

In Memoriam, Donald C. Lind (1927-2019)

By Jennifer Lind

He was Dad to us; “Gramps Lind” to his grandkids and great-grandkids; “Captain Don” around the Santa Cruz Yacht Harbor; and “Bongo Don” to his ukulele group. Donald Clarence Lind, resident of Santa Cruz since 1965, passed away peacefully at the VA Medical Center in Reno, Nevada, thirteen days before his 92nd birthday.

Don was born in Alameda in 1927, and later moved with his parents to Sacramento. At McClatchy High School he was a star athlete in track and field. At Sacramento Junior and State colleges, Don studied psychology and discovered the theater. As he began his acting career, World War II got in the way; in 1945 Don enlisted in the US Marine Corps. When the war ended, he was in Oregon in basic training: one of hundreds of thousands of young people preparing to be shipped out for the U.S. invasion of Japan that didn’t happen.

After the war, Don went back to acting: in the late 1940’s working in New England’s summertime Straw Hat Circuit and other theater companies around Boston and Cape Cod. He returned to California to operate companies in Santa Cruz (his first time there) and Sacramento.

“They always said I was a John Barrymore, leading-man type,” my dad told me last week as we sat together at the nursing home. (Curious, I googled Barrymore and showed dad the picture on my phone. “Look at that,” he marveled. “You type anything in and can see it. Like magic.”) Barrymore indeed bore a striking resemblance to young Don – they both had a tall, slim build and blond good looks. But dad had piercing bright blue eyes.



Lind’s “Company of the Red Bull,” as advertised in the Santa Cruz Sentinel on July 2, 1952

Below: Don backstage at the Sacramento Civic Repertory Theater, circa 1953



Innumerable women swooned over those eyes, including Charline Jackson, whom he married in 1953. Settling down in Modesto, they had three sons: Charles, David, and Craig. To support his family, Don took numerous jobs: over the years, shipping clerk, forklift operator, foreman, mechanic, and also correctional officer at Folsom Prison. Eventually he discovered an opportunity to apply for a government fellowship toward a career in social welfare.

This opportunity led Don to enroll at the University of California (from which his father, Clarence Lind had previously graduated) to earn a Master's of Social Welfare. During this time, his marriage to Charline ended; for at Berkeley he met Mary Catharine (Cathy) Olson and was "struck by the thunderbolt," as he would always say. They graduated and married in 1965, and moved to the Santa Cruz area, where I was later born, and where Don worked for Santa Cruz County in the division of Child Protective Services. Don and Cathy lived and raised me in a house in Aptos.

His artistic temperament unsuited to a 9-to-5 office job, Don looked to his hobbies for inspiration. He loved boating; for a few precious weeks each summer, we vacationed in the Sierra Nevada mountains at Pinecrest Lake, where Don fished, sailed the family Sunfish, and rumbled around the lake in our motorboat.

Once he bought a fishing boat for the bay ("think of all the fresh salmon!" he enthused to me and my skeptical mom). But it sat under a tarp collecting oak leaves, so he eventually sold it. Eager for exercise, Don joined Song's Martial Arts Institute in Santa Cruz, where, under Grand Master Soonho Song, he earned his black belt at age 58.

Most of all Don sought inspiration through writing. He rose at 3:00am to write every day before work. He wrote and published multiple plays – one of them, *Empty and Waiting*, told the story of a loving matriarch of a large foster family, and showcased some of the horrors and heartache that Don confronted in his work in child services.

Don and Cathy divorced in 1988, and Don began another phase of his life in Santa Cruz. He moved into the Palomar Inn, a residential hotel for seniors that dwells invisibly over Pacific Avenue's boisterous El Palomar restaurant. When Cathy bought out his share of the Aptos house, Don used the settlement to buy a sailboat that he named *Lena D*, after his grandmother. Don moved aboard the boat in the Santa Cruz Yacht Harbor's U-Dock.

He commented that the boat provided an infinite source of projects to keep him busy; indeed, his tanned, leathery



With his kids at Pinecrest Lake



Hauled out on Lena D

hands were always tinkering away with one tool or another. “Last week I had to install a new bilge pump,” he’d report, or “we’re getting ready for the haul-out.”

Don continued writing. He worked on a novel about a gentle old sailor who lived on a boat (!), and later a novel he titled “The Search for True Love.” Its protagonist was a young woman named Leslie who overcame heartache after an affair with a good-for-nothing named Loverboy, and conversed at length with a shaman, who enlightened her about the ways of the world and

men. And there were robots.
Something about robots.



Bongo Don with the “Sons of the Beach”

For fun, Don joined the “Sons of the Beach” ukulele club that performed on the beach by the harbor. He accompanied the ukes on the bongo drums and sang gustily. “I like to bump and grind,” he’d cackle, to my mortification, and to the grins and gasps of the audience.

During those days in the harbor, as *Good Times* [profiled](#), three days a week, “Lind takes his routine brisk walk along the harbor to the local coffee shop. He

carries an audio recorder with him everywhere he goes in case he gets an inspiration for his novel. At the coffee shop he drinks his yerba mate tea, walks briskly back and spends a few more hours working on the boat. He devotes the rest of his day to his novel.” Seen on his walks, sporting his captain’s hat and puffing on his pipe, Don became a harbor institution.

Don later sold *Lena D* to purchase a larger and more comfortable power boat, which he named *Karma*. In March 2011, the tsunami caused by the Japanese earthquake pounded the harbor. As the *Sentinel* [reported](#), during the crisis, diver Josh Pearlman struggled to tie up capsized boats that were “kind of pinballing around and sinking everything they ran into.” Seeing *Karma* in danger, Pearlman reached it in time, and secured it to the dock. Later, Pearlman said that Don “got all teary-eyed and gave me a hug and he was like, ‘This is my life. I don’t have insurance, I don’t have my wife, everything I have is on this boat.’ And he just gave me this big, heartfelt, warm hug.”

Over time, as Don trod less confidently over the harbor’s steep metal ramps and gently bobbing docks, he decided it was time to move back “to the hard.” He met a young couple with a small child who were having money problems and needed a place to live, so sold them *Karma*. “For a dollar,” he told me. You did what now? “They needed help!” he said, as if it were the obvious thing to do.

Don moved back to the Palomar, where he walked a quiet and routinized path between cafes, Trader Joe's, and so on. Don continued to write, branching out into poetry, and joined the local group "Poet/Speak." Friend and fellow poet Jim Russo wrote:

*Don is a poet, a theatrical poet, his inflections, volume, weeping, hysteria, changing characters, contorting his body, shivering, and all that only in one poem
When he reads, you don't want it to end
His impersonations, flashing blue eyes, you try to take in every nuance, knowing it's fleeting, becoming vapor with each new word
His poems will never be read again as Don would*

Don had a few falls in autumn of 2019, and this March, at age 91, one felled him for good. He broke his hip, and weeks of hospitalization and rehab caused him tremendous distress. Though he could no longer walk, he kept insisting, "I just want to go back to the Palomar!" Eventually we moved him to Nevada to be near his youngest son Craig; ultimately, under Hospice care at the Reno VA Medical Center, Don passed away on May 3. We walked and cried alongside while veterans escorted him, draped in a flag, through the hospital in a ritual Honor Walk, with nurses and patients in the corridors pausing to salute as we passed.

"My grandpa is a badass," wrote great-granddaughter, Aubrie Cooper. "He's lived his life his way, a writer and sailor." Indeed. Don Lind is survived by Aubrie and five other great-grandchildren, by six grandchildren, by his four children, and by unforgettable memories of bongos, poetry, and bright blue eyes.

