

MEMOIR: REMEMBERING FRANK JANNEY (1930-2006)  
February 2006

I knew Frank for almost forty years, first as a colleague at Dartmouth and then simply as a very good friend. Frank was a man of many sides, but the side I remember most is his love of music. Two summers ago, after a crowd of us had feasted on a pig roasted just across the road from Frank and Laurie's house in Vershire, Frank and his brother Jervis settled down under the great willow tree to play their guitars while Laurie sang to an enchanted circle of listeners. Though a sudden thunderstorm broke up the song and sent us all scrambling to our cars, I will never forget that moment. And I will never forget either the very last piece I heard from Frank's hands. Just a few days before he died, John Boswell and I drove up to Vershire to see him for what we expected would be no more than ten or fifteen minutes. But as we sat out on the patio next to their house, he spoke with us for the better part of an hour, talking of life in Vershire, of the pleasures of owning a piece of land that stretched out next to a river, and of riding his horse down through the trees from the wooded knoll that overlooks the house. As we got up to leave, he asked us first to hear a piano piece that he had just been learning. So we went inside and sat down and listened to him play—a little haltingly and with great poignancy—a Scottish lament.

Now we lament Frank's passing, but we also remember and celebrate the vitality of his music, above all the music of his guitar. He played the piano and the jazz trumpet, but his favorite instrument was the guitar, and on the one and only occasion he lost it, nothing could keep him from getting it back. Frank was not only a hunter, as we all know; he was also a man who would never give up on a quest. And nothing showed this better than his hunt for that guitar.

In the early seventies, when Frank was teaching Spanish at Dartmouth, he spent ten weeks in Granada supervising a Dartmouth foreign study program there. To Granada of course he

brought his guitar. And it was no ordinary guitar, nothing you could buy in a music store at the local mall. Frank's guitar was hand made in Madrid some sixty years ago by Jose Ramirez, who stands among guitar makers about where Andres Segovia stands among guitar players. Though its burnished spruce and rosewood panels had become a little cracked by the time I saw and heard it, this venerable instrument still resonated like a harp, a piano, or even a chamber orchestra. Frank loved it, and he loved to play it.

But even precious things can be mislaid, or momentarily forgotten. So it was when Frank and his family took their leave of Granada and piled all of their belongings into two taxicabs for the ride to the airport, where they caught a plane for Madrid. Only at the Madrid airport, where they had to claim and then re-check their baggage for the flight home, did Frank realize that he was now missing his guitar—along with a bag containing his Nikon Autoreflex and a hundred rolls of undeveloped film.

He tried hard to control himself. Since he clearly remembered seeing the guitar and the camera bag in the trunk of one of their two cabs, he did not panic. The driver who had failed to unload them, he figured, would surely hand them over to the lost-and-found department of the municipal office in downtown Granada. So he phoned a friend in Granada and asked him to call back when the items turned up. But when a week of waiting and repeated calls to Granada brought no news, he decided that the only way to retrieve his guitar and his film bag was to track down the driver of the taxi where he had stowed them. And there was only one way to do that: fly back to Granada.

He arrived with nothing more to guide him than a rough memory of the driver's appearance. No name, no cab company, no number. Just the mental picture of a youngish pícaro with dark hair, medium build, and a jaunty, slightly mischievous air. But where to find him? Where to look for him?

Frank started with the Granada airport. Because the airport was so tiny that he was afraid of being prematurely recognized by the very man he was seeking, he staked out the entrance in

disguise, sticking a fake black moustache under his nose and crowning his little spears of wheat-blond hair with a toupee of thick black curls. When two full days of watching turned up nothing, he went to the police station. Behind a large imperial façade above a daunting flight of stone steps he found his way to what might have been the front desk of a Manhattan precinct. There he told his story and described the driver.

“But *senor*,” said the moist, jowly face behind the desk, “there are *eight hundred* cab drivers in Granada.”

“But they all have to be registered, right?”

“Si, pero---”

“And you have pictures of every one of them?”

“Yes, but—”

“So let me see the pictures!”

“*No es posible, señor!*” Out of the question!

But here was a gringo speaking fluent Spanish and dropping the names of various Andalusian notables that he had come to know while snapping photos for an article on their prize Arabian horses: photos among the hundred rolls of film still missing along with the guitar. The moist fat face nodded and just audibly muttered, “Muy bien, *senor*.” It turned out to be possible to see the pictures of the cab drivers after all.

Out came an army of mug shots all lined up on sheets big enough to cover a bed. After hours of mind-numbing study in a cramped and windowless back office he narrowed the suspects to eight look-alikes, then tracked them down one by one—only to find that none of them was the culprit. Frustration made him desperate. When at one point he spotted a man who matched his memory of the driver in all but one respect, he rushed up to ask him, “Where’d you get that moustache?”—and then realized that he once again had the wrong man.

But he would not give up. When none of his eight suspects panned out, he spent one full day in the baking sun propped against a crumbling baroque fountain in the middle of a traffic circle, watching four lanes of cars and trucks swish endlessly by,

sweating under his black wig, gagging on exhaust fumes, and slowly going nuts.

Then he got a better idea. He hired an old and trustworthy cab driver to cruise the streets of Granada with him. After a day of looking and asking he at last spotted a dark-haired jaunty figure standing on a corner under a street lamp chatting with another man. This time there was no mistake. Climbing out of the cab, he strode up to the man that he recognized, clamped his left hand over the man's upper right arm, shook the man's right hand, and smilingly asked him,

“*Te recuedas de mi?*” Do you remember me?

The man jumped as if struck by lightning.

“Si, si, señor!” He remembered the *caballero Americano* and his family and he knew all about the guitar and the bag of film. He had not turned these valuable items into the lost-and-found department, he said, because he was afraid they might be stolen from it. Instead, for safekeeping he had stashed them in a garage belonging to *another* taxi driver—while patiently waiting for the American gentleman to come back and claim them.

The heaven of Christianity is traditionally populated by a vast crowd of angels all playing harps. If I ever get to that heaven, I will be listening for the sound of a guitar made by Jose Ramirez. And when I hear it, I will know that I have found my man.