

# Remembering Vincent Collin Beach

By Susan L. Anderson

When I think of our friend Vincent Collin Beach what comes to mind?

The first thoughts that come to mind are he was such a talented, remarkable, soft-spoken, patient, kind and gentle soul. Vincent made a significant positive impact on the lives of all people that he came in contact with over his eighty-five (85) years.

We first met Vincent and Anni Beach when she became a regular at our weekly jam sessions early in 1995. It has been a pleasure and honor to become friends with such a very special couple.

I have such delightful memories of Vincent and I sitting off to the side at jam sessions, camp-outs or pot-luck dinners and talking politics and government all evening or all day. This was fun as we both loved the topics and our opinions usually agreed.

Vincent, born Sept. 25, 1924 in Knollis, Jamaica, was educated by the nuns of St. Catherine's Catholic School and remained true to his deep faith in God all of his days.

Vincent passed away Sat. Feb. 7, 2010 of Progressive Supranuclear Palsy (Parkinson's Plus). He had been cared for at home, with much love, by his wife of twenty-five (25) years Anni and for the past year also by Hospice of the Valley. Vincent was a multi-talented man with a long history of accomplishments in spite of the difficulty in reaching his goals.

He was preceded in death by his father, Theophilus Augustus Beach, his mother, Rosa Rebecca Goldson, in Jamaica and two of his four sons, Jaswan Ali Beach and Lal Ramdin Beach. He leaves his loving wife, of 25 years, Anni; his first wife of 29 years, Miriam; sons Krishna Devi Beach, Sanjay Ragiv Beach, daughter Jenny Frances DuFresne, many grandchildren, a great-grandchild and a multitude of friends.

Vincent joined the Royal Air Force in 1944 and immigrated to England alone. His job was as a mechanic on military vehicles. During this time he bought a clarinet and started to study music. His enlistments were completed and he was discharged in 1949. He soon added tenor saxophone to his talents.

Vincent immigrated to the United States in 1952. In Indianapolis, in early 1953, he enrolled in The McArthur School of Music taking classes in music theory, singing, jazz and he joined a glee club that performed in churches and at community events. Soon he became the chauffeur for a wealthy lady; driving her everywhere in Indianapolis and also spending a winter in Miami. The latter was an eye opener on how horrific segregation was in the U.S. then. He still has his photo I.D. pass needed for Negro's in Miami then. He returned to England but knew there were many more opportunities in the U.S. even with segregation. In 1955 he reentered the US.

In the fall of 1955 he was able to enlist in the U.S. Air Force. Vincent spent his 22 year Air Force career in the traveling U.S. Air Force Band of the West. In 1968 he earned his GED on the first try. He then enrolled in college classes. Later, while still on active duty with the USAF, he was accepted in Operation Bootstrap and attended college full-time. He received his Bachelor of Science degree in Social Studies June 3, 1973. Vincent's thirst for knowledge continued and he was accepted into the Master's Degree program in Psychology at Central State University. July 25, 1976 he received his Master of Education in Counseling Psychology. Vincent retired from the USAF in 1977.

Vincent was hired by the Bureau of Indian Affairs as Supervisory Guidance Counselor at Toyey Boarding School in 1977 and later as principal of the Kinlichee Boarding School on the Navajo reservation in 1983. At this time Anni was hired in the position of "Homeliving Specialist" Vincent always called Anni "AC" for her name Ann Cathryn. Vincent and Anni were married January 14, 1985. They purchased their home in Chandler where they are still living.

In June 1986 Vincent retired from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Next Vincent taught Psychology at Rio Salado Community College, and then taught Political Science, Arizona Government and other subjects at the Chandler-Gilbert Community College. He also became a substitute teacher in the Chandler school system. He was Director of the Williams A.F. Base Catholic Chapel Choir. After "Willie" closed he found a home playing music in Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church in Queen Creek.

One day in 1994 two neighborhood children knocked on the Beach's door. They had met Anni in school and had heard her play the mandolin and had sung with her. They asked if she could sing with them again. This became the inspiration that became the Beach's joint project, the Jam Pak Blues 'N' Grass Neighborhood Band, now 15 ½ years old (in 2010). The band is now intergenerational. Vincent made the "canjos" for the band .... before they had real instruments. Vincent was a solid helper and jack of all things for Anni and the band. He helped set up, tear down, drive the van, and helped do everything. While Anni was playing mandolin Vincent took Cello and Viola lessons in his desire for more education and skills and did a little with the guitar and banjo. Jam Pak has grown these past 15 years and Vincent has been there assisting Anni every step of the way.

Vincent, with Anni, wrote his autobiography *Don't Throw Away Your Stick Till You Cross the River: The Journey of an Ordinary Man* that was published in January 2007 to very good reviews. The book won the 2008 Carter G. Woodson Award for "the most distinguished social science book appropriate for young readers that increases understanding of ethnicity in the United States".

Son Sanjay R. Beach, Former Wide Receiver for the Green Bay Packers said, "As you are drawn into the pages of this book, you will witness resilience in the face of adversity, and you will see a work ethic in a man whose positive attitude has sustained him through extraordinary times and challenges. Quite simply, you will come to know my father. Inspired by his example, I was blessed to have received a full football scholarship to Colorado State University followed by a six-year career in the NFL. His lessons in how to truly love and live life have since enabled me to establish a successful financial practice. My dad's priority for family has become mine as well, for I am continually thankful for my beautiful family — my wife Kristy and our four children, Kalpana, Makis, Tariq, and Jalen. May my father's story help you, too, persevere, strive, hope, all while being joyful and positive."

You may purchase a softcover copy from Anni Beach or through Amazon.Com.

Although the subtitle of his autobiography is "The Journey of an Ordinary Man", to all whose lives he has touched over his long life, he is surely not ordinary in any way. Vincent said in an interview published March 1, 2007 in The Catholic Sun, "I didn't achieve great success by the world's standards, but I achieved moderate success through hard work, perseverance, and through the blessings of Almighty God and the Father of the universe."

Vincent and wife Anni have earned many additional accolades and awards over the last two and a half decades. I could go on and on about how special they are, but now you know why I say he was not just an ordinary man, but a very special man who shall be greatly missed by all of his family and friends.

Vincent, you have left your lovely family and a huge number of friends. We are all better persons for having known you.

