"I would have paid more attention to him had I known," says Chester Brautigam of his destined-for-fame pupil, Alan Freed.

Brautigam, whose long involvement with youth and education in Columbiana County is detailed elsewhere in the "Salem Scrapbook," was Freed's band leader at Salem High School and also had Freed in his English 3 class.

"He always had confidence in himself. I don't think the future bothered him much," recalls Brautigam. "Like most boys, he wasn't too interested in trying to get straight As. He wasn't one to overachieve, but he did what came naturally."

And to Freed, what came naturally was music. Brautigam said he didn't teach Freed trombone and does not know who did, but he remembers Freed regularly staying after school, practicing in the band room. He liked to improvise, and his experimental style on his horn was "almost revolutionary in itself," says Brautigam. "He could have worked very well with a jazz band."

Brautigam also remembers Charlie Freed (quite a pianist") and Donnie Freed, who was one of Salem High's best drum majors. Alan, too, served as drum major, working in tandem with Bill Fineran.

Brautigam says Freed was an average student, earning mostly Bs and Cs at SHS. "Some of the teachers, I'm sure, found him somewhat mischievous, but I never found him so in either English or music. He never got himself into any trouble that I know of."

Brautigam taught at Salem until 1957, when he went on to serve as principal at Reilly School and the junior high and later as superintendent in the United Local Schools and as an English instructor for 10 years at the Kent State Salem Campus.

During the '50s when Freed rose to fame, Brautigam says the students in Salem "were proud of Alan and the achievements he'd made. He was one they looked up to, musically, anyway." Most kids were "gung-ho on rock 'n' roll at the time," he adds, although he is not certain the kids in Freed's hometown even knew the Salem High alumnus was the man who actually gave the music its name.

Ruth Sproat and Maude Freed were unusually close sisters, and their children grew up close, more like brothers and sisters than cousins.

All three of Alan Freed's cousins on his mother's side live in the area. Billie Hoffman lives along South Union Avenue, Jane Pfund resides in Canfield, and Bill Sproat lives along Maple Street. All three attended last November's ceremonies at the Salem Music Center when the city was presented with Freed's plaque from the Akron Radio Hall of Fame, and all are now looking forward to seeing Alan's other relatives, many of whom they haven't seen in years.

The Sproats followed the Freeds to Salem shortly after Alan and his family moved here during the

The Sproats followed the Freeds to Salem shortly after Alan and his family moved here during the mid-1920s. William Sproat, Alan's uncle had come from a Kentucky mining who had done very well in central Pennsylvania, but hard times had fallen. William and Ruth heard from Charles and Maude that Salem had been hit, but not as hard as other communities, by the faltering economy that preceded the Depression. They came to Salem and found work, William as a millwright and Ruth as a nurse at the old Central Clinic.

Billie was closest in age to Alan, and he lived with Billie and her husband for about a year along Georgetown Road on "Breeze Hill." Alan was working at WKBH in Youngstown at the time, commuting to and from Salem each day. Billie says she believes he knew he would be a success in radio.

"He wasn't a person who was a braggart. He didn't go around saying 'Oh, I'm going to be a disc jockey.' He was quiet about it all," Billie says. "His followers made the fuss over him and started everything going."

Bill Sproat recalls when Al J.'s brother, Charles brought home a microphone. Al was in the seventh or eighth grade. Bill says that he started carrying the mic around with him, onto the playground at the old Fourth Street School, up into his bedroom where the boys would do play-by-play of make-believe Indians games.

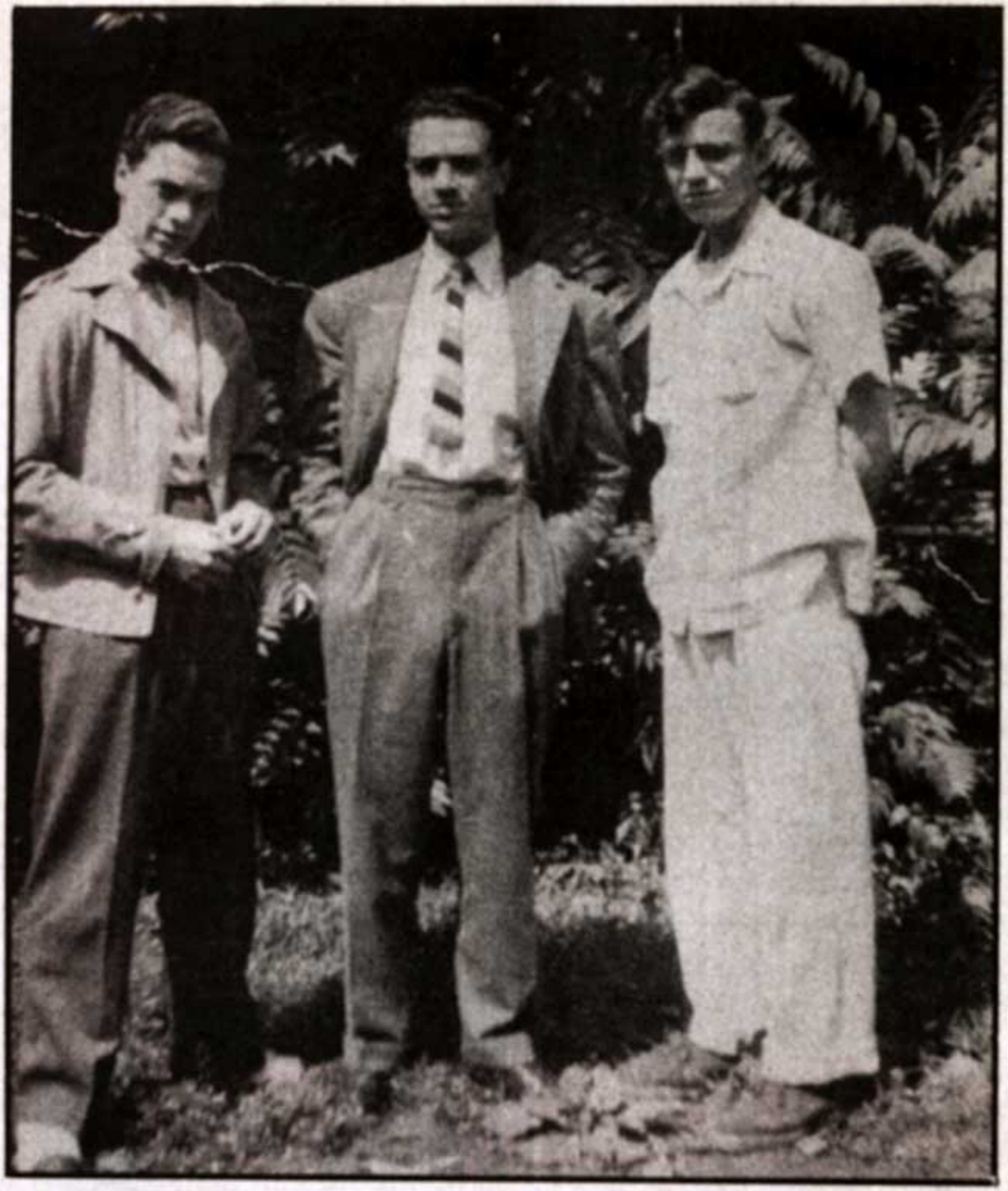
Jane was youngest of the cousins, and she was in fact playmate of the Freeds' daughter, Mitzi, who died at age 3 of mastoiditis. As he got older, Jane recalls she'd go to the Association dances at the high school where "The Sultans of Swing," led by her big cousin Al J., would play "Deep Purple" and the latest Tommy Dorsey tune.

Music was a big part of the Sproat children's lives, just as it was for the Freeds. Billie says she "took saxophone, but I didn't want to be in the band." She was also in the Baptist church boys choir with Al J. and Donnie. "They both had pretty good voices," he says. "I didn't sing too well, but I went along anyway." The boys' choir took part in the 1933 Chicago World's Fair and sang on the floating ampitheatre in the Hall of Religion, Bill recalls. Al J. and Bill once even sang a duet, "In The Garden." Shortly after the Depression at a tabernacle Bill believes once stood where the Firestone store is today.

Bill also remembers how all of the Freeds used to listen to the "Lucky Strikes Top 10 Tunes" show on the radio during the 1930s. In order to win, listeners had to pick the week's most popular songs. "They always got the cigarettes — always picked 'em right," he says, adding that even the Freed family dog would win; since there was a one-entry-per-person rule, the dog's name went on an entry form, too.

The Freeds and Sproats managed to have a lot of fun and to get into a bit of trouble as kids. Jane says her mom had a big tea wagon with wooden-spoked wheels, and it broke one day when Al and Donnie sat on it.

She also recalls how she and Alan really "loved Eagle brand condensed milk — we'd eat a whole can of it,



The Freed Brothers (from left) Al J., Doogie (Charles) and Donnie (David).

and I still do that once in a while." Her mother, Jane says, was a" real sweetheart with the Freed boys. They could talk with her about anything." Conversely,Jane grew up very close to he Aunt Maude. When she and her first husband, Murray, heard on TV in 1965 that Alan haf died, we went right ovec and we sat with her," Jane says.

Bill Sproat has a particular wealth of information about the boys' childhood activities. From their second and third grade combined class he says, Donnie, Al J.and he were "the Three Musketeers," or, ad they sometimes called each other, "Ub, Dub and Bub."

Like David Freed, Bill recalls many of the boys' sporting activities. They were Indian fans and would sometimes travel to Lake Park Stadium in Cleveland to see The Tribe play. He also mentions the neighborhood ballteams — the Perry Street Indians, Jennings Athletics and Superior Street Polecats 8 and how they used a taped ball because "that was the best we could afford, times were hard." There also were games of street football and mumblety peg, a game in which a boy tried to stand an ice pick on his finger, flip it and make it stick in the ground.

Salem didn't have a swimming pool in those days, Bill says, so the kids hitchhiked to Firestone Park in Columbiana a couple of times each week. "In those days, it was safe, and you'd get picked up fairly easily," he adds.

The kids grew up when the trolleys ran through the area. Billie recalls they all took a streetcar trip to Canton one day without bothering to tell anyone's parents where they had gone. "Alan must have gotten into his piggy bank, because we didn't have any money," she says. They went to Sebring, then Alliance — where Al J. spang for popcorn — then to Canton and back to Salem. "We came back and our parents hadn't even missed us, they never even asked us, " she adds.

Alan's cousins primarily remember him as a fun-loving, friendly boy who grew into a man who, while a celebrity, always remained congenial.

Jane says Alan's fame "didn't really matter to us. I was really proud of him,, but his being so well known didn't phase me. Our rapport was always good."

"He did a lot for people he didn't get credit for," says Billie. "I think it's nice he'd going to be recognized. I can turn my TV on and every once in a while hear about him. It's too bad he couldn't have had this recognition when he was alive.

Bill remembers his cousin as being "very generous. People that really knew him don't feel justice was done to him. If generosity got him into heaven, Bill adds, "he's probably in the front row."

Just before Christmas in 1958, The Crests were on top of the world and top of the charts with "16 Candles." But current band leader J.T. Carter first met Alan Freed about a year and a half before at one of Freed's rock 'n' roll extravaganzas starring Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers.

"The Teenagers...they really got us going," Carter remembers. "They were kids, just like we were. There were child acts before, but never kids like us...that we knew who made it, so it was a very powerful force for us."

"We were just kids from the street and we got an opportunity to have Alan Freed play our records and he loved it, he did, and that's how it happened," Carter says.

The Crests originally were discovered, he adds, on the subways. "We were doo-woppin' it up, having fun, and a lady came up to us and gave us her card. And the card belonged to Al Brown, who later on became a disc jockey in New York. He was a big band leader in Brooklyn, and he got us started...he started recording us, doing our hits...the smaller ones like 'My Juanita' and 'Sweetest One.' And we wound up at Co-ed Records in New York City."

Carter says he believes Freed "liked the concept of the group. It was an integrated group and there weren't many integrated groups around, in fact, there still aren't...coming from the Lower East Side, (of Manhattan) it was a racial melting pot, so it was very natural for us."

The magic of rock's early days was reflected in the unity of its audience, Carter says. Alan Freed and other "personality" disc jockeys of the day were responsible for getting kids to rally behind rock 'n' roll as "their" music. "They felt the music, and

they played it," Carter adds, and the enthusiasm was contagious.

Carter believes rock's merger with big business stripped away a lot of its charm. Rock lost its innocence in the '60's with the emergence of the Beatles, and there was no turning back; soon single superstar bands became bigger than the music itself.

Factionalization also played a part, Carter says. "Everybody's got a bag, they've got their following, what they do. Music is 'everyone for yourself' now. It's not like, 'you're doo-woppin', I'm doing it too — let's go in the hallway and sing some harmony.'

"That doesn't happen anymore, and the beauty of the business is gone," he says. "It's gone because there are too many dollars involved, it's gone because...it's just gone! Everyone wants too much money. They have to put in too much to make maybe not enough." That, he says, is the reason the 20-bands-to-a-bill extravaganzas of the '50s don't happen any more. "Plus, these groups that they have now would never do that."

On the other hand, Carter notes, a lot of the old rockers are getting back together for one-night stands and even tours. The Crests reunited with original member Johnny Maestro, who later went on to form the Brooklyn Bridge.

"There was a time when there was no demand for us at all...not like now, now everybody's saying, 'Hey, that stuff's good!'"

Carter attributes the resurgence of rock's popularity to people 35 and older who are deciding it is still the music they love best. "The ones I've met, they're like executives in insurance companies now and they're just sick and tired of the crap, y'know? And a lot of them say, 'Hell with this, I know the music I like, it made me feel good, and you guys can't fool me with that other stuff.' They want what they want now," Carter says.

These people have kids, and a lot of

Alan Freed made his first film, "Mister Rock And Roll," in 1956. The top disc jockey made five films altogether, and all will be screened this week during the Alan Freed Film Festival at the Salem Community Theatre.

Freed's Five Films Will Be Screened

All five films Alan Freed made will be shown during the Alan Freed Film Festival, slated for 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday at the Salem Community Theatre.

Here is a brief description of each feature:

"Rock Around The Clock." (1956) This was Freed's first feature, and it also stars Bill Haley and the Comets, who had made "Blackboard Jungle" — probably the first "rock 'n' roll movie" — the year before. Freed plays a disc jockey and manager ready to launch the rock 'n' roll craze. Freed was paid $10,000 plus 10 percent of the gross on this film.

"Don't Knock The Rock." (1956) The Comets also appear in this film, the tale of a rock 'n' roll singer who — along with his manager, played by Freed — encounters ill will toward the new style of music wherever he goes. Alan Dale plays the rock singer, but in real life he was more a crooner than a shaker.

"Mister Rock 'n' Roll." (1957) This purportedly was Freed's biographical film about how he started the rock revolution, but most of it is good-natured hype. The film's guest stars include Leo Mintz, owner of the famed Record Rendezvous store in Cleveland, and boxer Rocky Graziano. The movie is made to look like it was filmed in Cleveland, but it's Hollywood all the way.

"Rock, Rock, Rock." (1957) This film marked the cinematic debut of Tuesday Weld. She was 16 years old and lip-synchs a song actually sung by Connie Francis. Glenn Moore, who will be in Salem this week as a Jubilee guest, wrote the soundtrack.

"Go Johnny Go." (1958) Like "Rock, Rock, Rock," this is now available on home video. It's the story of a fictional rocker, Johnny Melody, who is guided on the road from juvenile delinquency to rock 'n' roll stardom by our hero. Jimmy Clanton plays the young rocker; the film also stars Chuck Berry, Joann Campbell, the Moonglows and Richie Valens, in the only film he ever made.

the kids pick up on rock 'n' roll originals through their parents' rediscoveries, Carter adds. "This is the first time that the whole population is into one thing. Even guys that like hard rock, they still like some of the oldies," he says. "As long as it's not too square."

Like everyone I talked with who worked with Freed, Carter says Freed was a scapegoat for a lot of abuses perpetrated by others in the music business. "I'm not sure how Dick Clark felt, I'm not sure of how a lot of people felt, but I was sure how Alan felt. He felt very good about us, he played our records...he was the one that inspired us to do the stuff by helping the little guys. We have a very natural feeling about Alan Freed."

Lance Freed started working at A&M Records in 1966, the year after his dad died. Today he is president of A&M's music publishing arm, Almo/Irving Music and its international affiliate, Rondor Music.

When he started at A&M, Freed was hardly following in his father's footsteps. A few years earlier he had said that he wouldn't be going into the music business. "I had no intention of getting into the music industry....I didn't think it was fair that someone could be a professional and not be able to practice their profession for political reasons." Like the rest of his family, Lance says he was disappointed about the way his father had been treated in the aftermath of the payola scandal. Alan Freed was blackballed from broadcasting, much as those allegedly identifying with Communism during the McCarthy era were effectively shunned from society, unable to find work or sympathy.

So Lance decided to make medicine his profession, and had attended Kent State University and the University of California at Los Angeles. By the time he started as a gofer in the shipping department at A&M, he recalls, his interests had shifted, and he had started pursuing English Literature studies.

Eventually, Lance started working full time at A&M. By 1972, he says, the music business he had once disdained had "got under my skin." He was still unsure, however, that he wanted to make it his career, and he went to Ireland to teach for awhile. When he returned to the United States, Lance says, "I had decided, yes, this is something I really want to do."

If his father were alive today, he would be proud of Lance. When I interviewed Lance on the telephone last month, he told me about the number-one song on the Billboard charts that week — "Heaven" by Bryan Adams. Lance met Adams when the young Canadian singer, now 25, was 19. They became good friends and Adams today isn't just one of rock's hottest acts — he's also godfather to Lance and Judith Freed's first-born daughter, Hannah, "a role he takes quite seriously," Freed says.

Aimo/Irving also has had hits with Tina Turner, Aretha Franklin, Supertramp and Dire Straits and, through its Nashville office, with Crystal Gayle, the Oak Ridge Boys and The Judds.

Although Lance now works in the same business his father helped found, he says his business associates aren't always quick to make the connection. If they do realize he is the son of Alan Freed,

Lance adds, they sometimes seem reluctant to mention it.

"And it's not something I frequently bring up," he adds.

Lance, now 37, was born in Akron while his dad was working at WAKR and spent his childhood moving around the country. Because he was just 16 when his dad died, and because his parents had been divorced years earlier, Lance says he knows very little of his father's childhood in Salem. "There were stories about a girlfriend he had in high school, and about playing trombone, how much he loved band," he says.

"I know he always had a great deal of affection for Salem," he adds. Lance says he does believe his father lost his small-town roots, even long after he'd left Salem. "Whatever you are when you're 16 or 17, that's something you take with you. They can't be forgotten even if you want to," he says.

Like most small-town kids visiting the big city for the first time, Freed was fascinated by the bright lights, the ironmongery, his son says.

It was Lance who told me of his father's regular record-rating sessions. On Sunday afternoons, he recalls, his dad would sit down with boxes of tunings, listening to about eight bars of each tune. If he didn't like what he heard, "if it didn't happen, he'd fling the record across the room," Lance recalls.

Another stack of records included the "mambo" tunes his father hadn't made up his mind about on the first listen. One or two records would survive the cut, and "he was usually right about 'em," Lance says. Freed had no musical tricks that helped him to pick hits, his son says; the ability apparently was his from the start.

Lance says his dad's popularity sprung from Alan's ability to "really communicate with the audience; whether it was one or 500,000 people, each felt like listening. That was a gift."

It was his father's personality that made him the top DJ of his time, Lance says. He claims there has been a "vacuum" in American radio for at least 15 years and that all disc jockeys are "oh and 'commercial hit radio" sound the same.

Lance says his father undoubtedly would be pleased to find rock 'n' roll thriving in 1985. Aside from being a $4 billion-a-year industry, popular music is "the poetry of our century," says Lance.

Lance believes his father knew rock's power all along, and knew the music would continue to change and grow. The years from 1959 through 1963 were bad ones, Lance recalls. It was the period when Alan Freed had been banned from New York radio and the witch-hunt atmosphere had made everyone nervous, musicians included. "There wasn't a lot happening that was as exciting as earlier in the '50s," Lance says. "People were naturally frightened at that time, people naturally recoiled."

Rock had become predictable, and then the Beatles came along. Lance says he "half-expected" his father to say, "This isn't music!" But for Alan Freed, the birth of the Beatles represented an affirmation of rock's ability to forge yet another generation. "I just think it's great!" Lance recalls his father saying. "He was just so happy for something new."

Anyone who seeks to prove the existence of a magical bond between dads and daughters should talk with Alana Freed Belton.

The depth of Alana's feelings for the man for whom she was named and the clarity of her memories of times they spent together have not diminished, not even 20 years after his death.

Alana lives in Burlington, N.C., with her 14-year-old son, Greg. Her visit to Salem this week will be her first in seven years, and the fact that her father's hometown is honoring him is "most exciting, something that takes my breath away" Alana says.

Although Alan and Betty Lou Freed were divorced when Alana and Lance, two years her junior, were very young, the children saw a lot of their dad. Alana remembers going to the WJW studios to see him work.

"As young as I was, it wasn't all that impressive. It was part of my life. I enjoyed spending the time with him because at that point my parents were not together. It was important that we just spent the time with him, no matter where he was or what he was doing," she says.

When Freed moved onto the New York, Betty Lou and the children were living nearby. "We spent a great deal of time together at that point. We went to every (Freed) rock 'n' roll show that was ever given...Christmas, Easter, whenever it was, we were there.

"We spent most of our time backstage, but I used to beg my father, 'Take me out front. I want to go out front and watch the show.' I was about 13, and I was really engrossed in the music."

In many ways Alana was like the millions of other kids who adored her Dad and the music he was introducing. "I used to listen to my father on the radio every night. I never went to sleep until he was off the air. And when he had his television show in New York on Channel 5, I used to go down about twice a week, and I used to dance on the show," she says.

"He used to have dance contests, and I entered and won. But believe it or not, they would not allow the first prize to be given to me...they said it wouldn't look right."

"Well, I said, 'Hey, I won that.' It was a record player and I wanted it. But they said, 'You've got to understand, Alana, it would not look right. You'll have to take third place.' Well, I didn't understand, but I did take it...it was a Ponytail album."

Alana had moved to North Carolina by the time trouble surfaced for her father. She recalls she didn't hear much about the allegations against Freed at school or in the neighborhood, mainly because, in the South "very few people even knew who he was."

"What I had to deal with was main-

ly at home, knowing what my father was going through, knowing as much about it as I did, which at the time wasn't nearly as much as I know today...not really understanding what was happening. I changed very quickly."

"I was talked to by a lot of people who probably should not have even involved me...lawyers, friends of my father. They'd sit me down and go into all these things about, 'If there's ever any questions about this, this is what I want you to say.' Well, what do you tell a 14- or a 15-year-old kid? It just scared me more. All I could see was they were destroying him, and that's what mattered to me."

After she was graduated from high school, Alana was accepted at a college in North Carolina but decided not to go but instead to travel to California to live with her father.

"I had been away from him a couple of years. We had seen each other but not much. And I felt I'd lost something and I really wanted to get close to him again," she says.

"I went to California and I spent that year with him, and am I ever glad I did"

It was to be the last year of her father's life.

While she was there, she started working toward a career in theater. She had studied drama in high school, and had worked in school and community theater; during her senior year, the school's drama department took top honors in state competition and Alana won a "Best Actress" designation. She also was in the Miss Burlington pageant and served as first runner-up, staging a scene from "The Diary of Anne Frank" in the talent competition.

Alana says she received a lot of support and encouragement from her dad. "I would say to me, 'Alana, you have talent, but you need a lot of work. Is this what you want to do?' And I said yes. That's what he wanted me to do, and that's what I wanted to do."

Freed had scripts with which she could practice and, above the fireplace, a mantle. "He would put me on that mantle, and he'd say, 'Okay, you're on a stage I want to hear you read these lines.' He really worked with me. My mother did, too."

Alana's father had, in fact, made arrangements for her to study at the Pasadena Playhouse. "Just all those arrangements were made prior to his illness. And after his death, I just gave it up. I didn't want to do it."

Alana says she remembers her father as a caring, honest, generous man. Her son, Greg, never knew his grandad, but Alana says she tries "to bring some part of my father to life for him." She related some stories to me, too.

"My father lived from day to day. He was not the type of person who put money in the bank wisely and saved it. He lived, he earned it and he spent it, which is why when he died, he died with nothing.

"There are a lot of people who live their lives that way and I don't put anybody down for it. But I know there were many occasions — I'm just guessing at the amounts — he might have had two or three thousand dollars in his pocket. And someone would walk up to him and say, 'Alan, I know this couple, or this lady or man who is ill in need, et cetera, etcetera,' and there would be tears in his eyes. And before the story was ever finished, he would be into his pocket and it would be gone. I

into his pocket and it would be gone. I mean, never thinking about, 'I could have used this for something.' He didn't worry about it. There was a need for it someplace else."

"I can tell you a story... this doesn't have to do with money, but just to give you an idea of the inside part of my father. When we lived in Palm Springs, he did a great deal of cooking. He loved to cook, it was his kitchen and you stayed out of his kitchen. So when he started with the apron, we knew to stay out.

"We were served and we were told to eat what was on the plate and to be very thankful that we had it." If they did not eat everything and felt compelled to throw food away, they'd walk into the kitchen. "Over the garbage can, up on the refrigerator, was a picture of a little girl — and to this day I never forget it — who was starving to death. It was an absolutely appalling picture, one that just tore your heart out. We had to look at that picture as we emptied our plates, and it was put there for a reason.

"That was just to let us know we were to be most grateful for what we had," Alana says. "He had some very good qualities. Like I say, he would have given his last arm and he probably did."

According to longtime local musician Randy Strader, there's one man who deserves at least as much recognition this week as Alan Freed himself.

Strader calls Lew Platt, who also was from Salem, "the brains behind Alan Freed. Alan was the personality, the energy, the bombshell, but he had no head for business."

Platt was Freed's manager throughout most of the disc jockey's heyday in the 1950s. "Lew was resentful because he never got the credit he felt he deserved," Strader says.

Platt apparently left Freed in 1958, roughly the same time Freed's popularity started to dip because of questions about his involvement in payola. Platt moved back to Salem — his family had stayed here all along, living along 10th Street — and got out of the music business, although he booked circus acts on occasion.

About that same time, Strader was part of a Salem High School band that included Fred Naragon, Al Catlos, Joe Crawford and Bob King. Strader says he started pestering Platt to help "Randy and the Renegades" to get started in the music business. At first, Strader recalls, Platt told him to "get lost, but I kept pestering him."

Platt finally did agree to help the young band in May, 1961, and "Randy and the Renegades" enjoyed success throughout the 1960s.

Strader says he met Alan Freed twice in the early '60s. During those days, he says, Platt — with whom Freed had stayed in touch — would bring Freed into town "incognito" so he could see his parents.

Freed was known for his flamboyant, high-energy style on the air. This WINS publicity shot shows the Moondog in a familiar pose.

Photo Credits

Page 2 - Alan at microphone, WINS publicity shot; others courtesy Jeffrey Rutledge Productions. Page 3 - Alan, Charles and David Freed, courtesy Jane Pfund; 'Mister Rock and Roll' Columbia Pictures publicity shot, courtesy Jeffrey Rutledge Productions; Page 4 - Alan and family, courtesy Jane Pfund; Alan on the air courtesy Jeffrey Rutledge Productions.

dedicated to the memory and spirit of John Lennon.

"It will definitely be in Salem," he says "because the people of Salem have been the first to recognize Freed and to give him the honor that's been due him."