

REMEMBERING HARRY L. ALFORD

In this profession, I believe what you are depends largely on what your colleagues think of you. Harry L. Alford was one of the most respected musicians of his time. I asked his daughter, Mrs. Eric E. Bottoms, of Arlington, Va. to tell me some things about her father and so, with her permission, we are sharing her letter about him.

Leonard B. Smith



BY RUTH BOTTOMS

"I was delighted to receive your kind letter in the mail today and will do my very best to answer all your questions.

Yes, I truly felt that my beloved daddy had exceptional talent and a certain ability : found in today's composer.

First, here are some highlights of his life: He was born in Blissfield, Michigan, August 3, 1875. His musical education - Oberlin, Ohio. He married my mother (born in Canada) Lucille Teetzel, Oct. 1, 1901.

There were just two children, my brother Harold and myself. Harold is a retired Eastern Airlines Captain and lives with his family in Miami, Fla.

Daddy started his arranging business on Clark Street in Chicago and then progressed to the State-Lake Building in the early 20's where he built his arranging and composing business to such an extent that at one time, he had a secretary, bookkeeper, 4 copyists and 4 arrangers and himself.

Then, in 1932 - the big depression - unfortunately daddy had to let some of his staff go, but, bless his heart, he hung on and then built it up again and operated it until he passed away March 5, 1939. Tragically, my dear mother predeceased him in January of 1938. After Mom died, daddy seemed to lose his spark and zest for living and peacefully died in his sleep

of a heart attack at the Medinah Athletic Club where he was living.

The Masonic order and Shrine meant much to him and the Commandery in Oak Park, Illinois. He was their band leader there for years and years.

Another thing about daddy's life, before going to Oberlin, he earned money travelling with wild west shows throughout the land. My - the experiences, he had! He played trombone and piano and one time while out in Cripple Creek, Colorado, the wild west show manager ran off with all the money and left the whole show stranded so daddy tuned pianos across the country. Imagine - what a fabulous guy he was!

My brother and I had a very happy and unusual childhood. If we made good grades in school, our reward was to go back stage weekends and see the big time vaudeville acts rehearse. Daddy wrote so much of their music!

Two of Daddy's best friends were Merle Evans (the long time band leader with the Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey Circus) and of course, John Philip Sousa. They always came out to the house to eat when they were in town to specially enjoy my mother's delicious roast pork and lemon meringue pie. Mother always thought that Mr. Sousa (while a "March King") was

a "little sissy man" because he always wore white gloves but she put her foot down and made him take them off while dining at our table. I thought you'd enjoy this little story.

We also went behind the scenes and visited the musician's tents and saw Mr. Evans every August when the circus would be at Grant Park on Chicago's lake front. Writing this to you just bring back so many memories.

I clearly remember visiting daddy in his Clark Street office and going up in the old fashioned "open all sides" elevator. I was just a little girl then and it scared me stiff.

My hubby is a civil engineer and retired in 1969 from 40 years with the U.S. Army Engineers. We have 2 daughters - married - and 2 granddaughters. They live in Apple Valley, Calif. and Grand Rapids, Mich.

I do hope I've given you enough information about my dad. Anything about daddy would be "very special" to me.

Very sincerely,

Ruth Bottoms