



PLAYERS – PART 6

by **Dick Odom**

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In the formative stages of *Skillet & Glass*,

I put together a list of my friends who initially were, first and foremost, **Cooks**... professionals or amateurs...**Cooks**. On that first list was **Chef Mike Clinton** (Big Mike...Big 'un). I shared that first list with Jody, and in typical fashion—you ask for it you get it from Jody--“Dick, you’ve got Mike Clinton’s name on the list, but one of your very best friends, Dan, Mike’s brother, is not on the list! Whyzat?” My reply, “Well, **Dan’s not a cook!**”

Big Mike is one of our members whom I most revere. Why? Because of his triple role—chef, barkeep, and owner of a renowned restaurant...and spent a ton of time during his tenure--where?--in the kitchen, and behind the bar.

MacDinton's (pronounced Mack'-Dinton's) is still a fixture in Tampa, now known as *MacDinton's Irish Pub*, though Big Mike has been a fixture in Rock Hill for the past 27 years operating a local *Cracker Barrel*. In the first 13 years of its existence, *MacDinton's* was one of the most (if not, the most) popular bar-and-restaurants, in Tampa. Beginning as a brainstorm with his friend Jack Davis, *MacDinton's* was founded, and named a combiner of Jack Davis and Mike Clinton.

Steaks, seafood, and great cocktails, *MacDinton's* flourished for 10 plus years in Tampa's most popular restaurant district, SoHo, for “South Howard”, and *MacDinton's* was on South Howard Street. Then along came change...inevitable change...Ybor City. Out of the blue, night life—meaning food, spirits, revelry—transitioned from SoHo in Tampa to Ybor City.

Ybor City (say it...Ee' Bo), an historic neighborhood just northeast of downtown Tampa, originally settled by Cubans and famous for its cigar factories, started becoming the new trendy destination, with cute shops and restaurants--had that Old Havana feel. The writing was on the wall, but encrypted. Meaning, it wasn't readily apparent but *MacDinton's* was doomed. Mike and Jack held on.

What was happening while holding on? Well, one of the most popular entrees on *MacDinton's* menu was its Maryland crab cakes. Big 'un had an idea that a little

transition to some *Koobah* cuisine might pull some of the old patrons back home. So, he traded recipes with one of his restaurant friends in Ybor City. Maryland crab cakes for Cuban sandwiches. But adding the “Cubans” to *MacDinton’s* menu didn’t make much of a dent in bringing life back the formerly popular night spot.

The successes they had had, had (**wow!** I love that--**had had, had?**--how many times does that happen?)...translated to savings, even though they had become accustomed to a somewhat lavish lifestyle. They steadily poured their savings, and borrowed funds, into *MacDinton’s*, certain that the life support would spawn survival. The popularity would return. Had to! All the long time patrons (for years)—they would come back...they would come back! Just hold on.

They *Dinton*.

The savings slowly deteriorated as they held on. The debt accumulated. Now the debt was overwhelming. *MacDinton’s* succumbed to the...encrypted. Mike and Jack closed the, perhaps, most exciting chapter of their lives, and moved on.

For Mike, this played into a dream of his dad. Mike grew up with his mom, dad and three brothers in St. Louis, a sports town where the energy of competition was always in the air. That energy pervaded among the Clinton brothers there was competition at every event—breakfast, dinner, name it—in fact these are the most competitive brothers I have observed since the Mannings, Cooper, Peyton and Eli. And the competition translated to a closeness among the boys that ran through their childhood years ‘til today. Skillet & Glass loves that competitive nature.

Mike’s dad was in the car business while the boys were growing up. He was a car salesman, a Ford guy. He eventually moved the family to the Orlando area where the boys continued their competition and comradery and growing up, through high school and college. Mike would go to college in Orlando where he was introduced to the restaurant business and became a partner in franchise in Orlando that is a subsidiary of Marriott Corporation, Farrell’s Ice Cream Parlour Restaurant. His three brothers went to college in Tampa, USF (no bull), and Mike would spend time with them enjoying night life there and got to know the bar and restaurant landscape there, eventually leading to the opening of *MacDinton’s*.

During the years when the restaurant was booming, Mike’s dad—also named Jack—had managed to buy a Ford dealership in Rock Hill, South Carolina and taking one of his sons, Tom, as a partner, ultimately naming it Clinton Family Ford...“family” being the operable word. Daddy Jack’s dream had been to one day see all of the family--that at one time was spread from Tampa to Iowa--back in one place. His dream came true. The two other brothers, Dan and Jim, joined the family

business and now Mike had the opportunity to relocate, and searching for a restaurant opening in Rock Hill, landed a job running a local *Cracker Barrel* that just happens to be situated right across Interstate 77 from Clinton Family Ford's new dealership, completing his dad's dream.

We'll see some competition and demonstrations from Mike in our coming fun with Skillet & Glass, and we'll hear some good stories from the Big 'un. You're gonna love getting to know Big Mike.

Oh, and BTW, when Big Mike goes back to Tampa and visits *MacDinton's Irish Pub*, he's treated like royalty. The "Mac Daddy".

Enough for this writing...**MORE TO COME!** Still warming up. Still hope to eventually introduce you to all of our members in similar fashion. In the meantime "fellows", keep on cookin'.

"Creativity is inventing, experimenting, growing, taking risks, breaking rules, making mistakes, and having fun." Mary Lou Cook