Saving the children’s records
Saturday, July 13, 2013 by: Chuck Miller

My friend Peter Muldavin is a renowned collector of a very specialized music genre. He has the largest phonograph record collection of children’s music in the world. That’s right. All those little 78s and 45s that were originally purchased for kids – he owns them. About ten years ago, I helped him itemize and catalog his collection for a reference book; in return, he helped me put together the children’s records chapter of my second record collector’s guide.

When I visited his New York City apartment to photograph some of his records for my book, I noticed that he had packed every possible space – every closet, every crawl space, every location – with his rare recordings. He was kind enough to let me photograph what I needed, and he told me all the backstories of each disc.

Eventually, he put his growing collection into a series of storage facilities in Long Island. We stayed in touch, saw each other at various record collecting shows.

And then, the other day, I received some news from Peter. It was sad news – and inspiring news at the same time.

Last year, one of his storage units in Long Island was flooded out by Superstorm Sandy. His priceless and irreplaceable collection of youth vinyl and shellac and plastic and paper recordings were damaged.

This isn’t the first time that one of my friends lost a record collection to flooding. My college friend Mark “Zip” Pisani lost a ton of vinyl in a flood three years ago. And my Grandma Betty’s house was built on a flood plain, so there were times when, after a major storm, her basement could turn into an indoor lake.

Peter’s records were damaged. Virtually unplayable.

But Peter had an idea.

He donated the damaged records to a sound restoration laboratory at Florida Atlantic University, and the team began the arduous task of cleaning, washing, un-warping and restoring both the records and their fragile paper sleeves. As you can see from this report from WPBF.com, the team at Florida Atlantic are doing whatever they can to re-capture the songs, the joys, the entertainment of these fragile audiophonic treasures. The records were originally designed to withstand multiple rigorous spins on old steel-tipped kiddie phonographs; they weren’t designed to withstand damage from a superstorm.

There’s also a video documenting the FAU restoration efforts; I tried to embed it in this blog, but it wouldn’t embed properly. Instead, I recommend you visit this link and see the clip there.

Categories: Music