

If It Were Up To Andy

The Story of Andy Mackie

If it were up to Andy, he could rest peacefully knowing that his legacy will continue, that his foundation will thrive, and that the dream will live on.

The only dream Andy Mackie had left to realize, was the promise of his legacy going on without him. He wanted, more than anything, to know that he had done enough to inspire and compel others to continue on beyond him, and without him, for the sake of the music, for the sake of the children.

If only it were up to Andy...

If it were up to Andy Mackie, the world would be a very different place. It would be a place where children have an equal opportunity to feel and belong, to thrive and prosper. Every child would have a safe haven where he feels welcome and free to express himself without prejudice or shame. Every child would take from that opportunity what he seeks, and then pass this blessing along to the next, so that the chain of sharing and learning would span generations to come, effortlessly.

For Andy, that “place” is the peaceful, heart-filling, soul-soothing place we call music.

Andy’s story begins at age five, when he was given a harmonica from his mother. Its significance only revealed itself much later, but Andy somehow knew inherently that music itself is a gift, and he always hung on to that harmonica.

Whenever he felt overwhelmed by life and all its turmoil and trials, or when he was just bored and uninspired, Andy turned to his harmonica, even just for a moment. And even today, it follows him

everywhere. Whether it's a few moments stuck in traffic, or long evenings suffering through the painful physical agony that has become his reality, Andy reaches for his harmonica.

Andy believed that music feeds the soul. It's an escape; a place where joy and happiness preclude pain and sorrow. It's a therapy, a release, an outlet...

If it were up to Andy Mackie, every child would have the opportunity to learn to play music. That was his wish. That was his will.

Well, as far as Andy Mackie's concerned, it *was* up to him, and he's done something about it.

Life's most meaningful moments are not usually planned. Life-altering events that shape the future and give inspiration and hope, are not usually those events that are pre-conceived and executed according to a map of steps and progress charts.

The most significant are the ones we don't see coming. The same holds true in the case of the enormously significant contribution that Andy Mackie made to our world. It was never a dream or a planned goal, it happened much by circumstance as many of life's most meaningful moments tend to occur.

Andy simply had a single idea on a single day. And that's where it started.

About 11 years ago, Andy's fate was made none too promising after a series of health issues including serious heart complications and depression. He spent most of his time alone and in severe debilitating pain, and he spent most of his money on medication, which he believed would only prolong the inevitable.

At this pivotal time in his life, and asked himself one simple question; "If I had one thing left to do on this earth, what would I want it to be?" Drawing on his own experience, the answer was easy; give a child the gift of music. Because to Andy, music had always been the remedy to all ailments. So he made a phone call, asking a school

principal for permission to come in and teach a class of children how to play the harmonica. He would provide instruments for each of them, he said, in exchange for the opportunity to share his time, and his gift.

Without giving it a second thought, he took the \$750 he would otherwise spend on medications that month alone, and he instead bought harmonicas for that classroom of kids. He asked only one thing of those children: when you no longer wish to play the instrument, pass it along to another child, and teach them to play it, so they too can have this opportunity.

That fateful day changed the life of Andy Mackie and promised to change the lives of many others for years to come. After his session with the kids that day, the principal asked him if he would share his gift with the rest of the school... and so it began. Andy gave up his medication full-time and started buying harmonicas in bulk.

Soon Andy's calendar of teachings began to grow as he took on more and more schools. The enormity of what he was taking on started to reveal itself, but did nothing to slow Andy down. He began recruiting people to help with the teaching, so that no child would have to be denied. Eventually, some of his musical pupils became teachers themselves, honoring the promise they'd made to pass along the gift.

Harmonicas were just the beginning. Spending time in the schools, Andy discovered there were many kids who wanted to play other instruments; guitar, violin, piano, etc. Andy committed himself to providing these instruments as well, but buying them wasn't an option. Not one to be stopped in his tracks, Andy started building them.

First he built a few dulcimers, then came up with a small 3 stringed instrument he calls a Music Stick. Andy borrowed a shop, picked up some tools at garage sales and started producing instruments 50 at a time.

It may have been around this time that Andy calmly accepted his destiny. This was now a full-time, all-consuming commitment. This

was now Andy Mackie's life, and his mission; one that he was more than happy, honored in fact to take on.

He soon found his days immersed in this commitment. It meant a lot more than just a few instruments and a few hours of his time. Andy, personally built instruments in his workshop, organized student concerts, planned fund-raising events, hired teachers, scheduled after-school music programs and set up at craft fairs and concerts where he gave away a few instruments and showed a few kids how to play.

He held himself fully and solely responsible for all activities, and their success. In addition to all the physical work involved, his determination to keep the dream alive required that he take on some business building activities as well, to try and generate interest, publicity, and support.

Andy didn't start out with the intention of building a foundation, coordinating fund-raising events, recruiting volunteers and teachers, marketing, and keeping a website. He didn't even have a computer.

He simply started out wanting to help a child, and that's what he did. He wanted to help any child, every child, and he accomplished that every day.

Andy steadily built the Andy Mackie Music Foundation one step at a time, by working tirelessly and actively attending to every aspect himself. Everything that the foundation was doing was conceived and executed by one man - Andy Mackie.

Thus far, he has placed harmonicas in the hands of over 18,000 children, he has personally built over 3000 strum sticks, taught hundreds of children to play music, given away scholarships and broken the world record for the largest harmonica band playing together.

The foundation continues to build and donate instruments to dozens of schools, provide free music lessons to any child who wants to learn to play an instrument, plan fund-raising concerts and community events, and continues to evolve and grow, in the name of music, in the

name of children. School workshops have been set up wherein building instruments has become part of the school curriculum and Andy hoped that many other institutions would join in.

The foundation, of course was Andy Mackie himself and the children he has helped.

He was extremely hands-on, because he had to be and wanted to be. He built all the instruments. And when he was not building the instruments, or teaching a class, or attending concerts, he was building Christmas reindeer, and selling them at fairs and craft shows, so that he could use the earnings to buy materials and make more instruments. Sounds like a lot of work for a one-man show, doesn't it? Everything Andy did every day was somehow connected to the foundation.

And the payoff was greater than he ever imagined. He saw a real change in some of the children.

For Andy Mackie, it's all very simple. Reach out and give a child the gift of music. And when you are finished with it, pass it along to another child.

Having achieved what he initially set out to do, many would have packed it in at this point, and allowed themselves a rest, satisfied with their accomplishments. But not Andy. He continued to wake every morning, and as long as he had a breath left in him, he continued to advance his foundation. Andy struggled daily through immense pain from his physical ailments. He often asked himself how it could be that he was still here. The answer to that question he knew was that the kids were the best medicine for him.

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