

WABASH VALLEY

P R O F I L E S

A series of tributes to hometown people and events that have shaped our history.

Ken Kercheval



Long before the outrageously outspoken character Cliff Barnes appeared in the CBS series *Dallas*, Ken Kercheval was making barbershop-style music with the Wabash Harmoners.

Born in 1935 in Wolcotteville, Indiana, Kercheval was one of two children of Dr. Marine "Doc" and Christine (Reiber) Kercheval. When Ken was in the third grade, the family moved to South Fifth Street in Clinton. He attended Clinton High School, but graduated from Chamberlain-Hunt Military Academy in Mississippi.

As a student of voice at Indiana University, Kercheval appeared on television as master of ceremonies for the popular *IU Showtime* series. He also attended the University of the Pacific in Stockton, Calif., and the Professional Theatre School at the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York City.

On Kercheval's trip home at the end of August this year, he shopped for antiques. The owner of Antiques Inc. gave him the program from *Sweethearts*, a 1953 Municipal Musicals production in which he performed. The photo of himself in the program (above) is, therefore, his "most recent photo," he said with a chuckle.

Kercheval spent four years in New York before he got his first job — a Tennessee Williams off-Broadway play in which he portrayed a Mexican with no lines who sat in a corner wearing a serape and hat. He earned \$5 per performance. Things gradually got better, and he began to appear on Broadway, where his career took off. He performed in such hits as *Fiddler on the Roof*, *The Apple Tree* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolfe?* and had the leading role in *Cabaret*.

Eventually, Kercheval made the move to television, acting in the soap operas *Secret Storm* and *Search for Tomorrow*, for which he was named *Soap Opera Digest's* Best Actor. Although he resisted at first, Kercheval, then age 38, turned down a leading role in another daytime drama to move to Los Angeles on the advice of his agent. Within three days of arriving in L.A., he landed his first movie role in Sylvester Stallone's debut film, *Fist*. He worked bit parts for television until he accepted the role of Cliff Barnes on *Dallas*, which ran from April 1978 to May 1991. Since *Dallas*, Kercheval has returned to the theatre, recently completing a two-month run of *Lend Me a Tenor* in Canada. Kercheval says he's as energetic as ever following a recent surgery to remove one lung. He will continue to work, preferably on the stage. Upon his return to California from Clinton, Kercheval planned to discuss with director Hal Storm the role of Andy in *Showboat*.

Kercheval and his wife, actress Cheryl Paris, live in Northridge, Calif., and have one daughter, Madison. Paris has appeared in the made-for-TV version of Tennessee Williams' *Sweet Bird of Youth* starring Elizabeth Taylor, as well as episodes of *Colombo*, *Matlock* and several cable programs. Kercheval's three grown children include Aaron, a professor at IU; Liza, a housewife in New Jersey; and Caleb, a promising pianist/composer in New York. Young son Asa lives in Louisville, Ky. Kercheval said his stepdaughter Katy (from a previous marriage) is like one of his own.

Throughout his career, he has made appearances for local events, including the Little Italy Festival, the Indy 500 and the Indiana Special Olympics Summer Games. He still returns to Clinton whenever he can to see his family. Doc Kercheval died in 1967; Christine, earlier this year. Sister Kathryn lives in rural Rosedale, niece Shelly lives in San Francisco, and several cousins live in the area.

TERRE HAUTE

(812) 238-6000



NATIONAL BANK

Always Close to Home