

SOFT LANDING

For guitarist, banjoist, vocalist, and festival organizer Dave Para, the pandemic offered an opportunity to reimagine life after his world had been knocked off its axis. In April 2019, his wife of nearly 40 years, Cathy Barton, passed away. A champion banjoist and an accomplished hammered dulcimer player, she'd also been Dave's musical partner in a career that spawned 16 albums, and together they founded two music festivals, the Big Muddy Folk Festival (now in its 32nd year), with their friend Ed Dwyer, and the Boone's Lick Country Folk Festival, which flourished for 20 years.

A Chicago native, Dave got started on his musical path with classes at Old Town School of Folk Music. He met Cathy

while in college in Columbia, Missouri, her hometown, where he managed a coffeehouse well-known for its folk music scene, started playing with local string bands, and hosted a radio show, "Across the Wide Missouri."

In their rich musical career, Cathy and Dave played the festivals, including 15 years at the renowned Walnut Valley Festival in Winfield, Kansas. "She was the first hammered dulcimer player to play onstage there, in 1976," says Dave.

It was at Winfield that Cathy and Dave met Albuquerque's Erika Gerety and her late husband, Gary Libman, who had been camping at the festival for 20 years with a group of New Mexican friends dubbed Picko de Gallo. "Cathy and I never camped at the festival," says Para. But one year, they were introduced to Carp

Camp, which is renowned for its mass evening jams. "At its peak on the weekends," says Gerety, "there's like 50 people. It's kind of like a folk orchestra."

The experience proved life changing for Cathy and Dave. "It was just so inspiring," says Para. "The players were great. If they're not playing they're always laughing." They began camping at the festival in 2011, invited to join the Picko de Gallo camp by a friend of Erika and Gary, and the two couples became fast friends.

Gary passed in 2016. In 2018, Dave and Cathy came to Albuquerque to help dedicate a private performance space Erika had built in honor of Gary. In 2019, Cathy passed, and a couple of months later, Dave came to Albuquerque to attend the folk festival, on whose advisory board Erika sits. "We had a real heart-to-heart the night before he left, just commiserating and understanding each other, having empathy for each other and realizing that was really nice to have this good friend that you could share with," says Erika.

The friendship grew, with Dave visiting often, and when COVID hit, "I was here all the time," he says. "We got closer and closer and liked it more and more, and so our COVID story is quite different." They got married on Zoom and Facebook, COVID preventing a gathering of more than three people.

Dave is settling into life in Albuquerque. He's playing in several bands, including the local group Cheap Shot; Snorty Horse, with Erika and their Missouri friends Mike and Tenley Fraser; and he's also been seen with the Adobe Brothers. He's taken on the role of board president for the folk festival, and he and Erika are hosting the "Folk Roots" radio show on KUNM. You can reach him at president@abqfolkfest.org, and check out his website, bartonpara.com, where there is a trove of information about past and present activity.



Dave Para and his wife, Erika Gerety.

Be sure to check out *Musically Speaking*, Mel's online music journal, at www.melminter.com.

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