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### A talk with Red Holloway

Jazz and blues musician who played with Billie Holiday, B.B. King and many more will be this year's Pinedorado Parade marshal



Red Holloway stands with his saxophone at his home in Cambria, at right is a painting of him as a young man.

While he has only written 20 pages of his autobiography, Red Holloway already has a title picked out: "If You Do Not Like Foul Language and a Lot of Sex, Do Not Buy This Book."

Which explains why some of the quotes from his recent Tribune interview can't be printed in a daily newspaper.



You learn that, in order to eat, you have to play whatever they want



Holloway with Dizzy Gillespie



A promotional photograph for Sonny Stitt and Holloway circa the late 1970s or early 1980s.

Yet, Holloway's life isn't just about sex and running from jealous men with guns — though that's certainly part of his story. As his book will relate, it's about being born to a 13-year-old mother, escaping the segregated south for Chicago and performing with legends including Billie Holiday, Muddy Waters, Sonny Rollins, Aretha Franklin, Dizzy Gillespie and Duke Ellington.

"It's gonna have all kinds of s--- in there," Holloway, 84, said recently from his home in Cambria.

Holloway, who will be the grand marshal at this year's Pinedorado Parade, shares more than a name with his old friend Redd Foxx. Both were redheaded African-Americans raised by single mothers in Chicago, where they attended DuSable High School. And both have humorous, raucous stories sprinkled with salty language.

But whereas Foxx pursued a career as a comic and actor, Holloway was destined to play music since he was a child.

"My mother played organ and piano in the church," he said. "And I used to pump the organ and took piano lessons from her."

While his mother was strict about his music — "You can't go out until you finish that page," she'd tell him — their closeness in age helped them develop an unusual mother-son bond.

"We was like brother and sister," Holloway said. "Yeah, lemme tell ya — my mother was really something. She always kept me laughing and kept me involved in a whole lot of different projects. I could ask my mother anything — about whores and pimps and that kinda s---."

When his mother became pregnant at age 12, the family of Holloway's father, then 17, whisked him off to Los Angeles. Holloway moved to Chicago with his mother when he was just 5, and he didn't see his father until he was about 20.

"My father somehow found out that she had a couple of beauty shops," Holloway said. "And, thinking she had a lot of money, he came to Chicago and wooed her again, and they got married. So I was no longer a bastard— I was legal. But it didn't last. Because even with two beauty shops, you don't have a lot of money."

Musically, Holloway was gifted, learning to play harmonica, piano, flute and drums. But he began his music career playing sax.

Though he hadn't played sax long, he wound up playing and touring with Gene Wright's big band while still in high school. Then, he got drafted and played in the U.S. Army band.

"I didn't join the Army," he said, clarifying that it wasn't his choice to give up his music gig. "I went in screaming."

When he got back to Chicago, the jazz player immersed himself in the blues.

"Roosevelt Sykes and my mother went to school together," he said. "And he was a blues player. And so he came to visit my mother and he saw that I had a saxophone. And he said, 'Boy, can you play that thing?' I said, 'I think so.' He said, 'Lemme hear something.' And he started playing the blues, and I played with him."

That shift led to gigs with other bluesmen, including Bobby Bland, B.B. King and Junior Parker.

"When he first came to Chicago, I played with Muddy Waters because I was working with the Chess brothers from Chess Records," he said. "But when Little Walter came on the scene — the harmonica player — the Chess brothers no longer used saxophone; they used a harmonica."

Holloway learned early on to be flexible, which is why he has performed blues, jazz and rock.

"You learn that, in order to eat, you have to play whatever they want," he said.

While in Chicago, he had the opportunity to perform with Billie Holiday. A year before her death, Holiday's famous relationship troubles were evident, Holloway said.

"Her husband was a real dog — he was a pimp," Holloway said. "I asked her a few times, 'Why are you still with this dog?' and she said, 'Because he loves me.' And I said, 'S---, he loves your money.' "

Eventually, he wound up moving to New York, working with organist Jack McDuff and future Grammy-winning guitarist George Benson, in the early 1960s. When that group split up over a money dispute — McDuff was getting much more money than the others — Holloway went back to Chicago.

After years on the road, Holloway found a stationary gig in 1969, booking acts at the Parisian club in Los Angeles.

"My mother always said, 'The good lord will take care of you — but you'd better get your ass out there and do some work.' "

There, he transformed a club that once booked only local acts into a popular venue that brought in big names like Dizzy Gillespie, Big Joe Turner and Count Basie.

"I couldn't afford Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan, but they would come by the club and sing for free. And this dude here," he said, pointing to the cover of Foxx's autobiography, "Redd Foxx B.S.: Before Sanford," "he would come and spend an hour or two onstage."

Holloway worked at the Parisian for 15 years, but when he was turned down for a \$35 cost-of-living increase — despite having brought in much revenue to the club — he quit. So he took up with bebop sax player Sonny Stitt through the late 1970s and early 1980s. It was during the '70s that Holloway also toured and recorded with British blues rocker (and former Eric Clapton bandmate) John Mayall.

“That’s why a lot of people know me — because of the fact that I was working with him for a while,” Holloway said. “And I still do things with John, like recording with him.”

Through the years, there were plenty of women, Holloway said, and at least a couple of incidents where jealous men threatened him with a gun. While Holloway eventually settled down (more than once) and had children, marriage never worked out.

His most recent marriage ended when he decided to move to Cambria.

“My wife, she didn’t like being isolated,” he said. “She’s a big-city girl.”

But, having lived in cities most of his life, Holloway took a liking to the Central Coast. And after playing a gig at a local winery, he found a house for sale in the Pines, where he has lived since 1987.

When he’s not performing, Holloway likes to watch the variety of birds that land on his back porch. While the trees behind his house have grown, blocking his view of the ocean, he knows it’s there, just a short walk away.

“I had planned to get a boat when I got here because I had sold my other house,” he said, laughing. “But when you get a divorce, your boat money goes to your wife.”

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