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2007

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Stories**

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with little—and contributed much

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Senator Mel Martinez in Cuba
before coming to America

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Double Life

I was born in Houston in 1951, but my folks moved to Winter Park when I was 5. My dad was a mechanical engineer working for a contracting company on the mechanical portion of this giant building at Patrick Air Force Base. That really started the space program, well before Cape Canaveral and the Kennedy Space Center. After that, he decided to stay here and start the S.I. Goldman Company. He did very well when Disney came along.

At that time, I think all of Central Florida was like an Ozzie-and-Harriet lifestyle. My mom was a housewife, and there was just me and my little sister at home. I got a little allowance and a friend and I would tag team to mow lawns, but I didn't need a lot then. I knew my parents would put me through college, so I didn't have to worry about that. Besides, I didn't want a whole lot of stuff.

When I was 12 or 13, we moved to Drexlerich Estates in Maitland. That's when I bought a little 8mm movie camera and during the summer me and my friends made a bunch of movies together. I'd save my money and buy a reel of film and shoot the movies and splice them all together. They were really terrible but really funny. One of them, Professor Von Skroshnik, was kind of like *The Nerdy Professor*, but without sound. Or talent.

Around 1965 I found a book at Gooding's supermarket called *Learn Electronics at Home*, or something like that. It was a cheap book, but a damn good book. I started reading up on it, and since my



Steve Goldman

He grew up equally at ease in the seemingly different worlds of music and science which, to his day, are where Steve Goldman, 56, still lives. But 20 years ago, when he realized that the door to a musical career had closed, a window to a career in computers was opening. In his hometown of Maitland, he formed Distributed Processing Technology, which created the world's first intelligent dial controllers. After selling the company in 1999, he again turned his attention to music (as well as to motorcycling, travel, food, reading and the United Arts) and began writing orchestral scores. His endless curiosity is also leading him back to school to pursue a graduate degree in physics, and his passion for music finds him creating the Young Composers Challenge to give kids an opportunity and incentive to create works for orchestras.

INTERVIEW BY GARY MCKEONNE AND NANCY HOWELL

dad was a mechanical contractor, hell always have leftover equipment and motors and switches and automatic dangle operators and levers. I'd take these things in my room and build all this crazy stuff with the parts. As I got older, I started building high voltage electric things like Tesla coils and Van de Graaff generators and things that made lightning. I was in all the science fairs. Phil Tiedlie is still pissed at me for winning the Maitland Middle School science fair with my Tesla coil. He thought his project—a linear accelerator, I think it was—was better. He's right.

In school, I kind of did my own thing. Since I was really into science and music, I had an eclectic group of friends. I was writing pieces for orchestras back then, although I really didn't have an opportunity to learn a lot about music. In band you learned about marching and winning marching contests. If you wanted to be a composer, you'd have to get out a box of pencils and a good pencil sharpener and sit there for six months working on a score. Even though that helped me win a scholarship to Stetson, I didn't go there because I wasn't sure how to make a living at music.

I wanted more of a creative experience, so I joined a rock 'n' roll band called Live Oak. There were other bands in the area—Marshmallow Steamshovel and Plant Life—that were better than mine, but we were working all the time. We played sock hops and roller rinks, making \$150 to \$400 a gig that would split three ways. We had a fan base, but when you're only 16 you didn't really have a lot of groupsies.

When I graduated in 1969 and went to Georgia Tech, I quit writing for orchestras and concentrated on rock 'n' roll. I wanted to join a band so someone suggested I go to an underground newspaper called the *Great Speckled Bird* and, just like you'd expect, there was a hippie girl at the desk. She told me about her friend Orville Davis and his band, Brick Wall, who were looking for a keyboard player. I auditioned and I got the gig.

I was a pretty straight kid from Orlando, which was a very Wonder Bread place then, and the guys in Brick Wall were—well, back then there was a comic strip called *The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers*. That was these guys, Hardcore hippies. So now I was exposed to the hippie thing in a time and place when people would bust up hippies. Once at a truck stop in some tiny town in north Georgia, these two truckers came up and said, "Boys, do you believe in the Bible?" And Orville, who was also a great politician, said, "Oh, yes sir. And we're not hippies. We're musicians." And that's when a reader said—

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well, he said something—and they ended up chasing us out of there.

What was frustrating about Brick Y'all was they didn't practice, they'd just jam. I kept asking, "When am I going to learn a song?" Even when we played this gigantic rock concert called the Turkey Trip—with a group called the Booger Band and the Allman Brothers, before their first album came out—

I still didn't know a single song. I just put on a pair of dark glasses and pretended I was playing.

I was leading a double life. At night, I was Super Keyboard Player and during the day I was in school with my calculator and dialer rule. In 1971, I left Georgia and transferred to the University of Florida and joined a band called Dark Star. There were two big bands in

Gainesville then—us and Mudcrutch with Tim Petty. It was good playing, but in my junior year I started thinking about grad school and I knew I needed to do better than A-minus. I needed A-grades. It's not just about getting the answers right, it's about understanding on a fundamental level what it's all about. So I left the band and did nothing but the best I could do in physics for two years, until I graduated in 1974.

After that, I moved back to Atlanta and then out to L.A. trying to make it in a band called Legal Tender. It was a bad time to try to make it. I had missed the window. 1974 was no good. Disco was coming in and all these venues had been converted into discotheques so there were 10,000 great musicians in the city but only 10 places to play.

Meanwhile, my other personality had been tracking the development of micro-processors. After two years of starving, we agreed to break up the band and I moved to San Francisco to get a job with a computer company. This was before Apple, although I learned later that Steve Jobs lived near me and we went to the same parts-and-hobby store all the needs would go to.

I was there until 1976, when I came back home to spend some more time with my dad. I worked with him until around 1977, when I started this little company called Distributed Processing Technology. Even though I had produced a computer and I wrote the operating system, this was not Silicon Valley. There was no money and no customers. Since I couldn't figure out how to sell software, I came up with a new thing called "teaching," which was the first time anyone had put a microprocessor on a peripheral. Now it's used everywhere. We became very successful and, in 1999, we sold the company.

I think I'd give someone starting a business the same advice I'd give someone trying to get into music. When I was trying to break into the rock 'n' roll world, I was trying to write things I thought people wanted to hear. But it doesn't come out nearly as good as when you write what you want to hear.

It's the same thing for anything else you do. By the way, my goal was never to make money. My goal was to do things that would make a change for the better. I had a friend in college who said, "You know, all I want to do is put my drip on that sandcastle." That's a great way to look at it. That's what I'm still trying to do. Put a drip on that great big sandcastle. ☺

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