Remembering Jimmy Borges

By Dr. Richard Kelley

Hawai‘i – and the world – lost a wonderful person on May 30, when entertainer Jimmy Borges passed away at age 80 after a long battle with cancer. Jimmy and I had been friends and contemporaries in Waikiki for close to 60 years. I regret that I was not able to join others close to him last week as they gathered on the sands of Waikiki, paddled canoes past the shore break and scattered his ashes in the warm blue waters of the Pacific.

Jimmy and I were both born on O‘ahu, just two years apart in the mid-1930s. In those pre-World War II years, the economy of the Territory of Hawai‘i was dominated by agriculture. It seemed as though fields of sugar cane and row after row of pineapples were everywhere. Waikiki had only two multistory hotels, the Moana and the Royal Hawaiian.

It was a quiet, sleepy time in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

Who could have predicted that a few decades later, the wood-framed bungalows that Roy and Estelle Kelley were building in Waikiki would grow and mature into an international company called Outrigger Hotels and Resorts?

And who would have bet that Jimmy Borges would become an internationally known singing and acting talent? He starred on stage, had his own television show, and appeared on national TV in Hawaii Five-O (both first and second series) and Magnum P.I. as well as on shows hosted by Merv Griffin, Jonathan Winters and Victor Borge.

Jimmy Borges was known to his loyal fans as the “keeper of the flame” in reference to his trademark homage to George and Ira Gershwin, Cole Porter, Jerome Kern, Johnny Mercer, Harold Arlen, Rodgers & Hart (Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart) and the rest of those legendary early 20th century composers and songwriters. Jimmy included music by these creative geniuses in every show. He and I shared a particular admiration for singer Frank Sinatra.

About a year ago, in 2015, when Jimmy released a CD titled Jimmy Borges, which features him singing songs previously made famous by Frank Sinatra, including I’ve Got You Under my Skin, Old Devil Moon and Luck Be A Lady, he sent me a copy in care of his wife Vicki, who is executive assistant to David Carey, Outrigger CEO.

I replied with a note of thanks and added that he probably was not aware that he had played a small but very important role in my romance with and later marriage to a fourth grade teacher from Punahou School named Linda Van Gilder.
Jimmy Borges ... << From 1

In 1978, on our first date, I had taken Linda to see Jimmy’s show at Trappers, a lounge at the Hyatt Waikiki where, for many years, he performed accompanied by pianist Betty Loo Taylor.

I can’t remember what Jimmy sang that night. Maybe it was those Sinatra favorites *I've Got You Under My Skin* or *Luck Be A Lady*. Whatever it was, it must have had a tremendous impact on both of us. Next week, as Linda and I celebrate our 37th wedding anniversary, we’ll be drinking a toast to Jimmy Borges!

God bless you, Jimmy. Rest in peace. ☺️

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*Jimmy and Vicki Borges*

34 years of marriage

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Loved his malasadas!

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Jimmy performs at the Honolulu Zoo’s “The Wildest Show in Town”