning there, that there is magic there, and hoping just a little bit will some how seep into your hands and your bones, and all those things you think represent his playing will also be true of your playing.

I returned to The Bone Player, as I sometimes do, making the pilgrimage up to the second floor of the American Wing, after giving my representation of rhythm bones to the 50 something people in the audience in the Instrument Collect at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. It was like walking down to the cabin of an old friend, saying, "I just happened to be in the area, and I wanted to say Hello."

Though many images of The Bone Player circulate on the Internet, in books, and other medium, there is nothing like standing before the portrait painted some 161 years ago by William Sidney Mount, and a pilgrimage I would highly recommend. [Check out Steve playing in front of the painting at <https://youtu.be/MIBnfpZ4bs>.]

Well the snow is starting to recede and I'm making my way to the number of St. Patricks Day gigs, meaning spring is opening it's eye's, and yawning a bit, starting it's yearly wake up. the New England Folk Festival is literally around the corner, which means The Blues Bones Fest in Clarksdale, Ms will soon be here.

Located in the heart of blues history, Clarksdale is not only the former home of blues greats Howling' Wolf and Muddy Waters, but it is the location reported to have been the meeting place between Robert Johnson and the devil which legend has it gained Johnson his uncanny ability to play guitar.

I have loved the blues since first playing in a high school blues band, and the music does seep into your bones! We will be in the heart of it, staying at the Shack Up Inn, playing in the Juke Joints, and getting to know the people of Clarksdale!

I implore you don't miss this one, and who knows perhaps a number of us will gather at midnight down by the cross roads to see if just a little of Robert Johnson's magic just might rub off on our bones! *Steve Brown*

## Bones Fest XXIII Update

BONES FEST XXIII is just around the corner, only 6 weeks away; we have over 30 bones players and future bones players registered and anticipate more will get on board. When I spoke with Bill Talbot, owner of Shack Up Inn, last week there were only 10 rooms/shacks left in the block he set aside for us, so if you want to stay at the Shack Up for the full Mississippi blues experience get a reservation soon. There are also other motels and hotels available in town, I would suggest a new one called Traveler's Hotel. It looks like we have several beginners and newer bones players coming in and that is a great situation in that rhythm bones was once more prevalent in the blues and reintroducing the bones back into the blues is one of the goals of Bones Fest XXIII. Of course all genres of music and styles of bones playing are welcome as always.

Thursday evening May 2nd will be a hospitality and greeting session at Shack Up Chapel with hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar from 5 to 8, with blues music and bones jamming going on. Friday and Saturday breakfast will be served from 7:30 to 9:00, and lunch from 12:00 to 1:30 by Ms. Sasha Montry, our fabulous local caterer, cost included in registration fee. Evening meals will be on your own

at local cuisines. However, on Friday a local vendor, Mr. Bobby Cook will be at the Shack Up doing a crawfish boil from 4:30 to 7:00, before night jams at 8:00 at Stan Street's Hambone Art & Music Gallery, featuring The Hopeless Case Bar on 2nd Street in Clarksdale. We will have music happening and space for teaching bones in back and working on our individual performances for our public show at Ground Zero blues Club on Saturday evening. Ground Zero features "Southern Soul Food" so if you want to chow down on the real thing before the show it is exceptional. I had a pulled pork plater with meat hot out of cooker last week "WOW"! The climax of every Bones Fest is the "individual bones playing performances" which will take place on the famous stage of Ground Zero Blues Club, where every blues man wants to play. We will have the stage from 7:00 to 9:00 for our performances followed by one of my very favorite blues bands the fantastic "Organgrinders" – "Come and party with the Monkey". Enjoy amazing music, food, Southern hospitality and fellowship at Bones Fest XXIII.

If you are selling bones try to keep yourself mobile as we will be moving around in the evenings. Workshops and day time activities are still in planning stages. Many local musicians have expressed interest in the festival and will be at Shack Up and be available for jam sessions. *Randy Seppala*



**May 2, 3, 4, & 5, 2019**  
**Based at "Shack Up Inn"**

**On the Historic Hopson Plantation**

**Highway 49 South – 3 miles south of the Crossroads Marker**

**Reserve a room or a shack: [shackup@shackupinn.com](mailto:shackup@shackupinn.com)**

**(662) 624-8329**

**Information available at [rhythmbones.org](http://rhythmbones.org)**

**\$85.00 Registration Fee**

**Hosted by Randy "DaBones Man" Seppala - [dabonesman@gmail.com](mailto:dabonesman@gmail.com)**

(Continued from Page 1)  
combining with equal gravity...Music - Motion - and EMOTION! For example watch *Redwing* at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyKLHmNDtY4>.”

There is a short section in a video that shows a young Spike Bones performing at a summer festival in Chicago. Go to <https://mediaburn.org/video/image-union-municipal-mirth/> and move to 14:24 in the video. It is delightful particularly for those who have only known him as a RBS member.



Children listen to Spike Bones at Pirate's Cove Children's Theme Park in Elk Grove Village. File photograph from Daily Herald, August 1982

In 1991, Spike joined the Lonie Walker's jazz band playing most weekends at the Underground Wonder Bar in Chicago. From that relationship, Spike self produced a limited release CD titled "Bones Meets Jazz."

Another recurring venue was street performers on the Chicago Transit Authority's historical rapid transit train where he was at times joined with city officials.

As for his connection with Percy Danforth, he once wrote this. "I remember the weekend I spent with Percy Danforth at a university in La Crosse, Wisconsin. The university paid Percy to come as a performer, and scheduled him for two all day street fairs, several luncheons and dinner performances as well as a evening appearance with the symphony. Percy was physically drained and his legs hurt, but he just kept on boning.

"That weekend I went along as Percy's

go-for, chauffeur, and assistant. We discussed everything from music to his life as an architect during the depression. I will always remember him saying to me: Spike, always remember every intelligent plan fulfills a need."

Spike with Scott Miller hosted Bones Fest XII in St. Louis, and to read the details search the online newsletters for the Volume 10, No 4 issue or watch 'https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fn-MegTzLeJ8.' We had great facilities and program at the University of Missouri at St. Louis with plans for a riverboat dinner, but some events got canceled for security reasons due to the 100,000 person political rally under the 'Arch' for the 2008 Obama-Biden campaign.

Spike's performances at annual Bones Fests are remarkable. One feature is getting the audience involved by passing out rhythm bones and other musical noise makers and going into the audience. His performances have included a skeleton costume with red fluorescent rhythm bones lit by ultraviolet light, rhythm bones with long red flags attached, juggling rings, limberjack doll, violin, large cue sheets for the audience, skeleton marionette, animal rhythm bones, vegetarian (wood) rhythm bones, and he has given workshops on how to perform like he does. And at a couple of Bones Fests he has put on a shorter performance of his 'Bones Show' that he describes next.

"Now I focus my professional attention on a one-act theatrical presentation titled *Skin and Bones - Hair and Guts*. I define Spike Bones as a 150 theatrical character - part fact - part fiction. This play has allowed me to bring 40 years of boning experience to share with folks in a one hour show. This is my Sunset Show.

"During the last four years, I have been focused on creating a two acre venue called "Bones Camp" sometimes called, "A Poor man's Disneyland. Thank you Mary Lee and Frank Sweet for your visit. You are my witnesses. Originally this camp was to be a venue for my show as a rhythm bones podcast.

"Some of my goals were met, however, the tail was wagging the dog. That is the main reason I've been missing the last two years from these Bones Fests.

"To see a documentary on Bones Camp, A Poor Man's Disneyland go to <https://vimeo.com/214239758>.

"I just purchased my first home and am in the process of closing down Bones Camp. I am simplifying and refocusing my life. I will see you all in Mississippi in May come hail or high water. Looking forward to hearing rhythm bones and your stories."

Spike was interviewed on television recently and promoted the Rhythm Bones Society. Check it out at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PL0o51w-HVCwWsTFDJYp2FeNJ32uZV\\_tc-d4&v=RJjyR-orRuE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PL0o51w-HVCwWsTFDJYp2FeNJ32uZV_tc-d4&v=RJjyR-orRuE)

With such a warm and entertaining personality, it is hard to imagine Spike not on stage or on the streets delighting children and all of us. See you soon, Spike Bones! *Steve Wixson*

## Mary Lee Sweet on Spike Bones

So what do you do on the way back home to Florida when you find yourself near Columbia, Missouri? You call Spike Bones, of course, and invite him to lunch. But he invited us to "Bones Camp!" What an incredible place he created! We saw many of the displays that he has used at Bones Fests. There were also new sights! After the tour, we enjoyed a great lunch together and were on our way. *Mary Lee*

## The Speed of Some RBS Members

The story of Cecil Rivers on the opposite page makes one wonder what are the speeds of some of our fastest members such as Jerry Mescher, Barry Patton, and Bill Vits. The only way I could test this was by using video clips from previous Bones Fests which unfortunately are not their fastest speed since they were playing to live or recorded music. The method was to look at a 1 second clip of triplet rolls with an audio program and manually count the clicks.

The results: Jerry, 8 per second playing solo to Maple Leaf Rag, Bill and Barry, 13 per second.

These numbers suggest Cecil's 18.9 clicks per second is believable, however, hopefully one day we will find out how he obtained that number so we can try to beat it. *Steve Wixson*

## Cecil Rivers



Cecil George Rivers was born on December 13, 1910 at Watersville, Vermont, and died on January 14, 2000 in Portland, Maine following a single car accident. His obituary notes he carried the name of "Mr. Bones," and he was playing rhythm bones and performing right up to the end of his life.

What makes him of interest to rhythm bones players is his claim to be the fastest player in the world, playing 18.9 clicks per second or 1134 per minute. There was mention that this was a Guinness World Record, but no official record has been found.

Cecil lived in Vermont and Massachusetts with his first wife and had two children. Later after marrying his second wife he lived in Moultonboro, New Hampshire and later close-by in Tamworth. There were many step children and step grandchildren, and one of the latter, Beth Barker, was very helpful supplying newspaper articles and calling family members for other stories.

According to his long time next door neighbor, he had an interesting life. When he was a young adult, probably sometime in the late twenties or thirties, he played semi-pro baseball for a team out of Vermont. After that, he spent some time in Alaska and other parts of the country doing construction work.

He was a 'See Bee' in the Navy during

WWII serving in Guadalcanal and the Philippines and was a sharpshooter. He qualified for the 1936 Olympic Shooting team though since Hitler would not let foreigners have a gun in Germany the competition was held in Norway. He had a collection of something like 60 long guns. He was a photographer for a while for a well know historian. He was a registered backcountry and hunting guide in New Hampshire and Maine. He was a carpenter and cabinet maker and later a boat builder, and also had a large collection of axes (his father was a woodsman). Cecil was the kind of guy who, if he decided he liked you, would do darn near anything for you.

In his younger days, he was a drummer, and during the 40' and 50s played in a swing band. His favorite instruments was the banjo that he learn when he was a kid and played professional, however, that stopped 25 years later when he accidentally crushed his hand in a planer. Cecil said, "I was pretty good." He learned to play rhythm bones when he was six years old, and moved to playing them regularly after the banjo accident and when his drums got to be too hard to move around.

His obituary said he was renowned in Washington Valley for his ageless zest, his love for the dance floor and his musical ability. He was a frequent performer with many bands playing rhythm bones, and he was still playing the bones at various country dance halls almost up until the day he died. Cecil loved to tell stories and talk about his experiences.

His stage and dance hall routine went something like this. He would dress up in one of his many outfits and drive some-

times long distances to find a place to play his rhythm bones. When he arrived and there were drums and no drummer, he would play the drums. Bands who knew his skill would invite him to play because the crowd love him.

Cecil said, "I came to play, and if a band wants me to play, I'll play. I go up and tell them I'm better than they are and if there is anyone in the hall who likes to hear me play, they better let me play." If a band didn't think he would fit it, he did not take it personally, and would go back to his table where frequently a pretty young lady would help him on with his vintage sports jacket.

When a band let him play he was most grateful. He had studied the band's playlist and knew what song was coming.

One trait dance hall owners liked is that he would take to the dance floor and get people dancing. There were lots of 'his honeys' that he danced with, however, if they couldn't keep up with him, he would find another.

He readily admitted that his zest for the stage and the dance floor was partly just a search for companionship. After his third wife died he sold his house and bought a trailer. His daytime contact with people was often limited to trips to the post office and with teens who wanted to explore his record collection.

This story of Cecil Rivers is incomplete, and maybe there will be an update in a future issue. One issue is to find the contest where he documented how fast he could play. Another small detail is the identity of the rhythm bones player who play bones at the back of the church at his funeral. *Steve Wixson*



Cecil Rivers playing rhythm bones with The Shifters Band



## The Story of a Pair of Rhythm Bones

This is the story of a pair of Rhythm Bones, circa 1900, played in the trenches by a West Yorkshire soldier in WWI and by his son through WWII

**February 21 2019**

I got the following email from a gentleman in West Yorkshire, England:

“Hi, my name is Stephen Thorp. I have a pair of very old rhythm bones, circa 1900, which belonged to my grandfather.

“Just wondered if they may be of interest to you or do you know of a collector who may be interested in buying them. I enclose photographs, and look forward to your feedback. Regards, Stephen.”

I engaged in conversation with Stephen and over the next few weeks and I was fascinated, thrilled and humbled by the story that unfolded. I bought the bones from Stephen and I will be putting a tribute video up on my website in the coming months.

Here is the story, mostly told in Stephen's words, and I hope that people who read it will take a minute to remember Charlie Thorp, his son Jack Noble Thorp, and his grandson Stephen Thorp, and thank Stephen for sharing these precious and amazing memories:

**22 February 2019**

“The bones belonged to my Grandfather, and passed down from his father, and from the tales my father told me they were used to entertain the troops in the first world war.”

**23 February 2019**

“Hi Tom, Thank you for accepting my offer of 35€ for the bones. I am the last surviving member of the Thorp family line and have no-one to pass them on to.

### HISTORY

My grandfather, Charlie Thorp served in the British Army 1914-1918, my Dad told the story of Charlie playing the bones to entertain the troops in the first world war.

My Dad, Jack Noble Thorp, born 1922 served in the British army 1939-1943.

I can remember my Dad trying to play the bones when I was a lad at Christmas and birthday parties, but believe me you wouldn't have wanted him in your band, ha ha.



Unfortunately the ghostly photo of Charlie Thorp is the only remaining photograph of him.

When my Dad died age 86 I became the keeper of the bones. If this little bit of history about the bones does go into the Society magazine I will be thrilled. 'They should not be forgotten.' Kind Regards, Stephen.”

I received the bones from Stephen on March 1st. I couldn't believe I was holding in my hands a pair of bones that had seen two World Wars and been used to entertain troops in the trenches in World War One. I wanted to know more detail of the history, and here is what Stephen wrote:

**March 5 2019**

“Hi Tom, That's great, and here's a bit more information on their history.

My grandfather was Charlie Thorp from Wakefield, West Yorkshire who served in the British Army during the 1st World War. He was in the 1st battalion, K.O.Y.L.I (the Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry) 1914-1918. Charlie saw action in Singapore, then the Western front in France, then Salonika Greece.

The bones would have traveled with him, so if they could speak they could tell you a real story of the horrors of war. His and his comrades contribution to the war effort should never be forgotten.

When he finally came home from the war he still entertained people by playing the bones in the local hostelrys and at family gatherings.

Unfortunately Charlie didn't live to a great age, as he passed away at the age of 39. That's when the bones were passed down to my father, Jack Noble Thorp.

Jack served in the British Army R.A.S.C (Royal Army Service Corps) 1939-1943. His rank was Private, Army number T-1070960. 1805 Bailey platoon.

Dad was away from home for 5 years from age 18 to 23 . He served in Italy at the battle of Monte Casino, then North Africa, Holland and Belgium and finally saw the horrors at the liberation of Belsen.

I believe he too had the bones with him during his Army service, even though he was no expert at playing the bones.

It's really hard to believe that a little set of bones could tell such a story.

Please find attached photo of Dad age 86 at his granddaughters wedding with his cap badges and Army medals around the frame (see Page 8). Plus a photo of myself Stephen John Thorp, the last in the line of the Thorp family. Unfortunately dad passed away 10 weeks after this photo was taken.



Jack Thorp in his Army uniform at age 21

Don't know it's of any interest to you , but the story could go on. It's not really relevant to the bones, but I have some letters that my father wrote home during his Army days to his friend back home, that have an interesting twist, as the way I came to have them is quite unbelievable.

Please do use the photo's, I am so happy the story will be told."

Needless to say I could not resist getting back to Stephen and asking him about the story behind the letters written by his dad Jack to a friend back home during World War Two. Here is that story:



Stephen Thorp

### March 8 2018

"Hi Tom, This is the story of Dad's letters.

My Grandfather Charlie Thorp died young, so it left Dad a bit lost without a father to look up to.

Dad started work at the age of 14 and worked for his uncle, Sidney Noble as an apprentice carpenter/ undertaker.

When war broke out and Dad got his call up papers he saw it as a way to get away as he was not happy at the time. 'Out of the frying pan into the fire' as they say. Dad was taken under the wing of an older man called Harry Charlesworth, who was a master cabinet maker. Dad thought the world of Harry, so when Dad went away to war he wrote letters to Harry for 5 years, whenever he got the chance.

When Dad came home at the end of the war in 1945 he got a job at a local firm EMD Parkinson and Son Funeral Directors. He himself then became a funeral director for the next 50 years, until his retirement at the age of 80.

Sadly he lost all touch with his great friend Harry. Fast forward 35 years when Dad got a call from a lady whose husband had just passed away. When Dad went out to arrange the funeral and pick up her husband's body, he was shocked to find out, yes, it was his old pal Harry.

She had no idea at this time who Dad

was. As the funeral arrangements went on, she got to know Dad's name, and she said 'are you the Jack Thorp who used to write to Harry from the Army?' I am said Dad, to which she replied, then I have something for you, she then went upstairs and brought a pile of Dad's letters from Harry's bedside drawer, he had kept them all those years. Then she said I am so pleased that Harry's old pal will be looking after him at this sad time. He would not have wanted it any other way. It was such a shame they couldn't have been reunited in life, rather than after Harry's death.

Dad took the letters home, but never opened or read them again. Then one day about a year before Dad passed away, he told me this story and gave the letters to me. I also did not read them until a few years after his death. They were so lovely to read, but also very upsetting.

If there is such a thing as fate, then this was meant to be. The contents of the letters are not horrific tales, but are of a young man, scared, lonely and far away from home, he just needed a friend.

Dad started dealing with death at the age of 14, and saw unimaginable horrors during the War. And then spent the next 50 years dealing with death and bereavement. He was a kind, caring and compassionate man, who never let anyone down. He had a great sense of humour and a lovely smile. And when he died, I lost my best friend.

I am so pleased I have had the opportunity to tell this story to you, Tom. You are the only person apart from my wife that I have ever told it to. It is something I have wanted to do for a long time. If you do want to know the contents of the letters, I would be more than happy to send you copies of them. If not, I won't be offended, just pleased that you have shown an interest in the story. Regards, Steve."

I found this story touching, sad, joyful and inspiring. Isn't it wonderful that rhythm bones can be instruments for such human connection. Slán go fóill,  
*Tom Connolly*

[Editor Note: Pocket musical instruments like rhythm bones and harmonica have gone to many wars. For another touching WWI music story, search the Internet for WWI and Silent Night.

## Scott Miller on Spike Bones

Spike is an enormously creative and energetic person who has dedicated himself to the ancient art of rattling the bones.

I first met Spike in 2003 at Bones Fest VII in Louisville, Kentucky. His on-stage performance was a big hit with everyone - especially children. After the performance my two young kids met him in the lobby. Spike is a natural entertainer who knows how to make kids laugh.

A few years later we worked together on Bones Fest XII, which was held in 2008 here in Saint Louis. It was Spike's idea to take on the challenge to begin with. About all I did as co-host was arrange for the main venue. Spike did just about everything else.

- He created the BFXII logo.
  - He came up with the "Bones University" theme for the event.
  - He booked a riverboat cruise.
  - He petitioned the Mayor's Office which officially proclaimed October 17 through October 19 as "Bones Fest XII Weekend" in the City of Saint Louis.
  - He coordinated a Bones Fest excursion beginning from our headquarters at the University of Missouri, to the Metro Link train, to Union Station for lunch, then to Soldier's Memorial for an impromptu public bones show.
  - He coordinated the "Grand Bones Fest Show" public performance.
- ...and he did so much more.

Incidentally, Spike even met with the University of Missouri media department, which documented Bones Fest XII - and put it on a DVD that was mailed to each participant.

Oh, and Spike did most the work while living in Columbia, Missouri - a two hour drive from Saint Louis!

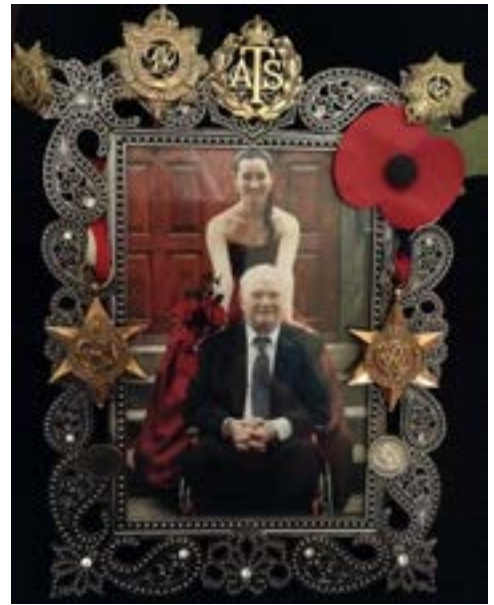
We are truly fortunate to have such a creative, resourceful, dedicated, and welcoming member in our group. *Scott Miller*



Spike Bones performing his 'Bones Show' at a Bones Fest



WWI Rhythm Bones - See Page 6



Jack Thorp took those rhythm bones to WWII

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## *Rhythm Bones Society*

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*Address Correction Requested*