

Who Is Washboard Willy???

Washboard Willy is a unique, interactive children's entertainer that provides a special combination of rhythm, sound effects, and comedy to delight everyone. Willy's love of people and music shows in a special warmth, energy and spontaneity that irresistibly captures one's imagination.

With his own kind of energy, Washboard Willy has become a Pied Piper of Rhythm in children of all ages. His interactive style connects with all audiences. During his performance he and Washboard Wanda pass out hand-held rhythm instruments to the kids and together they become

Willy's Washboard Jamboree.

With thimbles on his gloves and bells and whistles on his rhythm board, Washboard Willy is fast becoming a low tech, high energy washboard legend known around the world.

Quote: When you go by, you create a "bliss wave". Or, Washboard Willy leaves smiles in his wake!!

A long time ago in Evergreen, Colorado, there lived a young entrepreneur named Donnis. She owned a secretarial service in a building on Buffalo Park Road. A Landscape Architect named Larry had a business in that same building. Landscape Larry needed secretarial help. A business partnership developed.

During this time, Larry was going through a divorce. As the story goes ... "my wife left me for a bowler named Duke at the Holiday Bowl & Bar." As a result, he wasn't too interested in developing a long term relationship but a wonderful friendship grew. I would go and watch him play as a drummer in a band and play an occasional washboard solo. He shared the design of his new Whiskett Rhythm Board: a wonderful, custom washboard. Then, in 1984, Larry moved a couple hours north to Boulder to expand his career as a Landscape Architect.

We never said goodbye, but the distance caused us to drift apart and we found separate life paths. I actually searched the internet several times trying to find my friend. There was no listing and so I put my feelings in this little box in the top of my closet.

... Scene Shift to 14 years later in San Francisco, California ...

November, 1999. I was living in San Francisco, working for United Airlines, and going through a divorce after being married to an alcoholic for 12 years. I was at the Harvest Festival with my housemate, We were in line to buy tickets when I noticed a musician over in the corner entertaining the ticket line. When I looked at the face, I said to myself ... that's Larry. Then I saw his custom washboard gloves and knew it was my long lost friend.

Richard went inside but I waited to talk to him. I stood there ... my heart pounding and butterflies in my tummy waiting for him to finish his song. He looked up and said, "Donnis" ... I said, "Larry, it is you." We hugged and were excited to see each other again and to have the opportunity to catch up on each other's life. He confessed that he thought about me many times and wondered where I was and what I was doing. I shared that I had tried to find him by doing an internet search. We both promised never to lose each other again.

We did keep in touch. He was finishing up his 1999 tour season and I was finishing up my divorce. When he began his 2000 tour, I was able to use my flight benefits to fly to see him a couple weekends a month. We were both cautious: he had given up on women and I had given up on men ... bah humbug to both. There was definitely chemistry and we both didn't want to let our feelings go because of how others had treated us. And, if you believe in destiny ... the synchronicity of our paths crossing again was very apparent. The creator planted a seed so many years before and now was our time to be together.

Life was going well. My ex-husband was transferred to Atlanta so I could close that chapter of my life. My boss at United petitioned successfully to make my job permanent.

Larry finished his tour in December and began a drive back to Kansas for Christmas. He wanted to stop along the way and share his new CD with those that had been his support system in the early years. He was driving through Colorado and decided not to stop as there was a storm just behind him.

So he headed for Iowa. In a cross wind, he hit black ice. When he stopped spinning, he and Penny (his dog daughter) were fine but the truck was totaled. We talked from his hotel room and he said, "I'm okay".

His friends, Mary and Gabe, helped him to rent a truck. After prodding, he called and said, "I need your help". Within hours, I was at the airport. It was the weekend before Christmas and I have practically no seniority to move up the standby list. I missed getting on flight after flight. Finally, I was able to get into Chicago. At 2 AM, I put my head on a pillow. I was up at 6 AM to catch the first plane to Des Moines. Finally, 24 hours later, I was there with him. We hugged and cried together. I began putting into place the final details for the task of driving back to California. We stopped in Kansas and spent Christmas with his family.

It was on this trip that our relationship transitioned into a committed, serious partnership. We had very wonderful, meaningful talks along the way. After a week of driving back to Los Angeles, it was a difficult goodbye when he dropped me at the airport to return San Francisco ... back to work for me. He began the chore of replacing his truck.

In February 2001, I bought a mobile home in Pacifica which is just south of San Francisco. I lived 100 steps from the ocean ... WOW ... a dream come true for me. I was able to buy this little piece of paradise for the same price as renting an apartment. The challenge with an apartment is that I had

a boyfriend that was a musician and he had a dog ... not the best credentials as a candidate for being moved to the top of the list of possible renters!!! Larry found a truck just in time to begin his 2001 tour. The circle began again. I would go visit for the weekend a couple times a month.

That spring he had the opportunity to purchase an acre of land just south of Bend, Oregon. It was a great deal and the price was \$10,000 below market which meant instant equity. It was a big step, but we decided to be co-owners. A big step for this guy that had been a proclaimed bachelor for ssoooo many years. There were talks about our retirement and how we would spend winters in Pacifica and summers in Bend. When I retired after 10 years, we would take Washboard Willy around the world on United Airlines. Life was good.

I had been promoted to Supervisor over 25 people and was in discussions of being promoted again to Program Manager. I was really excited about this move because my new boss was the best. He was a computer programmer just like me and understood my conversations and challenged my skills. Then, infamous morning in September as I was pulling out of my driveway, my neighbor said: "Have you seen the news?" No, I said ... so I turned on the radio. 9/11 ... United lost 2 airplanes. I spent the day photocopying the Aircraft manuals for those planes. The FAA requires that documentation on all aircraft involved in a crash.

Larry called on my cell phone. I felt so far from him. An announcement came over the PA that

anyone that needed to leave and be home with family was free to go. Since I had no family and Larry was in Oregon, I stayed to work. The next week Management was given a 30-day notice for layoffs. 31 days later, 21 in my department, including my "to be" boss, were released.

So for the second time in just a few years, my life was turned upside down. I immediately put my little house on the market. Packed all my belongings and put them into storage on our property in Oregon. By the time that was done, Larry was finished with his tour. For the next 45 days we went on a worldwide vacation. Flew First Class to Paris, First Class to Chicago, First Class to Wichita where we spent Christmas with his family (now called Mom & Dad). Then back to California where we unpacked winter clothes and repacked clothes for Hawaii. We spent 17 days on the big island of Hawaii ... what a magical trip.

When we returned, I felt it was time for me to address my life and face the changes it had been dealt. What was I going to do? So, I asked "What are we going to do?" His reply, well I need to work on the truck and get things ready to leave (you see, his 2002 tour would begin in just a few weeks). I said ... "no Larry, what are WE going to do". mmmm, there was silence. Then he said, let's have a cup of coffee and it was time.

What we worked out was that I would make his Nu-way 5th wheel into my home. He was just using it for storage as he traveled in a Weekend Warrior RV trailer. It was smaller and fit better into

the environments where he was booked. So, he had his space and I had my space. He still wasn't sure about this relationship stuff. You see, he had had no success with women and being on the road. Most of the time he was asked ... don't you want to be a Landscape Architect again and stay home? Well, that resulted in a "goodbye" and away he went.

I set about the task of changing this storage unit into a home. As the transition began, he smiled and said, it's nice to have this be a home again. And it did feel good to be making "our" home ... of course, that was in my mind. I had found my soul mate, my best friend and had totally committed to our relationship. My heart was "married" and a legal document wouldn't change things.

A few weeks later, it was time for Willy to head to the Cloverdale Citrus Fair. From there, Riverside County Fair, and then the CA-Mid Winter Fair. Another year began. He was going thru the final checks and making sure all was ready. In his mind he was going back and forth: do I take her, do I leave her here, do I take her, do I not take her??? ... I was in the 5th wheel going: is he going to take me or do I have to go find a job??? Finally, at the last minute, he asked: "Are your bags packed?" With my heart fluttering wildly I said, "Give me 5 minutes" ... Away we went.

In June, we're driving down the road and he made a comment. I said, Larry, do you realize we've been together 24/7 for over 6 months now. He responded: "NO ... I can't do that" Then he said, "really"? He began to realize that he had found a fellow gypsy.

I truly love life on the road ... the places we see, the people we meet. And we are bombarded with affirmations that we are on our right life paths. We are so very blessed. As interactive, children's entertainers, we are able to have a positive impact on hundreds of children. The stories we could tell would fill a book.

Then, one day as we drove down the road, in casual conversation, the words "we could get married" slipped out of his mouth. You see, the "m" word was not allowed in conversation so I had just resigned myself to being happy as his companion.

Our wedding was beautiful. And once he got over the shock that he was getting married, he opened the doors of his heart and the flood gates opened. I couldn't ask for a more loving, devoted husband. We are both blessed to have found each other. And, as icing on the cake, we recently learned that we are Native American: I am Cherokee and Seminole, he is Cherokee. And, we both go back to those roots so our spirituality and belief base is the same.

It's never too late. We are in the winter of our lives yet feel our life has just begun.