

James "Yank" Rachell was a person that had mastered the expression of the human condition. He could tell you about life. He loved living and he didn't take it for granted. So often he spoke about it. He dealt with emotions and expressed them in ways that made you realize that feelings are universal. And in doing this, he let all of us know that we are not alone in the human experience. He knew how to live. And in a world where so many people struggle with apathy and hopelessness, he was an example of *joy* because he *felt* and he let you know about it. He knew it was okay to talk about the blues. But the blues emotion was only a fragment of the man. He spoke of friendship, loyalty, love, sex, and family joy, to mention a few. He knew how to "hang out" and pass the time. He was an artist on *how to live*.

So many people were touched by Yank all over the world. *The WORLD*. He was someone that you didn't forget. He knew how to accept affection and adoration. He allowed people to let him be a "*Legend*" and we saw greatness in him because of his humility and humbleness. He was a gentlemen and a kind person.

Everyone has varied "Yank experiences":

Some were from afar - you might have just watched him play one time.

Some relationships were very personal.

Some were love/hate friendships - you couldn't get through a night without a friendly argument.

He and Jimmy Walker, the great blues pianist, were like this. They liked passing time "competitively" you might say, but I know that Jimmy was a dear friend to him and I could see it in Jimmy's eyes as well.

So many people were touched by Yank in one way or another. And one thing was certain, he was someone you didn't forget easily. He impressed people to think about him. Sharing these Yank experiences with each other can only "round" our knowledge of the man, the person, the musician, and the legend. It is *communion*. He does live within us.

I think that Steve Robbins said it best, "We were made special . . ." because we were touched by him in one way or another. But let us not forget how special we made him feel. Yank spoke of friendship. "I got so many friends here." "Everybody know me." "So many people so nice to me." Yank saw the good in people. He saw the "other stuff" too, but he could readily spot the good in a person and he let you know about it.

Yank loved women. All kinds of women. And he always thought that they loved him too. And many did, but probably not quite the way he wanted them

to love him. He was lonely. He understood love and loss. He lived with loneliness. At the age of 87, he married once and he loved twice. He loved his wife, and after her, he loved someone very special around here. He spoke about her often. I thought it marvelous that he could fall in love again and he presented an example that love is not just for the young. It is ageless.

He loved his family. He truly loved his family. Sometimes when he'd pick up one of the kids, I saw so much joy in his eyes. He worried so much about taking care of them because he loved them so much. They kept him busy and less lonely. His family knew how to share him with the world - to let others adore him. He has given them his music and spirit. He loved them very much and was so proud of their talents.

Yank was truly a musician. He worked on his craft. And like any musician, he didn't always want to play a gig. Sometimes he said that *'he had the blues so long that he didn't have 'em any more'*. But, even on the days he might not be into playing a show, once he got started, he'd light up when the people would get going.

He loved making people happy. He loved giving "moments". He could tell some "stories". He loved having happy people around him and to know that he was the *cause of it all*. He liked showing-off, but he didn't need to. His presence had *presence*. His presence had greatness and that was entertaining in itself.

And I know that he was a musician, as well as being a legend and an entertainer, because he learned new music. He would play at home sometimes on music - and not just on blues chord progressions. He was open-minded to new music as long as it was good in his opinion (and might I mention - 'not too loud'). He liked people doing their own thing. He could appreciate something different. He liked the Aquarium Rescue Unit, Dave Grissom (of just a few that were played for him). So he was open to new music.

But nothing made him feel better than blues music played well (and might I mention again - 'not too loud'). And, of course, bad blues music just annoyed him, but he'd never tell you it was bad.

He was a very polite man.

Yank will be missed. He was walking greatness. He was a gentle soul. A kind man. A man that loved humor and dirty jokes. A man that had "cryin' spells" and wasn't afraid to talk about it. A man who loved people. A man that lived as

an example of all that a human being can be
when they reach their potential.

-[Yuni Percifield](#)-