

Second Act Stories (www.secondactstories.org)

Episode 28

Changing His Tune: Dr. Arnie Rosen Is Now A "Band Grandpa"
(12/3/2018)

Who	Audio Segment
Dr. Arnie Rosen	<p>I hope any of my patients listening to this are not offended when I say that the mind can wander during the administration of a colonoscopy. And for about a year prior to my anticipated retirement, I was thinking a lot about how I wanted to spend my retirement time. And this expression Band Grandpa just popped into my mind. I knew I wanted to spend time in a school band room because growing up, that was a very happy place for me. I loved it.</p> <p>So I thought well, I want to be viewed as kind of a grandpa and I'll be in the band so I'll call myself a Band Grandpa.</p>
	<p>INTRO MUSIC</p>
Andy Levine	<p>Welcome to Second Act Stories, a podcast that looks at people who have made major life changes and are pursuing more rewarding lives in a second act. I'm your host, Andy Levine.</p> <p>For today's episode, I traveled to Rockford, Illinois. And I spent a morning with Arnie Rosen, a retired doctor, and 80+ 7th and 8th graders in the band room at the Lincoln Middle School.</p> <p>Dr. Rosen loved his 27-year career as a gastroenterologist in this midwestern community. But when he finally retired two years ago he had a plan for what he wanted to do. He wanted to become a "band grandpa."</p> <p>If you've never heard that term before, don't feel out of the loop. Dr. Rosen actually created it two years ago. Here he is working with Carma Lopez and Nelly Tinker, two 8th grade flute players.</p>
Band Tutoring	<p>PLAY REHEARSAL SEGMENT</p>
Andy	<p>This is how Dr. Arnie Rosen spends every Tuesday during the school year. He works with 6th, 7th and 8th grade students who are learning how to play a wide range of instruments. Here, he's not Dr. Rosen. He's just Mr. Rosen or to some students "Grandpa." And it brings him back to his own time in middle school and high school.</p>

<p>Arnie</p>	<p>I was very lucky growing up in Pittsfield, Massachusetts with the band program that it had. And the most important teachers...not necessarily most important, but the people with longevity in my life were the music teachers. Because if you were in band in junior high school, you had that person for three years. If you were in band in high school, you had that person for three years.</p> <p>When I was in eighth grade, Mr. Fulginiti, my band teacher, knew of an all-county festival. I knew how to play the saxophone, but I didn't have a tenor saxophone. He gave me his, a Selmer Mark VI. If you're in the saxophone world, you know that that's a beautiful instrument, a very valuable instrument. He let me borrow his horn so that I could go participate in that festival.</p> <p>And so, I always thought that the music was the greatest home in school.</p>
<p>Andy</p>	<p>Arnie played in middle school, high school and a bit in college. But once he enrolled in medical school, his playing days were put on hold.</p>
<p>Arnie</p>	<p>Once med school started, music stopped. My interest in music didn't stop but I never played, didn't own a horn, didn't take lessons. Internship, residency, fellowship, children, all of that conspired to keep me away from playing.</p>
<p>Andy</p>	<p>So how old were you when you picked up the tuba again?</p>
<p>Arnie</p>	<p>I was well into my 30s before I started playing again.</p> <p>I met some doctors who played in an all physician Dixieland band and they needed a substitute tuba player for when the dentist who played their tuba wasn't available. So I was lacking talent and an instrument. The talent was harder to come by but I found an instrument. I had become friends with the band director at Rock Valley Community College, a wonderful man named Jack Simon who remains a good friend and I asked if I could borrow a tuba. He said I could but I would have to play in his community concert band. I said, "If you'll have me, I'd be delighted."</p> <p>So I did that and got the bug back. It was like being reunited with an old friend playing the tuba. It was wonderful. And there were no tuba teachers locally but 50 miles away at the University of Wisconsin in Whitewater was indeed an instructor of tuba, John Tuinstra, perfect name for a teacher of music. And I would travel on Wednesday afternoons while other doctors were golfing. And I would drive to Whitewater to take a tuba lesson. It was marvelous.</p>
<p>Andy</p>	<p>Arnie took the music seriously.</p>
<p>Arnie</p>	<p>Thursday nights were sacrosanct. That was band rehearsal night. I would make schedule requests many months in advance at work. Don't put me on call on Thursday nights. I have band responsibilities. It was a really wonderful therapy.</p>

Andy	I wanna transition you here to the idea of the Band Grandpas. So this is your idea as I understand it.
Arnie	Correct.
Andy	How did it come to you?
Arnie	<p>I hope any of my patients listening to this are not offended when I say that the mind can wander during the administration of a colonoscopy. And for about a year prior to my anticipated retirement, I was thinking a lot about how I wanted to spend my retirement time. And this expression Band Grandpa just popped into my mind. I knew I wanted to spend time in a school band room because growing up, that was a very happy place for me. I loved it. I love being in a band room. I like to be among the players. I like to be among the instruments. It's just a great place.</p> <p>And knowing that people were in need of some attention, I thought this was a logical thing and I wanted to be that sort of grand paternal person in the life of the student. So I thought well, I want to be viewed as kind of a grandpa and I'll be in the band so I'll call myself a Band Grandpa. I didn't anticipate that there'd be a program. There are now about 12 of us volunteering at middle schools and high schools in Rockford.</p>
Andy	How did you recruit this group? I mean how did you put out the word and were you surprised at the response?
Arnie	<p>I'm on the board of the Rockford Symphony Orchestra and through the Rockford Symphony Orchestra, I met Margo Steadman who is on staff there and involved with educational efforts and outreach. And I had mentioned this Band Grandpa idea to her and she knew exactly who I should talk to, a woman named Bonnie Spurling who works in administration in the Rockford Public Schools. And Margo thought Bonnie and Arnie ought to get together and the three of us had lunch. I mentioned my Band Grandpa idea to Bonnie and she thought, "It sounds great, I'm in."</p> <p>And among the three of us, details got sorted out. So both Rockford Public Schools and the Rockford Symphony have provided some structure for this and an all-points bulletin went out through various mechanisms. If you're interested, let us know. And then word spread and it grew and every band teacher is happy to have some help.</p>
Andy	So I've observed this today but for my listeners, how does the Band Grandpa program actually work?

<p>Arnie</p>	<p>Different individuals have different commitments. I spend one day a week every week that whole school day with my band director and the band classes. We have five classes a day and I do largely what he asks me. Free help is desirable and really, whatever we want to do as long as we can make a steady commitment is tolerated very well by the actual faculty. At my school typically during the concert band classes, I will go into a practice room with a few of the kids and work on specific parts.</p> <p>Other times, I'm asked to sit or stand next to another student or sit in the middle of the tubas or the percussion section and say please help with such and such a passage. So I'm kind of a utility player. I go where I'm asked. I can't play every instrument but I usually know what the note ought to sound like.</p>
<p>Andy</p>	<p>Steve Mikulay is the music teacher that Arnie works with every Tuesday.</p>
<p>Steve Mikulay</p>	<p>Having a Band Grandpa is helpful because it's an extra set of eyes, whereas if I could give a student an assignment and say, "Go into the practice room and practice," well, then they're not supervised. Although they might get something done, having an adult in the room with them really kinda puts the pressure on for them to stay focused, be able to ask questions by someone who is knowledgeable of music. Even if they don't teach music or didn't teach music as a career, they were still musicians.</p> <p>And then additionally, it's nice to have that reliability of an adult coming into their lives one day a week so that then they'll know, "Well, Mr. Rosen is coming today because today is Tuesday. And then Thursday, Mr. Christiansen will be here." They have that reliability, that dependability that they can count on that.</p>
<p>Andy</p>	<p>Is the Band Grandpa a good term to describe what's going on here and the role that they're playing in this band room?</p>
<p>Steve</p>	<p>I think it's nice just because there are students who probably do not have their grandpa or didn't know their grandpa. To have an older role model to them, I think, is something different, something they wouldn't see anywhere else. You wouldn't have a Math Grandma or Grandpa. You'd have a math volunteer or a social worker who comes in. It's different. A Band Grandpa, it's kinda unique to music for us.</p>
<p>Andy</p>	<p>Tell me about the students that you work with.</p>
<p>Arnie</p>	<p>There's a broad spectrum of interest and talent among the students. Some are in band unfortunately because they have to be someplace so it might as well be band. Others love music and are enthused. Almost none of them have the wherewithal to have private lessons. So their first musical experience is in band.</p>
<p>Andy</p>	<p>Arnie retired from his medical practice at the age of 62. And I asked him why he decided to leave.</p>

<p>Arnie</p>	<p>There are a few things. My father died at age 64. That weighs on me periodically. He had just retired and was starting to have a bit of fun and then got sick and died. I found that very frustrating for a variety of reasons. So that number stuck in my head. Also as a gastroenterologist in a private practice, I was on call periodically and my tolerance for being on call diminished.</p> <p>You never know when the phone is gonna ring and it may just be a simple question about medication or it may be that someone's gotten their bratwurst stuck in their esophagus and you've got to now come to the emergency department and fish it out. And I never really liked that part but I was liking it less as the years passed.</p> <p>I love my practice, I love most of my patients, I miss the staff, I miss lots of it, I don't miss being on call at all. Sunday nights now are a dream. I can enjoy my meal. I don't have to worry about what I didn't accomplish over the weekend or what's facing me in the week. After having done perhaps 20,000 colonoscopies, I'm doing fine not having done any.</p>
<p>Andy</p>	<p>So taking a little different direction, I wanna imagine you are advising someone who maybe is 60 years old, is thinking about a kind of retirement and trying to figure out what they want to do. What advice would you give to them?</p>
<p>Arnie</p>	<p>Frustrated retirees that I have met have been the ones who worked very hard and did not have a game plan for retirement. I don't think it's wise to leave your work if you don't have something exciting to go to. My simple advice would be to find that thing or things that really interest you. Gee! If I only have the time, I would do X. If you've got that in store and it's financially responsible for you to retire, then do so. Because every time I hear about some tragedy, some premature death, some bad thing, I'm thinking, "Boy, I'm glad I'm having more fun now."</p>
<p>Andy</p>	<p>You not only found something to do, you created something, something that didn't exist. Is that something you'd recommend as well?</p>
<p>Arnie</p>	<p>If the thing you do proves to be popular, is of interest to others, great. I didn't set out in any sort of mission with the Band Grandpas. I've received accolades, it's wonderful. But it was ultimately really a selfish thing initially. How do I want to spend my day? I want to spend my day at a school in a band room.</p>
	<p>REHEARSAL SEGMENT</p>
	<p>OUTGOING MUSIC</p>

Andy	<p>It was such a pleasure shadowing Arnie Rosen for half a day. He's really fantastic with the students – upbeat, encouraging and patient with their progress. And he's sharing his deep love of music with a new generation.</p> <p>As I think back on the lessons of this episode, two items come to mind:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In a second act, some people find a way to go back to an activity they enjoyed growing up. For other individuals profiled in this podcast it has been acting, baking and biking. For Arnie Rosen, it was music.• The second item is taken directly from Arnie's comments about retirement. Retirement should not just be about <u>leaving work</u> it should be about <u>going to</u> something – something you really enjoy. And you have to take the time to figure out what that is before you pull the trigger on leaving work. As Arnie put it, you need a game plan. <p>Our special thanks to Arnie Rosen and all of the Band Grandpas in the Rockford Public School System. Wouldn't it be wonderful if this idea took off? I'd love to see the National Society of Band Grandpas with chapters in every state in the country.</p> <p>We hope you'll keep listening. There are more second act stories just around the corner.</p>
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