

A little bit of Jazz history – right under my nose...

By Gary U. Petrin 10/09/2010

The guitar pictured below was owned by the late Freddie Guy of the Duke Ellington band. It was given to me by his ex-wife Dorothy Guy-Lynch back in the early 80's. I still have possession of the guitar, but it's not in the best of shape. It is in the same guitar case, and there are a few items still in the case (such as picks, capo, etc).



Here is my story...

In 1976, after graduating from high school in Saco, Maine I decided to move back to Florida. I was 18, had no plans for the future (basically no real plans at all) – so I ended up moving in with my Mom and Step-Dad in their apartment (condominium) off of Biscayne Boulevard in Miami. There was never a dull moment living with my Mom and Step-Dad, there was always something going on. It appeared that my Mom knew everybody and she was always introducing me to tons of people (mostly older people). Literally everyday someone would drop in to say hello to my Mom. It was pretty much the same ritual, right around 5pm my Mom would bring me home some food (take out) from the Little Brown Jug (a bar and grill that her and my step dad owned and operated), I would sit down to eat, and then people would start knocking on the door and visit. I really didn't care much for most of the people living in her building so I would just say "hello," eat my food and do my own thing. My Mom introduced me to her friend Buffy (Dorothy Lynch / Dorothy Guy). Even though her name was "Dorothy" I will refer to her as "Buffy" from this point on. Buffy and her husband Jim Lynch lived on the same floor as us (the 10th Floor) – just a few doors down. Buffy would always come by to say hello to my mom, and they were always inviting each other to go out and socialize (there was lots of partying going on).

(These are the only pictures that I have of Buffy and Jim Lynch).



Pictured Left to Right are my Mom (Pat Eckmier), Jim Lynch, and Buffy (Dorothy) Lynch.



Pictured Left to Right are my Aunt Gloria (Greene), Jim Lynch, Buffy (with her dog), and my Mom.

I really didn't know much about Buffy (or her husband Jim) at the time, but they were always very friendly to me. I did know that Buffy worked at Gusman Hall in downtown Miami, she had something to do with the shows there (concerts, etc).

One evening Buffy came by the apartment and offered us (my Mom and I) tickets to the concerts at Gusman Hall (the concert hall in downtown Miami where she worked). Being a guitar player, I loved to go to concerts. Buffy said to take a look at the schedule, and let her know which concerts we'd like to go to, and she would take care of it. She even said that I could bring my friends with me (4-6 at a time). This turned out to be a dream come true. Not only did she get us into concerts, but the seats were located on a balcony on the house right side of the stage. What a great view of the bands! I got to see the Little River Band, Blood Sweat and Tears, and George Benson (and a bunch more, although I really can't remember all of the concerts I attended there).



This would be Gusman Hall as it appears today (they remodeled the whole place around the 1990's). But those balcony seats still look pretty good to me...

It is now called the "Olympia Theater at the Gusman Center of the performing Arts."

And still located at:

174 E Flagler St

really

All I

remember is that it was a lot of fun going to the concerts, and it made for a cheap date (the balcony seating made an impression on my friends and my dates). My Mom also attended a few concerts (George Benson, Minnie Riperton). What a treat this was for us!

Now back to the story...

One evening I happened to be the only one home - there was a knock at the door. I opened the door and it was Buffy, and it was obvious that she had been crying. She asked me if my mom was home and I told her that she was still at work. She said thanks, and started walking down the hall. I then asked if she was alright, and she just turned and said, "I'm ok." I told her that if she needed anything just to let me know. She said, "Thank you so much, it would be nice if I had someone to talk to until Jim got home." So, I went down to her apartment. When I walked in she got me a soda, and we went into the dining room. There were photo albums, newspaper clippings, and photographs spread out over the table. Buffy said, "As you can tell, I'm a little upset, and this is why" (she motioned to the items on the table). She continued, "This is the anniversary of my ex-husbands death, he committed suicide 5 years ago." This was unexpected, but I was a little intrigued at the same time. She continued, "I don't know if you know who Duke Ellington is?" I said, "Yes, of course I do." Buffy explained, "At one time, I was his girlfriend." Now this was getting interesting. "Duke Ellington was away overseas with his band playing, most of the band came back, but Duke stayed in Europe. One of the band members, Freddie Guy, the guitarist, had a crush on me, and I kind of liked him also - well, I was pretty much in love with him, but didn't want

to cause any trouble within the band or with Duke.” She continued, “When returning from overseas, Freddie came by to see me, and the first thing he told me was that Duke was having his way with the ladies any chance he got. He told me that he loved me, and then asked me to marry him, and I said yes.” Buffy then showed me tons of pictures and newspaper clippings, etc. She also mentioned that it wasn’t a pretty picture when Duke Ellington came back from overseas! He pretty much flipped out, and was pretty pissed off about the whole ordeal. But just the same, Buffy and Freddie Guy got married. Buffy began to cry again, and said she was sorry for crying. She said she feels so bad, and said that Freddie must have felt so alone to do something like that (referring to the suicide). She then said, “Enough of that, your mom tells me you play the guitar?” I said “Yes I do, at least I try to.” She said, “Open that closet door, there’s a guitar in there, pull it out and let’s take a look at it.” I found a guitar case, pulled it out, and opened it up. It was a very nice guitar. I tuned it up and played a few chords on it.



I said, “Wow, what a nice guitar” (at 18 years of age, I really had no idea what I was holding at the time). Buffy then said, “There should be a banjo in there also.” So I looked in the closet and found the banjo. It was missing a few strings, and pretty beat up. She asked, “Do you also play the banjo?” And I said, “No, I’ve never really held a banjo before.” She then said, “You are a very special young man, to take the time to sit with me and listen to me go on and on, “You probably had better things to do?” I said, “What are friends for, right.” She then said, “I am going to leave these to you in my will.” I said, “You really don’t have to do that.” She said, “No, I insist. Do you want the guitar and the banjo?” I then uttered the words that I am most regretful for, “I do play the guitar, but I wouldn’t have any use for the banjo.” She said, “Fine, the guitar is yours, I am going to leave it to you in my will.” What a shock! I had the biggest smile on my face when she told me that. We talked for a little while longer and looked at more pictures until her husband came home. When Jim walked in the room he said hello and then asked me “What do think about all this?” And all I could say was “Wow, I wasn’t expecting all this, what an interesting evening” (something to that effect). I then said “Have a good night,” Buffy gave me a hug, and thanked me again. We really never talked about the guitar again after that, I didn’t want to bring it up, what was I going to say “have you changed your will yet?” (I don’t think so). Eventually I ended up moving out of my Mom’s apartment (but only a few blocks away). I saw Buffy and Jim once in a while when I went to Mom’s apartment for food (my Mom would still bring home food around 5pm, so I would come by and eat). I am really not sure of the last time I saw Buffy or Jim Lynch, but it may have been around the time Elvis died. I was at my Mom’s apartment – waiting for dinner, and the news of Elvis passing came on the TV. A bunch of my Mom’s friends congregated in her apartment that evening to talk about it and I am pretty sure that Buffy was one of them (I remember a lot of people in my Mom’s apartment, feeling awkward, and then leaving. I then moved to Sausalito, California in January of 1978, and then from California I moved to Lake City, Florida where me and my brother Mike started our first “real” band.

The Big Surprise...

A few years later I got a very “unexpected, but pleasant” surprise. Our band was playing in Jacksonville, Florida. My mom (who was now remarried to Robert Eckmier) decided to come and see us play (of course she brought a bunch of friends with her). After saying hello, my mom handed me the keys to her car and said, “There’s something in the trunk for you.” When I went out to the car and opened the trunk, there was the guitar. Buffy had given the guitar to my mom to bring to me. I asked my mom, “Why now?” She said, “Buffy didn’t want to wait until she died to give it to you, she thought that maybe you could use it now?” Then I found out what really happened – apparently my Mom and stepdad Bob were visiting with Buffy and Jim, and Buffy had asked how I was doing? They mentioned that my brother Mike and I were in a band now, and we were playing in Jacksonville. Somehow it came up in their conversation that Buffy still had me in her will to get the guitar. Bob said, “Well Buffy, why wait until you die, it would be a better gift now, and he could probably start using it.” If you knew my stepdad Bob, you would understand that this is something he would say. Buffy told Bob, “You’re right, why not give him the guitar now,” so she gave the guitar to Bob and he put it in the trunk of his car. When I took the guitar out of the case - it was virtually “un-playable.” The strings were left tightened, there were small cracks in the wood, and the neck was slightly bent. I was pretty disappointed, but I loosened all the strings and put the guitar back in the case. I never opened the guitar case for many years after that, but when I finally did, the neck wasn’t bent anymore (go figure). I eventually took the guitar to a guitar shop in Virginia to see how much repairs and a fret job would cost. It was weird, they wouldn’t give me an estimate, and they just kept asking me if I wanted to sell it? I said “No” and that was the end of that. The guitar just went back into the closet for many more years. Every year, I sent a Christmas card to Buffy and Jim. Buffy did call me about 10-12 years ago to ask how things were, and to ask how my mom was doing. She said she was trying to get in touch with my mom, but never heard back from her after she left several messages. I asked her how Jim was doing, and she told me that Jim had passed away. I told her that I was very sorry to hear that, and I gave her my Mom’s phone number. She asked if I still had the guitar, I said “Yes.” Buffy then said, “I thought you would have sold it by now?” And I said, “No, I still have it.” I am not sure why she asked that, but she did.

I never played the guitar in a performance, never practiced on it – I just pretty much forgot about it, and left it in the case all these years. I didn’t even think about the guitar for a very long time (actually I didn’t think about it until sometime in 2008). So I started doing a little research on-line. I contacted a place called “Gruhn Guitars” about it. George Gruhn said to check the serial number inside the f-hole, and that the serial number should be on a small piece of paper. The picture below shows where the paper used to be glued there, but no serial number.



The Serial Number on these guitars was imprinted on a small piece of paper inside the guitar.

The S/N used to be here, but is now nowhere to be found? Maybe it came off inside the guitar and is still there?

During my research I found some very interesting information...

I had no idea about the impact that Freddie Guy had on early Jazz music. I found that he was a major contributor with helping Duke Ellington and his band become successful. Freddie Guy was one of the “pioneers” involving the guitar and banjo’s contributions to early Jazz music. He was the force behind the Duke Ellington Bands rhythm section, and I found it very interesting that his main role was to keep “time.” After the bass evolved as the main “time keeping” instrument, his role diminished dramatically. None the less, Freddie Guy was a very important part of Jazz history.

Freddie Guy was born on May 23rd, 1897. He was self-taught on the banjo, was leading his own bands by the early 1920s. He then went to work for Joseph Smith – a popular band leader at the time. And then in 1925, he joined the Duke Ellington Orchestra. It was interesting to find out that Freddie Guy did not perform any solo’s, and is not credited for writing or organizing any of the bands music. In fact, his biggest contribution and main “role” in the band was keeping time. It was said that he was the only one in the band that could keep the right time, and he did it playing the banjo. He switched to guitar sometime in 1935 (on the advice of Eddie Lang – jazz guitarist). But then Freddie Guy’s guitar playing became “unessential” after bassist Jimmy Blanton was added to Ellington’s orchestra to keep time.



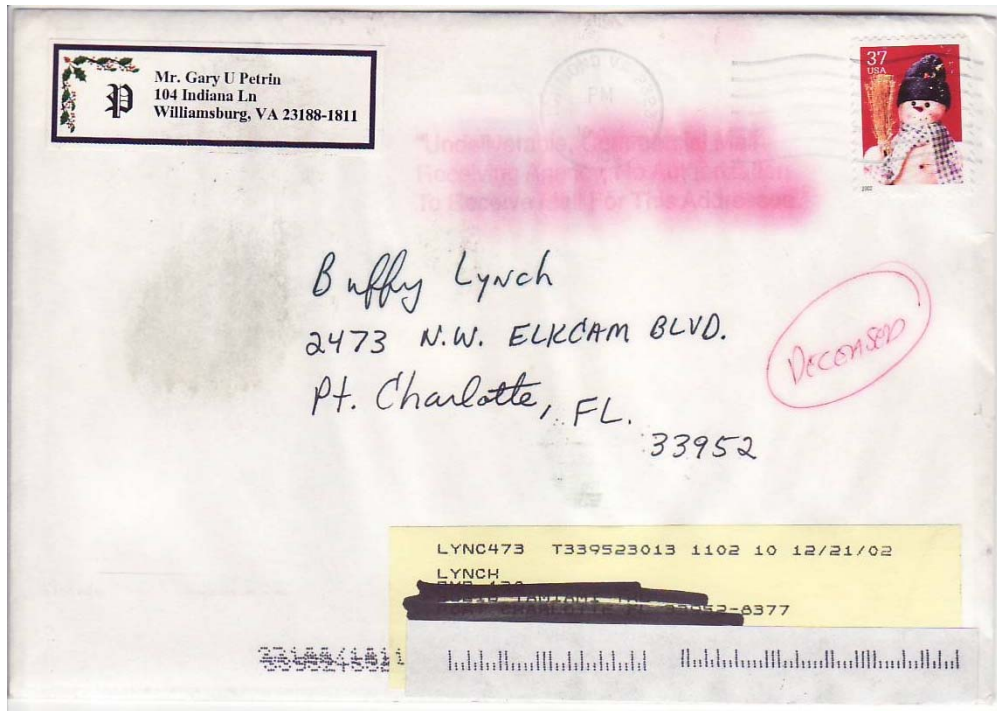
Freddie Guy was a very loyal member of the band and pretty much spent his entire career helping Duke Ellington realize his dreams. Freddie Guy stayed with Duke Ellington until 1949. He retired from music and worked as a local ballroom manager in Chicago for 20 years. Freddie Guy committed suicide on November 22nd, 1971 after many years of obscurity – he was 72 years old at the time of his death.

Then I found a picture of Freddie Guy playing the Levin guitar – this really blew me away!



(Freddie Guy / Duke Ellington Orchestra – Playing the Levin Deluxe Guitar)

Then in December 2002, the Christmas card I had mailed to Buffy came back as “undeliverable,” and the word “deceased” had been written on the envelope.



I did some further research and later confirmed that Buffy did in fact pass away in April of 2002. At this point I felt really bad that I never attempted to contact Buffy while she was still alive. I did plan on visiting her every time I went to Florida to visit my Mom, but that never happened. I really felt that I should have made a stronger effort to try and visit her a few times. To think about how interesting it would have been to hear more stories about her life with Freddie Guy, Duke Ellington, and maybe even check out a few newspaper clippings from the past? Even so, the realization was coming to me – I own a small part of Jazz history. This was the instrument that was played during the Big Band Era in one of the biggest Jazz bands ever, and Freddie Guy was a very significant part of how “keeping time” evolved in music. This guitar was actually played by a musician that helped Duke Ellington achieve success. I look back at this whole story and now understand the implications of my decision regarding the banjo. When Buffy asked me if I wanted the banjo, I now realize that I should have said yes. This decision haunts me to this day! But when I sit down and think about it, I realize that Buffy gave me the guitar as an act of kindness, and maybe she thought that I could use the guitar in a performance, I don’t know? But I am determined to see Freddie Guy’s legacy remembered for his very important role in Jazz history, rather than just some ex-musician of a famous orchestra that just faded away – he deserves to be recognized for his contribution to Jazz music. I am currently researching additional information, and will continue to do so until I exhaust all my resources. This has proved to be a very difficult task since Buffy and Jim have both passed away. I really do appreciate her gift of kindness, and now that I am older (and maybe a little wiser) I very much appreciate what I have – which is a piece of musical history!

Additional inquiries can be made at gupetrin@aol.com

ARTICLES OF INTEREST / FACTS / ETC...

1. Check out the markings on the pick guards...

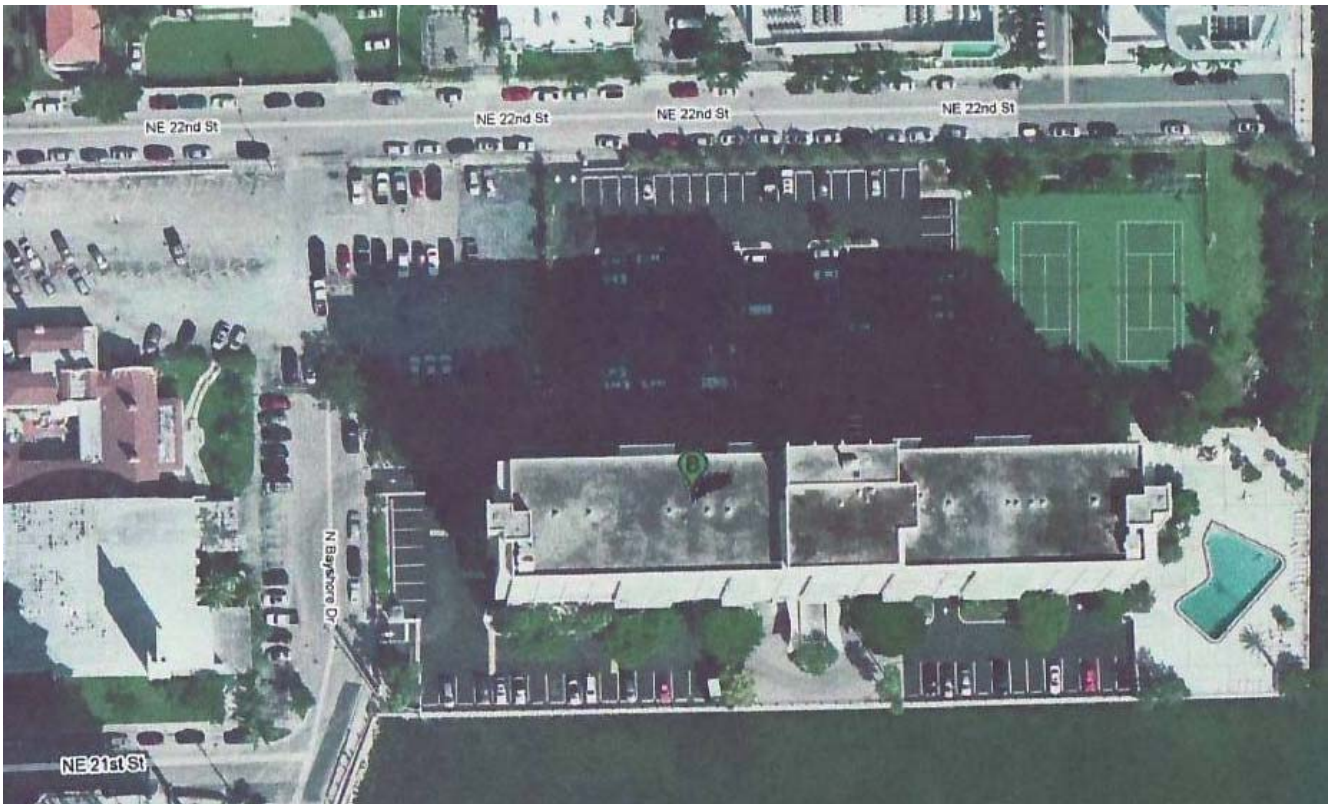


(1940?)



(2010)

2. This is where we all lived off of Biscayne Blvd in Miami back in 1976.




(The big building with the green letter "B" on it – courtesy of Google Maps).

3. This is the information I got off of "People Finders" service...

PeopleFinders.com | Background Check Summary Page 1 of 1

[Log In](#)



Last Name: First Name: Middle Initial: City: State:

Date of Birth: Age:

Background Check: LYNCH, DOROTHY H in PORT CHARLOTTE, FL born 1917 1 Match Found (100 max.)

[<< Search Again](#)

Name/AKAs	Birth Date	Phone	Address	City, State	Possible Relatives
1. LYNCH, DOROTHY H (Age 90) Associated names: GUY, DOROTHY H	Available	Available(2)	Available	PORT CHARLOTTE, FL PUNTA GORDA, FL	Possible Relatives: LYNCH, J LYNCH, JAMES F

Additional Results from Reunion.com

[dorothy.lynch, 50](#) [West Palm Beach, FL](#) [Email](#)

[dorothy.lynch, 28](#) [Woodbury, NJ](#) [Email](#)

[dorothy.lynch, 35](#) [Upper Marlboro, MD](#) [Email](#)

[dorothy.lynch, 24](#) [Seadrift, Tx](#) [Email](#)

[More results](#)

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[DOROTHY H LYNCH](#) Born Feb 1917 [More Information on DOROTHY H LYNCH](#)


2473 ELKCAM BLVD [Map It](#) Recorded: 09/01/2005 [DOROTHY H LYNCH business listings](#) [Check Yellow Pages](#)

PORT CHARLOTTE, FL 33952 [Leave a message](#)

[Google Dorothy H Lynch](#) [Current and Historical Public Records about DOROTHY H LYNCH](#)


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Continued...

PeopleFinders.com - Report Page 1 of 23

 Search ? Help Your Orders Log Out

Welcome, Gary Petrin.
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Comprehensive Background Check

Search Results

Subject Name: **LYNCH, DOROTHY H**

Date: 9/25/2007 12:16:16 PM

Report Number: 1906384

Name and Address Reported Information for LYNCH, DOROTHY H

Name(s): **LYNCH, DOROTHY H**

Associated names: **GUY, DOROTHY H**
Based on the criteria entered, the above names are associated aliases of your subject.

Possible Current Phone: (844) 627-3734

Address(es): **2473 Elkcam Blvd, Port Charlotte, FL 33952**
Reported:12/01/2002

18363 Goodman Cir, Port Charlotte, FL 33948
Reported:12/31/1996

716 Elkcam Blvd, Port Charlotte, FL 33952
Reported:10/01/1995

716 Elkcam, Port Charlotte, FL 33952
Reported:05/01/1995

18506 Fort Smith Cir, Port Charlotte, FL 33948
Reported:12/01/1993

716 Elkcam, Punta Gorda, FL 33952
Reported:03/01/1993

716 Elkcam Bl, Port Charlotte, FL 33952
Reported:03/01/1993

1500 Ft Smith Cir, Port Charlotte, FL 33950
Reported:09/01/1982

Footnotes:
The above address(es) are associated with your subject.

Date of Birth: **02/10/1917, 90 years old**
The above date is your subjects birthday.

Possible Relatives for LYNCH, DOROTHY H

Name: **LYNCH, JAMES F**

(Just another page of the report showing pertinent information)

4. This is the information I got from “Legacy.com” service (obituary notice).

Obituaries | Death Notices | Newspaper Obituaries | Online Obituaries | Newspaper Death Notices | Onli... Page 1 of 1

DOROTHY H. LYNCH

Dorothy H. Lynch, 85, Port Charlotte, died April 24, 2002. She was born Feb. 10, 1917, in Philadelphia and came to Port Charlotte 27 years ago from Miami. She was executive vice president and consultant at Afram House, an African- American owned and operated cosmetic business founded in 1968. She was on the staff at the American Cancer Society in Miami, and continued to work as a volunteer later in Port Charlotte. She was an original cast member of "South Pacific" on Broadway. She remained active in various volunteer theatrical production groups. Survivors include a cousin and three nieces. A memorial service will be later. National Cremation Society, Port Charlotte chapter, is in charge. Published in the Herald Tribune on 5/4/2002

Today's Herald Tribune obituaries

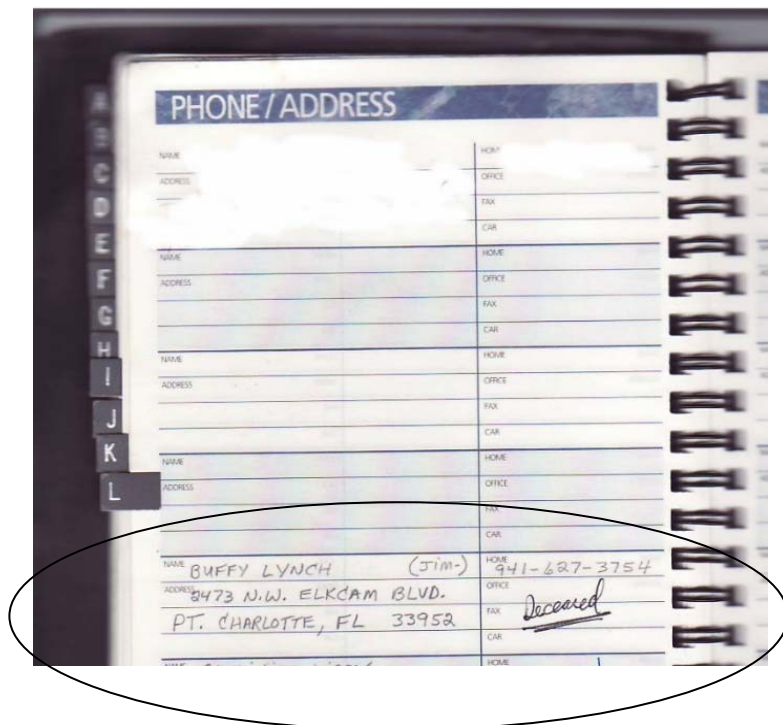
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obituaries nationwide

Back

* Note – The part that states she came to Port Charlotte 27 years ago from Miami is incorrect. I didn't graduate until June 1976, and I met her for the first time in Miami later that year at my Mom's apartment building.

5. This is the Buffy / Jim Lynch entry from my address book (which is over 17 years old)...



6. This is the email I received from Gruhn Guitars...

Subj: **RE: Question on Levin Guitar?**
Date: 7/10/2006 2:18:20 PM Eastern Standard Time
From: ggruhn@gruhn.com
To: Gpetrin142@cs.com
Received from Internet: [click here for more information](#)

The number should be on the interior paper label. This was their most deluxe arch top model and would be of interest to collectors.

George Gruhn

From: Gpetrin142@cs.com [mailto:Gpetrin142@cs.com]
Sent: Sunday, July 09, 2006 7:58 AM
To: gruhn@gruhn.com
Cc: Gpetrin142@cs.com
Subject: Question on Levin Guitar?

Where do I find the serial number on an original Levin guitar? I cannot locate it anywhere on the guitar.

I am including a picture.

Thanks,
Gary Petrin.

7. The Guitar Case - Notes / Facts

The case that the guitar is housed in is a Geib Case. The Geib Case Company made the original cases for Martin during the 40's and 50's. Many people refer to them simply as Geib cases, but the company is no longer in business, and the current cases are believed to be manufactured by Cedar Creek (the custom division of TKL) for Martin. The Geib style cases are constructed from plywood and come in two levels. The 300 series are built from 3-ply, while the 500 series are 5-ply. They have a similar appearance, but the 300 series is much weaker (particularly – and most importantly - on the top, offering much less protection for the guitar.) Do not stack things on the top of a 300 series case.

Both series feature a textured black exterior, a green (usually) crushed velvet interior, padded stitched leather handle, internal compartment, white stitching, brass plated hardware, and a keyed lock.

I am not sure about the actual case model #, but it does have the “GEIB” symbol on the compartment inside the case...

8. This is a picture of the guitar and the contents inside the case...



The picture below shows a picture of the contents inside the guitar case compartment. There are a few fingerpicks, a regular pick, and what looks like a “Capo” (not sure what a Capo looked like back then). I originally thought that this was the strap (handle) missing off the guitar case, but there is a spring loaded mechanism that makes me think otherwise (so I am really not sure what it is).



Additional Info / Pictures...

This is me today
holding the guitar...



Picture of my step dad
Bob, my Mom, and Me.

Picture of my Mom and the Chevaliers



Picture of my Aunt Gloria and the Chevaliers

