

milestones



RICHARD STILES 1933–2008

by Jerry Dees

Dick Stiles, an Emmy-nominated Production Designer and longtime Trustee of the Art Directors Guild, died November 24 of pneumonia following complications from brain surgery. He was seventy-five.

Dick was born and raised during the Depression, in Salt Lake City, Utah, and he loved to tell all the great stories of those years: mixing the little packet of yellow into the white lard to make margarine, rationing stamps for sugar and gas and many of the things we take for granted today, planting a victory garden to raise vegetables and fruits that were available in no other way, waiting for the first cold blast of winter so the water would freeze at Liberty Park and the skating rink would open.

Not every memory was a great one. He got a lemon as a kid: undiagnosed rheumatic fever that couldn't be treated correctly in the cold climate of Salt Lake. It attacked his sister Patricia as well. It was cruel and unrelenting. His heart was damaged and would never fully recover. Before it was finally diagnosed and properly treated, the best medical evaluation of the day pegged his longest life at thirty, possibly thirty-five years. He would suffer stoically from the after-effects of this disease for the rest of his life.

His military-officer father arranged to transfer the family from the cold and taxing elevation of Utah to the recuperative aesthetics of Chandler, Arizona, just outside of Phoenix. In Arizona, things got a lot better. His mother Lois nursed Patricia and Richard back to health while her husband was serving in the cavalry. She would never end a day without sitting and singing to Richard. He found this the most rejuvenating of all his treatments, and the one he sought for solace during the rest of his life.

Richard missed a year of school, but returned to a normal life, just a little less strenuous than before. He excelled in drama, singing, art and all of the creative pursuits. He worked hard and was a star.

After high school, he enlisted in the Air Force and was picked for flight school. He graduated and, while his scores qualified him as a pilot, his vision made navigator the role the military would offer him. He served for a little over four years including a stint in North Africa. He was recognized as a sharp airman. When his squadron was placed in the desert for a two-day training exercise, their lack of orienteering skills expanded the time to three and then four days, until they were lost and in danger of dying, out of food and dangerously low on water. He picked up the compass and, with the skills learned as a Boy Scout in Salt Lake City, he guided his group back to safety and home.

Years later, for my twelfth birthday, he would give me a compass and encourage me to learn everything I could in Boy Scouts. When I expressed my awe at the intricacy of the clamshell engineering and the thin gold wire to sight by, and then questioned my ability to master such an instrument, he related this desert Air Force experience and encouraged me to always be prepared to help. He promised that if I would prepare to save a life, the opportunity would come. I did prepare and, as usual, he has been proven right.

After graduation from high school, Dick started college with an exchange program in Mexico. It was an internship in art at one of its historical fountains. He got to see Diego Rivera up close and personal on a project on the streets of Mexico City, and it was the beginning of his life in art. He continued his studies at the University of Houston and did post-graduate work at UCLA.

While in Houston, he designed many stage productions, including the Southwest premiere of *Gypsy*, and a few years later, he transferred his skills to television where he spent seven years at CBS as Assistant Art Director, drawing the sets for *The Red Skelton Show*. His other television credits include: *The Don Knotts Show*, *Peyton Place*, *Brigadoon*, and *The Scarecrow*, for which his dear friend, Production Designer Jan Scott, won an Emmy®.

Our family was always close, and Uncle Richard became a surrogate father to myself and my brother when his sister Dorothy moved in with him for a time. I remember when I was a teenager, he took me to a one-man exhibition of an artist he knew in downtown Los Angeles. I had never heard, nor could I remember, the artist's name when we arrived. The gallery was huge. There were paintings and sketches and color everywhere. I was so surprised that one person could produce so much art. A lot of it made sense to the uninitiated teenage mind, a lot didn't, and some of it scared me. Uncle Richard told me that this was a real artist, who would become even more famous as



Images © Sony Pictures Television

Stiles designed new WHEEL OF FORTUNE sets for each location as the production traveled the length and breadth of the country. He even built the set once on the flight deck of an aircraft carrier. Above are sets for Charleston, Chicago and Philadelphia.

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time goes on. As the two of us approached this unusual-looking man, he smiled and greeted Richard by name, and Richard then introduced me to Salvador Dali. My daughter dropped her jaw, years later, when she saw the signed Dali print hanging behind Uncle Richard's piano.

Since its inception in 1974, for twenty-seven years, Richard designed sets for the classic game show *Wheel of Fortune*. He created more than a thousand separate settings, capturing the flavor of each of the cities that the production visited. To this day, he has the distinction of being the only game-show designer to ever receive a primetime Emmy nomination.

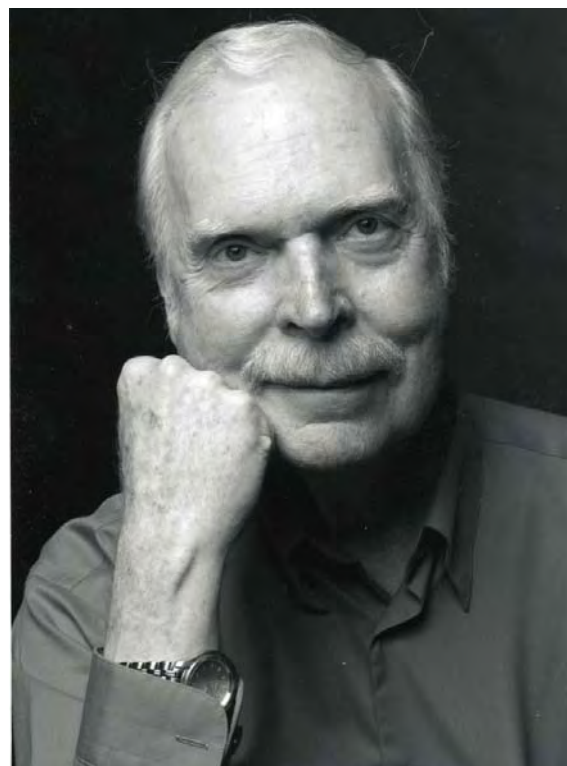
Through much of his adult life, Richard kept his childhood love of music alive by singing with the Angel City Chorale. With them, he appeared at such venues as Staples Center, the Los Angeles Convention Center, the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, the John Anson Ford Amphitheater and UCLA's Pauley Pavilion. He performed with Stevie Wonder, Luther Vandross and Mary Chapin Carpenter, among others. The friendships he formed with members of the Chorale remained among his strongest.

He was also an accomplished sculptor whose images of famous television talents are on display in the plaza in front of the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences in North Hollywood. For years, Richard served on the Academy's Hall of Fame Sculpture Committee, including three terms as the Committee's co-chair. His bronzes of Carol Burnett, Jackie Gleason, Oprah Winfrey, Jim Henson and others will continue to delight us all.

Among his many contributions to the Art Directors Guild, over his nearly-fifty years of membership, were terms on the Board and participation in a wide variety of committees. He was passionate about his service as a Trustee, guiding the Guild's investment and financial decisions. But his proudest achievement, and the one for which the Guild will remember him best, is his nearly single-handed creation of the ADG Scholarship Program, to benefit the children and dependents of ADG members. Each year, more and more college-bound students are helped by the Guild's and Richard's generosity.

He is survived by his two sisters, Dorothy Dees and Patricia Barber; six nephews and nieces, Jerry Dees, Russell Barber, Charles Dees, Joanne Merrill, Arlene Maynard, and Jim Barber; and his cousin Phil Debs, as well as Phil's daughter Michelle Debs who was such a huge source of joy to him during the last two years of his life.

Artist, sculptor, singer, soldier, citizen and son, there really wasn't much Richard didn't excel at in his uncommon and unassuming way. He brought the same passion and success to being a brother, uncle and surrogate Dad, philanthropist, hobby horticulturist, trustee, director, and one of the most respected members of the Art Directors Guild.



calendar

GUILD ACTIVITIES

Through May 2
WOMAN
Images and Interpretations
at Gallery 800

April 1 @ 6:30 pm
Town Hall Meeting
& New Member Orientation

April 10
Good Friday
Guild Offices Closed

April 15 @ 5:30 pm
STG Council Meeting
7 pm
ADG Council Meeting

April 16 @ 7 pm
SDM Council Meeting

April 23 @ 7 pm
ILL Craft Membership Meeting

April 26 @ 5:30 pm
THEY WERE EXPENDABLE
Film Society Screening
@ the Aero Theatre

April 28 @ 7 pm
General Membership Meeting

May 20 @ 5:30 pm
STG Council Meeting
7 pm
ADG Council Meeting

May 21 @ 7 pm
SDM Craft Membership Meeting

May 24 @ 5:30 pm
FLASH GORDON Double Bill
Film Society Screening
@ the Egyptian Theatre

May 25
Memorial Day
Guild Offices Closed

March 26 @ 6:30 pm
Board of Directors Meeting

Tuesdays @ 7 pm
Figure Drawing Workshop
Studio 800 at the ADG



Bedrooms, Kitchens, Living Rooms, The Oval Office, Restaurants/Bars, Schools, Workplaces
- as well as Mill Space and Parking

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