



Bluegrass Express

In Memory Of Frank Nelson

By Mike Gaddison

Frank Nelson, a founding member of the OBA and a pivotal figure in our community, passed away July 14th, 2016. Frank was 81. According to Glenn Larkin, "Frank attended grade school from 1946 and to the 10th he was a regular attendee at local Bluegrass shows. In fact, he says, Frank asked his friends to start him in play and sing. He was keeping a steady beat, making sure everybody was playing up to tempo from the beginning!"

There is a tribute by Mike Gaddison, originally presented in The Bluegrass Express a few years ago, followed by a photo collection of some friends.

Bluegrass performers and fans have honored Oregon and Washington born grasser musicians in a past, literally near who contribute much of what we love about the music. The tribute, Frank Nelson and his trademark smile have done much to quickly raise the music forward, while giving all of us a connection to the grammers, more simply put. Like lots of folks living in the Northwest, Frank's story began far from here. In a place and time where playing and picking was a part of everyday life.

Frank was born on February 14, 1935 in Berlin, Oklahoma. He parents named the family to Oklaheima, Oklahoma soon after, and Frank grew up there, a child of the Depression and the Great South. He recalled when he was about 10, he began going to an Assembly of God Church with his family and friends, and that was where he learned to sing and to play the guitar. Much of the gospel music he heard there is played and sung today in our homes and churches, and Frank says that it is still his very favorite.

He moved to Springfield, Missouri in 1957 to live with his sister and brother in law and he was get a job with

the Missouri Pacific Railroad, where he eventually became a locomotive helper. His job was to bring the steam locomotives to the maintenance and to clean and service



Frank and his sister in law in "Springer, Mo"

them before their next run. Still that take them back to the depot to be loaded to their train. As we talked, his hands reached out and moved over the buttons and brake levers of these long ago engines. He

smiled and said, "It was our first." While in Springfield, Frank met and married Helen, and they began a family, eventually having two daughters (Kathleen and Lorita), and a son (Don). When 1970 Oregon, Frank and his family moved to Portland to find work with Helene Johnson. Frank worked for Columbia Records, making several years and then induction into the Navy. He was called before Frank was out of commission, and he and his family decided to settle in Portland. The Nelsons lived in "Sappart, a small city off its own, which was built in North Portland near North Columbia and Williams Street in lower Sappart and stayed workers. Frank said that he began playing music with others living in Sappart and they were formed around Frank. They played country and swing music, the music they had all grown up with. Two of the bands he played with, "The Tumble Tumble Band" and "The George Duke Blues" played shows in the area and traveled as far as the Oregon coast, playing once a week at the Salsburg State Music Center in Lincoln City. He particularly remembered one of his band mates, Woody Ball and Mike Francisco. Ball was a Salsburg locomotive, who Frank remembered as having a great voice and being a fine guitar and steel guitar player.

continued on page 2

