



Dell McLain

November 23, 1965 - March 3, 2021

Delton (Dell) Ottis McLain

November 23, 1965-March 3, 2021

“This is the day the Lord has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it.”

Psalm 118:24

This could be a two-word tribute, beginning and ending with the words irreplaceable and superstar, to describe the essence of our friend Dell McLain, but stopping there would not be enough. Because if we stopped there we would not be doing justice to this incredible human being who captured the hearts of all and brought so much to the Durant community.

Dell’s first big break took place in Dallas, Texas when he was born on November 23, 1965 – a mere 55 years ago. The curtain fell on Wednesday, March 3, 2021, when he left this stage for bigger and brighter heavenly venues. He didn’t want to leave us, but when called, he made a graceful exit with love in his heart and prayers of hope for those left behind. Prayers that we would continue on, follow in his footsteps to serve others and keep the torch of his life on earth forever burning. To honor his memory, we promise to keep the fire burning but know the warmth of its glow will be impossible to duplicate.

Larger than life, this man who was at least half Molly Risso, with Hugh Grant, Dudley Moore, Mr. French, Rhett Butler, Desmond Tutu, George Carlin, and Lady Gaga mixed in, was nothing short of spectacular in the life he shared with us. Dell had a magnetic personality and a huge presence. If he was on stage, our attention and hearts gravitated to him. If he was in the classroom, we paid more attention. If he was mixing cocktails at a party or on his YouTube channel, we wanted to be part of his tribe. No matter what he was doing, directing, or delighting in, Dell brought us along for the ride.

Most of all he was genuine and true to himself. Being true might have meant challenging

an opinion, asking for a term-paper rewrite, calling students out for being late or lazy, or instructing someone to get back on stage and try again, but when he challenged us, it was not a frivolous exercise. He wanted us to be better, do better, expect more of ourselves.

In earlier days, Dell, the standout student, joined with a troupe of other young actors who became lifelong friends to fulfill dreams of putting on perfect productions at Southeastern. Working side-by-side with mentor Molly Rizzo, Dell's characters were/are legendary; his creative portrayals without equal. These were the glory days at Southeastern that brought Shakespeare to rural Oklahoma and made theatre less intimidating. With Dell as the ring leader, this talented group acted in dinner theatres, sat in on tryouts, laughed and cried together, lived together, got wild and crazy, and made history.

Dell ventured to New York and New Orleans – with other stops along the way - for training and education before deciding on a return to his Durant home. He wasn't born here, but he was from Durant. His return was celebrated far and wide, with so many realizing he was bringing along his love for us, the university and a style that makes theatre at SOSU so amazing. He brought history and innovation in the same swoop, made the program his own, and got down to the business of mixing old and new. He was back and times were great again for 23 years with Dell at the helm as Director of Theatre (and many other titles) at Southeastern.

Everything went as planned until it didn't and we were forced to imagine a world without Dell. A world less optimistic, less joyful and just less. Our hearts were broken at the thought, but Dell didn't want us to linger long in our collective grief. Instead, without a word, he directed us to mentor a student, welcome a stranger, preach a sermon – or listen intently to one, sing a song, lift a spirit, give wise counsel, set high standards in a classroom and beyond, live our lives fully....and laugh; he would want us to laugh. A lot.

Dell was preceded in death by his father James Odell McLain and brother Gary Don Spence. He is survived by his biggest cheerleader and fun-loving mom Phyllis Jean McLain; brother Terry Lee Spence and sister Kathryn Ann Olivis. He also leaves behind a family of friends, followers, colleagues and former students who, along with his mom, brother and sister, will miss him daily for the rest of our lives.

In anticipation of his departure, Dell worked to create a fund through the Southeastern Foundation that will benefit students. You are cordially invited to skip the flowers and go straight to the foundation with gifts of love and support. Contributions to The Dell McLain Memorial Project, #0341, may be directed to the Southeastern Foundation online at se.edu/giving/give-here/ or by mail to 425 W. University Blvd., Durant, OK 74701.

Due to seating capacity and social distancing concerns, there will be no service at this time. An outdoor celebration of all things Dell is being planned for this summer with updates to come.

Dell, it seems somehow fitting to let you go with a whispered prayer in the form of these combined words from Shakespeare, "...Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore, so do our minutes hasten to their end; Each changing place with that which goes before.....Good night, sweet prince; and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest."

To close with the sentiments so many have expressed in such a short time, we are thankful for your passion, your presence and the gifts you shared. We are simply better for having known and loved you, Dell McLain. Godspeed.

Tribute Wall



“ *I remember in high school we all went to Dells house to watch the wizard of oz. We had so much fun that night. We always had a good time when we got together. He was a good friend and I wish we would have never drifted apart.*
Leslue

Leslie - July 11, 2024 at 05:53 PM



“ *Dell McLain*

January 08, 2023 at 11:32 PM



“ I, along w/Dell McLain, was a Lambie of Molly Risso, along w/a motley crew of wildly talented & of course, breathtakingly beautiful actors, actresses, & techies in the 80's. Dell & I directed our 1st productions side by side. As you could only imagine, we were an over the top fearlessly creative flock.



During one of our final semesters at SOSU, I found myself walking through our main classroom stage area, in front of Molly's office, at a strangely dark & quiet moment. I was acutely aware of the lack of presence of others. This space was always being utilized in some way. It was off-setting & had my mind racing of the many legendary stories of the ghosts, of productions past, that were to have haunted our production hall ways, back stage areas & venues for many years! I was spooked!

My heart raced! I started walking faster to out run the darkness of the abandoned classroom/stage area & was headed to the far door to enter the 'Gary Varner' stage design work shop. The lights were always on in there.

*When I rounded the corner, a dark figure suddenly jumped out of the darkness from the men's bathroom, & growled ferociously! Scared sh**less, I dropped my books & fall back wards, onto the floor, in attempt to escape...I looked up to see, you guessed it, a Gorillia!*

A towering Gorillia singing, "You Can't Always Get What You Warnt" ! The Gorillia reached out his hand, & apologized, while laughing his mask off, literally & pulled me up from the floor.

It was Dell! I went from mild altering terror, to belly laughing w/tears w/in mere seconds.

My friends, Dell McLain was a treasure. This is one 'thumb print' of many this warrier educator & epic actor left on the many lives he graciously touched.

I am honored to have called him friend.

Rest in peace, Lambie!

Delbert (Dell) Otis McLain November 23, 1965 - March 3, 2021.



“ Dell McLain.
was a wonderful mentor and teacher to me and he will be miss



Thomas Holcomb - March 09, 2021 at 05:54 PM

CC

“ I worked with Dell at Oklahoma Shakespeare several summers and remember so well the last time we had dinner and I saw Forever Plaid. What a blessing he was to the world. Always smiling, kind, bringing love and laughter to whoever was with him. Always. I was heartbroken to hear of his passing. Camille Carrell

Camille Carrell - March 08, 2021 at 06:00 PM

TP

“ He was an amazing director..He directed me in the funnest show I was ever in, "Forever plaid." I mourn over this loss.. I am praying for everyone close to him..

Thomas Posey - March 06, 2021 at 09:21 PM

TP

“ He was an amazing director..He directed me in the funnest show I was ever in, "Forever plaid." I mourn over this loss.. I am praying for everyone close to him..

Thomas Posey - March 06, 2021 at 09:20 PM

KM

“ Jean, Kathy, and Terry, I was very saddened when I saw that you lost Dale. My thoughts and prayers go out to all of you. If you need to talk you can call me. 541-430-3440. If you need anything please ask. Dale was always a happy person and fun to be around. I miss you all it's been such a long time. I love all of you. 🙏❤️

Kathy Murray - March 06, 2021 at 10:24 AM

CM

Jean Kathy and Terry I AM SO SIRRY TO HEAR ABOUT Dell. He will be missed greatly. If u need to talk or anything else let me know. My number is 541-643-3842. We miss u guys and we love u bunches.

Carol Murray - March 06, 2021 at 12:58 PM

CS

“ Jean, Kathy & Terry. I have the fondest memories of Dell when he was young, specifically, when he stayed with our family. We welcomed his humor, antics, and the larger than life presence, which seemed to follow him through life. I can see from all the posts on his Facebook page that is well loved, but nothing compared to the love he had for his family and his family for him. Sincere condolences and love! -Carmen Brumwell Sundin.

Carmen Sundin - March 06, 2021 at 09:38 AM

JB

“ Dell was such an influence in my life and a friend I will miss very much. Judy R Boone

Judy Boone - March 05, 2021 at 07:00 PM

RM

“ Jean and family so sorry about the loss of Dale, he was a great person to grow up with we had alot of good times all of us, Love you all,miss you to. Love Randy Murray

Randy R Murray - March 05, 2021 at 12:10 PM

LT

“ Sending my deepest condolences and love to all the family.

Dell was such a force and presence in so many lives. For me personally, I wouldn't have the degree or skills I have today without guidance from him. Literally, I was in the wrong company meeting my Freshman year and tried to sneak out. Before I could make it to the door in UC300 he stopped me and after a short conversation he encouraged me to give Theatre Management a try. Outside of the suggestion to go to Southeastern this was best thing that happened to me and I am so grateful and thankful for that pivotal moment in my life. He had an uncanny gift to know what each and every students potential was and could foster it like none other. He will be missed but never forgotten.

Lani Toomer - March 05, 2021 at 11:58 AM

CG

“ It's no secret to those who know me that I have allowed circumstances within mainstream christianity and the 'c' hurch to cause me to drive head long into the ditch on the opposite side of the proverbial rd and continue to spin my tires there until I was buried up to my fleshly frame. I have struggled submitting to preaching or teaching for several years, although inwardly I had desired and longed for it. I'm so stubborn yet so needy.

Last year my daughter , Lauren Manon , and a few of her friends were Invited to sing in the choir at the First Christian Church in downtown Durant and we started attending. I went there to support my daughter but didnt give much hope in finding God loving inclusive preaching in such an ' old ' church . Wow! Was I wrong.

I had met Dell McLain several years prior when my oldest daughter Brittany Lopez was involved in theater at SE and they had a cookout during a homecoming football game. However I would never, ever, never....well you get it , would have ever imagined that he would have been the guest speaker (PREACHER) at this church when I showed up. I was super apprehensive (jackassed) and sceptical (dumbassed) just to be completely honest. However I quickly realized that this man personally knew the heart of God better than I. His words , his smile, his light , his voice and his presence exuded love patience and inclusiveness. I was smitten with his preaching/teaching and I was being pulled out of my muddy , worldly, hateful ditch that I was stuck in and for the first time in a long time felt like I was driving down the middle of a sunny , music filled middle rd full of goodness.

I know it sounds cheesy but I'm sure I'm not the only person to have encountered Dell McLain and not come away changed for the better. I'm so so so grateful for the time I got to hear him share the love of God and his love for God. I pray tonight that our Father embrace him tightly and whisper a thank you for me.... Peace love and healing my brother. Thank you for being the face of God for me and a light in a dark time.

Chris Gibson - March 05, 2021 at 10:57 AM

EF

If Dell existed only to “drag you out of the ditch on the other side of the road,” then he would have considered his life worthwhile. Blessings and hugs, Elaine Freeman

Elaine Freeman - March 05, 2021 at 12:29 PM

AB

Jean, Kathy, Terry, my sincere condolences for your loss. I remember Dale, Randy, and JonPaul playing together as young boys. It's hard to lose a loved one. May God be compassionate and bring you comfort for a long time. Prayers for you.

Formerly, Alma Crain

Alma Bayomi - March 06, 2021 at 09:01 PM