Written by Kathleen McCarthy
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I've known Mike Dassie for well over 20 years. Mike passed away last Thursday, June 28, after 57 years of a truly great presence on this earth. Mike was manager of the Davenport Country Club for thirteen years, owned O'Meara's Pub in downtown Bettendorf for five years, and then went on to operate his own successful catering business. Both through his ownership of O'Meara's and through his catering, Mike was a huge fan, supporter, contributor to, and faithful advocate of the Blues.

In addition to his enormous contribution to the Blues in the Quad Cities, Mike's real claim to fame was his unyielding commitment to stay young at heart, to play hard, to work at being a success without compromising his ability to have fun, and to remain a loyal and true friend. I never, not once, had an encounter with Mike when humor and levity was not part of the protocol. We always laughed and carried on together. He was quick-witted and outrageously flirtatious (he always commented that he wanted to get something straight between us) without being the least bit offensive. He loved women in a Don Juan sort of way, and we loved him right back. His friends claim Mike was a cross between Pan and Kokopelli, both gods of fertility in the Celtic and Native American cultures, respectively. Yet he was also a man's man. His male friends loved him dearly and felt as comfortable with Mike as if he were a brother. He was bawdy and caustic at times, but at the same time warm and mirthful. He did everything "on his own terms," as his son Shawn Dassie so accurately said. "I wouldn't change a thing about the way he raised me," Shawn said, "I only hope I can do as right by my own children."

Mike had a huge heart. It had room for so many people. I marvel at the number of people who genuinely love him and are profoundly saddened by his passing. The world truly seems less joyful, almost like a big hole in the Quad Cities has been created. Mike represented a stronghold of individualism. He managed to traverse his life's journey without giving up who he was. So many of us, as we have grown older, have become more mainstream. Mike successfully resisted that pull. He always stayed with his own program and was a unique and wonderful character for it.

While reminiscing with several of Mike's friends, the underlying theme was Mike's ability to comfort, console, advise, and resolve conflicts and problems among those he cared about. Ken Brandt, who has known Dassie most of his life, aptly stated, "If you met Mike as a friend, he would be your friend forever. You really had to go out of your way to offend him. We've had our falling outs, but every time we would come back and hug. For the hard parts of my life, that guy was there."

Marvin Kane, a close friend and co-worker, affirmed, "He was always willing to help solve problems, big or small, it didn't matter."

Longtime friend Richard Hanson concurred, "He'd give you just enough information so that you would figure it on your own because he knew that is how you learn and remember."

Richard, Ken, and Marvin explained that Dassie always had an "open door policy." "You could show up on his doorstep any time, day or night," said Richard. "He knew the bigger meaning of the word 'friend.'"

The fun times remembered are countless. Dassie's motto was "Work hard, play harder!" Ken remembered one of the funniest evenings he had with Mike and a group of people at a high-end tequila bar in Chicago. "Dassie kept eyeballing these T-shirts they had and commenting on how cool they were. I thought he was hinting, so I bought one for everyone at the table. Mike grabbed his, whipped off his shirt in the middle of the restaurant and donned the new t-shirt. Everybody got in the act, ripping off their shirts and putting on the new ones, even the girls in our group. We laughed so hard and had a great time."

"One night we were all at O'Meara's partying," Richard recalled. "Mike was pretty pickled and literally keeled over backwards, off his barstool onto the floor. After that, laughing hysterically, we all put crime-scene tape around his fallen body and it stayed there for months until it finally wore off. Mike loved it and considered it a sort of badge of honor. We howled about it every time we saw it."

Richard also pointed out that Mike had an incredible "bullshit meter. God help you if you asked a dumb question!" he explained laughing. "Or he'd bust your compass," Ken added. "And he had a leprechaun's laugh. You could always recognize it in a room full of people." But his eyes laughed most of all. He was as amused as he was amusing.

While fun was the hallmark of Mike Dassie, everyone who knew Mike would agree that music, including the blues, was the underpinning of everything Mike did and loved. As Ken explained, "He intertwined everything with music. His philosophies, everything, centered on music."

Richard added, "He had so many facts about musicians, artists, he was like a walking encyclopedia. Dassie believed music is the key to the soul. He allowed that belief to penetrate everything."

Ken emphasized, "He was so thrilled at being invited up on stage with bands to play his harmonica. He told me once that 'you guys have no idea what it means to me when you let me come up there and play that one song with you. I could never be a professional musician, but being allowed to join in like that means everything to me.'"

Mike Dassie supported the Mississippi Valley Blues Society for years by catering the festival each year. He worked extremely hard containing costs and giving them the best possible service for the money. He was committed to the festival and when it came to backstage catering, he gave it his all. He provided home-styled cooking, including his own famous version of Jambalaya, helping to establish and continue the tradition of midwestern hospitality the MVBS blues festival is widely known for amongst blues musicians nationwide. So when the Blues Society did not invite him back this year to cater the festival, Mike was deeply hurt. Marvin explained, "Mike worked extra hard for the festival because it was so near and dear to his heart to help support the blues in the Quad Cities." Dassie also booked blues bands all year round when he owned O'Meara's to keep the blues alive here. And Dassie hosted many of the Blues Society's meetings and smaller events at his pub. He put his resources where his mouth is, so to speak, to make sure that the blues had a place in his town.

According to Richard, "Mike was a spiritual being as well as a naturalist. He was a warrior.

This is an excerpt written by Martin Prechtel, and this is Mike, what his message was to everybody: 'Dear light beings, you are not your life experiences. You are much greater than you ever dreamed. No need to respond from fear, for each experience is an opportunity to rise above it, to peel away another layer to become closer to all that is until the moment comes when you are all that is.'"

Ken also described Mike as a warrior, recounting his service in Vietnam for the US Air Force. "He told me once that he had seen enough torture and pain there to last a lifetime. When he came home, his then-wife and parents met him at the airport. He sat in the back seat of the car and sobbed in his hands. He was so emotional and so overwhelmed with the joy and relief of being back in the United States. He could never put it into words how glad he was to be home and away from that horror. It is why he was so good at conflict resolution."

Richard agreed, "His conflict-resolution skills were second to none in the bar business. You never saw a fight in the pub. He always managed to calm things down. He was really good at resolving things between people. He had a way of making each of the parties stop and see the bigger picture."

"He was an awesome peacemaker," Ken stated.

Mike Dassie brought depth to his relationships, and the highest standard of unconditional love and loyalty. He was the real McCoy, and those who were lucky enough to know him will miss him terribly.

As Marvin was driving Mike to the hospital, Mike said these words: "If things go south and don't work here, no matter what, keep moving forward. And tell all my friends I love 'em!"