

# Remembering Ronn “Skip” Prokop

*By John Swartz for the Packet & Times, September 7, 2017*

As I write, the funeral for Skip Prokop is about to take place. Ronald Harry Prokop died last Wednesday. You know him as the co-founder of Lighthouse and writer of One Fine Morning, Pretty Lady, Sunny Days and many other tunes. Let me tell you something of him many do not know.

He wasn't just a good drummer; he was a Canadian Individual Champion snare drummer and a member of the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps from 1960 to 1964. Before that he was in the Preston Scout House Band for one year and started his drumming career at the age of 12 in a navy league band and then the Sea Cadet Band, both in Hamilton.



*Ronn “Skip” Prokop entertaining other corps members  
(bus trip, 1963)*

During those last two years in Optimists, Skip also started to write music for the drumline. On the alumni website there are pictures of Skip and the corps, with one notable picture. He's on the bus playing his guitar for the rest of the guys. He was writing music for the rest of us even then.

The connection here is decades later, I would be the section leader and arranger for the Optimists Alumni Corps. Skip sometimes dropped into weekend rehearsals to see his friends and hear what we were up to. Those happened to be every single time I had to skip a rehearsal (“Johnny, you missed it, Ronn was here last week.”). Yes, to the Optimists he marched with he was Ronn, with two Ns.

Being around all those brass players in one's musically formative years, it wasn't a stretch that Skip would, along with Paul Hoffert, come up with a plan to create a rock band with a brass section. Chicago and Blood Sweat and Tears had a head start of only a few months, but the idea to also have a string section (the orchestra kind) was a twist. Some from the Optimists Drum Corps know well the influence when we hear Sunny Days, which is similar to a song from the Optimists repertoire, but that's another story.

In the Drum Corps fraternity, the bonds go across generations. Finding out an acquaintance or a stranger marched in the same Drum Corps as you is the beginning of a life-long friendship. We are brothers and sisters regardless of age difference or how many years spent with a Drum Corps.

This is how it was with Skip on a day in 2012 when I called to interview him for a story in advance of a concert here in Orillia.

I started the conversation with “Mr. Prokop, we have something in common.”

Of course this changed the tone of the whole interview, and resulted in enough material to also write a two part feature for a Drum Corps publication.

On concert night at the Opera House, I checked to see if Skip was there yet to say hello in person. I was told he was out back having a smoke, so off I went.

To an observer it would have appeared to be the meeting of two friends who hadn't seen each other in years. We talked about drumming, being in the corps, the people we both knew, and life. We talked for so long, Skip finally asked, "What time is it?"

It was five minutes to 8, showtime was in 5 minutes and we both had a long way to go, me to my seat, Skip to his behind the drums.

I raced through the empty (except for my girlfriend who was wondering what happened to me) lobby and up to the auditorium, taking my seat just as the band was walking on stage, with Skip bringing up the rear.



*Ronn Prokop instructing the Bantam Optimists (1963)*

The show was great. Skip played a drum solo, he always did. Part of that was a breakdown of a double stroke roll. This is a tribute to his drumming roots. Once upon a time you couldn't be a snare drumming champion if you couldn't break down a roll perfectly, that was a required part of competing.

And until the day he hung up his drumsticks he played 3S model sticks, (drum corps sticks) on his drum set. They're like tree trunks to most drummers, but Skip could also use them like he was playing on his mother's finest china.

***Rest in Peace brother; March On!***



*Ronn Prokop and Optimists drumline (1962)*