

Music from the heart

Music has always been a family affair for **Tim Sullivan**, and the guitar in particular has always intrigued him.

When he was about 13, “some of my brother’s friends played, and it looked cool to me,” he said. When one of those friends was going out of town, Sullivan asked to borrow his guitar while he was away, and he practiced like crazy. He was hooked.

The New Hampshire Merged Branch 44 member took lessons for a short time, but then he began to figure the instrument out on his own by ear. He did so by doing tablature, a form of musical notation that indicates instrument fingering instead of musical pitch.

Sullivan played in his first “real band,” Mindscape, right out of high school, playing “punk, hard-core mu-

Tim Sullivan performing in his 20s



sic” before getting into heavier music that he said would “make Metallica sound mellow.” The band played clubs in Salisbury Beach, MA, as well as occasionally in Boston, and even opened for some national acts such as Gwar, Bolt Thrower and Meliah Rage. But, as the band members got older and their priorities changed, they went their separate ways.

“In my mid- to late 20s, I got the itch to play again,” Sullivan said. He had an acoustic guitar, but soon bought an electric guitar and formed a band with his brother and his best friend, playing backyard barbecues. After a while, they ended that band, too, as some members started families, and Sullivan laid down the guitar again.

His musical taste also has changed a bit over the years. Early on, he says, Iron Maiden was his favorite band, along with other heavy metal musicians. As he got into adulthood, he turned to Billy Joel, the Dave Matthews Band and Mastodon.

After starting with the Postal Service 20 years ago, he eventually began playing acoustic guitar around the house in front of his three children and three stepchildren. His son, Jonah, played several instruments, so they would sometimes have jam sessions. “My kids could always sing,” he said. “I’m not a singer. I can’t sing to save myself.”

His younger daughter, Jenna, “was always super shy,” he says, but when she entered middle school, she got into

theater and music and began to open up. “[When she was] in high school, they were doing open mics around town,” he added.

Though she was initially hesitant, Sullivan eventually convinced Jenna to perform with him at an event in Derry, NH, in early 2016. He accompanied her singing on his guitar. “She picked the songs,” he said, and since she liked country, “I had to learn some country songs.”

He added, “Our style was that she’d hand me songs, and I’d learn them and play them over and over and over again.”

They’ve now broadened the musical genres that they play. Some of their favorite songs to perform are “Always” by Killswitch Engage, “Great Escape” by Pink and “Wheels” by Foo Fighters.

Open-mic nights generally are on Friday nights. Because Sullivan typically works on Saturdays, he asks Jenna to arrive early to get them signed up, as the earlier you sign up, the sooner you perform.

The carrier says that although he used to occasionally play guitar in front of a crowd of thousands with his band performing their own songs, these days, he gets more stage fright at the coffee shop performances, because he has to learn other artists’ works. “I do enjoy it,” he says, but “I’m petrified of losing focus. I like when she chooses easier songs.”

In late 2016, Jenna’s friend, Jason Flood, with whom she had played on

Tim Sullivan and daughter Jenna perform at an outdoor festival from before the COVID-19 pandemic.



the open-mic circuit, died by suicide. To honor his memory, his parents put together a non-profit organization, The Jason R. Flood Memorial, to help raise awareness of suicide prevention and focus on mental health. The signature event, Pizzastock (“think of Woodstock,” Sullivan says), is in honor of Jason’s band’s dream of putting on a music and pizza festival by the same name, with proceeds going to local charities, such as a soup kitchen. (A battle of the bands has since been added in between the annual music festivals.)

The event takes place at a park in Derry, and Jenna sometimes has emceed. The last time Sullivan and his daughter played the outdoor event was in the summer of 2019; Pizzastock has since been moved online during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and has been offered at more frequent livestream events.

Sullivan’s daughter named the duo “Express Mail” on an event invitation on Facebook for one Pizzastock performance. When the carrier saw it, he thought, “That’s gotta be us. It was cute.” Jenna’s friends—and occasionally Jenna herself—call him “Tim the Mailman.” And the online performance went off without a hitch—once Sullivan and Jenna logged in, the event “went like it was an open mic night.”

The Jason R. Flood Memorial is “a good organization, and we’ve become close with the Floods,” Sullivan added.

“They’re doing [Pizzastock] to keep Jason’s memory alive. It gave an added meaning to what Jenna and I were doing.”

Some co-workers of “Tim the Mailman” have come to the 25-plus events they’ve done to support them, though he says with pride that the positive feedback is “always about Jenna.”

Guitar-playing remains an important part of Sullivan’s life and a way to relieve stress. “It’s something I’ve always enjoyed doing. It’s been a constant,” he said, before adding with a laugh, “I’ve been playing guitar for 35 years. I should be a lot better than I am.”

Sullivan hopes to continue performing with Jenna in the future, both at open-mic nights and outdoor events. “With the pandemic, I’ve been playing at home and waiting for things to get back to normal,” he said.

The carrier says there’s “no better feeling” than participating in the live

music scene with Jenna. “Out of all the things I’ve done music-related, none have been more fulfilling than standing next to her while she sings, trying my best not to embarrass her,” he said. **PR**

Jenna introduces her dad as “Tim the Mailman”



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