

# The Door Jazz Espresso Coffee House

1818 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue

1958-1962

In 1958 while stationed at Fort Ord in California, I was fortunate to visit San Francisco on several of my weekend leaves. During this time, was the beginning of the Bohemian revolution which opened several new coffee houses in the Haight Ashbury district that attracted a variety of customers from businessmen, collage students, beatniks and Army personal on week-end leave from Fort Ord.

Arriving back in Seattle, I met with brother Ed and old friends Ron Gregory and Joe Racibaskis. We all worked together for several years in the display department at Fredrick & Nelson. During these meetings I explained about the popular fast growing smoke filled coffee houses in the Bay Area which were smoked filled, fun & funky, filled with antique tables and chairs, nick-nacks and memorabilia to serve a growing group of customers, while enjoying Turkish and espresso coffee, teas and pastries listing to folk singers, poetry and comedians. Immediately, they all wanted to help to get involved to develop and create a new coffee house for Seattle. In a week I found the ideal location one block from F&N, behind the Music Hall at 1818 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

To start, Ron and I made many visits to old junk shop and secondhand stores to find and identify anything that was funky and different antique and useful that would fit my limited budget. Our first store was Guy Rockwell Muldavin Antiques in North Seattle on Aurora that soon moved to Lake Union and he was later charged in the disappearance of his wife Manzanita. The majority of finds came from an old junk building on 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue, a jam packed, old and musty, dim-lit and dust covered junk in piles. I negotiate for chairs, tables and a 2 handled espresso coffee maker ( I hoped still worked ) 85 used silver plated F&N teapots, tall white lady statue, thousands of round cork floats on ropes with nets, back in a dark corner I found a small antique National cash register. Later I purchased from a city light crew who just completed a major installation on 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, two empty large wooden cable spools, I converted into large tables surrounded by small barrels purchased from Sweeny's Cooperage on Lake Union, made into padded stools.

With the assistance from my brothers, Val assumed the responsibility to find quality artists to exhibit original pieces in our mini-gallery and advise on our limited menu from his pantry experience working at the Seattle Rainier Club. Jerry was responsible to work with Joe Racibaskas in the business remodel and installing the gated front door and hanging "The Door" sign, installation of the espresso machine with the professional plumbing assistance to install and hook up our antique espresso machine came by my classmate John Edwards. Brother Ed

worked on signage advertising & promotion and the layout and design of two wall murals by himself and Ron Gregory who's imagination was seen in his espresso machine mural. Brother Mike assisted and worked on set-up and operating the espresso machine and service bar as our first Barista. I picked up the pieces, hiring employees, and entertainers. From Seattle Public market I found fresh ground Veal & pork to make Piroski and Lumpia from Dan's Market and fresh crab and shrimp for salads from City Fish. On the lower public market floor I first purchased Medaglia d-oro Espresso Coffee and other items from Pete Delaurenti. Later I purchased cases of the espresso from Merlino Foods. From the Swiss Pastry Shop and Marcells bakery we served the city's finest pastries. Pizza supplies were purchased from Gil Centioli who later became the first Washington State franchise owner of KFC. Next came kitchen equipment china and small wares purchased from Brodie Hotel Supply. Finally came a sound system and stand-up piano that was soon replace by a baby grand piano. I even brought in cigarette vending machine and exhaust fan to exit the smoke. Before the year was over I removed the cigarette machine, because the main people buying the cigarettes, were my 3 brothers their cousin Al and friends.

When we opened open The Door, we handed out many donut cork floats as souvenirs. Our mini-gallery was enjoyed and viewed by many elderly businessmen and guests in attendance who enjoyed a variety of folk singers while sipping on demitasse of espresso, hot darjeeling tea with Swiss pastries while listening to folk singing entertainment. Several month later I changed our music format from folk singers and poetry to local Jazz musicians, my first group was the Pete Delaurenti quartet who happened to be a relative of my first coffee vendor. Next came a newspaper article about "The Door" Seattle's Espresso (Jazz) House.

Some weekends we experienced long sidewalk lines up 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue up to the ticket office of the Music Hall Theater. Now I had to hire my sisters Mary and Jeanette along with their cousin Mea to handle the front while Ed & I retreated back to work the floor and kitchen.

To create added customer interest we printed a give-away menu for customers, on newsprint paper that listed the current entertainers and artist, the menu and "Cordova's Coffee Break" highlighting what happening in Seattle. On the back side were Seattle finest businesses and faithful, who paid for the printing.

Opening 5 days a week seem to eat up the profits. We decided that Seattle was still growing and not quite a top destination city to attract daily tourists but enough weekend tourist from the state and Canada, to justify week-ends, cutting back on payroll and entertainment expenses.

Quarterly Val would schedule a new group of top local Northwest artists, many from Artists Equity to exhibit in our mini-gallery open on weekends. We also permitted a freelance lady artist to roam the floor to ask customers if she could draw them in charcoal.

Each December we held Christmas parties for 300 children from Seattle's 3 Housing projects, Yesler, Holly Park and Rainier Vista. We had them bussed on 3 separate times to properly receive and entertain each child to enjoy hot chocolate, assorted cookies, live entertainment and a gift from Santa Claus.

One night a young lady asked if she could sit in, to audition for part-time work, Teri Spencer a graduate from the Toronto Royal Conservatory of Music and Julliard had just completed a playing tour that started from New York. When she sat-down she literally rocked the house with a mix of hot to mellow jazz. Several months later a black entertainer, who had just completed a gig at the Fontainebleau in Miami came to Seattle on the advice from fellow musicians. When Teddy Ross sat-in with Teri Spencer quartet, it was magic and made immediate history.

In 1959 I Held a special customer appreciation party. A Hawaiian Luau with Fresh leis and orchards flown in from Hawaii and Hawaiian dancers, live wild birds and a Roast pig with lomi-lomi salmon, poi and small pineapples filled with frozen sorbet topped with a shot of liqueur

In October 1959 after a final remodel of an old furniture shop on Madison Street, 3 blocks from Seattle U, I requested the city for an official final inspection of my 2<sup>nd</sup> coffee house, called "The Windows". The remodel included the resurfacing a the large rectangular wooden work table and bench into a study table to seat 20 students and local guests. Unfortunately, the inspectors rejected my opening and recommended that I needed to raise the ceiling and lower the floor 1"each in the newly refurbished kitchen area to meet an 8 foot building regulation. Financially, I could not do that and closed. In 1960, I sold my never used espresso coffee machine to Walt Wilcox who was in the process of opening "The El Matador" coffee house on Lake Union

We promoted several recording sessions for Teddy Ross which included a special night evening recording promoted by KOMO called "Once Upon A Holiday".

In 1961 I created the first Aqua Jazz Concert at the Green Lake Aqua Theater that featured many faithful local Jazz musicians who were hired or came for late evening local Jazz sit-ins at the Door. The pay-back concert was a successful for all in attendance.

In 1962 I expanded the second Aqua Jazz format featuring Teri Spencer and Ted Ross and many other top local entertainers of the Door. At intermission, we were entertained by a fashion show by "Shirlee" with models who walked from the stage to a viewing platform in the middle of the exhibition pool, close to customers. The final feature was the Dave Brubeck Quartet, showcasing Paul Desmond on tenor sax playing their new hit tune "Take 5". The evening was covered by Bob Peterson, a soon to be famous local photographer who went on to work for Time, Sports Illustrated and Peoples Magazines

Soon I sold the Door and was hired by Western International Hotels to help open the Space Needle during the 1962 Seattle World's Fair.

Teri went to Portland Oregon to create a popular large Jazz community. And Teddy took leads from Dave Brubeck and others and moved to LA which landed him later in 1975 on Broadway and the Wiz, featuring him as the Lion receiving a Tony Award, supported by Michael Jackson, Diana Ross, Lena Horn, Richard Pryor and others.

By their Jobs, my family members went on to contribute to the growth and success of Seattle.

In 2001 Nordstrom invested and took 15 floors of a new 24 floor Office Tower, with the actual building entrance at 1818 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and in 2021 had to vacate the building because of the Seattle riots that shuttered much of downtown Seattle.