

Once Upon a Time in 1939 - Shirley Arvidson *Presented February 12, 2016*
Playing it Forward: The Kenneth & Evelyn Pinckney Young Musicians' Fund

The first band master I had was about 5' 6" and more interested in violins than woodwinds. You can imagine how excited we were when we trouped into the band room on the first day of school in 1939 and saw a tall, nice looking, single young man who was our new director. I said "single" so you realize that all the little girls were totally smitten.

Under Mr. Pinckney's tutelage, we became a concert band, a pep band, a marching band, and he coordinated a drum corps for the VFW. For the first time ever, we had uniforms so we even looked like a band. We played at all pep fests, games in and out of town, marched in parades all around the county, went to and held massed band concerts and participated in competitions, many of which we won. We had been plagiarizing the Notre Dame fight song, so Mr. Pinckney was responsible for creating our own school song - The Purple and the Gold - which became The Purple and the White later.

Then, the unthinkable happened. He announced he was getting married. We were not best pleased with that because we had had his undivided attention and weren't anxious to share that. But, we met Evelyn who was just as nice as she was pretty so, not only were the girls twittery, but so were all the little boys.

As with all high school bands, about the time a student has actually mastered their instrument to play well, they graduate and a class of freshmen take their place. So others and I graduated in May of 1942 and that year the State Fair Board invited Mr. Pinckney's band to play for three days at the fair in August. This was a big honor back then. He asked the seniors who could do so to please come back for that last venue and quite a few of us were able to make the commitment. He re-wrote the Star Spangled Banner for more harmony, said we would be playing it to start or end every concert at the fair and we needed to be perfect. He gave us our parts to take home and practice, practice, practice. I had played first chair clarinet in the last year and the part he wrote for that had notes I'd never seen before, notes my clarinet had never played before and I wasn't sure if it really ever could. But I did as asked, went home and practiced, practiced, practiced. While I was practicing one day, my dad came home, listened a couple of minutes, looked at my mother and said, "Hasn't that kid learned to play that damn thing yet?"

The week to go to the fair there was a glitch. Evelyn was due to deliver their first baby any of the days we might be gone. Mr. Pinckney was a basket case. He couldn't renege on the fair, he knew he couldn't take us down there and turn us loose, but he also knew he needed to be home when the baby was born. So Evelyn, in trouper fashion, had Patricia the night before we left. Solved all the problems. We had a wonderful three days at the fair, played many concerts and the last evening, we played in front of the grandstand to the largest audience we had ever performed for and the Star Spangled Banner has never been so well played!

Mr. Pinckney's tenure and legacy was long and far reaching. He taught children of his first band students including our three. Clay played a sax and was the drum major for the marching band in 1966, Ross played a cornet and graduated in 1969 and Claire played a clarinet and graduated 30 years after her mother in 1972. I have long contended that right here in River City, we have had our very own Music Man.

My friendship with the Pinckney family has extended over 75 years and I thank them for that and count our relationship among my greatest blessings.