



The world of Hugh Clairmont

This time, George didn't go home

IF THERE IS ONE TIME in the life of Cal Waite that he'll not likely forget it was when George Snache summoned him by telephone to leave a comfortable bed and go out into the frigid night to start a car that was parked in the driveway of my Bay Street residence.

The operator of the Gravenhurst garage wasn't long arriving on the scene with his service truck and soon had the motor of the stalled car perking like a charm. George thanked Cal and apologized for having disturbed his sleep.

At that, George decided to let the car warm up before heading home the 20-odd miles to the Rama Indian Reserve. As was often the case during the many years he was with my musical group, The Sandmen, he came into the house for a nightcap and a chat.

"Well, I guess I'd better be on my way," said George as he took his leave about 2.30 a.m. But it was only a few minutes until he was in the house again, his car having got stuck in a snowbank while backing onto the street.

"I guess I'll have to give Cal another call," George exclaimed, his tanned and chubby face reddened by the crisp night air.

"Yes, I'll be down there in a short while," said Cal, who had just got nicely back into bed and would have to get dressed again.

In the meantime, I warmed George with another hot toddy and we passed the time recalling the years we worked together, in the late 1940s and the 1950s, with Ray Cole's orchestra at the Rose Room, the Rainbow Room and Fern Resort at Orillia.

Cal Waite finally reappeared and soon had George on his way. That, one would think, should be the end of an eventful episode. Not quite.

Cars always seemed to be the bane of George's life, and this one was no exception, even though he could sometimes take junkers and nurse several thousand more miles out of them.

A few miles south of Gravenhurst, on this particular night, an OPP cruiser pulled George over beside a high snowbank. The officer flashed his light in the car and said: "Oh, it's you, George. Are you aware you have a broken tail-light?"

George was relieved to know he was in friendly company, but that wasn't unexpected, because he had become a well-known and popular figure as the result of playing dances for so many years between Toronto and North Bay.

During a short conversation, George's car stalled and there was no way he could get it restarted. "That's no problem," said the cop. "I'll radio for a service truck."

By this time, it was about 4 a.m., and who should show up in response to the call? None other than Cal Waite. He took

one look at George on their third meeting of the night and curtly greeted him: "For Chrissake, not you again!"

It was a story George used to often tell. And it was also an indication of the steps he would take to be at home with his wife Helena and their eight children. Most of every day and night their house has been a centre for family and friends playing cribbage or music or just chatting over a few beers.

George wasn't away from Rama very long, after being born there 63 years ago. It was while a young man in North

Bay that he added the tenor saxophone and clarinet to his musical ability as a guitarist.

I first heard him in 1946 on a radio broadcast from CFOR in Orillia. He soloed on *Body and Soul* and I was amazed that his sound on the saxophone captured the same warmth as that of Coleman Hawkins, the recognized "father" of the instrument and the man who made that song a jazz anthem. Little did I know at the time that, several years later, George and I and Orville Johnston would be accompanying

the same famous Hawk for two weeks at Muskoka Sands Inn.

We three were The Sandmen, and we also had the pleasure of accompanying other international stars, such as the great Count Basie, trumpeter Buck Clayton and clarinetist Henry Cuesta of the Lawrence Welk orchestra.

Ours was a musical bond that was especially distinctive because George was the first Indian to be a member of the Toronto Musicians' Association. The secretary at the time, Gurney Titmarsh, pointed that out when we were admitted in 1961.

Because most of The Sandmen's engagements have been within two or three hours' driving distance of home, we are usually not away overnight. The odd exceptions were club dates for a few weeks in Sault Ste. Marie and Niagara Falls, where George was the first to awaken each morning to do a crossword puzzle and advise us that "the Falls are still running." And then there were two weeks performing on a mobile van at Expo 67 in Montreal, where we paraded the 50 millionth visitor around the grounds for two hours on the second last day of the show.

George always said he was glad to get home, even though his cars would sometimes slow his arrival or on other occasions a driver friend might be late coming to pick him up.

Don Macdonald was having a party at his Muskoka Bay home one late night during the Muskoka International Mixed Bonspiel. As would happen, George's car got stuck on a hill. Among those pushing him to level ground were broadcasters Wally Crouter and Don Sims, who is now Ontario's chief film censor.

When his car stalled another night - this time it was summer - George got home through the good graces of Verne Martin, well-known horseman and a director of the Ontario Jockey Club, who was a guest at Muskoka Sands. He loaned George his big new Lincoln Continental, in which the Snache family all enjoyed a ride around Orillia the next day.

George had an ability to make friends wherever he went. People of all walks of life have asked about him regularly since ill health forced him to retire from our group about five years ago. There was widespread concern last year when he had a leg amputated and when he later had a slight stroke.

And so on Tuesday, at the little church in Rama, there was hardly a dry eye as the sun peeked through the window and shone on the flower-covered coffin containing the body of George Snache.

A few minutes later, just before the hearse was to pass the Snache residence, it made a right turn. This time, George wasn't going home.



GEORGE SNACHE put down his saxophone and picked up his guitar when the internationally famous Coleman Hawkins appeared in 1964 with him, drummer Hugh Clairmont and pianist Orville Johnston at Muskoka Sands

Inn. Working with Hawkins, considered the "father of the saxophone," was one of the highlights of George's life, which ended with his death during the week.