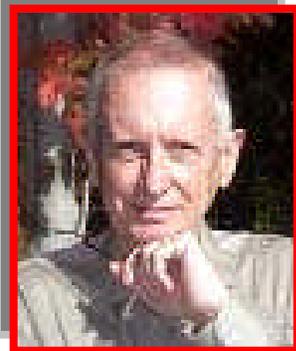




CHS Bio

Don Venable – “CHS Liberace”

1955



After I graduated CHS my family moved to Pasadena, California where I continued my studies in music. Then on to UCLA for one semester followed by two years at the Juilliard School in New York City. After that I moved to Chicago and became the assistant conductor of the Chicago Jazz Ensemble and played solo piano in various hotels and restaurants. In 1962 I toured Alaska and the Far East Command with USO, entertaining the troops. I'll never forget playing a show in Korea and having the building empty out (was I really that bad?) as the Cuban Missile Crisis began. We could see the Nike missiles rising out of their silos and the pilots getting on full alert! We all know how that ended, but it was a truly alarming couple of hours. Later, after landing in Saigon following visits to bases in the north, our pilot discovered about six new bullet holes in the left wing of our C-47 and deduced that we had been fired upon by snipers, even though we only flew at night. I'm still waiting for my medal.

In 1964 I went to Wellington, New Zealand by working as a deckhand on a German freighter to pay for my passage. There I worked in a slaughterhouse and on a construction crew and played piano on some radio shows. I've always wanted to get back to New Zealand - a true paradise with friendly people and incredible natural beauty.

In 1969 I moved to Anchorage, Alaska just at the right time: the oil lease sale was going on and there was plenty of work for pianists to entertain the young oil workers down on R and R from the North Slope who had lots of money in their pockets and looked for the closest bar to find wine, women and song, so to speak. I remained there for about ten years, playing in hotels and restaurants and I wrote a musical score for a film on the Totem Poles in Sitka, which I understand is still being shown in the visitors' center, about thirty years later. I should have held out for royalties!

Music kept me moving around, and I spent three fantastic years in Copenhagen as a solo pianist and arranger for a 60-piece symphony orchestra. In 1985 I joined a cruise line as bandleader and met my current wife Barbara. We cruised the Mexican Riviera and Alaska for about fourteen months and then I did two additional cruises with Holland America in the Caribbean. I got certified in SCUBA diving and spent all my free time in the water, snorkeling and tank-diving.

My last piano-playing job was in the Ritz Carlton Hotel in Dana Point where I was forced to look out the window at the island of Catalina on a daily basis, playing the Steinway in my tuxedo. (A dirty job, but someone's.....). My most cherished memory of my time at the Ritz was the night a man came over to the piano and gave me \$20 if I would NOT play any songs by Andrew Lloyd Weber. (I would have done it for \$10, but he insisted).

Barbara and I are enthusiastic travelers, having seen Madrid, Paris, the cities of Shanghai and Guangzhou in China and much of Mexico in the past few years. We finally settled down in San Juan Capistrano, a lovely town in Southern California, and we moved to

Grass Valley in California's fabled Gold Country about three years ago where I am involved in my new passion, video editing and photography. I am producing DVD's for clients, archiving their photo collections, wedding videos, and other memorable occasions. I usually write music for the projects on my trusty Macintosh and the work is rewarding and a nice side business in my "Golden Years".

Which reminds me: does anyone know who coined that term, "Golden Years"? As I watch my friends and family drop like flies as the years pass, that seems like a rather odd phrase. Of course I'm kidding, these later years are great in many ways, but I do feel for our classmates who have had severe health problems. One of those is **Diane Martin**, from whom I got my first kiss! I wish her well.

At Central High, like most young lads, I had crushes on **Dotty Westby**, **Gay Hammond**, **Judy Irons**, all the usual suspects, but can't recall any reciprocity from them. I was fortunate enough to be piano soloist for two years in the "Daze" and did a short-lived comedy act as a Liberace wannabe (kerosene lantern instead of candelabra, seat belt in the piano bench, most of the material stolen from Victor Borge). I also remember having a short-lived but highly successful duo-piano team with **Bob Middlebrook**. I auditioned to play solo piano with the Tulsa Philharmonic and was beaten by **Mary Hazleton** whose sister Darlene later told me that I only lost because "she played better than you". Well, DOH! (Of course, my concerto was much more difficult than hers.)

I had no serious romantic relationships at Central, as I was too busy practicing the piano to have much time for romance, just a few minor dalliances. I have lately gotten back in touch my old friend **David Holland** and years ago had dinner with an old friend, **Colleen Lear**, in Seattle. Also, I ran into **Dale Webb** in Anchorage where he was practicing medicine and flying his floatplane which was moored just 50 feet from his back door (in a lake). Otherwise I have not been in contact with my classmates and regret that I didn't keep a few lines of communication open with my good friends there. I'd love to hear from some of my old classmates and can be reached at chocstarfish@sbcglobal.net. I'll close this bio out now before it becomes a novel. I am too teary-eyed with nostalgia to be able to see the keyboard anyway.

I saved the best for last! I just signed a contract with Columbia Records: I have to buy 12 CD's from them in the next two years! (Cymbal crash !)

**See Ya at the
50th Don!**

