



## Family Fun on Facebook

Back in March, Craig and Maren were in the studio rehearsing a song called “Canned Goods” by the Divers for a Sunday morning church service. Lahna (Craig and Linda’s oldest daughter) decided to record it on her phone and post it to Facebook to share with her friends. As it turned out, people who didn’t know the song enjoyed it so much that they decided to put out a tune a week for people. Most of the songs chosen had some sort of message or theme attached, while some were just for fun.

Over the weeks, people continued to watch, comment, and share. It was a fun treat that people looked forward to. Some hadn’t seen Craig play guitar or Maren play the ukulele before. The last one they did was on the 4th of July when Casey, Craig’s son, joined in on John Denver’s “Country Roads” with a backdrop of the

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Wasners’ Barn. Music has surrounded the family with so many lasting memories and joy that it only made sense to share.

Here are some other songs they played:

- “Never Alone” – Lady A
- “Wildflowers” – Tom Petty
- “Jama Day” – Peter Mayer
- “Missin’ You” – Little Feat
- “Be Still” – Hillary Scott
- “Thank God For Kids” – Oak Ridge Boys
- “Some Days You Gotta Dance” – Dixie Chicks
- “Everybody Be Yo’self” – Keb’ Mo’
- “Make You Feel My Love” – Garth Brooks
- “A Better Man” – Keb’ Mo’

And the link to the Facebook page is here:  
[https://www.facebook.com/lahna.tran.9/videos\\_by](https://www.facebook.com/lahna.tran.9/videos_by).

**Hilltop Happenings a popular variety show that has been presented regularly in Montgomery, MN since March of 2012. With their 9<sup>th</sup> season cancelled due to COVID-19 concerns, this “varietyletter” was conceived as an attempt to keep performers in touch with their loyal fans and to introduce the series and troupe to those who have yet to see a performance.**



## John's Jottings

by John Grimm, Publisher

Sometimes the songs I write are of redeeming social value.

Sometimes not.

### I'll Become A Eunuch

*I think someday that I'll become a eunuch  
With the word "harmless" emblazoned on my tunic  
Life would be much simpler, womanless—you bet  
Yes, I think I'll do it, but not just yet*

*Monday is the day I do the garbage  
Tuesday is the day I wash her car  
Wednesday is the day I take her shopping  
Scouring toilets Thursday is the worst by far  
Friday is the day I help with laundry  
Saturday it's time to scrub the floors*

*Sunday she lets me watch a ball game  
But if I wanna smoke she makes me go outdoors*

*I can't go in the house with my shoes on  
The only car she lets me drive is a mini-van  
I can't go playing poker with the guys  
Doing dishes in an apron isn't for a man  
I've gotta wash my hands before I eat  
If I have an opinion, I'm contrary  
When I get home from a hard days work  
I must clean up my body and my vocabulary*

*I think someday that I'll become a eunuch  
With the word "harmless" emblazoned on my tunic  
Life would be much simpler, womanless—you bet  
Yes, I think I'll do it, but not just yet*

It's with trepidation that I publish these words, in fear that all female readers will be overcome with guilt and remorse.

CRAIG WASNER & JOHN GRIMM  
INVITE YOU TO THE NEXT SERIES OF  
**HILLTOP Happenings**  
PIZZA, PERFORMERS, & PLENTY OF PIZZAZZ...  
BEGINNING OUR 9TH YEAR OF ENTERTAINMENT IN 2020!

NO ADMISSION CHARGED! Donations accepted to help defray production & overhead expenses.  
Hilltop Hall ~ 206 First St. N., Montgomery, MN

**DUE TO COVID-19, SEASON 9 IS POSTPONED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE.**  
For updates, please check <http://www.bighonza.com/hilltop-hall/> or listen to KCHK Radio AM 1350 or FM 95.5. Meanwhile, enjoy our 15-minute Excerpts Video on YouTube!

Since 2012, Hilltop Happenings shows have featured a wide range of familiar standards, popular favorites, show tunes, original compositions, concert hall classics, inspirational gospel, costumes, and comedy...truly something for every taste. With two new troupe members and several new guests on board, even more variety is in store for you in the future!

Regular troupe members (above, left to right) now include Howard Braith, Maren Brogger, Mary Lou and Wade Fradenburgh, John Grimm, Chuck Mallory, Louise Meyer, Hank Nieland, Craig Wasner, Lynn Wilms, Mark Wilms, and Wendy Zaske; additional guests often appear. It's a unique mix of breathtaking talent, lighthearted entertainment, and tasty snacks - all in one lovely and historic place. Don't miss a single show!

**SODA, SNACKS, SUPPER - IT'S ALL HERE!**  
Pop & popcorn sold throughout...Pizza from Pizzeria 201 sold at intermission.

The Hilltop Happenings Series is an ongoing program that brings entertainment, enjoyment, and inspiration to the folks of South Central Minnesota.  
Find more information at <http://www.bighonza.com/hilltop-hall/>

**ALL SHOWS BEGIN AT 4:00 P.M. - BRING YOUR FRIENDS - SEE YOU THERE!**

Graphics by W. Zaske



## Eight years of entertainment...

If you've never seen a Hilltop Happenings show, you've been missing out on some spectacular performances in an absolutely delightful setting!

John Grimm purchased Hilltop Hall (which is on the National Register of Historic Places) in the early 1990s "to save a significantly historic building" and "to create a place where local folks could perform."

Having begun in March of 2012 with a handful of performers, the troupe now features 12 multi-talented members, three of whom were in the very first show.



## The Royal We

by Pastor Mark  
and Lynn Wilms

Royal, Iowa

WILMS 1,  
COVID 0

That, happy to say, is the result that is shaping up from Mark's close encounter with the SARS-CoV-2 virus, better known as Covid-19. We have always been cautious, keeping social distance from people, wearing masks when required, washing hands. But there are a thousand ways to get an illness no matter how many precautions you take.

Mark began to show symptoms of what appeared to be a common cold. This progressed to a more miserable state until he just couldn't go in to work. Mark hasn't taken a day off for sickness in years. That night he did go to the office to engage in a Zoom church council meeting, and he must have looked terrible because the next morning, council asked him to get a rapid Covid test just to be safe. Sure enough, it was positive. He was put on quarantine at home for 10 days, as was Lynn.

Life in quarantine is no fun. The first thing we had to deal with was food. But of course our church members were great to pitch in and bring us meals every day. They also have done some shopping for us and gotten our mail. People are so kind and helpful! The next thing was the mentally suffocating feeling of being closed in a house all

day, every day. We just had to cheat a little and take a drive in the country one night for our mental health. But to top it all off—get this—our furnace broke down! Now, understandably, heating/cooling guys won't enter a Covid house until the quarantine is over, so you are up the famous creek without a paddle. But those church members, God love 'em, brought us some space heaters and they are working nicely in the rooms we are using until a repair person can come in. One heating/cooling guy is also a firefighter, and he thought that if the space heaters didn't work, he could put on one of those masks and air packs they use to enter a burning building and then look at the furnace. He figured it would keep out the virus. Got to give him an A for creativity!

As we write this during Thanksgiving week, we are waiting eagerly for the quarantine to be over and return to living again in the world. This experience has taught us to value what we take for granted, and also that none of us are bullet-proof. We tend to think stuff always happens to the other guy, but if you're human, it can happen to you, too. The most positive thing we've learned is that no matter how tough the challenge, there are always solutions if you wait and don't let problems get you down. And there are always people around who care about you and will help. So, God has blessed us with the knowledge of these things as He cares for us during this holy season.



## Meyer's Menagerie

Louise Meyer greets a lot of animals every morning, and gets them all ready for bed at night. The fun part: only two are live animals! In addition to her two parakeets, she currently owns two life-size ceramic cats and 34 stuffed animals (this photo was taken in 2019, so not of them all are represented here). She calls them all by name each day, which means that even at age 88, she has a better memory than many of us!



## Frad's Faves

by Wade Fradenburgh

Christmas at the Fradenburgh household is a **BIG DEAL**. We celebrate the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ and remember why He came to earth to reconcile us to our God. We do not take it lightly, either.

Christmas for us begins at Thanksgiving and lasts until January 6. We have the tree and some decorations up at Thanksgiving to get us into the attitude of the season. Mary Lou's father was Russian Orthodox and the rest of the family was Roman Catholic. The family would go to midnight Mass and open one present when they got home. The next day other presents were opened, but not all of them. In the Russian Church, Christmas is celebrated on January 6; so trees, leftover presents, and decorations were held until then. In our house today we keep our

decorations up until the sixth of January in honor of Mary Lou's family.

Mary Lou and I have played a lot of music at Christmas time all over the area. A group of us went caroling around New Prague to the hospital, nursing home, senior centers, and up and down Main Street if the weather was decent. Usually there were at least a dozen folks that joined us and we did that for 24 years. Of course, this year we were not able to do so.

Pictured below is our family. In the top row, left to right, are our grandsons Danny Musil and Ryan Musil. In the bottom row is our daughter and son-in-law Angie and Tom Musil and on the other side is our daughter and son-in-law Emily and Dustin Booth.

From our home to yours, we pray you had a blessed Christmas and that 2021 will be a joyful year for you and your family.





## The Dobro Defined

by Hank Nieland

As most of you have seen at the Hilltop shows, I have played the dobro guitar. Its real name is resonator guitar. There are a few styles: round neck, played like a regular guitar; and square neck, the style I play, which is played flat using a steel bar similar to the country western pedal steel players. There is also an all-metal body style which, back in the 20s, was made by the National Company that employed John Dopyera and a musician named George Beaucamp looking for a louder sound coming out of the guitar.



Hank with his dobro

The dobro name is currently owned by Gibson and manufactured by Epiphone. Today, most any resonator guitar is called a dobro (small d), kind of like when you were going to make a copy of some document and said “I’m going to xerox that” even though you copied it on a different brand of printer. Dobro (with a capital D) is the official name that is used by Gibson on their “Dobro” dobros.

Early development of the instrument started in the 20s and wasn’t patented until 1929 with brothers John, Rudy, and Ed Dopyera ... the Dopyera brothers ... shortened to Dobro (a name which means “good” in their native Slovak). The instrument looks like there’s a giant hubcap on top of the body. Some rumors have it that they used a hubcap from an old Buick car for the first

cap. I have never found any evidence or documentation about that. But the rumor sounds good anyway!

The Dobro was first introduced by country music’s Bashful Brother Oswald, who played with Roy Acuff starting in 1939. I learned my style from Josh Graves, who played with Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs.

The instrument is tuned to open G tuning (which is the most common), so whenever you strum all the strings, you have a G chord. Then you use the steel bar at different positions to get a C chord or a D chord or an E chord and so on. The fun part for me is to pick out some individual notes, slide into a position or bend a note to give it some extra feeling.

I like to play a variety of string instruments: guitar, dobro, banjo, mandolin, and upright bass. And as time permits, I’m going to try to learn something on the lap steel this winter.



The banjo

But I somehow always go back to the dobro. Gone but not forgotten, my dobro instructor told me it was the only instrument that closely mimicked the human voice. It’s not normally a lead instrument, but the background sounds it makes can be haunting or sweet.



The upright bass

So I tip my hat to John, Rudy and Ed for their contribution to the music world. Dopyera means GOOD, the dobro sounds GOOD, they made a unique and GOOD instrument. I can hardly wait until we all get together again and make some GOOD music!



## Life Moves in Mysterious Ways

by Maren Brogger

Two years ago I had the opportunity to drive to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and document an oversize load that weighed over 637,000 lbs. and traveled 60 miles to its final destination. This is the second time I've been able to experience this type of haul while working for the trucking company I've been at for almost 8 years now, Perkins Specialized Transportation in Northfield, MN. Just like in my music abilities, I dabble in a little bit of everything in the organization—but Marketing and IT (Information Technology) are my main gigs.

I couldn't really call myself an expert, but helping people be successful and organized is a passion I try to achieve in any task I do. On this trip I planned on getting aerial footage of the load using a drone in order to educate people on these types of loads and what the company is capable of. Sometimes the details get a little technical, but I'll do my best to explain it in a way that is easy to understand.

There were actually 7 engines that had to be moved from a port on Lake Michigan to Eagle Mills, MI, which was 60 miles away. By car it'd take roughly an hour, but this trip would take upwards of 7 hours to complete, and it would take up both sides of the two-lane highway. If that wasn't impressive enough, the length of the load from bumper to bumper was 391 ft, which is a little longer than the length of a football field and



it weighed the equivalent of about 70 elephants or 320,000 tons. It was required to travel at night and was as tall as a two story house at 19 ft. high. This is not your standard oversize load you see on the highway, this takes years of preparation and assistance from officials on the state and federal levels to accomplish. Can you tell I enjoy my job? It requires a sweet blend of technical and creative juices to pull these projects off.



I arrived just in time to capture an engine being loaded. Without getting too complicated, the load is actually suspended from beams that are attached to hydraulic dollies to disperse the weight evenly. The wheels on the dollies, or axles, distribute the weight as it travels, which if you include the trucks is over 1.3 million lbs. altogether. Each tire (of which there are 192 total), carries the same weight as a regular semi would in order to not damage the roads. The load is pulled with just one semi-truck, but is also accompanied by up to three trucks in the back, which are used for pushing the trailer along, as well as to help brake the load when going down hilly terrain.



Night travel minimizes the impact on the general public because, since it takes up the entire highway, it restricts traffic from being able to pass for extended periods of time. If I've lost ya, the pics should help illustrate the magnitude, but trust me, seeing it person confirms that it is massive! The job was completed successfully without any incident or accidents within a three-and-a-half-week timeline, and I am still very proud to have been a part of the experience.

In a way, it reminds me of listening to or watching live music. It can be very magical as things unfold and come together in perfect harmony and rhythm. So much has to be in sync. People and parts are operating separately, yet everyone must pay attention and work together. It's much like musicians in a band, actors in a play, dancers in a ballet, or players on a field do. I may tap the cajon or sing a song on stage, but without the other players, instruments, working gear, and of course, the AUDIENCE, it would be lacking some serious feeling and sense of purpose, which is part of the reason we do it in the first place, right?

We are certainly living in a time where being separately-together looks and feels different, but as we take care of each other separately, we are taking care of ourselves together. We may not know what's on the other side of these mysterious times, but whatever that new or different way of playing, working, and dancing looks like, I hope it fills your soul with a sense of love, accomplishment, and purpose to get through this because you're needed in that group when we can all gather again. So although it is different right now as you're reading a newsletter instead of experiencing the music and community in person, the hope is to keep moving forward and keep your spirits up because we will see each other again real soon, and I'm not the only one who can't wait.



## Wendy's Musings

by Wendy Zaske, Editor/Designer

When Hilltop Happenings began back in 2012, I was working at KCHK Radio in New Prague. In addition to serving as receptionist and administrative assistant, I hosted a half-hour show weekdays at 2:30 called "Afternoon Break with Wendy Z."

In the promo, I described it as being "just like your favorite variety magazine, but it's on the radio!" With an overall theme that changed weekly, the show featured "food for thought," recipes, local music or classic standards, tips for thrifty living, and fun with words.

The station manager at the time encouraged me to ad-lib throughout, but since writing is easier for me than extemporaneous speaking, I scripted each segment on my own time the night before—a process that took about 2 hours—and tried to make it *sound* spontaneous! I don't think I fooled anyone, but at least I was never at a loss for words. And having calculated roughly how many words I spoke per minute, I designed my scripting template with minute-long text boxes so

that I could fill in the correct amount of verbiage to read and still end up finishing exactly at 3:00, just in time for the news. My script also included prompters reminding me which buttons to push (and *not* to push!) so that, for example, I wouldn't end up muted when I was supposed to be talking and live on air when I was having a coughing fit.

It all worked out pretty well, with very few glitches! The only goof I can recall was when I brought up my own microphone instead of the track on which a commercial was supposed to be airing, and everybody heard a brief conversation I had with another DJ about playing the piano while lying backwards on the bench (which was probably quite amusing and, believe it or not, actually works if you cross your hands)!

Anyway, one of the best crockpot recipes I shared during the show was the simplest: "Pickle Roast." All you need is a chuck roast and a jar of large dill pickles (whole or quartered, it doesn't matter). Just throw the roast in with the entire jar of pickles, cook on low for 8-10 hours, and you're done. What could be simpler?

So that's my belated holiday gift to you: an easy and tasty recipe to start out 2021!

**PUBLISHER: John Grimm - EDITOR/DESIGNER: Wendy Zaske**

**ADDITIONAL TROUPE MEMBERS CONTRIBUTING TO THIS ISSUE:**

**Maren Brogger, Wade & Mary Lou Fradenburgh, Hank Nieland,  
Louise Meyer, Craig Wasner, Lynn & Mark Wilms**

**OTHER TROUPE MEMBERS INCLUDE: Howard Braith, Chuck Mallory**

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**MANY THANKS TO OUR LOYAL FANS FOR NINE YEARS OF ONGOING SUPPORT!**

**Hilltop Hall is located in Le Sueur County, 60 miles southwest of the Twin Cities Metro area at 206 First Street North, Montgomery, MN 56069. For more information, contact John Grimm at [jgrimm.hilltop@gmail.com](mailto:jgrimm.hilltop@gmail.com). To join our bulk email list, contact Wendy Zaske at [HilltopUpdates@gmail.com](mailto:HilltopUpdates@gmail.com). Previous issues of *Troupe Talk*, a link to our 15-minute excerpts video on YouTube, and more information can be found at our new website address: [hilltophall.wordpress.com](http://hilltophall.wordpress.com) (Larry Pint, Webmaster).**