

Brought Together by the Blues

by Art Tipaldi

Imagine playing every night for 25 years in one of the hardest-working blues bands in the world with your spouse never more than 12 bars away.

When Rod and Honey Piazza are on the job, they're never apart. They play the gig, get in the van, ride to the hotel room, get up the next morning, ride for hours to the next gig, set up, play, and repeat the process. Over and over.

"The secret is to have a marriage that would work if you weren't in the business," said Honey. "We're in a little box in the day — the car — and in a little box at night — the room. Then for as many as three weeks at a time, we work together every night with a band where the only common thread is your love of the music. I certainly wouldn't advise it for husbands and wives that aren't used to being together all the time.

"Being on the road with Rod is one of the strengths of our relationship. Together, we're just a good couple. At night when we are alone, we always talk about the future. All of our plans have been discussed on the road. That's why you've got to have a life that you can come back to."

What the Piazzas come back to is their home and family in Southern California. They recently built a house, custom-designed by Honey, on five acres in the mountains of Murrieta, Calif., between San Diego and Los Angeles.

It's a long way from their early days together in the mid-'70s. They each had left difficult relationships and were struggling to raise Honey's two children in a house on a tiny 50-by-100-foot lot in Riverside.

Honey toiled as a supermarket checker, Rod worked in a hair salon, and together they mowed lawns on weekends. "Music didn't build this house," said Rod. "This house is really the result of getting lucky in the classic-car market in the late 1980s, working mowing lawns at the same time we were playing gigs at night, and selling a house that I bought in 1975 for a lot more than we paid for it."

Fans who think Rod and Honey sit at home and play harmonica and piano all day would be surprised to know that music is only one aspect of their lives. "It's an intricate part of our lives; it's one of the threads," said Honey. "And we are always thinking of it. In the beginning, every day was learning a new song and practicing, getting ready for gigs. Then, as time progresses, just like with everybody, it stopped becoming so consuming."

For Rod, life at home begins and ends at a beach in San Onofre called "Old Man" — the Pepper's Lounge of the surf world. It's where the original long boarders still meet to swap tips and stories. Honey also surfs whenever possible.

Back in his garage, Rod is surrounded by 1950s memorabilia: antique radios, vintage bullet-style taxicab microphones, old Coke and Pepsi posters, antique Nehi and Dad's Root Beer bottles, and Silvertone amps. Surf and blues stickers and photos of the band cover the walls.

