

The Legend of "The 5th Freshman"

by Patrick (The 5th Freshman) Santell

1. A LITTLE BACKGROUND MUSIC, PLEASE!

Since my Dad played with the big bands and my mother sang a little, it is easy to see that I grew up in a show business environment, especially since my "godfather" was Frank Sinatra. Yes, Frank Sinatra. My father and Frank were good friends (I have photos). I have wonderful memories of holiday parties at our house, with so many big stars around me, like Tommy Dorsey, The Andrews Sisters, Billy Daniels, Doris Day, and, of course, my godfather. My dad passed at a very young age (33). Most of the people that were at those parties, and a lot of other show business people, came to our house for the viewing. I was about ten years old. It was after that we moved to Milford, Connecticut.

2. MEETING THE GUY THAT WOULD GET THINGS STARTED

Even prior to high school, my friends and I had a "favorite" DJ: Bob Crane ("Donna Reed Show," "Hogan's Heroes"). Early on, he was a great radio DJ. As it turned out, my best friend and I spent a lot of time with Bob over the years, and a very good friendship was created. Bob helped me get into radio. Several years passed; Bob moved to the West Coast. I finished high school and wound up in the USAF. Bob was doing a little TV work and continued to DJ on KNX in LA. Every time I passed through Los Angeles, I would visit with Bob and I would sit in as he finished his show. Then we usually had lunch and said our goodbyes until our next visit.

3. MEETING BILL WAGNER AND YVONNE DECARLO

On one of my visits with Bob Crane, after he finished his show he told me that he had a business lunch with someone (Bill Wagner), but I would be welcome to come along. It was at the Brown Derby. Bob, Bill, Ms. DeCarlo, and me! This day would become one of the highlights of my life! Lunch, drinks, conversation (some private), and Bob said he had to go. "See you next time Pat, take care!" Ms. DeCarlo said her goodbyes, then Bill looked at me and asked, "Have you ever been to the Capitol Records Tower?" I said, "No." He said, "If you have time, I'll show you around." I said, "Yes, that would be great."

4. NEXT UP: THE LETTERMEN, THE FOUR FRESHMEN, AND THE CAPITOL TOWER

Bill had to stop at his office (I think next to Capitol Records) where he auditioned a group named The Lettermen. (Actually, the group had been around for awhile; I think this was to handle them and sign the group to Capitol Records.) Sounded a lot like The Freshmen, but more "pop" than jazz. I don't recall how that ended on that day, but I made friends with Tony Butala and The Lettermen did record for Capitol. When Bill took me to the Capitol Tower, I got the whole nine yards, as they say. I even got to see the "basement!" We walked into one of the control rooms where Bill (and I) were greeted. Then I looked in the studio, and there they were: Don, Ross, Bob, and Ken...The Four Freshmen! Yikes! I could not believe my eyes! I felt like a teeny-bopper. Bill asked if I wanted to meet The Four Freshmen. Of course, I calmly said yes. On the inside, I was going, "Yes, YES, YES!!!" The time frame here is a little fuzzy, but Don was still alive so I think it had to be June or July, 1961. For sure, it was before October. It was really great meeting the guys and Bill, but the best was yet to come.

5. THE LEGEND OF THE 5TH FRESHMAN IS CREATED

Leaving the Capitol Tower, Bill asked if I wanted to help with a small project back at his office. I had a lot of time on my hands, so I said, "Yes." The Four Freshmen fan letter was called "The Freshies" or something along that line. A new fan letter was created called "The 5th Freshman," and when we got back to Bill Wagner's office, the "project" was to hand address several thousand of the fan letters. It was Bill, myself, and another person (female, I don't recall her name). After a few hours, Ross arrived with coffee, donuts, and colas for all. After a short break we continued, with Ross joining the group. Ross and I talked a lot while addressing. Pretty soon we found out we had a few things in common, like playing pinball machines, and Ross discovered that I sang a little as I did a lot of singing and addressing. When we finally finished those letters, Ross said to me, "We should call you the 5th Freshman for all the work you did." I said, "Sounds good to me," and everyone laughed.

Ross and I left Bill's office and went down to Sunset Boulevard to an arcade. We played pinball and talked. He beat me 4 out of 7 games. Over the years, the guys and I saw a lot of each other and, depending on place, size, and attitude of the audience, the 5th Freshman would join The Four Freshmen, and it was a once in a lifetime event that one would never forget. Great fun for all!

The last time I saw Ross (and met Bill Comstock) was in Miami, Florida. They were playing at a small lounge near the Miami Airport on Lejune Road. I'm not sure of the date (late 60's/early 70's), but the guys were kind of quiet, and Ross looked very tired. He was happy to see me, but was not very talkative. There would be no 5th Freshman on this night (small room with a small crowd), or ever again for that matter.

THE LEGENDARY SAGA OF THE 5TH FRESHMAN WAS OVER!

It was great fun for a lot of years! I had a few personal problems around that time and health issues myself. After seeing Ross and the guys in Miami, I lost track of The Four Freshmen and I guess I dropped out. When I got back to being myself, I was very pleased to find out The Four Freshmen are as strong as ever, and I am very proud and pleased to be a member of The Four Freshmen Society!

THE FOUR FRESHMEN TODAY, TOMORROW, FOREVER!