

MASTER OF THE MASKS

Our monstrous hobby defined by Verne Langdon

In 1963, he was twenty-one. The “College DJ” and son of the “Flying Dentist” from San Jose had just moved to Hollywood with his new wife Dawn, to buy fifty percent of a little mask company. After a crab luncheon, a check and a handshake, Verne Langdon was welcomed into the position of co-owner and partner by the eponymous originator of Don Post Studios.

Although Don Post Sr. told Verne he was buying “the lion’s share of the business”, their lawyer, Voltaire Perkins assured him it was an even split, fifty-fifty.

The “Spirit” Behind Our Monstrous Hobby

At the time, Don Post Studios was well established as a novelty mask company and as a rubber prop maker for the movie industry and Disneyland. Verne could have renamed the company for himself, but kept the name of Don Post Studios as an already established brand. One that drew him in since his first exposure to a Don Post chimp mask when he was only eight. One that he would build to become the benchmark by which all other rubber mask companies would be reckoned, in quality of both design and workmanship.

By forfeiting personal fame and keeping the existing name of Don post Studios, Verne took the first step toward becoming the least known name in the world of our family of Famous Filmland Monsters.

By

Kelly Mann

&

Verne Langdon (his words)

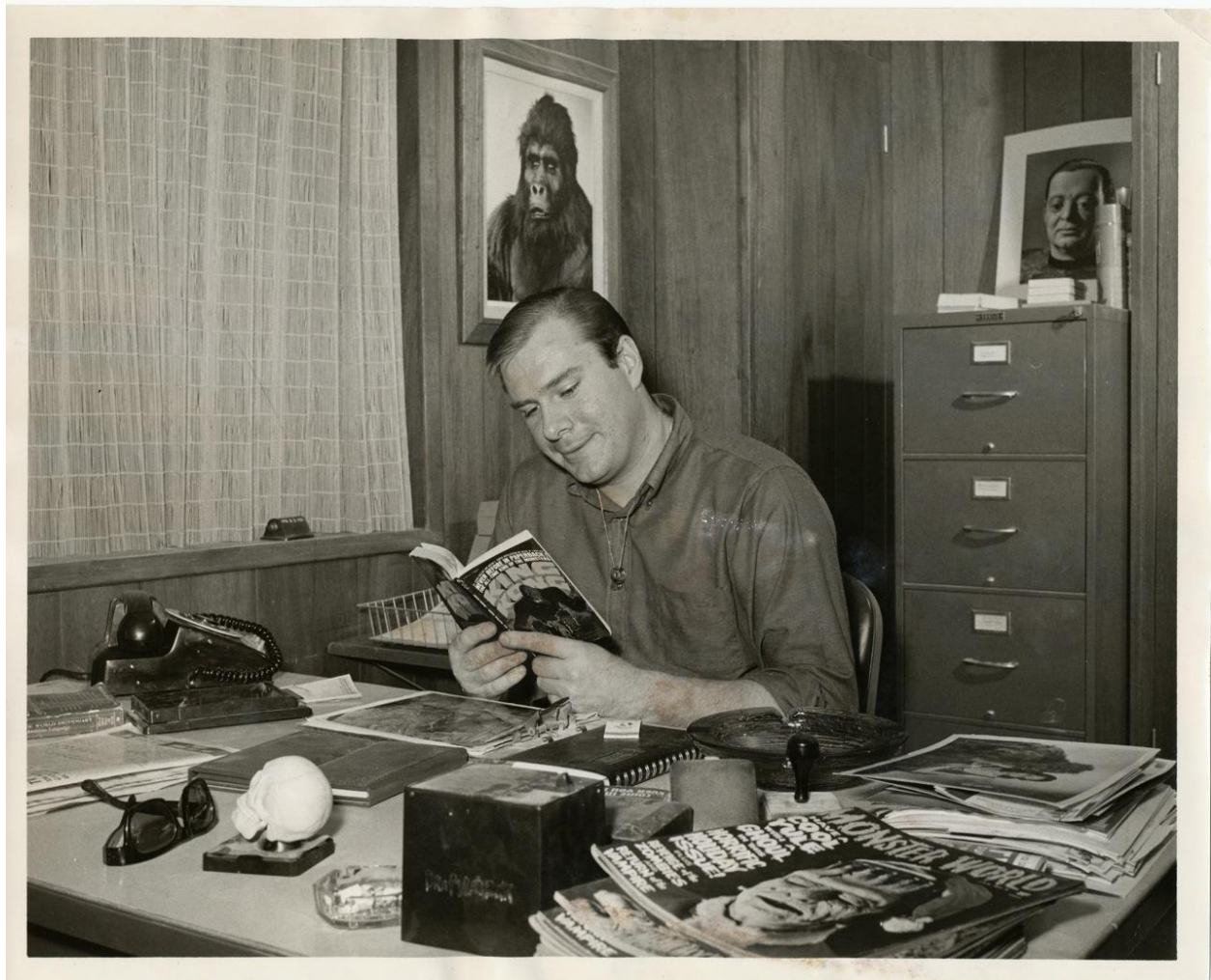
This book is dedicated to:

Verne Langdon. He was a monster maker, a musician, a magician, a circus clown and a wrestler. He was also a dreamer who made his dreams reality, a reality that we all loved to share.

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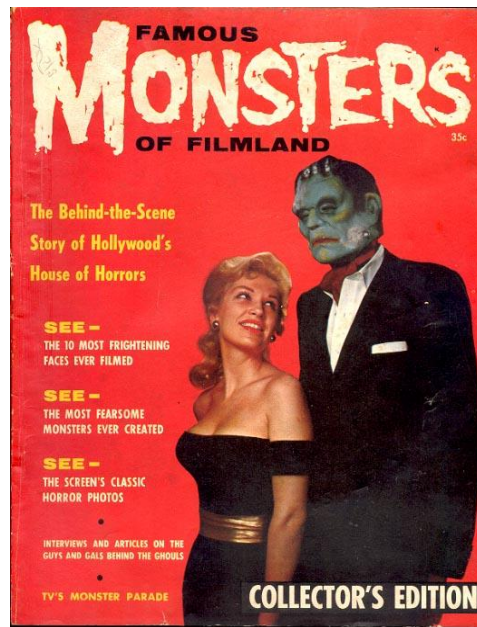
PART I: The Spirit Behind Our Monstrous Hobby

In the late 1950s, Universal Studios and Columbia Pictures released a bunch of Horror and Thriller pictures to television syndication through Screen Gems as a package called Shock Theater and Son of Shock Theater, creating a throng of movie-monster loving kids. These kids grew up to become Stephen King, George Romero, Peter Jackson, Stephen Spielberg, Benicio Del Toro and many others who now shape the face of Horror, Science Fiction and Fantasy films.

These “Monster Kids” were readers of a magazine called Famous Monsters of Filmland. A kind of “Teen Beat” for monster movie followers.

Chock-full of rare photographs supplied by Forrest J. Ackerman, with puns galore, and its hip comic book like styling designed by Jim Warren, Famous Monsters of Filmland was originally intended to be a one-shot publication.

Although over the years, it spawned many imitators, many of them superior in paper, story content and picture quality. But Famous Monsters of Filmland endured for decades as the original horror movie lover’s go-to magazine.



The magazine mogul Jim Warren and Verne Langdon became life-long friends due to an oversight on Verne’s part. Because of that, Don Post Studios advertisements became sort of a fixture in Famous Monsters of Filmland.

Chapter One:

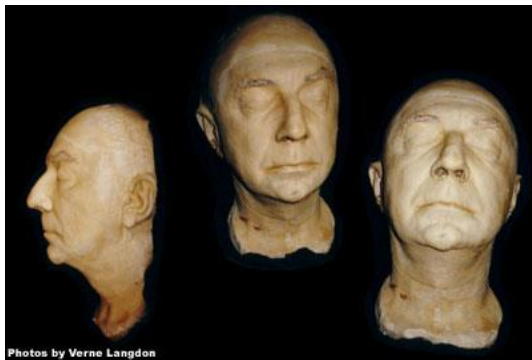
Bringing the Monsters Back

At the time Verne Langdon and Don Post joined forces, Don Post Studios was not known for monster masks, even though there was a Frankenstein Monster mask in the line-up.

One of Verne's passions was masquerade. Years before, he had a little mask-making studio in the back of Victoria's Costume Shop in San Jose, now long gone. Where he poured & painted clown noses and sculpted masks, including a "zombie" type mask he called "The Ghoul" faintly resembling the ZOMBIE mask he'd created in 1972, with which we're now familiar.

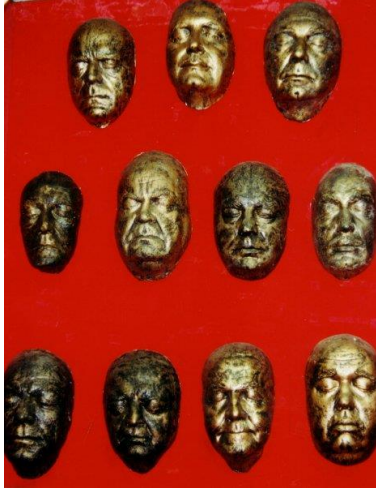
When Verne came into Don Post Studios in January of 1963, Don was renting a 1,500 square foot industrial building at 5537 Cleon Avenue in North Hollywood, California. Product output would vary from a dozen of something to a gross per day. The "crew" consisted of Verne, Don, Ernesto "Benny" Bianchetti, who hefted and poured all the molds and tried to keep the place clean, and Peggy Clinton, along with Verne's wife Dawn, and Don's wife Louise.

Since Don had already amassed several life masks, Verne put together "The Don Post Private Collection" of life masks, all the stars who had played in "monster movies," including Boris Karloff, Basil Rathbone, Lon Chaney Jr., Vincent Price, Peter Lorre, John Carradine, Charles Laughton, Tor Johnson, and one that was missing: Bela Lugosi.



The Lugosi life mask was nearly impossible to find. But Verne was determined to find it, Verne's the knight in tarnished armor who eventually rescued Bela's life mask from probable oblivion. Verne methodically explored every makeup department in Hollywood, including Warner Bros. supervised by Gordon Bau, and the old lab at Universal, with Bud Westmore's help; these expeditions yielded nothing. After a year or so,

Verne finally found Bela's life mask in Columbia Studios' makeup lab, where expert lab technician/makeup artist Clay Campbell had immortalized the 61-year-old Lugosi's classic countenance for the great special makeup effects finale in "Return of the Vampire" (Columbia Pictures, 1943). A full 3/4 mask, it includes Bela's ears and neck, down to his collarbone. Lugosi was said to have been claustrophobic, and it was the only mask ever taken of him. EVER. In 1968 John Chambers borrowed the life mask, explaining that Universal didn't have a life mask of Bela Lugosi for their Universal Studios Tour. Werner Keppler in Universal's makeup department made a mold from which a copy was cast. Somehow somebody got to it and "lifted" a copy from the duplicate that Werner made for Universal, and now it's all over eBay and everywhere else. But Verne found the original, with some of Bela's eyelashes still stuck in it!

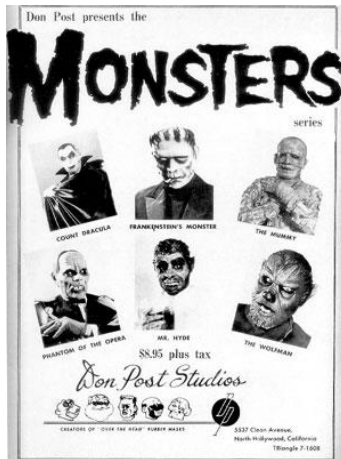


Don loved this little collection of life masks. Verne took a life-cast of Don and appropriately included his mask in the "Don Post Private Collection." He even did a life mask of Forry Ackerman, and gave Forry a complete set of copies, including his own mask.

In July of 1963 Don Post Studios was beginning anew with ads for the HOLLYWOOD HORRORS! series of extra thick latex monster character masks which included Frankenstein's Monster, Count Dracula, The Wolfman, The Mummy, Phantom of the Opera, and Mr. Hyde. \$25.00 each with zippers down the back, all sculpted by Pat Newman, except for Frankenstein's Monster, originally sculpted by Don Post Sr. and poured in very thick rubber with a zipper down the back (Custom made for spook shows). In December of 1963 they released a polyurethane-foamed "Monster Headpiece" and neck bolts as advertised in Famous Monsters of Filmland and Genii the Conjuror's Magazine for \$35.00. Clown wigs, masks, feet, shoes, and even rubber chickens appeared in the Genii ads too, plus character masks in April of 1964 and a Professional Ape Outfit from \$450.00, hand sewn by Peggy Clinton.

One day a letter arrived from Universal Studios. Upon opening it Verne and Don were stymied to see a cease and desist order from the legal department at Universal telling them NOT to make any more monster masks. Don said that he had the licensing as he rummaged through his desk. When he found it, it was apparent that he had forgotten to keep up with the payment agreement, so Verne went, hat in hand, to the Universal Studios legal department to obtain the license for all of the Universal Studios monsters. After a productive meeting with David Hammond, the licensing was secured for what is now a paltry sum, Verne left not only with the means to make his beloved monster masks, but he'd made friends in the personages of David Hammond and Norma Jean Wright.

Verne was an early reader of Famous Monsters of Filmland, and liked it's cover art. He had read Famous Monsters ever since buying "#1 The Collector's Edition" in January of 1958. On that first cover, Jim Warren himself was wearing a Don Post "over-the-head, borrowed personality" green \$3.95 (by then) Frankenstein Monster mask and tux, and posed with sexy Marion Moore, wearing glossed fire-engine red lipstick and a very snug-fitting and nicely-low-cut black cocktail dress!



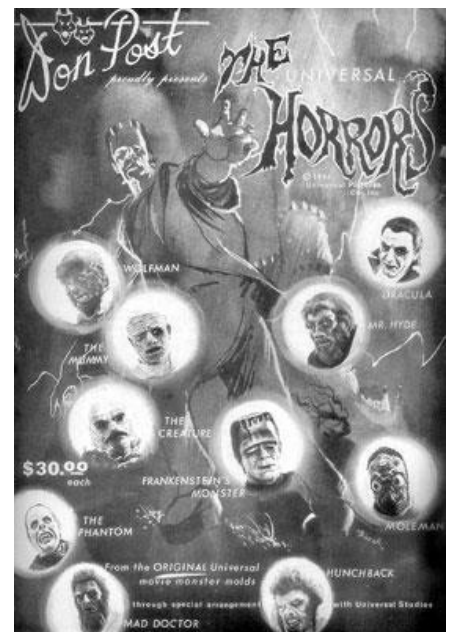
Verne had always admired the FM logo, so he unwittingly cut it out and used the "MONSTERS" part of the registered copyrighted "FAMOUS MONSTERS" logo for the eye-catching header on the new over-the-head-masks monster series ad: "The Universal Monsters". Verne had a bunch of fliers made up, and sent them out to novelty and costume shops everywhere. He also sent one to the publisher of Famous Monsters of Filmland magazine, one James Warren. A week or so later, Verne received a personal letter from Mr. James Warren, succinctly explaining that he had always wanted to own a mask company, and inasmuch as Don Post Studios had violated certain United States copyright laws by

"borrowing" his magazine's logo for that ad, his attorneys would be taking them to court. Then he added, that if Verne wanted to avoid such a confrontation, he should contact Ben Taubman, the Captain of the Captain Company, and make arrangements to sell Don Post Studios' masks in the magazine. As a result, Don Post masks were featured in nearly every issue of Famous Monsters of Filmland. Since then, due to Verne's mistake, and the two men became the best of friends for life.

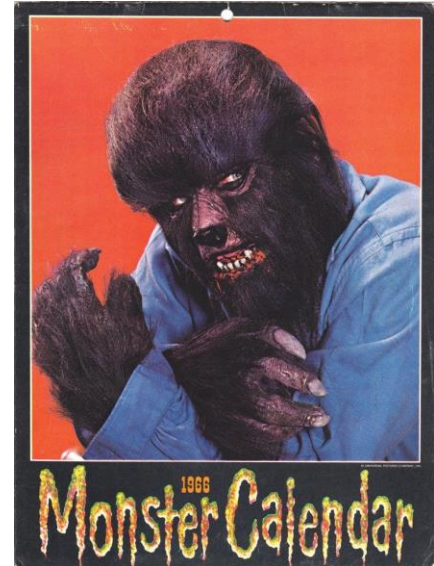
Don Post Studios masks began appearing in Warren Publishing Company's Famous Monsters of Filmland magazine before the end of 1964. The less-expensive half masks and over-the-head original Frankenstein's Monster masks were wholesaled to them. One of Verne's wife's (Dawn) specialties was locating and wholesale-selling Don Post Studios masks to other mail order retailers, like Eddie Golden's Magic Wand, Pico Novelty, and Sunset House. Verne and Dawn would personally hand-deliver masks to local L.A. area retail stores, like Burt Wheeler's Hollywood Magic, and the Disneyland Magic Shop.

When Don post Studios debuted "The Universal Horrors" line ("The Calendar Monsters" as they have come to be known). They were drop-shipped direct from Don Post Studios. Captain Company would furnish their label, already addressed, with their check for each mask plus postage and handling, and Don Post Studios would make the mask, pack it and ship it.

The Universal Horrors line was comprised of ten masks, all sculpted by their new sculptress, Pat Neuman. There was a new Frankenstein Monster, A Mad Doctor, a new Wolfman, The Hunchback, a new Mr. Hyde, a new Dracula, The Mummy, and "Through a special arrangement with Universal Studios, from the original movie molds", The Creature from The Black Lagoon, The Metaluna Mutant, and a Mole Man. Nearly every mask in The Universal Horrors line was hand painted and haired to perfection by Verne Langdon himself.



Ambivalent as Don Sr. may have been about monsters in general, it pleased him that Verne put the the Universal Horrors Karloff version of The Frankenstein Monster mask on the cover of "An Evening with Boris Karloff & His Friends," with a credit for Don Post Studios, and Don really liked the 11x14 photos of the custom "Universal Horrors" monster masks Verne had framed for their new, improved office. Not long after Verne hung those prints, his Friend Larry Strock Rupert (who later produced the live Uni-Mart shows "Stunt Stars from Screenland", with Sid Koss, which showcased Don Post Masks and Gorilla suit along with Tor Johnson at Uni-Mart stores around Southern California) brought a friend (publisher Jim Matthews) into the office, Jim wanted to sell the masks in a new monster magazine he was going to publish called Modern Monsters, but he also wanted to do something commercial with the photos themselves. Verne suggested a calendar. The 1966 Monster Calendar featuring Don Post Studios' masks, came from new product shots of the masks Verne conceived and directed in 1965. Verne painted and haired those masks, put together costumes, and directed the calendar photo shoot.



According to Verne, those masks were carefully finished like all the others. Apparently, it was the printer, Prestige Publications, or Jim Matthews who altered the colors to make the masks more colorful in the printed calendar.

Most mask collectors now assume that these masks, priced at \$35.00 in the late 1960s were what made the most money for the company. Not so. The bread-and-butter items were actually the modestly priced items. Like the thinner masks priced at \$8.95 each, and the Professional Clown Noses modelled on a cast of Verne's own nose, and the Professional Bald Caps which Verne had improved to be thicker with better, thinner edges. They also sold small quantities of the liquid latex rubber from which their masks were cast, to the various movie studio's makeup departments. They could do this, since they bought latex liquid in large barrels from the Firestone Tire and Rubber Co. on Central Ave, in South Gate.

Pat Newman sculpted nearly everything in the custom/commercial lines that came out of Post Studios at this time. Later they hired mask & prop maker Ellis Burman Sr. who had created the Frankenstein Monster headpiece worn by Lon Chaney Jr. in "Ghost of Frankenstein," and the lycanthrope cane head in "The Wolf Man." Verne had Ellis sculpt a marvelous human skull that sold in Disneyland, Disney World, and magic shops all over. Ellis also later sculpted the new \$8.95 line ("800 Series") of the Universal monsters, which were poured in a specially-formulated (loaded) latex he had devised. Verne appointed Ellis Head of the lab, and eventually his two sons worked for Don Post Studios, Tom Burman and Ellis Burman Jr.

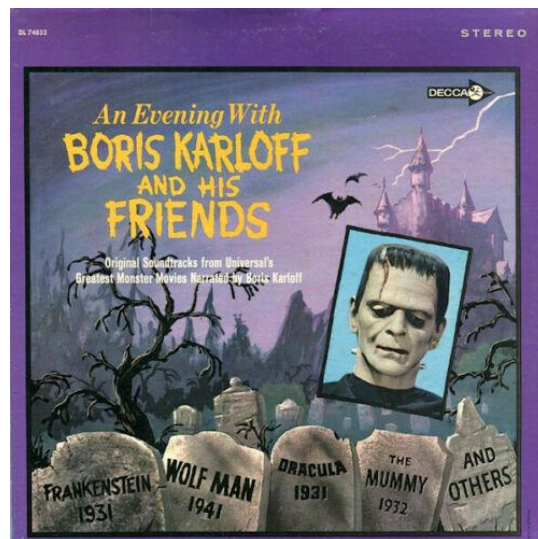


Being in their early twenties, Verne and Dawn found themselves to be the youngest players in their newfound world of masks, monsters and macabre music. Forrest Ackerman, The Posts, and most other professionals they dealt with, were at least 5 years their senior, and even those folks were kind of “making it all up” as they went along. Just to be safe, Dawn felt she needed to go to Law School.

In 1967, Verne and Milt Larsen of Magic Castle fame, dreamed up "An Evening with Boris Karloff & His Friends", which really is an all-time Classic. The script, credited to Forrest J Ackerman is just outstanding, and Frank Bresee's editing is excellent. Charles "Bud" Dant Executive-produced for Decca Records, Bill Loose composed the transitional music and conducted the orchestra, and all of this on an album of original "terror film" voice-tracks hosted by The King himself! A monster lover's dream-come-true. Verne came up with the idea of putting those voice tracks on record, but it was Milt Larsen who suggested Boris Karloff as "host." To Debut the Album, Verne even designed a special display in Wallich's Music City, at historic Sunset and Vine, in Hollywood.



There were Don Post masks surrounding the album, and an eye-catching life-sized mummy! Verne and Milt felt they also needed to have a press screening for the album. They concocted a gala event at The Magic Castle for Boris Karloff.



In attendance was Verne Langdon, Milt Larsen, Robert Bloch, Alex Gordon, Ruth Gordon, Dr. Donald Reed, Boris' agent Arthur Kinnard and Forrest Ackerman. Boris was also interviewed in a 4^{1/2} minute interview for local TV. This was the only presser Boris Karloff ever received, personally. An Evening with Boris Karloff & His Friends was so popular, it had sold out at local record stores, even before the advertising had rolled out. Decca Records didn't expect that much from the album and made no plans for additional pressings.

Chapter Two: King Kong and Other Apes

John Chambers was interested in the direction Don Post Studios was going, and became involved in a couple of the projects, specifically creating or advising "prehistoric men" for showmen Jerry Malone (John created this "dead" Neanderthal) and Frank Hansen (Verne referred Frank to La Brea Tar Pit/Natural History Museum sculptor Howard Ball who cast this figure in hot melt vinyl).



John Chambers also helped in creating a 12 ft. King Kong figure for the wax museum for Mack Howe in Canada. Kong was a collaborative effort between John, Ellis Burman, and Verne. Ellis was responsible for every inch of sculpting the big ape.



Dawn Langdon recalled that it was fun to watch these three giant personalities work on this extraordinarily giant figure. All three of them weren't always there in the lab at the same time, but you could be sure they were all there when the moving truck came on the delivery day! Pat Newman also sculpted likenesses of many famous actors which the Studio replicated in foam filled latex, to be installed in the wax museum along with some of the Universal Monsters.

At this point, Don Sr. pretty much left Verne to run Don Post Studios, as he was investing a great deal of his time with his newly-established vacuum-forming business "Don Post Inc". Although the Vacuformer was on the premises of Don Post Studios, it was a separate business. Don Sr. had two partners, in this venture; movie special effects men Milt Rice and Bobby Bonning (Verne was not a part). They made vintage car bodies for movies like "The Great Race" and realistic sides of beef for "Irma La Douce".

When John Chambers Headed up the makeup department at 20th Century Fox for "Planet of the Apes", he took Pat Newman and Tom Burman and Verne along with him.

Don Post Studios was running well now, as planned. Verne did not need to be there to "run herd" on everyone. Verne worked on "Planet", all four of the sequels, the "Planet" TV series, "Lost in Space," and "Hello Dolly!" Verne got his card in Makeup Artists and Hairstylists Local 706,



Pat Newman joined the plasterer's union and worked exclusively, sculpting for all the major studios, including Universal, and Tom Burman joined Local 706 and became a lab technician and makeup artist. As a makeup artist in his own right, he started his own company and teamed up with John Chambers on many projects.

During this time Verne was becoming more and more involved with outside studio makeup work, and he was increasingly absent from Post.

Don and Louise felt it was impossible for him to work full-time in the motion picture & TV Industries, run Don Post Studios, and pursue all his other interests. So, in 1968 Verne, Dawn, Don Sr., and Louise met at their company attorney's office, and made it legal:

Verne sold his lion's share of Don Post Studios back to Don Post Sr. for one dollar.

PART II: A Different Kind of Music

Chapter Three: Organ-izing

The 1970s was a tumultuous time for Verne Langdon. During these ventures, Verne made many new acquaintances. Some of which were to shape his life in the coming years.

Verne went on staff for two years at CBS Television City in Hollywood as a makeup artist. He worked on many variety shows, which were very popular at the time, like The Sonny & Cher Show, The Smothers Brothers Show, Red Skelton Show, turning people like Pat Paulsen into wolf men, making Tiny Tim noses for the Red Skelton Dancers, and making up people like Burt Reynolds (for his very first pilot), Bobbie Gentry, Liberace, Boris Karloff, and applying clown makeup (a specialty of his) on Anthony Newley and others. Verne also did weekly duty on the Carol Burnett Show making up Tim Conway and Harvey Korman.



During his tenure at Columbia Broadcasting Service, Verne had the rare opportunity to mix two art forms in which he was extremely accomplished; makeup and music. Verne was a makeup artist for The Gong Show, where he'd do Chuck Barris' makeup and also those on the Gong dais, where he and Jaye P. Morgan became fast friends. Verne would feed Chuck Barris one-liners, while in the makeup chair, as well as furnish fill-in time on the show by essaying his own outlandish musical character Johan Sebastian Bork! playing piano, singing, or joking around.

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Chapter Four: Music and Monsters in the 70's

Milt Larsen and Verne were sitting at the downstairs bar of the Magic Castle one night in 1972 enjoying a booze, and lamenting the fact that Decca/Universal pulled their album "An Evening with Boris Karloff & His Friends" off the market. When the Lugosi's filed their lawsuit against Universal, Dracula masks and Lugosi voices on soundtracks and other Bela-related merchandise was pulled off the market by Universal immediately. Since their album had Bela's voice track on it, it was pulled too. Milt Larsen and Verne had tried to buy the album back from Decca several times, but they weren't interested in selling it back. So, Milt came up with the idea of doing their own spooky album that night as they sat at the bar, quaffing cocktails. He knew of Verne's pipe organ work because we had recorded some pipe organ atmospheric background music for the Castle's "Houdini Séance," so Milt believed Verne was the phantom for the organ. They booked an hour and went back to Whitney Studios in Glendale, where years before Walt Disney and organist Loren Whitney had built a recording studio around a massive 4-manual, 34-ranks-of-pipes Wurli-Morton organ. Verne played six compositions of his own - very heavy, ponderous, depressing themes suitable as background for embalming, interment, or simple mayhem - while Whitney recording engineer Paul Elmore kept the tape machine rolling. Executive Producer Milt Larsen adroitly directed the session.

When their new album "Phantom of The Organ" was released, critics in the music industry gave it rave reviews, and Erik has been playing his organ in people's homes and amusement parks, on Halloween and on cable and network television shows like "Good Times," "All My Children," and "Port Charles" ever since.

With the success of "Phantom", Verne and Milt were inundated with requests for "more spooky music," so Verne followed up with "Vampyre at the Harpsichord." In 1973, Verne explored, musically, another of his all-time favorite places: The Circus! He and Milt Larsen again teamed up to produce "Circus Clown Calliope," with a cover photo by Charles Eames. It features Verne on a real vintage Tangley Circus Clown Calliope, owned by Milt, playing a carefully condensed collection of clown songs. It was followed up with the album Circus Clown Calliope Volume 2 in 1974, for ELECTRIC LEMON RECORDS. These albums were sold at Disneyland and Disney World for many years, as well as magic and novelty shops, and many costume and Halloween shops, nationwide, along with their later recordings; "Music for Magicians," "Dr. Druid's Haunted Séance," "John Carradine - Poe with Pipes".

Milt Larsen - was opening his Mayfair Music Hall out in Santa Monica, and he and Verne were writing songs for that show. Verne was directing the first show as well, and also working at CBS. He was also writing and producing for satirist Stan Freberg (Stan lured him away from CBS for a short time to work at his Freberg, Ltd. - advertising agency). At this time, Verne met Stan Freeberg. He and Stan wrote and produced commercials for Sunsweet prunes, and Campbell's soup. Verne's plate was full.

Around 1972, Verne ran away with the circus! Ringling Bros. Barnum and Bailey Clown College, in their winter quarters of Venice, Florida, to be precise. There, he realized another childhood fascination. He applied his expert abilities at applying clown makeup on would-be Ringling clowns, and helped them to create their own designs. He also developed a method of taking life casts of veteran clowns, so as to preserve their makeup, for others to study.

In August of 1975, Nick Marcelino, head of make-up at Universal Studios was approached by Jay Stein and Terry Winnick to come up with a more elaborate makeup show to replace the one in the small Glamour Pavilion. He suggested that his friend Verne Langdon could create a show which could play to a larger audience up to 10 times per day. The stunt show was moved to a new venue, and the 1500-seat outdoor arena was prepared for The Land of a Thousand Faces show. As this was an open-air arena, the sets and props had to be securely fixed down so they didn't get dislodged during strong winds.

The show began with "The Spirit of The Mirror" (show host in "Spirit" makeup,) a wizened wizard reminiscing about the great screen makeups of the past, including Lon Chaney's Phantom of The Opera, followed by Charles Laughton's portrayal of Quasimodo, The Hunchback of Notre Dame, plus the Wizard of Oz characters: The Cowardly Lion, The Scarecrow, and the Tin Woodsman. As each famed makeup and its artist-creator were mentioned, their faces appeared within the huge ornate mirror displayed before the crowd and morphed one into the other. The pre-recorded voice of "The Spirit" was character actor

John Carradine, speaking lines written by Verne Langdon, to pre-recorded Theatre Organ accompaniment composed and performed also by Verne Langdon.

The classic makeups created in The Land of a Thousand Faces show (Frankenstein's Monster and the "New" Bride of Frankenstein) were applied to two tour visitors selected before the start of the show, and already seated in place when the curtains parted on the makeup department set following The Spirit of The Mirror and show introduction.

A giant panel 12'x12' made up of large color transparencies – four in each set – illustrated Glamour Makeup, Casualty Makeup, Old Age Makeup, and Clown Makeup on various movie stars of the day.

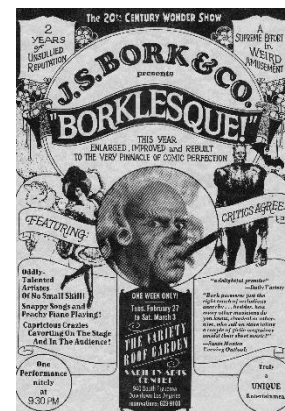


As each type of makeup was described each frame would light up. At the end of the 20-minute show, the chosen tourists had been transformed into Frankenstein's Monster and His "New Bride" (a special makeup conceived by Verne Langdon and Bob Zraick) in full view of the audience as the rest of the show was proceeding by original show makeup artists Keith Crary Marcos Barragan and Nick Pagliaro.

They appear in a brief sketch where the show host becomes the "mad doctor", and miming again to Carradine's "mad doctor" voice and Langdon's pipe organ score, the two monsters are enclosed in an "eternal life" cabinet by the mad doctor, then the switch is thrown and the cabinet "explodes" in a giant blast of smoke, revealing two charred skeletons in place of the tourist actors. Nearly all of the makeup artists who worked on The Land of A Thousand Faces show, Verne has brought from Ringling's Clown College, to work in the "Big Time" of Universal Studios.

Verne was busy in the makeup department at 20th Century Fox: the five "Planet of the Apes" films and the TV series, plus the many variety shows on which he was a makeup artist. He was also producing the Universal Studios live shows, writing commercials for Stan Freberg, the shows for Milt Larsen's Mayfair Music Hall and public appearances for Famous Monsters of Filmland. He wrote, produced and performed in a lavish stage show "Borklesque" Based on his character Johan Sebastian Bork! It was a vaudeville-styled, bawdy, irreverent show featuring everything from honky-tonk piano, to La Cage Au Faux type dancers.

During this time, he also wrote, and recorded "The Phantom of the Organ", "Circus Clown Calliope", "Dr. Druid's Haunted Séance", "The Vampyre at The Harpsichord", "Circus Clown Calliope Vol.1&2" and "Music for Magicians", "Hollywood on Parade" again, with John Carradine, "Key Of Sea", "Music By Candlelight", and three albums based on his Bork! character; "Musical Menopause", "Honkeychord", and "Bork Live!".



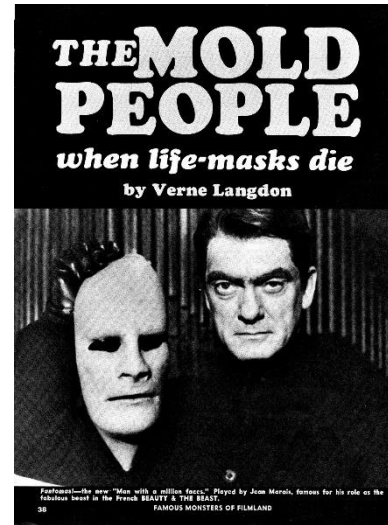
From the early seventies, Verne was balancing a grueling work schedule, and Dawn was working different jobs; Occasional body makeup for film (assistant to Edith Smit), Proofreader, and others. The two rarely had any quality time together. Due in part to their schedules, social circles and the pace of Hollywood in the 1970s they thought it best to separate. According to Verne, "Dawn is my ex-wife, and still my very best friend."



For the 1974 Famous Monsters Convention in New York, Verne and Keith Cray were tapped to provide an expose on makeup and monster makeup for movies. There were some lucky conventioners, who got their face casts made, and one or two attendees who were made up as original monsters. Jim Warren even got into the act, as Verne and Keith made him up as a fantasy Frankenstein monster complete with giant neck bolts, and a flower growing out of the top of his extremely tall head-piece!

Through-out the seventies, Verne was a ghost writer for Famous Monsters of Filmland contributing articles about certain makeups and projects. He also wrote many credited articles. One in particular was about mask making called "The Mold People".

"Visit Castle Dracula if you dare. You haven't lived until we've scared you to death."



That was the advertising line for

You haven't lived until we've scared you to death.

After 500 years in darkness, Count Dracula is making permanent daylight appearances in his new castle at Universal Studios Tour.

But do not come to Castle Dracula if you choose to be safe. Because the curious will be greeted by angry bats, hungry wolves and disturbing monsters. Who will trap you—torment you—and torture you. All for Dracula's cruel amusement.

We promise you that you will experience things at Castle

Dracula you never dreamed of—even in your nightmares.

And then, if you do indeed survive your stay at the Castle, you may not survive the 6,000 pounds of deadly Jaws that await you on the Tour.

Nor the chilling Alpine avalanche. The collapsing bridge and flash flood.

And of course, there's The Battle of Galactica. Where you'll be captured by hostile Cylons and caught in a spectacular but deadly laser battle.

Come to Universal Studios Tour. The world's biggest and busiest movie studio. And while you're here, visit Castle Dracula. (If you dare.)

The Prince of Darkness will be waiting to scare the daylight out of you.

Seven terrifying days a week.

Hollywood Freeway at Lankershim. Open daily. One price covers all attractions. Tours run continuously, Wednesdays 12 a.m. - 10 p.m. 5-30 p.m.; weekends 9:30 a.m. - 10 p.m. For information call (213) 677-1311; groups (213) 508-3771.

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UNIVERSAL STUDIOS TOUR
AN MCA COMPANY

"Castle Dracula" show which ran from Friday 13 June 1980 to January 31st 1983. This show was the first in the newly enclosed Castle Theatre (now home to the Special Effects Stage). As "The Land of a Thousand Faces" make-up show was so successful, but was in an open-air arena,

Universal management (Jay Stein & Terry Winnick) decided to build walls and a roof on the arena, and again, asked Verne Langdon to create a new show to take advantage of the space. An enclosed theater with greater control over lighting and sound meant the show could be more atmospheric and complex.

As well as Dracula and Igor his assistant, the show also featured The Wolfman, and animatronic Eric the Phantom of the Opera that Verne had originally voiced by Paul Lynde, (whom he had befriended while doing makeup on "The Hollywood Squares") but was re-recorded shortly after the run started because his voice was too recognizable. Guests in the park were selected from the audience to be made-up as Frankenstein's Monster, his Bride and the Wolf Man.

The 20-minute performance cost \$3 million (at 1980 prices) and ran up to twelve times daily. The final performance of Castle Dracula was on January 31st 1983 after which Conan: Sword & Sorcery Spectacular took up residence.

Chapter Five: Welcome to Slammers!

-Edgar Arce A.K.A. El Toro Bravo

I remember being on the wrestling team in high school my senior year. I was throwing around the freshman wrestlers and slamming some of the sophomores on the floor! My current coach told me about a gym in Sun Valley, roughly 30 minutes north of Hollywood. My coach was working at the gym, "I teach collegiate wrestling there, but they also teach people how to do pro-wrestling." I was immediately curious. "What's the name of the gym?" My coach replied, "Slammers.....Slammers Wrestling Gym." He continued, "The owner is pretty cool, very interesting guy named Verne." I took note and got the phone number, and made plans to head over the Slammers as soon as possible.

Verne had opened Slammers in 1989, about a year before I showed up. Slammers Wrestling Gym was a place for fans to take lessons and learn to be a wrestler or rent the ring for private matches with friends. The gym also had a museum of professional wrestling that had everything from authentic boots, costumes, even snippets of hair that once belonged to Gorgeous George.

When I met Verne, I was struck first of all by his stature. Here was this six-foot-plus giant behemoth of a man opening up the steel door and answering with a bellowing, "Yes?" I felt like I was knocking on the door of a dungeon. I introduced myself and let him know of the connection I shared with my high school wrestling coach. "Well, come right in! Welcome to Slammers!" He was talking like a ringmaster at a carnival. "So you want to be a wrestler?" I replied affirmatively. He showed me around and let me know about rules and procedures, prices, etc. Funny thing, after talking to him for about twenty minutes, we were chatting as if we'd known each other for years. It seemed that our love of wrestling had created an instant rapport. We were the same type of crazy.

Thursday nights in Bakersfield

Verne had a dream. His dream was to secure us a weekly "gig" wrestling and possibly make some money in the process. The opportunity presented itself in the form of Bakersfield, California. Strongbow stadium is located in the sleepy town of Bakersfield on 22nd and V street. Known initially as Strelch Stadium, then Strongbow Stadium, and these days The Bakersfield Dome, wrestling was the only thing consistent about the venue since its inception in 1941. In the 90s, Strongbow Stadium and the town of Bakersfield opened their arms and welcomed the Slammers Wrestling Federation.



The SWF would host shows every Thursday night for an entire year. Verne had finally secured us a weekly "gig" where we could showcase our talents and live the life of a professional wrestler.

One night we had a battle royal in Bakersfield. A battle royal is a match in which a specific number of wrestlers are in the ring simultaneously. In this case, it was about 15 wrestlers. The goal of the match is to eliminate each wrestler by tossing them over the top rope individually or via a coordinated group effort. At one point in the contest, I am in the corner and being double-teamed by Verne and another wrestler. As I am fending off the other wrestler attempting to pull my legs out from under me, my attention is immediately drawn upwards to a fast-approaching Verne Langdon closed fist. Verne clobbers me right in the mouth, causing me to clench my eyes closed, sending my head back while hearing a snapping sound. I knew what had occurred the minute his fist made contact with my face. In a panic, I looked down to the arena floor, searching every object I could spot. Instinctively, I climbed between the top and middle ropes and jumped down to the floor, and fell to my knees right about where I think it fell. Without skipping a beat, I grabbed my tooth (root and all), shoved it back into my gum, climbed back into the ring, and proceeded to unleash my fury on Verne. I kicked him and pounded on him as hard as I could, trying to inflict as much damage as I could. Both Verne and I were eventually eliminated from the contest and relegated to the dressing room.

After a few minutes had passed and we had time to cool down, we looked at each other and Verne began laughing uncontrollably. "What's so funny?" I angrily asked. "You!." Verne replied. He continued laughing and then said, "I've never been kicked or punched so hard in my life! You were trying to kill me out there." I replied, "I was trying to kill you. You knocked my tooth out!" Verne's eyes got wider as a look of surprise came over him. "Your tooth is not missing!" he declared. To which I replied, "That's because I jumped out of the ring and shoved it back in my mouth!" Verne's look of shock turned to a loud, hardy uncontrollable laugh that was so contagious; soon, I was laughing along with him. Anytime we encountered ourselves in a comedic predicament after that, he would warn me and say, "You better watch it, or I'll knock your tooth out again!"

Slammers Wrestling Gym and Slammers Wrestling Federation would exist for nearly two decades before finally closing its doors. It was not a financial success, but doing something you love does not always equate to a large bank account. Verne Langdon opened Slammers because of his love of wrestling and ran it in such a fashion until the final bell rang. While his accountant argued that Slammers was not a success, the cast of characters that came out of Slammers Wrestling Gym might beg to differ. Verne had provided us all a place to live out our dreams, even if only for a short amount of time.

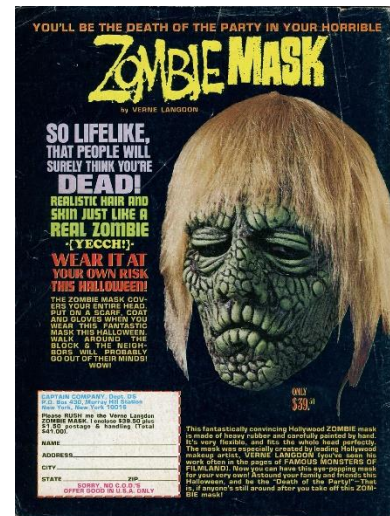


Chapter Six: Resurrection and Resolution

-Kelly Mann

I was fourteen in October of 1973, when I got my copy hot off the magazine rack at Bell's Bookstore, 204 Broad Street, in Lititz, Pennsylvania. It's a rural area, and newsstands with monster magazines for sale are rare. Adding this issue to my collection of two other Famous Monsters magazines, would make my three-mile bike trip into town well worth the ride. Actually, when I laid eyes on the back cover, and saw the incredible pebbled green face of Verne Langdon's ZOMBIE staring coldly back, I knew this was the coolest mask I could ever own. I had to acquire this mask!.....But where would I get the \$39.50, plus postage to pay for it?!

My folks owned a little Mom & Pop grocery store in an even littler town, and I didn't get much of an allowance. The money I did get, I usually blew on theatrical make up. I knew that by the time I'd manage to scrimp and save that great an amount, they probably wouldn't even be offering the mask for sale. Over the next month, as I eagerly awaited the next issue of FM to appear at Bells, my desire grew to really possess one of those ZOMBIES!



Time passed slowly, as it does for a kid. The next five issues never came to my favorite little bookstore. I saved as I could, all the while revisiting issue #102, reading and re-reading the article inside, over and over, about Verne Langdon. Then, to my glee, FAMOUS MONSTERS OF FILMLAND issue #107 appeared! It offered the usual rare fare of Universal monsters, Aurora monster hobby kits, Frankenstein Monster and Vampirella posters, Music for Robots and Phantoms of the Organs, and even real live squirrel monkeys! But, alas, no ZOMBIE MASKS! But...I just HAD to own a ZOMBIE! By next month, Issue #108 confirmed my fear. The ZOMBIE ad had re-appeared, but with a bold SOLD-OUT printed across its face!

Since that time in 1974, I've done stage work in Pennsylvania, moved to Los Angeles in 1985, worked in film, and even designed theme park projects for Disney and other studios. But sadly, I had never owned a Verne Langdon ZOMBIE mask. In 2001, I decided to leave the LA rat race. I moved to peaceful Florence, Arizona. Out in the desert solitude, an idea popped into my mind. I phoned a good friend in LA, Dante Renta. I remembered he was one of Verne Langdon's pals, so I asked Dante if he would talk to Verne and see if I could license the ZOMBIE mask character, re-sculpt it, and make and sell redux ZOMBIE masks, staying as faithful to his original as possible, so that people like me who didn't get one thirty years ago had a second crack at it!

On February 11, 2002, I received an e-mail from Verne! He liked my idea, and I was thrilled! He accepted my offer to work with him on the project via the Internet, saying he trusted me do a good job! We agreed on terms of license and sales, and began the project immediately. We e-mailed almost every day from the 11th through the beginning of March, hammering out the details via digital photos. According to Verne: "Dante Renta was over for dinner and brought up the question as to whether or not I'd be interested in having "The Zombie" re-created in a limited edition. I liked the idea, and so Dante put me together with Kelly Mann, who is just sensational!" Verne and I agreed that we would offer a limited edition of thirty masks. All with Certificates of Authenticity, signed by the both of us. And when we sold the final mask, #30, the mold would be destroyed, and no more would be made! I began the sculpture in water-based clay. Verne's emails were always colorful and bold, he was also very particular as to how the sculpture should look. "I enjoy 'watching' your progress, and wish I were there, perched on a stool, looking over your shoulder".

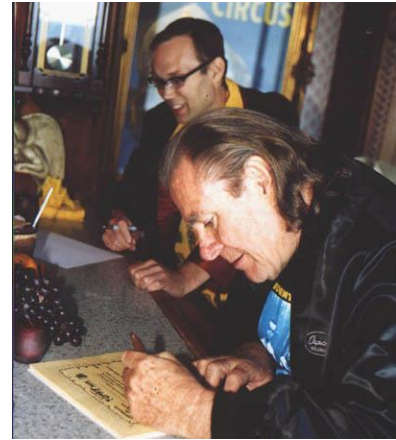
Not only was the sculpture on-going, but we were also designing the ads together, and I suggested that a Certificate of Authenticity should be included with each mask delivered. Verne agreed, so I designed and printed those as well. On March 5th I e-mailed Verne; "So, now we have: A certificate of authenticity, A hair color, A temporary ad, And some advance orders. All we need now is the mask. I sent you a "snap" this morning. It should arrive in a timely manner. Till then I will not touch the sculpture, so it will be a good representation"

What I had done to make a "snap" mold was to effectively make a 'life mask' of my sculpture, and cast it in thin plaster. I sent this snap mold casting to Verne so he could see, as exactly as possible, how the face looked. He told me he was very happy with it, and that I should proceed with the mold. While he had the snap, I asked him to paint it so that I might use it as a guide to hand-finish all our collector issues. While Verne was painting the plaster snap, I was making the mold on our Verne Langdon ZOMBIE. A few days later the painted snap arrived in the mail. It was beautiful! The mold was dry and ready. I began pouring the first orders for the re-issue of the mask I had coveted for thirty years! Following Verne's paint scheme, I hand-finished our maiden issue of ZOMBIES. During the sculpting and other processes, I built a website to advertise the ZOMBIE, in order that the masks could be pre-ordered on a first-come, first-served system. I reserved the edition's numbered masks for each customer at the time I received payment. When the mask was finished, I shipped it to them. The number of the mask matched the number on the certificate they received with the mask. In the last week of April, 2002, with the prototype finished, and the pre-ordered masks done, I drove from my home in Arizona, to Los Angeles, with Verne's prototype copy of the finished ZOMBIE, as well as a mask,



as a gift for Dante Renta, who was the man responsible for making the entire ZOMBIE project possible.

On April 30th, Valpurgisnacht, which is the European celebration of the yearly opposite of Halloween, (and one of Dante Renta's favorite holidays,) Dante and I drove up the coast to Montecito, to finally meet with Verne Langdon and present him with his prototype mask. This was a big thrill for me. Even though I felt I had come to know Verne somewhat through my correspondence with him during the past two and a half months, I was finally getting to meet the guy who was the major reason for my hobby, and for my chosen career; Monsters and make up.



Upon our arrival, Verne welcomed us into his eclectic abode, situated handily on the beach. We got right down to the fun business of awarding him his very own, first-one-made- copy of the Verne Langdon ZOMBIE. We three talked the day away. We signed our Certificates of Authenticity. Over good food and drink, we reminisced about masks, the movie business, and remembered people we didn't realize we knew in common 'til just then. For me, meeting Verne Langdon was not only a sort of fulfillment of my wanting to get that mask I desired for the last thirty years, but also being afforded the opportunity to collaborate with the person who was a major influence in my life. It has yielded a very creative partnership, and a true friendship. After resurrecting "The Zombie" as first, a mask, then a T shirt and a Tiki Mug, I actually still had to further convince Verne that the benchmark mask work he'd done at Don Post Studios and his creepy music albums were an influence to not only me, but so many of us Monster Kids. When other fans started telling him their stories and how much they loved those masks, he called Dawn and exclaimed over the phone, "Dawn, I'm famous!!".

By the beginning of August in 2008, Eliot Brodsky had already staged "Mask-a-palooza" in Cherry Hill New Jersey. I had made Verne Langdon aware of it, but both he and Jim Warren were unable to attend. Verne was with Jim at meetings on the West Coast for The Warren Music Group. Afterward however, both Verne and Jim Warren counseled and advised Eliot on how they thought Eliot should proceed in creating his newest venture "Monsterpalooza".

Verne was plunged even deeper into the world of monsters than ever before! He had become the "Monster of Ceremonies" for Monsterpalooza. "Studio Quality Masks" became the name of our little mask company for the masks I'd sculpt from his designs and concepts. We were selling Zombie merchandise; Verne was writing new spooky music albums on CD and I was art directing them. The monsters pulled him back into the mix, and he loved the creativity.

Epilogue/Conclusion

When we began our business as mask-makers, together, we hadn't known each other very long. Verne said to me "We'll just keep doing this 'till it isn't fun anymore.

That's the way Verne did everything. He was a bit of a hedonist. If there was something he wanted to try, he would. He believed in living his dreams, not just dreaming them. He'd moved to Mesa Arizona early in 2009, he only lived about 35 minutes from me, and every day we had fun, either working on the current project, or dreaming up something new.

Over the eight years we were partners in creativity, we made Four original masks as "Studio Quality Masks" in the spirit and quality of his tenure at Don Post Studios. We collaborated to create over twenty CDs. Verne and I resurrected both his ZOMBIE and The Neanderthal masks. Cult Movies magazine also tapped us for a cover and two articles. We made and marketed a T shirt bearing the ZOMBIE's likeness, as well as a ZOMBIE Tiki Mug. To support our ZOMBIE mug sales, we built Trader Verne's Tiki Lounge, a cyber bar combining Tiki and monsters, where one could get drink recipes and read the many musings of the "Old Trader Hissel".

Early on New Year's Eve in 2010, he called and asked if Tina and I were free that night. We were. We drove to his place, where he had a huge spread of deli meats, cheeses and veggies. Motioning to a bouquet of a dozen roses, he said Jim Warren sent all this. He said he and Jim had a quarrel, and when they realized their friendship was more important, Jim sent a "party" as a way of apology. We ate and played Scrabble (Verne won every game) and laughed 'till after 2011 came in. Verne played several of his songs for us on his baby grand; "I'm the #1 fan of the elephant man" and "Sippin' a navy Grog", included.

After a great evening, it became late, so we said our goodbyes. Verne said "I'm glad I got to spend this evening with some of my best friends". We let him know we were very glad that he called us to come over. Tina and I drove home feeling lucky that we had such a friend as Verne Langdon.

The next day, his friend and houseguest Artie, called me to say Verne had passed away in his sleep.

Verne's services were held on January 25th, 2011 at 1:00 p.m.at Pierce Brothers Valhalla, North Hollywood, CA.

Verne's "Family"; Dawn Langdon Karrasch, her husband (who Verne called his husband-in-law) Brent Karrasch, their daughter Brianna and her husband Jason are now the bearers of the memory of Verne's legacy and music. Verne is now represented on Instagram as "The World of Verne Langdon". Verne's masks, mugs and music are always available through vernelangdon.com. The website is a constant work in progress, as new items inspired by Verne's ideas are created. I work with them to maintain the inventory of the things Verne and I made, and also some of the new things that will carry Verne's ideas and concepts to new generations of monster lovers.

Bibliography

Acknowledgments

Dawn Langdon Karrasch

Jimmy Doughty's "Box of Monsters" interview with Verne Langdon

Edgar Arce aka "El Toro Bravo"

Thestudiotour.com