

Dog Salmon and Rutabagas continued from front page

as he called it. Kytr said he had “searing images” of driving through the Tillamook Forest immediately after a forest fire, images which left a big impression. Kytr had also planted trees in the forest as an eighth grader. “I had a chance to meet people who had seen the Tillamook Forest before it burned for the first time in 1933, and I became really interested in what had happened in this area,” said Kytr. “I am deeply attached to this region and I wanted to learn about the unwritten background of this wonderful area.”

It was around this time that a Vernonia local, Dave Brunsmann, with whom Kytr was acquainted, first introduced him to John and Kim Cunnick. “Brunsmann told me there were some neat people I should meet,” remembers Kytr. “They were living out in Keasey, writing music and playing homemade instruments. The first time I went out to meet them, they weren’t home, but I just camped out overnight and woke up being greeted by their big dog, Dufus. John had to rescue me. And that was my introduction to John Cunnick.”

Kytr remembers John Cunnick as, “... a striking and profound individual-- a very interesting guy.” Cunnick grew up in Ohio, and had run away from home and headed west when he was a sophomore in high school. According to Kytr, Cunnick had lived in San Francisco for a time, and worked for an underground newspaper in Seattle. When Kytr met him, he was playing old-time music from the twenties and thirties, “... music from the very first days of early recordings,” according to Kytr, and writing his own songs as well.

Unfortunately, Kytr’s relation-



A young John Cunnick at the Keasey Cabin.

ship with John Cunnick was to be short-lived. That next winter, John Cunnick tragically died in an auto accident on Highway 47 on his way back from Mist

mountain. Cunnick’s truck slid off the road and down a very steep embankment in a sleet and snow storm. Apparently Cunnick survived the accident, but his body wasn’t found until five days later by friends who were searching for him. “John was sitting with his feet in a stream, his hands positioned as if he was playing a mandolin, with his favorite pick in his hand,” said Kytr. Vernonia and a close-knit community of friends were devastated by the loss.

The Cunnick’s friend, Jim Buxton, helped Kim with the funeral arrangements, and John’s body lay in state on the Buxton’s front porch. Cunnick was buried on private property in Ke-



John Cunnick’s funeral in Keasey. (Photo by Janelle Wiggins)

asey, in a hand-built cedar box, wearing his favorite pair of wing-tipped shoes, his body wrapped in a quilt. Tony Hyde carved a cherry-wood banjo for the top of the casket and Kytr wore Cunnick’s rubber boots. “It wasn’t a religious ceremony, but it was profoundly spiritual,” said Kytr. “Everyone came to honor their friend, John, and say goodbye to their balladeer-- their minstrel.”

Cunnick left behind a musical legacy that still survives in the region, including copies of his songs, published in the *Timberbound Songbook*. Kytr, Berge and Kim Cunnick began playing music together around Oregon and the Northwest as a string-band called *Timberbound*, touring at one time with famous folkie Mike Seeger, and once playing for Oregon Governor Robert Straub. And John’s inspiration appears throughout Kytr’s music.

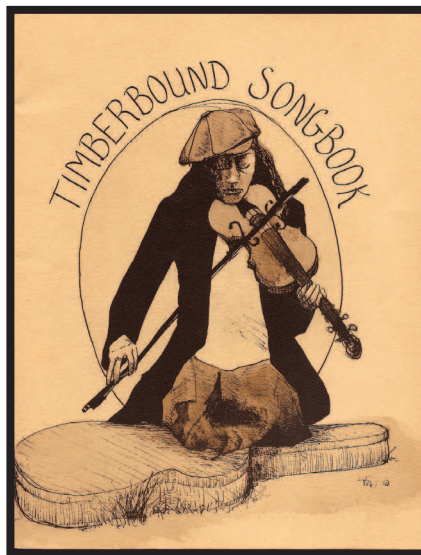
Kytr continued to gather material for what he called “Songs of the Northwest,” performing them on banjo

and guitar and telling the stories, while accompanying Vernonia photographer Janelle Wiggins, who showed historical slides of old timber camps. “Janelle was a big part of it,” says Kytr. “She and I were artists in residence in 1978 in Clatsop County, and we collected those stories and documented the history together.”

Berge and Kytr continued to play together in various bands over the years, eventually playing together at a monthly old-time country dance in North Plains. It was during this time that they met many of the musicians who would appear on the *Dog Salmon and Rutabagas* CD.

Listening to the music Kytr and Berge have preserved is like taking a leap back in time. The songs tell the story of the region when salmon ran thick in the rivers and creeks and the Oregon-American Mill was still in operation. The song

Dead Kids Drop was written while Kytr lived at Camp Keasey and is about an old, rotten trestle-- a place that would naturally attract curious children. *Roustabout*, *Sweet Voodt*, and *Oregon-American* are about logging camp life and mill operation, and feature the Keasey area as their inspiration. *Old Hollow School*



Timberbound Songbook cover artwork by Tony Hyde.

was written by John and Kim Cunnick, *Spring Rain* was written at Kim Cunnick’s cabin and *Trees* was written for John Cunnick after his death.

The title song, *Dog Salmon and Rutabagas*, has one of the more interesting background stories. Kytr attended a birthday party in 1980 where he was asked to play some songs for Lesta Weed Garner, who was the daughter and granddaughter of the first two pioneer families in the Nehalem Valley. While at the party with his friend, photographer Wiggins, Kytr was



Members of the band Timberbound— Dave Berge, Kim Cunnick, Hobe Kytr and Mark Loring. (Photo by Janelle Wiggins)

treated to stories from the early years from some of the other “silver-haired” ladies in attendance. They called these stories “dog salmon and rutabagas” stories. Apparently, before any roads were put through the valley and the mill was built, money was scarce and contracts for school teachers, postmasters and church preachers were paid in salmon and vegetables. All the ladies had “dog salmon and rutabagas” stories, and shared them with Kytr and Wiggins, making quite an impression that day. The song features “The Rutabaga Chorus”-- longtime friends of Kytr’s from Keasey, Vernonia, and Mist. Kytr dedicates that song to Janelle Wiggins, who lost a long battle with breast cancer over ten years ago.

Kytr continues to play and perform, although he has given up on making it a career. He still plays the banjo, and his wife Gina accompanies him on fiddle. He is one of the founding organizers of the *Fisher Poets Gathering*, an annual gathering in Astoria that has garnered national attention and is held during the last weekend in February. Today, he works at “Salmon For All” in Astoria.

Kytr felt it was important to turn the original recording of the songs into a CD. “I didn’t want this project to die,” said Kytr. He printed a lot of copies of the CD himself, and would like to get them out into the hands of people who will appreciate the music. “I have lots of other songs I want to get out there.”

You can get your own copy of *Dog Salmon and Rutabagas* by contacting Hobe Kytr. Send \$15 for the CD, plus \$3 for shipping to: 5253 SE Ash St., Astoria, OR 97103. You can also reach Hobe by email at kytrfam@charter.net or by phone at 503-325-0278.

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