

OVER 100 YEARS' OF DRUM CORPS/MARCHING EXPERIENCE

John & Barbara Flowers (2012)



Edinburgh, Scotland

Yes – that’s right – together, John and Barbara Flowers have over 100 years of drum corps experience. Thirty-seven of those years marching/teaching/judging together! No other drum corp couple has even come close to these remarkable figures and accomplishments. Between them they have:

- Five DCA Championships
- Several American Legion Championships
- * Numerous State Championships
- * Numerous Individual Championships

John and Barbara met in 1977 when John was hired by Vince Bruni to teach the Rochester Crusaders percussion line. Barbara had been with the Crusaders since '71 when they first “allowed” women in the corps. Yes, folks, prior to that, Senior drum corps was strictly a male endeavor.

John’s D&B Corps History

John started in drum corps in 1948 by playing cymbals with the GAR Cadets. He then played tenor with the Temple Cadets from '51-'52 and then snare with the West Reading Police Cadets from '53 to '57. In the Police Cadets in '56-'57 John Dowlan was the drum instructor and told him about the Air Force Drum Corps where he was also instructor. He auditioned in late '57 for a snare position and entered into the AF Drum Corps from '58 thru '62. The AF experiences included several overseas tours playing in such elite venues as the Edinburg Tattoo, parading before the Queen of England and representing the USA in many other parts of the world and throughout the continental USA. He and the other three members of the AF Drum Quartet were quite talented and became famous for their backsticking. While in the AF, he

played with the Archer Epler competitive corps for the '59 season. In '60 the Bucs approached him to instruct the percussion section. He was with the Bucs arranging, instructing & performing from '60 through '74. The Bucs won the first DCA Championship show in 1965 and DCA High Percussion in '65, '69 and '74. He also composed and performed with the Yankee Rebels during the mid '60's. In '75 he left the Bucs to teach the Yankee Rebels who won DCA High Percussion that year and lost in '76 by one tenth to the Cabs. *So he won back-to-back DCA High Percussion in '74 and '75 with **TWO** different corps – a very unique accomplishment indeed!* John was quite innovative during his years with the Bucs. He designed and built a “cymbal tree” and several bass drum configurations enabling the performers to play more than one instrument at a time. For St Lucy's he designed a cymbal tree with many cymbals on it and a double bass with aluminum extensions – remember at the time ALL equipment had to be carried and could not be 'grounded'. For Bucs he also did an aluminum cymbal tree for several cymbals, configured a harness so the bass drummer could carry timbales on his back for another drummer to play, designed a three-bass drum arrangement similar to the triple/quad instruments used today.

In '77 Vince Bruni asked him to compose, instruct and perform with the Rochester Crusaders Percussion Section. Here's where he met his future wife Barbara who was performing with the Color Guard. After that season Barbara moved down to PA where they both taught (John on percussion, Barbara on guard) the '78 Westshoremens who won the American Legion Championships in New Orleans. Shortly after this he was elected DCA Percussion Caption Chairman and held that position for several years. In '84 he was contacted by the CT Hurricanes to arrange, instruct and perform with the percussion line. In '85 Jim Costello contacted him to compose and instruct the Hawthorne Caballeros percussion line.

John has had the pleasure of working with some great Brass Instructors: Skip Groff, Frank Ferraro, John Sasso, Red Winzer, Joe Genero, Jim Wedge, Wayne Downy, Larry Kershner and the inimitable Truman W. Crawford.

Some (there's too many to remember and list) of the Junior corps he taught were: St. Lucy's (67, 68, 69); St. Andrews' Bridgemen (71 – 73); Belvederes, Cambria Cadets, St. James Cadets, Hurricanes All Girls, West Reading Police Cadets, GAR Cadets, Empire State Express, etc. Some (again, not all) of the Senior corps he taught were: Connecticut Hurricanes, Rochester Crusaders, Bangor Yellow Jackets; Milton Keystoners; Westshoremens (54,55,56,66,67,78 & 80's); Viscounts & Commanders (Canada); Ohio Brass Factory; Yankee Rebels – Competing & Alumni, Cabs; Competing & Alumni, Archer Epler; Competing & Alumni, Bucs; Competing & Alumni and Reilly Alumni and the Skyliner Alumni.

John has also worked with several high school bands and many baton corps among them are: Arch Bishop Wood, Owen J. Roberts, West Chester State, Northern Lebanon, Danville, Mt. Carmel, Conrad Weiser, Reading, Cedar Clift, Pine Grove, Desperados, Sparkies, Liberty Belles, Renegades and Thunderbolts. All of these have been of championship caliber. He's also been a member of the American Originals Fife & Drum Corps. While with the fife corps he toured Switzerland twice performing with them and also performed for Presidents Clinton and Bush.

Other related drum corps highlights are Drum Major & Program Director for Yankee Rebels '75 & '76; Drum Major for Westshoremens '78; Business Manager for Bucs for many years and Corps Director for Archer Epler Alumni Corps for two years. He's also had the pleasure of taking private lessons from Les Parks; working with Bobby Thompson at the Bridgemen; playing two percussion clinics with Louie Bellson and of course his association with John Dowlan, his mentor. John has competed in MANY Individual competitions and has placed 1st in the 1961 VFW Senior Snare division and 1st in several Eastern States competitions. Most recently in 2004 at the age of 67 he placed 10th at the DCA I&E in Scranton, PA out of 24 competitors most of whom could have been his sons or grandsons and at age 68 in '05 placed 12th at the DCA I&E. He placed 3rd at the CADRE I&E in Canada in 2006 at age 69 and in 2012 at the age of 75 placed 14th of 21 at the DCA I&E in Annapolis !!

John's been judging for over 48+ years with such organizations as: Mid-Atlantic, DCI, DCA, VFW, American Legion, KIDA, Cavalcade and over 47+ years with National Judges Association. He also judged the very first DCI Championships in Whitewater, WI – over 100 corps in two days!! He has also served as the bass & cymbal tech for the TOB All Star Band for the Thanksgiving parade in Philly.

He was inducted into the DCA Hall of Fame in 1982 and is also a member of the Buccaneers, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, KIDA, APRDC, USARD and Eastern Review Halls of Fame. In June of this year – 2015 – he will be inducted into the TOB National Judges Association Hall of Fame.

In 2003 he started the American Patriots Rudimental Drummers Club (APRDC) – never dreaming it would become even half as successful as it was. The role of this organization was to preserve the heritage of rudimental drumming. At its zenith the club had over 80+ members from as far north as Canada, south to Florida, East to Massachusetts and west to Minnesota. Each year the club had a convention in the Harrisburg area where many of the icons of drumming met to perform and pursue the camaraderie of their fellow drum enthusiasts.

In his “personal” life he has degrees from Temple University School of Pharmacy, PA University in Advanced Safety Management and Dale Carnegie Effective Speaking Course. He’s been a distributor of safety products for his entire life and went into business for himself – Vision Safety Associates - in 1995 with an off-shoot selling percussion items in 1998 entitled Vision Drums. John is still working full time, traveling as much as possible and doing all his “drum” gigs. John looks forward to continuing arranging, instructing, judging and performing as long as he can. Most recently he was performing at the GAS Reunion in Binghamton , NY besides performing with the Yankee Rebels, NJ Alumni, USARD, etc. This year he was also a clinician at the USARD convention As recently as 2012 he performed with both Yankee Rebels and Skyliners at DCA Championships. He also completed a short compilation of just a few of his numerous arrangements.

Barbara’s D&B History

Barbara began her marching career in 1953 with a local D&B corps in Chili, NY. In those days each fire department had their own D&B corps and the summer seasons were filled with parade competitions held at each fire companies’ annual week-long carnival. Her first marching instructor was William McGrath, Sr. At a local senior corps competition held in Rochester it was announced that an all-girl corps was being formed and any girl interested should sign up while at the show. At the urging of her mother, Barbara did so and that was her first meeting with the inimitable Vince Bruni. Barbara marched with Vince’s Alpine Girls for the next several years even after “aging out” and joined the Crusaders in ’71. She started out on American flag in Chili and moved on to rifle and working flag line during the pursuing years. During her many years with the Crusaders she was in the working flag line and served on the steering committee and as Secretary. The Crusaders won the American Legion Championships in ’72 in Chicago and numerous New York State Championships. Barbara continued with the Crusaders until meeting her future husband John Flowers in ’77 when he began working with the Crusaders percussion line. In ’78 both were hired by the Harrisburg Westshoreman: Barbara did the guard and John the percussion section. Yes, it’s true – in those days basically ONE person did it all. Barbara created the routines, taught the routines, “cleaned” the routines and actually ended up performing the routines. The same with John for the percussion line. No “entourages” in those days. That was the first year that the Westshoremen ever beat the Bucs and they also won the American Legion championships in New Orleans. She was one of the first – if not the first – Senior corps guard instructor to incorporate choreography and grounding of equipment into a senior corps routine much to the dismay or approval of the judges – depending upon their point of view. Barbara is also the only woman senior corps instructor to be *banned “for life” from DCA post-show judges’ critiques* – the men could throw tantrums, tapes, punches, etc.....but God-forbid that a woman should speak up!

Barbara went on to work with such corps as the Ohio Brass Factory, Black Watch, and Empire State Express. Locally she worked with several championship baton corps and high school bands such as Reading High, Pine Grove, Thunderbolts, Desperados, and Liberty Belles. Eventually she branched out from not only working with guard but also working as a choreographic consultant.

When John began working w/the CT Hurricanes in ’84 it was apparent that Barbara’s guard career was endangered since their Wednesday evening practices precluded her attendance. At John’s suggestion, Barbara began playing cymbals and hasn’t looked back. Her cymbal bag reads: “I bang’em together and play Stormy Weather, while lightning shoots out of me ass!!” She’s marched with Cabs, Yankee Rebels , Archer Epler, Reilly, Sky and Bucs alumni corps. In 2005 John informed her he needed a bass drum player for his Yankee Rebel percussion line. Barbara never missed a beat and has been playing bass drum since. She also marched with the American Originals Fife corps as a working flag member and did the two tours of Switzerland and Presidential exhibitions with this fine unit. In 2012 Barbara played cymbals with Sky and bass drum with YR all season and performed with both corps at the 2012 DCA Alumni Spectacular.

Barbara placed second in the DCA I&E Cymbal division in '03, and won the DCA I&E cymbal competition in '05 in Scranton, PA at age 62. In 2010 Barbara won the I&E Cymbal division at the Sky indoor competition and in 2012 took home the gold medal with a score of 80.0 at age 69 from the DCA I&E Cymbal competition. She is a member of the Pennsylvania D&B Corps and KIDA Halls of Fame. She has judged for KIDA and Cavalcade of Bands and is currently in her 31+ year of judging with the National Judges Association. Most recently she was performing at the GAS Reunion in Binghamton, NY performing with the Yankee Rebels (bass drum), NJ Alumni (cymbals), USARD (bass drum), and Archie (cymbals), etc.

Barbara served as a judge and then the Administrative Coordinator for the Keystone Indoor Drill Association. In her position as Coordinator she was totally responsible for scheduling the entire season's competitions and organizing the Grand Championships at the end of the season. This was an immense task. She held this position for four years. Barbara was the Secretary/Treasurer of the APRDC and each year organized the immensely popular and successful conventions with attendance of over 100+. It was a huge task that required much time and effort. The Club became so successfully that it finally became too large a time and financial burden and was disbanded in 2008.

In her "personal" life Barbara has a degree as an Administrative Specialist from RIT, worked for Xerox Corp. for 17 years in Rochester, NY as an Executive Secretary to the liaison between the Research Department and Stamford, CT headquarters and then moved to Reading, PA where she held several Executive Secretarial positions. She's currently in her 14th year with VIST Bank as Executive Specialist/Receptionist for their Administrative Center. She's been a volunteer with the Philadelphia Zoo and is currently a volunteer at the Spring Township Library, the Berks County Animal Rescue League, a member of the Reading Symphony Orchestra League and Chamber of Commerce Women2Women organizations. Barbara is an extremely avid animal and nature enthusiast with memberships in many, many conservation organizations and has been very active in several world-wide conversation/environmental issues. She has met personally with numerous well-know conservationists such as Jane Goodall, Dame Daphne and Angel Sheldrick and Andrea Turkalo to name just a few.

She and John have traveled extensively with trips to Alaska, Hawaii, Switzerland, London, Edinburgh for the Tattoo, Costa Rica, Belize, Cozumel, Bermuda, Eastern & Western Caribbean, seven times to East Africa, Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe and one trip to South Africa. They are cruise fans and try to do at least one cruise per year. They enjoyed Disney World with trips there for 14 consecutive years. The last few years have found Barbara traveling solo to such places as Borneo, Thailand (where she took and graduated from a 5-day elephant mahout training course); Tanzania and Kenya, East Africa. This year she's off to Zambia, Botswana and the Okavango Delta. They have marched side by side (figuratively and literally speaking) since 1977 and continue to do so.

SOME ANECDOTES FROM THEIR DRUM CORPS EXPERIENCES:

- John – as Business Manager for the Bucs – late '60's: The Bucs, Sky & Hurcs were all staying at the same hotel for the DCA weekend in Rochester (definitely NOT a great idea!). The police were called because of furniture being thrown into the pool, light bulbs being smashed on the pavement, etc. John and the Business Mgrs. from Sky & Hurcs were escorted by the police into the hotel to see the damage first hand. They waited for the elevator and when the doors opened there was a naked man standing next to a full size Coke machine on the elevator (we won't mention what corps he was from...hmmm, why does New York, New York come to mind?). Needless to say much explaining needed to be done.
- John – as Business Manager for the Bucs – late 60's: Scranton, PA. After the contest John was handed the Bucs payment of about \$2500 – all in \$1.00 bills! Still in uniform, he had no place to carry it and so stuffed it in his pockets, blouse, shako, etc. as he walked back across the darkened parking lot hoping no one had seen the transaction.
- John in the 50's – standing up with his head sticking out of the roof of his VW while driving home late at night from teaching Bangor Yellow Jackets. Only way he could stay awake.
- Barbara – '76 Crusaders – Northern PA competition: In order to compete in the contest that evening each corps had to participate in the local afternoon parade. The Crusaders equipment truck and bus broke down and never arrived until just prior to show time. The few corps members who had driven marched the parade clapping their hands and singing the routine throughout the entire parade.

PS: At the end of the parade they stopped to watch the rest of the parade. Coming down the street were the Yankee Rebels. There's never been a better street time!! They played "Anything Goes" and to this day it's the

grooviest I've ever heard. I sure never dreamt that two years later the composer of that street time would be my husband.

- John & Barbara – American Legion Nationals – Washington, DC – 70's: although with different corps, both were witnesses to the “stick” event that occurred. At the end of the show as the corps were leaving the field, Sky (unhappy with the results of the show) showered the Legion Women's Auxiliary with drum sticks as they passed by – VERY interesting display. Sky was banned from ever competing in any Legion contests from then on and the Crusaders were awarded a Good Fellowship award that is notated in the Congressional Records.
- John & Barbara – Hershey, PA – 70's: as the corps left the field after retreat there were MANY pairs of white shoes in perfect alignment on the field where Sky had been standing. Again, unhappy with the results, they “protested” by leaving their shoes on the field.
- J&B – Hershey, PA – 70's: Westshoremens decided it would be innovative to release live pigeons at the end of their performance. Unfortunately, the pigeons were blinded by the bright stadium lights and didn't fly anywhere, but just kept landing on the field. One of the all time greats of judging – Walter Kelly – was judging that evening. He pulled out his starter pistol and started firing blanks trying to get the pigeon to leave they field – they didn't. It was quite a sight.
- Barbara – watching the Yankee Rebels in 1976. Saw their drum major clothed entirely in orange – orange slacks, blouse, shako, plume, etc. During the directing of the drum solo (concert) he was backing down the 50 toward the audience and tripped and fell over backward on an orange traffic cone that was marking the sidelines. He continued directing even as he fell and rose back to his feet. She remembers commenting that in the solid orange uniform all he needed was a green plume and he could pass for a carrot! This drum major was John who in less than two years would be her husband!! At this point they had never met.

WHAT THEY MISS MOST ABOUT 'OLD-TIME' DRUM CORPS:

* The uniqueness and individuality of the corps of days gone by. It's been commented by both John & Barbara – and many others – that if you close your eyes and just listen to the Junior corps of today – back to back with no announcing who's next – that you can't tell them apart. They pretty much all sound alike. Even the Senior corps have basically fallen into this scenario. Gone are the days when just a song or arrangement was enough to identify a corps. Each had their own individual style, look, sound and of course – maybe most importantly – their own signature musical selection. Cabs – the Rumps; Sky – New York, New York; Brigs – Shenandoah; Boston Crusaders: Conquest; St Joe's of Batavia – Watermelon Man; Hurcs: Magnificent Seven; etc.

* The precision required for the “tick” system, “Inspections”, military style of marching – eyes straight ahead, uniforms in perfect condition, ranks, files, echelons, company fronts, etc.

* Starting and ending lines – “Color Presentations”

* After show parties at every contest with ‘beer towers’ – singing of corps songs, great camaraderie!

GREATEST MEMORIES/EXPERIENCES:

Barbara:

* Winning the American Legion Nationals in Chicago in 1972 at Soldiers' Field. While on the field – during the playing of ‘Shaft’ – the Crusaders covered the entire field from starting line to finish, as she turned, Barbara saw the Hawthorne Caballeros already on the starting line – backs to the Crusaders. One of the big musical hits of that year was “Knights in White Satin” – she never, ever dreamt the Crusaders would win that show. To this day remembering that moment brings tears to her eyes. (Caballeros contested the results and the final resolution wasn't made until well past midnight – the Crusaders prevailed and were the 1972 American Legion Champions.)

* Winning the 2005 DCA Cymbal Individual Championship competition in Scranton, PA. Barbara had been released from the hospital (after a 23-day stay and emergency heart surgery) only five weeks earlier and had very limited use of her left arm and hand. She was just beginning to learn how to walk again and was very weak. John designed and built a cymbal tree stand for her to play so she wouldn't have to use her left arm & hand to hold a cymbal. Barbara composed her own music for her performance – a medley of Sing, Sing, Sing & Big Wind from Winnetka. After a descent start to the performance, Barbara's legs turned to jelly and she fell to the ground rolling backwards. Several audience members came to her aid, but she insisted upon getting up herself and finished her performance. She scored 79.0 beating the second place competitor by 11 points. She even ‘marched’ with the Cabs Alumni corps the next day even though she could only carry one cymbal. She proudly held her right cymbal high aloft as the corps came forward in their ‘company front’ during Flamenco Cha-cha!!

* Joining the Cabs Alumni corps in 1998. To actually be a part of the corps that is THE greatest corps of all time was mind boggling. At her first exhibition as a corps member, Barbara was covered with goose-bumps from head to toe on the starting line and silently cried throughout most of the performance. These were the men who'd been her idols for so many years and now she was one with them.

* Enjoying the Yankee Rebels Requiem Show of the 70's. Undoubtedly THE most unique field show ever produced in Senior drum corps. With Truman at the helm – it was a spectacle and innovation of all time! AND way too many more to list.....

John:

* Winning the 1965 DCA Championships with the Buccaneers plus taking the High Drum Trophy.

* Winning back-to-back DCA High Percussion with two different corps in '74 and '75

* Marching with West Reading in '57 and beating Blessed Sacs drum line AND just way too many to list.....



Ready to perform



Duet & Solo at GAS Toronto



Preparing to don hoods to go down in Shark Tank (hmm?! Or was that preparing for post-contest critique?)



DCA 2012



APRDC Convention