

The following are a few of the hundreds of great messages sent to or about Mr. Frank Hess by his band students and family around the time of his passing. Those written prior to his death were read to him. The messages allowed him to fully understand what a positive impact he made and continues to make in the lives of many. They also allowed him to relive lots of fun times. The Hess family sincerely appreciates everyone for giving him a tremendous amount of comfort, pleasure and love at the time he needed it most.

Anna Dunlap Shelton

To the Hess family. Thank you so much for sharing this time. My visit yesterday with Mrs. Hess and sharing those few moments with Mr. Hess was very special. He said "and who are you " I told him my name and he said " Oh Baritone " that was amazing cuz if you ever heard me play it would not be a moment to remember. Thank you so much you for all you gave.

Michael Butler

Mr. Hess is one of kind. Patient, Kind, understanding. He always produced great results, by bringing out the best in us. I recall that even though we joked and played around a lot at practice....once Mr. Hess stepped up to start we all would instantly stop, focus on what he had us do and try to do our best. The results were great...whether it was practice or a performance. He was a true leader and a great teacher, evidenced by the lasting impression he made on each student of his. I remember the first day I met him. It was the beginning of summer practice before school started. I had moved from Bossier and had to audition for him to determine where I would fit in the band. We sat in the Gym and talked about my experience in band. He asked lots of questions, and though I was at best a mediocre player, I could talk a good so by the end of the discussion both he and I were convinced that I was a pretty good musician. I thought we were done. I actually thought I had talked my way into a first chair part but he put a piece of music in front of me to sight read the first chair trumpet part for "Invictus" which to me looked like Chinese script... hopeless. Though I knew my bluff had been called I sucked it up and tried to play it which produce 2 minutes of the sickest, awful sounds a trumpet can produce. Mr. Hess just sat there patiently. To this day I cannot not imagine how he kept a straight face...I laugh to tears when I think of it....it was hilariously awful. At the end I just sorted smiled embarrassed and stated "I really can't sight read". He gently replied "I know"!

David Melville

Hi, I am one of thousands whose life is different and better having been taught by Frank. He excited me about percussion ... an excitement I have to this day, and have passed down to another two generations. I will always remember his smile, twinkle in his eye, his bounce as he directed, and his making you feel you are special. I still remember playing *Tuxedo Junction* under his leadership, and his expecting young Parkway Panthers to perform like professionals. He prepared me to play along with Ringo Starr on vinyl, and for that I will be eternally grateful. Well, he is special, and the church I pastor, Fellowship United Methodist, has Frank, you and your entire family in our prayers. Mrs. Jane Haire is keeping us up-dated. God bless all of you in this season of life.



Jacob Hess

Thanks you everyone for contributing and thank you Michael for setting up this group. It is great to read everyone's heartfelt words about my grandfather.

Lloyd Ramsey

Your father was a unique man indeed. He pushed us to reach for the excellence he knew was in us. When we had doubts, he encouraged us. He was kind, but he expected us to live up to his standards...Not ours. The fact he believed enough in Steve Baker and to send us as the reps of Parkway High to the 1977 Louisiana All-Star Band is one of the memories of him I will always hold close. The fact he was conducting that same band that year made it all the more amazing! All of us went nuts cheering when the end of "Rocky" echoed back to us from across LSU Stadium during that amazingly hot and humid summer. It was a grueling rehearsal schedule. Yet, Mr. Hess proved his leadership skills over and over again with this monster size band. He designed an absolutely killer show for the crowd and they loved every minute of it! One of his favorite sayings was "Corn sells." It always did. Many of the band members and I could probably tell you war stories about your father until you got tired of hearing us speaking about him. Treasure your memories of him, Danny. I know I will.

Beth Aiken Roe Fisher

I had a wonderful visit with Mr. & Mrs. Hess today. I really didn't expect him to remember me. I wasn't a Golden Girl, a Rifle, or Flagline. I wasn't first chair, concert band, or even A band. I was a mediocre player at best. But as soon as I walked in he said "Aiken – clarinet." I had the honor of feeding him some ice cream and I probably stayed a little too long as we shared some great memories! He smiled and his eyes did their little twinkle as I told him I was the reason he lost some of his hair! I was so uncoordinated and as we learned to march in that parking lot between Parkway and Sun City he often yelled, "Left Aiken, left! Left Aiken, left!" LOL! We talked about me coming to him wanting to quit band because I was such a perfectionist and knew I wasn't a good player. He told me at the time that you wouldn't have much music if everyone played first part. Playing third part was just as important as playing first. Of course I didn't really believe him at the time but I did stay in band and I did learn the lesson that he was trying to impart to me. Even if I couldn't be the best it didn't mean that I couldn't contribute something! Even with my mediocre skills he pushed me to give it my best and I think I did eventually make first chair of the third part (in the B , band!) Anyway, it was a great visit and if you've hesitated about going, thinking he won't remember you, I can bet you he will! Go see him, you won't regret it!

Robert Baker

Hi, Bob Baker, 2nd chair Tenor Sax beside Jimmy Ray. I remember the time you would say get Settle. We would turn around and start hitting Settle, on trombone. Another great memory, the time we were sight reading for competition. The song was "Love Story" none of us knew the song and worse of all, the woodwinds had the melody. You just couldn't believe we did not know the tune. Best Wishes and our prayers are with you and your family.

Kathy Young Allison

I know that this will sound like we walked to school 5 miles up hill both ways, BUT I do have to say that the kids who had Mr. Hess before PHS WAS PHS have some of the best memories. We were lucky

enough to have band with him from 6th grade on. While he was busy building a new program as Parkway became a high school,... we were going to Enid, OK and San Antonio in school buses, marching every darn parade in the area (and practicing that by marching around Shady Grove), putting on the first musical at Parkway -- The Boyfriend, and starting the show band that went to all the elementary schools to perform -- plus all the pep rally performances. I really don't know how Mr. Hess handled all of us (especially the drummers) through the years, but I'm grateful he did. :) Class of '73



Dan Owens

The outpouring of prayer and goodwill is not surprising given the type of man Mr. Hess is to all of us. My quick story: some of you might have known that my father passed away when I was in 9th grade (1979) just a few weeks after I got back from the spring band trip. That year, several freshmen were needed to go on the trip because they were short on a few instruments – I think that was a first for PHS and was honored to be selected to go – very scary for a freshman! I still have the music for Echano somewhere. Anyway, after my father passed away, I contemplated quitting band – not sure what I was going to do, but my interest was zero at that point. I remember Mr. Hess and Mr. Long both talking to me and counseling me. They both said if I quit band, I would regret it, especially since the band is your family. They were right and I am glad I listened. My remaining three years with my PHS band family kept me out of trouble (for the most part) and definitely shaped my life for the better. The PHS band legacy carries on in my three children: Kathleen entering 9th grade next year as a percussionist, Madeline entering 6th grade next year as a percussionist and my youngest, Austin (2nd grade) who is taking both piano and percussion lessons. Thanks again to Mr. Long and especially to Mr. Hess for instilling a pride and a love for music that IS being passed on proudly to the next generation.

Anna Dunlap Shelton

" 76" Those uniforms!!!! OMG! I would of died if mine was not done just perfect....those brass buttons and breast plates!!! My horn was a big silver plated baritone. I would have carried that big heavy thing anywhere for Mr. Hess. He always brought out the most in us! Love you Mr. Hess.

David Beach

I played drums at Curtis Elementary and when I graduated to Parkway Jr. High in 1968 Mr. Hess told us that there were too many drummers and if we all wanted to stay in band some of us would have to learn to play another instrument. So I left my buddies, Mike Basco, Tommy Mastranuzzi and Sammy Clark behind and learned to play the saxophone. I went on to play in the band for the next six years (when Parkway became PHS) and ultimately received a small scholarship to college to play in the band.

Mr. Hess so inspired me that I initially majored in music education with the intention of becoming a band director. Although I later chose a different path, the lessons I learned from Mr. Hess continued to guide me. From the 1st Grade through receiving a Juris Doctorate, Mr., Hess was simply the best teacher I ever had. He encouraged me to be better than I ever thought I could be... and for that I am eternally grateful.



Lori Stotko Funny memories: Remember how Mr. Hess would post a “sign up” list for busses on the band trip? Everyone wanted to be on the “cool” bus with all of their friends and we’d scramble for the best bus and best driver (whatever that meant at the time). Then I remember Frank saying, “I’m just going to mix up all those names anyway..... then listen to people moan about it...” I ain’t going on the damn trip on that bus with so and so...”. He sure had a tight grip on teenaged reality!

Mona White-Ortega

Do any of you remember when we were going to a competition, Mr. Hess wanted to "stack the deck"? I can't remember if it was Enid, Nashville, or where ever. We not only had a concert band, marching band, stage band and more. That year Mr. Hess formed a choir to compete. What a hoot when I tried out for it. I was in the practice room with Mr. Hess to try out for the choir. The try out was simply singing "la" to a key he would strike on the piano. That is when we both found out that I did not have an ear and when I did get close to the note, I was always flat. He looked so surprised and I was so embarrassed. But that didn't stop him from letting me sing. He just made sure there were enough in the choir to cover for me. I always had the heart and he appreciated it. Thank God for Frank Hess.

Gordon Brown

Frank Hess was a stern father, a wise yet hip grandpa, and that really cool uncle, all naturally layered into an inspirational foundation of unbiased patience and belief that willed many of us to truly experience honor, loyalty, and creativity for the first time. What a legacy

Joy Marney Hall

I remember in particular one of our many trips to Baton Rouge. We got all the way there and got lost AGAIN!!! I always found it funny how we could get lost going to the same place year after year. This year though I remember stopping at a Sunbeam bakery where Kay Tharpe went inside the bakery to get directions and came out with box after box of hot uncut bread, enough for everyone in the band to have one. That was what most of us had for dinner that night and the restaurant at the hotel actually ran out of butter...lol. So many wonderful memories. Thank you Mr. Hess for all you are and all you did for us back then and the memories that remain today.

Stacy Schreiber Salzer

I remember the summer practice starting my Junior year. Mr. Hess had all of us get out on "the block", he put me up on the front line in the top right corner and said, "Okay Stacy, if you get out of line, the WHOLE BAND will be out of line." I can still feel the flutter in my stomach..... and have tried to stay in line every since. Thank you Mr. Hess!

Robert Troyer

I will never forget the time when Mr. Hess was riding his bicycle down our street in Shady Grove one evening. I was outside our house on the driveway practicing with my tuba and he pulled up on the sidewalk & stopped. He asked why I was practicing outside & I told him that my parents were eating dinner & made me go outside.

Mr. Hess looked around and said, "Well I guess your neighbors must have already finished theirs". We both laughed & he said, "Well, at least your practicing" and then continued on his ride. What a great sense of humor!



Bill Carty

.....WOW!! That brings back memories!! My sophomore year, the "A" Band did that one at the St Louis Intl Music Festival. Robert Casales on Bass Clarinet and me on Bari Sax covered the Bassoon Solo!! We messed it up every time we rehearsed, but Mr. Hess never gave up on us. At the competition, we NAILED it!!

Alan Mott

"Over The Rainbow"... with temper paints in the bells of the cymbals. Homecoming was beautiful, but at competition that year the air was heavy and extremely humid... the percussion section looked like walking skittles after the "big climax." Whose idea was that anyway? I loved it. We all gave our best for Mr. Hess -- he had a unique way of bringing it out of us all. Funny... the things we remember.

John Andrew Prime

I wasn't the world's best sax player, and Lord only knows Mr. Hess knew it. But he had faith enough in me to try me not just on alto sax but then on tenor and finally baritone sax. But I was doomed, distracted as I was sitting second chair between Gayle Riddick and Sandy Spohn. No way to focus on the sheet music! But he opened the door to music to me and unknowingly set me off on a career as a music critic. Remember, those who can, do; those who can't teach. And those too dumb to play or teach, criticize. The training and attention he gave me from 1964 to 1968, my years at Parkway, set me on my wobbly path in journalism, and I thank him for that and pray for him and his family at this time. God bless you, sir.

Jeffery Allen Spence

I remember a fiasco marching show (I think 74-75?) at Captain Shreve where horn players running into each other, one line of 3 took a wrong turn, etc. After a few days, Mr. Hess could just shake his head and chuckle. Another parade in 74, Ritchie Maynard and I were playing dixieland on a float and my trombone slide slid off on the road to be ran over by the following car. I just knew I was in trouble but when Mr. Hess saw my flat-as-a-pancake slide, he busted out laughing and talked about it for the next few days. A great man.

Jeffery Allen Spence

I only hope that these posts will give Mr. Frank Hess a glimpse of all the thousands of lives he touched. Every year I entertain the Texas Bandmasters and Tx Music Educators in San Antonio. I tell them what a wonderful career they have chosen and commend because I know the impact that my superhero, Frank Hess played in my life. I have been a professional musician, entertainer, session musician and now film scorer for over 36 years, all because of the musical foundation laid down by Frank Hess. I had no father so Mr. Hess played the role of mentor in my life. Hard work ethics, respecting people and the music set my standard in my music career. Thank you, Mr. Hess for looking beyond our teenage bs and seeing a difference made in the future of young men and women.



Renee Welch Richardson

I tell people all the time how great our band director was. We had the best marching bands shows that I have ever seen. My favorite was making the shape of a football player and marching to make the leg kick the football (a/k/a flag girls). I have never seen anything like that and am very proud to have been a part of it. Mr. Hess is one of the greatest men I have ever met. Rarely do you find a teacher as dedicated and caring as Mr. Hess. He wanted every single one of us to succeed in life no matter where life took us. He will be greatly missed by everyone who had the opportunity of knowing him. Thank you Mr. Hess for overlooking all the immaturities in us and seeing only what we could become!

Linda Flipppo-Rocks

Eight to five - what??? Not six to five?? No more signature starburst pattern? During the middle of my band years, Mr. Hess decided to go with the times and ditch the military style and adopt drum and bugle style. Gone were the tweet, tweet, tweet, kick on four and sharp turns with toes pointed. In their place were softer high steps with smaller strides. Straight lines were out, free form lines were in. The music changed as well. Six young ladies stepped up to form the first rifle line. The drum majors used their hands and left the large baton behind. Those must have been difficult times for Mr. Hess as we struggled to abandon everything we knew to keep up with his efforts to keep the band current. But we trusted him, and these changes excited our audience. The current PHS band remains a drum and bugle styled band, what I consider to be a tribute to our Mr. Hess.

Linda Flipppo-Rocks

I was going post something about "corn sells" earlier and got sidetracked. Just like Cheri, I know I heard him say it dozens of times. And he was right. I'll never forget the 1976 bicentennial show, or as Mr. Hess coined it, the Linda Show. America the Beautiful was the closer. The band was motionless on the field and the music started softly as I snuck up from the back center surrounded by the flagline and a few guys who carried a platform. As the music crescendoed, I was hoisted up on the platform, the flagline flags popped down, and I raised the American flag. Thunderous applause. Standing ovation. Every.single.time!

Warren Collie

During my four years at Parkway, '76-'79', band was my reason to get up and go to school every day. Mr. Hess was responsible for making it the valuable experience that it was. He taught us the importance of having "class". That was one of his favorite words. He will be greatly missed. Thank you Mr. Hess. Thank you.

Sharon Manson

Mr. Hess is the coolest cat that ever is, was or will be. I used to love the stories of "those cats" he used to play with - he made band cool and me a better person for being in it.

Jeffrey March

Mr. Hess favored humility. I remember maybe it was '71 or '72 or '73. San Antonio, Texas, I think. Maybe someone can correct me. We were in a contest. I remember getting fidgety because we didn't know when we were going to take the field. It seemed like all the other bands had gone. We were never last. Then there was an announcement that went something like this, "Ladies and gentlemen please welcome tonight's feature band, The Parkway High School Marching Band."

What?

We weren't even competing? What? What nothing. Play or go home. What I remember most was the sound of a very quiet awe. We were lined up on the running track surrounding the field. All that practice. All that preparation. Shiny instruments. Shiny buttons. Shining faces of very serious youth.



Twееееet. Tweet. Tweet. Tweet.

Over one hundred left feet lifted off at the same time and landed, heel first in the gravel to the cadence of a soft drum corp. It's like the percussion section just knew to be light. And with each step all these drum sticks, all these kids clad in white shoes found each other in a shared comfort. Not a swagger, just a rhythmy glide that was present as we all attained a certain kind of perfection driven by strict tempo. We all knew it because we were all living it. But we were cool about it. We marched with confidence and humility.

I'm sure the show was good. I don't remember much about it. We probably did a starburst. Nemits probably trumpeted the beginning. Jackson or Hoff probably led us. It was probably a pretty good show. What I really remember though, was that quiet awe from those seated in the stadium as we clicked our way around the track before the show. You could hear them breathing in. After the show I remember as we walked back up the steep concrete steps in the stadium to re-seat ourselves, other bands applauding and nodding to us. Parents and well wishers showing appreciation for a good performance. Respect. Thanks, Mr. Hess.

I don't know if this is about playing through pain. I don't know if this is about us thousands of kids that got to perform under Mr. Hess's tutelage. I don't know if this is about the hundreds of thousands of people that heard and still hear us play today. I don't know that, if asked, Mr. Hess wouldn't say it was not about him or even his performance. He might say it was about THE performance. What I do know is that it will be well and good if someone lets heaven's musicians know to straighten up and fly right, thumbs on the inseam, shine that brass. Mr. Hess is coming home now. Thanks, Mr. Hess. See you in a few.

Ron Parr

Mr. Hess was and still is a great positive influence not only in my life but in the lives of others as well. I always dreaded the "Auditions" to determine chair placement, with approximately 30 trumpet players, by the time it was my turn I was so nervous that I didn't do very well. Mr. Hess somehow sensed my nervousness...s. So by the time I migrated my way to "last" chair, Mr. Hess in is infinite wisdom changed the order and I had to "audition" first, no time to be nervous and played well enough to make it to 3rd chair. After almost 40 years I'll never forget his insight and his innate ability to bring out the best in everyone. We are all better for having known him. I pray that God will shower the entire Hess family with an abundance of HIS Love, Mercy and Grace. In HIM.....-Ron Parr Parkway 1975



Steve Pruett

Dear Mr. Hess,

Even though I am now probably older than you were when I was in your band program at Parkway, I cannot call you “Frank”. I have too much respect for you to be comfortable with that. You were always approachable, yet demanding; you told us to have fun, but you were obviously competitive; you used every occasion to teach. In my 6 years in the program (2 while Parkway transitioned from junior high to high school), it became obvious you were in it for the long haul. Everything that happened last year was taken into account for the following year. That is probably the most important lesson you taught, and I use it almost every day in my career. As a scientist, I have had many more

grant applications rejected than accepted, and I get annoyed, but then I find a way to use the lessons learned for the next one. I think the other lesson that you taught by action more than by words was, don't set your sights too low. Dream big. In our concert contests, we played music that was well above the level attempted by other bands. In retrospect, I think I now understand that you could have been assured of better scores from the judges by picking something safe, but you want to challenge us musically and teach us to dream big. Lesson learned.

Even more importantly, you invested in students after others would have given up. One of my good friends in the band had some serious problems and self-destructive tendencies, and I feel sure, had it not been for your influence and participation in a group, he would not have survived through high school. I am sure there are many other similar stories about which I don't know. I do know that everyone who was in your band came away better for the experience and that there are thousands of people who do their jobs a little bit better, take a few more chances, continue to learn from their mistakes and to dream big, because of your leadership. You treated us as real people and as individuals, even though you were dealing with hundreds at a time. Your bands would do anything you asked, because it was obvious that you cared. You didn't have to make a big speech about it, because we just knew it. When you could have just had a marching and concert band, you did so much more (including at least one choral group for the big contest in Enid).

Now, how about a roast? Band time would not have seemed right without “it's the same ole bit”, which, as I recall, was your way of saying I have told you this a hundred times, when are you going to get it?! I learned not to joke too much around Mr. Hess. He was worrying about not having enough Tuba players one day, and I blurted out that I could probably play tuba. He wrote out a scale with fingerings marked and told me to start on Monday! Overall, I enjoyed playing tuba, but marching with one is a pain. Of course, Mr. Hess had to be versatile, so along with walking along with the band as we marched in a parade in the summer in Pensacola and keeping everyone in line, he had to point out those who fainted to parents walking along who could drag them out of the street! Wool uniforms and summer in Pensacola just don't mix, but the trip was great overall. There was also the bravery associated with practicing by marching through Shady Grove before school started and playing our songs along the way. I would be willing to bet someone got some angry phone calls about a marching band waking people up at 7:00am!

The bottom line is that in a world where there are so many bad things occurring, it is a real blessing to be able to remember someone who made a difference in a positive way in the lives of so many people. It is an investment that is still paying off and will for many years to come.

All the best, Steve

Danny Hess

He was not a hunter, did not work on cars and was not generally the go-to guy for home repairs. And good luck pinning him down on a political or religious point. A typical man's man Frank Hess was not. He did love being outside, playing tons of golf and camping throughout his life. Several times during his last few weeks we would get him up and wheel him out into the sun. He would close his eyes, look up and say "Man that feels good". Dad was one of the fortunate people who find and dive into their niche early in life. He recognized his good fortune. "We've been lucky" he would often say, though he had to know his success was more hard work than luck related. He was a really nice guy and a good musician, but what makes him so appreciated and memorable was his genuine interest in helping all of us to be more. I think he felt that way about his students as much as his children. No grudges, no gossip, no past or future laments. Just wide open, "Hey buddy, how's it going?" and "Man, that's great!". May we all be a little more Frank like. We can always find someone to fix the car.



Nancy Hess Collins

Dad, thanks so much for spending masses amounts of time playing with me when I was a little bitty squirt, for making riding in the car fun as a kid – whistling in harmony together and seeing who could spot the most Volkswagens, for telling me your great bedtime story about Jeffery the Frog a million times, for taking us on so many great camping trips and making sure we toured all the factories along the way (the marble plant was..uhhh....fascinating ☺), for allowing me to find my own way and not judging me or losing confidence in me even when I struggled, for showing me how to live in the present and enjoy each moment, and for giving me the deep sense that in the end everything is going to be okay. Thanks so much Dad. I love you and I miss you.

Jerry Hess

A few of Dad's more dependable comments that my ears will always ache to hear:

On the spirit realm: "weeeee'll see". On the bad golf shot: "good job Aaaaarnie". On just about anything: "same ole bit". After sharing your master plan: "sounds like a winner". And though seldom offered, his tad of advice on life: "everything we do matters".

The World's Greatest Band Director

Steve Baker

This past Saturday evening, (well, actually, about 1:00am Sunday), I was prepping for an early morning Easter performance. Ready to call it a night and attempt three or four hours of sleep, I set my trumpet aside, and reached to my MacBook for one last peek at new emails and Facebook messages. There it was, a forwarded message from Nancy Hess. That one message you intellectually knew would come, someday, but hoped never would.

The last time I saw Mr. Frank Hess was at the 20th Reunion of Parkway High School's Class of '78. Mr. Hess was 80, then, so the message had to come, sooner or later, right?



At the risk of coming across morbid, I will admit there have been a few occasions over these past years when I would log on to the Shreveport Times website, and name-search the Obituaries, looking for the inevitable announcement of my favorite teacher's passing. I did this, because not living in Shreveport-Bossier for the past 23 years has left me out of the loop on many hometown events. With the advent of Facebook, though, it has been easier to keep up with those I miss and care about, and THE message was couriered via that "social" medium.

It was simply stated: *"Hello Parkway Gang, Just wanted to pass along some sad info. My dad, Mr. Hess, is very ill and won't be around much longer; 2 days, a week... we're not sure."*

So much for sleep. It's not like I've never pulled off an Easter morning performance blurry-eyed, sleepless, with a somewhat modified toxicology... although that's usually the result of a late-Saturday club gig. This time, the overwhelming rush of memories, Facebook tributes, and a requisite review of the Superbia Pardi (Parkway's yearbook) were the order of business for the next few hours.

I do have one nagging regret relating to my time with Mr. Hess: my tenure at Parkway High School was for only one year.

My own father's career pursuits required a rather nomadic lifestyle of my family. I attended 14 different schools, including three different high schools. The summer before my senior year, my dad announced to us that another job-change was imminent, but for the first time in my life he was not going to purposefully seek greener pastures in another city. In fact, this time, he was leaving it up to me. We could either stay in Houston, Texas, where I could finish out my high school career at the same location, or we could go back to our hometown of Shreveport, Louisiana.

If we stayed, it would be the first time I'd ever been at one school for a two-year stint. But for me, it came down to one decisive factor: I hated the band program at the Houston school.

The Houston music department was huge and deep in talent, but the band director was a disaster. An abusive tyrant. After he was fired near the end of the year, we discovered this man had a history of abuse, and even an episode of physical abuse, once striking a student in the face.

I had the choice to stay in Houston or move back to Shreveport. I didn't know what the eventual fallout would be from the year-end happenings at the Houston school, but I'd had enough. My decision was made. "Dad, let's go home."

Understanding how important “band life” was to me, my Dad was even willing to let me scout the band programs back home before ultimately settling on where we’d eventually live.



In stark contrast to the state-of-the art music facility at the Houston school, I walked into a rather dumpish, egregiously cluttered band room. Well-worn instrument cases lined the back walls; open, giving off that unique and unmistakable odor which emanates from ancient brass instruments. The air-conditioning had no chance of keeping up with what the Louisiana summer was throwing at this poor little building, standing alone and disconnected from the primary school structure.

A couple of girls were in the band room, attempting some measure of organization in preparation for the pre-school marching band rehearsals. One hovering over piles of music, the other sorting through musty uniforms that mixed their own *special* smells with those of the open instrument cases.

Mr. Hess was expecting us, and enthusiastically greeted my Dad and me. To this day, I do not know if Mr. Hess had performed some sort of background check. I doubt it. I don’t know of any way he could have. Uncannily though, he seemed to already know “what he was getting” if I decided to make Parkway the school of my senior year. By that, (*and how do I say this without sounding horribly arrogant?*), I already knew I was an above-average high school trumpet player, just based on my successes at previous schools, as well as at district and state competitions. I was almost always 1st chair. If I wasn’t first immediately upon arrival at any new school, I usually worked my way into that position in short order.

But, how did he know? How could he? Most likely, he didn’t know. In fact, it didn’t matter to him. What I was witnessing for the first time in our relationship was his sincere, welcoming, encouraging, demeanor. That “thing” which set Frank Hess apart from all the rest was the first thing that greeted me, and allowed me to ignore the rather uninviting conditions of the physical facility.

This man—this “band director”—was genuinely glad to meet me, and let me know he’d be honored to have me as part of his program, regardless of how I stacked up to the rest of his trumpet section. I know this, because he didn’t even require me pull my horn out of the case, had not yet heard me play a single note, but had me convinced, in a matter of just a few minutes, that I would be a “valuable” addition to the Panthers Band. Considering the contrast to my previous and very recent experience, the decision was easy. “Dad, Parkway it is.”



Reading the tributes that have been pouring in the past few days, I can't help but have some feelings of jealousy for those students who studied under Mr. Hess all four years of high school. Fortunately, the aggressive time requirements of Parkway's band program, and my own academic circumstances did allow for both quantity and quality of time, in rather concentrated daily doses.

In addition to the heavy marching band and concert band requirements, there was also stage band. In my final semester, I had completed all my academic requirements, so I was able to load up on additional music classes, and was also privileged to have Mr. Hess as my Music Theory teacher. I even had a "personal practice period," which meant that because I had no remaining credit requirements, the school allowed me to use one full period per day for personal practice, or to assist Mr. Hess on any project he might have need of me.

By the time we hit contest season, I was basically attending the "Hess School of Music." Marching band in the morning. Concert band. Stage band. Practice period. Music Theory. Marching band in the afternoon. Additionally, of course, there were the actual performances, contests, and the annual band trip, all adding up to that irreplaceable time at the "School of Hess." Not to mention the relentless quest of Lloyd Ramsey, challenging *me, the interloping usurper*, for the chair he always felt was rightfully his, had I not moved into the neighborhood. This near-weekly challenge not only gave me more time with Mr. Hess, but also served to keep both Lloyd and I sharp and well-rehearsed.

The best part of the tributes I've been reading has been the individual memories related by Mr. Hess's students, especially those of his wonderful euphemisms and eccentricities. I'll leave those special stories to the others—those thousands of students Mr. Hess influenced and encouraged, and who are now pouring from their hearts how he impacted each of them.

For me, Mr. Hess single-handedly glued back together all the broken, disjointed pieces of my 12 years in 14 different schools. That part of my life no longer mattered. I was home, finally, and this was my family, if only for a short period of time.

My first lesson at Parkway High School was that marching band, in Louisiana, in the 70's, was a *blood sport*, and Mr. Hess expected each of us to be up for the challenge. From the first football game of the Fall season, to the last competition in the Spring, when we looked across the field at the other school's band, our job was to "be better." More specifically, to "take them down." We knew as many people came to Parkway football games to see the band as were there to watch the game itself.

Mr. Hess's humor, wit and anecdotes were also legendary. He always had a story about "The Cats" he'd played with during his years as a professional clarinetist. Sometimes those stories were used to teach a lesson about music or life, and sometimes just to amuse and entertain us. The humor sometimes

extended to the performances, as well. As others have pointed out in their tributes, Mr. Hess knew that “corn sells,” and wasn’t afraid to throw that card down, even on the football field.

Don Long, Mr. Hess’s assistant director, composed a powerful showcase song that became the centerpiece for all of our marching contests that year. “Ciudad de Ninos” (City of Children) featured a mid-field trumpet solo, during which the flags and majorettes twirled, swished and danced around in front of me, finally encircling me just before the solo began.



Mr. Hess always referred to the song as “The Kids.” I don’t think he ever called it by its actual title. I was honored that Mr. Long allowed *me* to write the trumpet solo. I was also more than honored to perform the assignment given me by Mr. Long at the last football game of the year: a new twist to the performance.

The week of our final game, against our cross-town rival, Airline High School, Mr. Long approached me with an idea. We’d already performed the feature number a couple of times for our home audience, so to spice things up, here’s what he wanted me to do:

Normally I left formation at the beginning of “The Kids” to take my 50-yard line position for the solo. I would take my hat off, throw it to the ground, and stand waiting for the majorettes to complete a short routine in front of me, near the home team’s sideline. On this night, he wanted me to pick a majorette—any majorette—grab her from behind as she passed in front of me, spin her around, and plant a big juicy kiss right on her lips, then run back to my position just in time for the solo.

Quick, easy, corny. Should be fun, and the crowd will love it. But that’s not exactly what happened.

At the appointed time, I pulled from ranks and ran to my position much faster than normal, threw my hat to the ground, and this time also laid my trumpet on the ground beside my hat. I stood waiting for the perfect moment when I would come up behind my selected “mark.” Sherri McFarlin was the target. Why? Well, we had “history,” and I fully anticipated everything would come off perfectly if I chose her—not that there weren’t others from among the ’77-’78 Golden Girls with whom I’d loved to have taken this opportunity.

Sherri is now right in front of me, on the 50-yard line, her back to me while she faced the hometown crowd, twirling her baton and dancing her way to her next position. I make my move, quickly sneaking up from behind, grabbing both of her upper arms...

Now, imagine this: if you’re a majorette, having performed at scores of shows over many years, rehearsing each routine hundreds of times, and during that entire career you’ve *NEVER* had anyone grab you from behind during a performance or rehearsal, what would you do if that happened?

You might faint.

Sherri went limp as a dishrag, and the Golden Girl hit the ground like a rock. The crowd in the bleachers audibly gasped. There was no time to think. I had a job to do, and I had an even more important job to do in less than a minute—namely, my solo.

Without hesitation, I knelt down on one knee and lifted Sherri's head from the ground, rolled her lips toward me, and planted the kiss. No immediate response. She's out cold.

It also never crossed my mind that cameras would be rolling, and photographers would be snapping away at the mid-field goings on...

CLICK . . . Sherri, limp, is not responding to the kiss

CLICK . . . Sherri begins to come to, is completely unaware of what is happening, or why, and reacts by trying to push me away with both hands



CLICK . . . Sherri suddenly realizes exactly what is going on, and wraps both arms around me, returning the kiss, at a full PG-13 rating, and the bleachers begin to roar, loudly, with their approval

Uh-oh . . . my solo was fast approaching, and the crowd was getting louder and louder. You could even hear them stamping their feet in the bleachers

CLICK . . . the final camera shots from the slideshow captures me wrestling Sherri from her grasp, and carelessly dropping her back to the ground, and then barely making it back in time for the first note of the solo.

I never saw how Sherri righted herself, or how she got back into position. I never heard a single note of my solo, as the roar from the stands drowned out what I was playing. At the completion of the routine, after exiting the field, we filed down the ramp tunnel beneath the stands. I was still being applauded—and called out to—especially by men in the crowd.

To this day I do not know if Mr. Long put me up to this of his own accord, or if he was a courier of Mr. Hess's own dastardly idea. (*Plausible deniability, maybe?*) What I do know, is that Mr. Hess loved it. Sure, soloists have kissed girls on the field before that night, and it's the very height of old-school "corn." But the unintended consequences that made this particular version of an old, corny routine stand above the others, made Mr. Hess guffaw as we relived it together, time and time again. The fact that he was pleased was all that mattered to me.

Mr. Hess's decision to keep "The Kids" as the feature for the Spring contest season, and his faith in me as a soloist, is THE main reason for the many scholarship opportunities I received, as it put me in front of countless college directors, the most significant being Bill Moffit, from the University of Houston. Following our performance of Mr. Long's "Ciudad de Ninos" at our year-end competition in St. Louis, I was summoned to meet Mr. Moffit, (he of the famous "Bill Moffit Soundpower Series" fame, the top-selling catalog of marching band arrangements), at the grand old Chase Hotel. He graciously invited me to be a part of the University of Houston's band program, and offered me a full-ride scholarship if I accepted. (*Houston, huh? No thanks, I'd already had enough of Houston.*) I ever-so-graciously declined.



As others have related, Mr. Hess was not always pleased, but he knew how to use circumstances to motivate and encourage us to excellence.

One particular rainy morning we were forced to move into the Girl's Gym, where we could march in place while running the routine for the Spring competition. At the end of one particular number, I did what trumpet players are sometimes prone to do, and took the last line up an octave. It was early in the morning, my chops were fresh, and I absolutely nailed the last note—again, doing what trumpeters are inclined to do, I held the last note far too long after the cut-off.

Mr. Hess angrily yelled out, "Damn it, Steve, don't ever do that again!" I thought he'd be pleased. Quite the opposite. My face always turns bright red when playing in the upper registers. It also turns red when I'm embarrassed. I'm sure everyone noticed.

A couple of days later, during one of my "practice periods," he handed me the solo trumpet part to Stan Kenton's arrangement of "Send in the Clowns." We had the school's Beauty Pageant approaching, and the stage band was to perform this at the event. After reviewing the degree of difficulty of the solo, I asked him point blank, "Are you sure?" He knew what I meant. He knew this was at the outer edges of my range, and could see I was intimidated by the part.

Mr. Hess smiled, and spoke the single most important words of encouragement and confidence-building he ever gave me. "Steve, we've got to do this while *you're* here, otherwise, we may never get to perform this piece."

For all I know, he had *first* trumpet players before and after me, who could play this part without breaking a sweat, but for me, then, in a manner of which Vince Lombardi, the greatest coach of all time, would be proud, Mr. Hess had a way of turning an embarrassing situation into a confidence builder—even while pushing me to another level of excellence.



Play with everything you've got, but save it for the right time. That's not a contradiction, in life, or in music.

Immediately after receiving Nancy Hess's message about her dad, I began an exchange of emails with her, into the late hours of the morning. I sent her a story, about what might be the most significant moment of influence Mr. Hess ever had on my life's direction—and it happened *more than 20 years after* I graduated from Parkway. I rarely tell it because of the high "cheese" factor, but who better to appreciate it, than Frank Hess:

Nancy –

At the Class of '78's 20th reunion, your dad was there. He marched right up to me and said, "Steve Baker!" I couldn't believe he recognized me, because I looked nothing like I did in HS, and he had to be . . . what . . . 80, at the time?

Anyway, he asked me if I was still playing the trumpet. I looked him dead in the eye, and lied to him, and said, "Yes."

Well, truth be known, I was still involved in the music business, and had very little time to actually play, and had not even touched my horns for several years. But I could not be honest with him. NOT HIM! More than my own Dad, I wanted Mr. Hess to know that I was still playing, and be proud of that, so I LIED!

But that's not the last of it. I was so guilted-out, when I got back home to North Carolina, I pulled my horns out of the closet, cleaned them, and set them on stands next to my desk. For the next few months, all I could do was stare at them. Finally, something clicked, and I started practicing again. Then, I started flying to Dallas to take lessons from an embouchure guru, who specialized in helping "comeback players" get our chops back, quickly.

Long story short, in less than year, I was playing professionally, again. Now, I'm back playing full time. Ever since I started playing again, I've had this desire to get one of my bands to Shreveport, and play for your dad, one last time.

I'm so sad that won't happen, now. But damn—he hung around a long time waiting, didn't he?! ;)

Again, my best to you, your family, and your Dad. He'll always hold one of the most special places in my heart and memories.

Nancy's response, the next day:

Hey Steve, I can't sleep. rrrrrrr. Wanted tell you that I printed out all the stuff folks have written about Dad on the little prayer site, and also your story. My brother read them to Dad. He was really touched by all the nice things and especially tickled with yours. He was in and out of slumber throughout the day yesterday, but several times woke to say "man, that was a really neat story Steve wrote." He went on to tell me about you; that you came from Houston with your Dad shopping for the right band. He was glad when you chose PHS over Airline. So, thanks again. Have a good week. Nancy

20 years later, Mr. Hess single-handedly, yet unknowingly pointed me back to my first love. Performing music, rather than just *being around it*.

32 years later, in his final hours, Mr. Frank Hess, reached out halfway across the country, and touched my heart in a way no one has done in years.

I was flat out gobsmacked, that on his death bed, at 92 years of age, Mr. Hess remembered our first encounter with such detail: about my Dad bringing me by the band room to check out his program, even that we were moving there from Houston.

It's an amazing irony, that my own father, who is only 72, and now suffering from Alzheimers, no longer readily knows who I am, much less that kind of specific detail. This past Thanksgiving, my Dad only recognized me for one short instance over a three-day period.

Is Mr. Frank Hess *The Greatest High School Band Director*, ever? Well, ask thousands of his students, and read the outpouring of tributes coming in from scores of those students, and I suspect many will enthusiastically say "Yes," even though they've had few, or even no others to compare him with.

Ask me, and well, I know a little bit about band directors. I've had a lot of 'em. A different one for every year of my junior high and high school careers. Mr. Hess is the best I ever had. Mr. Hess is also the best *teacher* I ever had. Period. Over the years, whenever conversations turn to that one influential teacher, who had the most impact over our lives, there is only one name I ever speak.

To Mr. Frank Hess. The Greatest Teacher, ...*ever*. I wish we'd had more time together, but your legacy will live on, long after you have gone. I teach my own children the lessons you taught me, and that same sentiment is being echoed amongst your students who have followed many paths, musical and non-musical alike. Job well done. Your life was well lived. Rest in Peace.

