

January, 1999

## Blessed by Jess and...

by Suzie Schatz-Benson, Wyoming ACDA President



I am a bit sad these days! Oh, don't pity me, nothing bad has happened. It's just that now that school has started up again, I realize how much I miss "Jess." He graduated last May.

So why was Jess so special?

Because I think Jess was (is) a musical genius. I know I may never again in my lifetime work with a student like him, and that makes me sad. I cannot explain the total awe and delight I often felt when he would display his many abilities. I certainly wasn't worthy to be his teacher, but I'm certainly glad I got to go along for the ride!

First, Jess had perfect pitch. (Good riddance pitch pipe!) "Jess, give a C!" or "Jess, identify this chord for us!" He could also sing the fastest sixteenth note runs with perfect clarity I've ever heard anyone do with no real vocal training.

Second, Jess played the best string bass I'd ever heard. Didn't need any music either. (And always perfectly in tune.) He didn't even need the string to play his bass. At our Christmas concert he played the whole conga drum part of an African Processional by slapping his string bass. (The congas were at the repair shop.) I thought it was incredible.

Jess wrote a piece of music for his final theory assignment that was way over my head. Jess used a friend's rather complicated text and wrote out a whole entire contemporary composition never once playing any of it on an instrument. It had a full piano score, and three-part vocal score. He analyzed every single chord at my request, and I was completely worn out after I tried to analyze the first two lines. When our accompanist finally played it for the first time for him to actually hear, he immediately knew when she had left out one note of a chord in measure 16. I don't think he ever had to change a single note from his original manuscript.

Jess sees pitches and chords in color. Before he left for college, I asked him to write down how he sees music. He listed every major and minor chord. Here are a few samples in his own words: C - black with shades of red tainted across it (soft blood). C# - a grey computer haze with tiny black dots and a touch of lavender. D - the brightest and sunniest blue sky with lots of white clouds. F# - purple haze (not Jimi Hendrix) with black shadows (bright). A - yellow with orange miscellaneous spots (the old-fashioned vanilla ice cream look).

I'm pretty sure I never really taught Jess anything about music that wasn't already in his head. I think he taught me in many ways. So where did I fit in his life? I guess that is a question only he can answer.

Now to the point of the story. So often we hear about how a teacher can affect a student for the rest of his or her life. Cannot a student have the same effect on a teacher? I have been blessed to have Jess in my life for a short time. But come to think of it, in other ways I have also been blessed to have Shanna, Doug, Dave, Jeff, J.C., Eugene, Mary, Jennifer, Kevin, Devin, Elizabeth, etc. ...you know what I mean!

Hope you all have a great school year with lots of wonderful blessings!

*Editor's note, December, 2015:*

*Suzie was asked about what happened to Jess. She said...*

*Jess went to college at the University of Wyoming and studied bass with Kate McKeage, though I don't think he graduated. He is now on the east coast playing in a band called The Deloreans (an 80's type band of some sort) of which his brother is also a member. You can check them out on the Internet, Facebook, etc. I had contact with him about a year ago at which time I sent him a copy of his paper on seeing tones in colors with his perfect pitch. I kept that paper after I retired from teaching about 10 years ago.*



*That's Jess on the right!*