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# TIMES-GAZETTE



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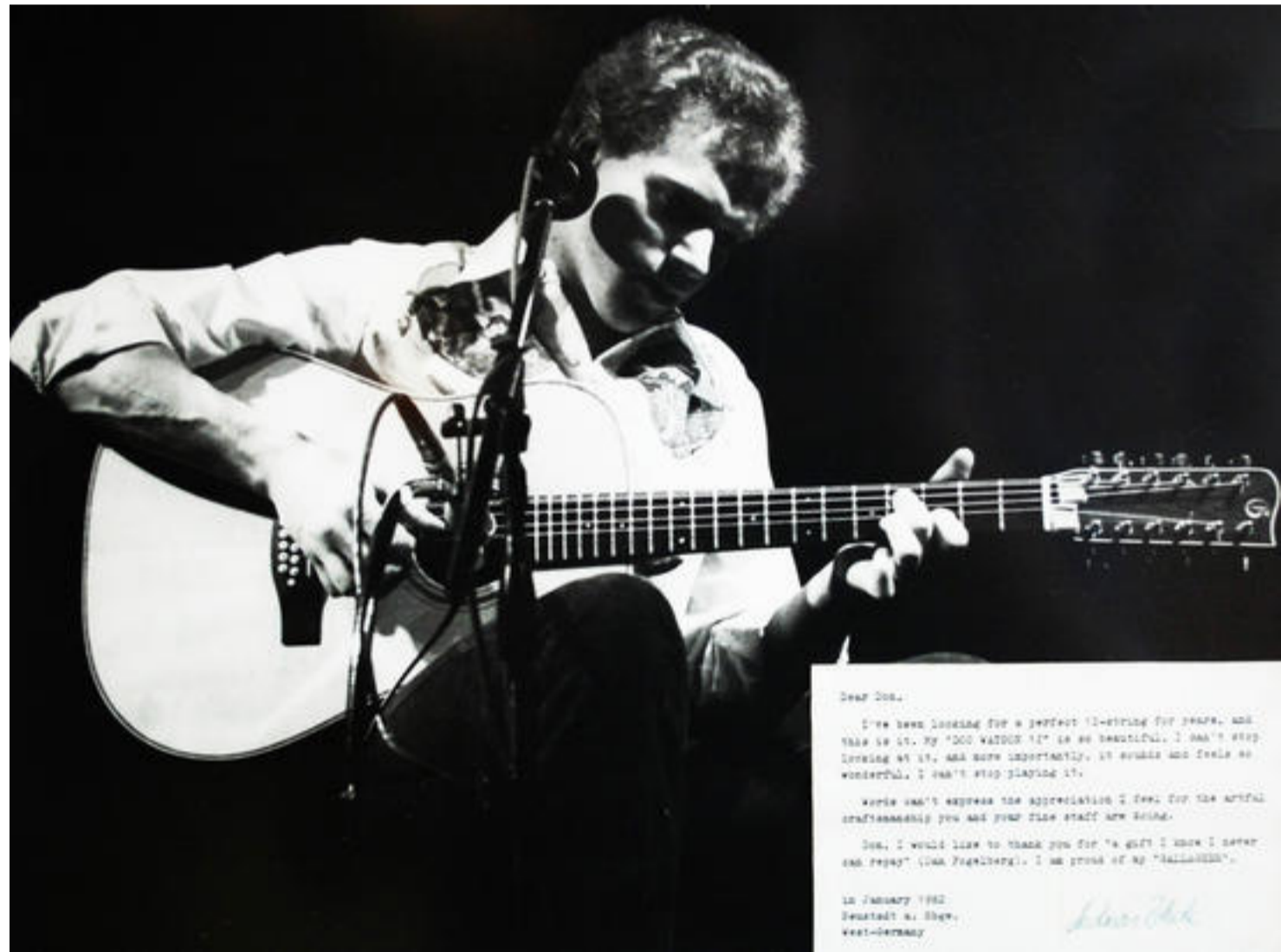
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## Reunited... and it sounds so good

Sunday, September 2, 2012  
By MITCHELL PETTY ~ mpetty@t-g.com



A photo and note that Andreas Rohde sent to Don Gallagher in 1982 hangs proudly in the shop in Wartrace. Rohde wrote, "Words can't express the appreciation I feel for the artful craftsmanship you and your fine staff are doing."

When German native Andreas Rohde toured the country interviewing prospective guitar makers, he had no idea that he would develop a 30-year relationship with a family from little ol' Wartrace.

Rohde was already enamored with flatpicking icon Doc Watson and his signature Gallagher guitar, so Don and Jean Gallagher taking him in as family on his first trip to Tennessee was icing on the cake.



Don Gallagher handles the freshly-renovated Doc Watson 12-string guitar #1434 that has now been returned to its owner in Germany, 30 years after it

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was stolen.  
(T-G Photo by Mitchell Petty)  
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## Just like family

"They invited me to stay with them, which seemed to be the most natural thing for them," Rohde said. "At the age of 22, I had never experienced open hearts like that before."

"Hospitality has been a tradition in our family," Gallagher said. "I occasionally will talk to someone who will share the delight they had as a young person coming to Wartrace to see our guitars and my father inviting them down to his home for dinner."

Rohde came to Wartrace while on a mission to find the perfect guitar maker to build his dream guitar. He was in the market for a 12-string guitar, and asked Gallagher if he would build a special Doc Watson model. Gallagher hadn't yet built a 12-string Watson, but obliged for the young, intrepid German.

The guitar and its serial number would be recorded in Gallagher's ledger, just as every other guitar the company crafts.

## Stolen!

In August 1980, Rohde received his one-of-a-kind guitar back home in Germany. Only two months later, however, it was stolen after a concert that Rohde had played in the German city of Oldenburg.

"Unfortunately, as far as I remember, I had proudly told the audience the story of the guitar," said Rohde.

The next year, Rohde returned to Wartrace to take part in the local bluegrass festival, but regrettably had to compete with another brand of guitar. He won second place, and stayed with the Gallagher family once again.

## Touching moment

"I remember the fun that I had standing in the shadow of a Tennessee tree, playing Tennessee music with Tennessee folks," he said. "The next day, I was standing in the open door of the Greyhound bus, half-way sleeping and still overwhelmed by that weekend. Don promised to build me the same guitar once again as a present. There is no need to describe my tears on the bus."

Rohde and Gallagher would travel to Winfield, Kan., a year later to take part in the Walnut Valley National Flat Pickin' Championships, where Rohde won fourth place. Many years would later pass before the two would come in contact again, however.

## Surprise find

Last November, Rohde's brother called him to alert him that there was someone in Oldenburg, Germany offering a Gallagher 12-string guitar on eBay.

No question, this was Rohde's guitar. It had to be.

In a matter of hours, Gallagher sent Rohde a certificate confirming that #1434 was his old friend's unique guitar. But, according to German law, if someone gets an object in "good belief" and holds it for 10 years, it is legally theirs.

So Rohde was forced to buy his prototype Gallagher for a second time, at the highest price. And unfortunately, the guitar was ill-maintained outside of Rohde's grateful hands.

## Good as new

"When I told Don about the development, this wonderful man told me I should not worry about those extra Euros," explained Rohde. "He would restore #1434 for me without any cost, no matter what had to be done. I would only have to take care of the shipping."

"Tears again?" he asked. "Yes."

Gallagher and his staff received the old guitar and gave it a total rehabilitation -- it needed one.

Why would someone devote so many man hours to a project that will bring no profits?

Well, obviously Rohde and Gallagher formed a lasting bond some 30 years ago. And Rohde has since bought another of the Wartrace guitars. But if you ask Don about Andreas Rohde, he'll offer up a few anecdotes to outline his sentiments.

"There are a few things that bopped into my mind about Andreas when he contacted me about his stolen guitar," Gallagher said. "Him writing a note to my boys thanking them for letting him eat their Captain Crunch cereal. Him teasing me as we drove to the guitar championships that I was driving too slowly. The speed limit was 55 -- he said they would arrest me for driving that slowly on the Autobahn. Him staying at our home and

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the dinner party we had for him when he came to pick up his replacement 12-string in January of 1982."

## It's about relationships

Clearly, Gallagher goes above and beyond when it comes to customer service and appreciation. He can tell you several stories that are equally amazing, and make you realize that maybe we do live in a small world.


Gallagher values these stories as much -- if not more than -- his customers, the subjects do.

"The relationships we have developed with our customers over the years is one of the aspects of this business that makes it so special for us," he said. "Not only do we enjoy getting to personally know our customers, but that interaction has been a big influence in the development of our guitars."

If only we could get all businesses to value their customers on this level, we'd be in pretty good shape.

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Great story! The Gallagher family has long been known for their hospitality and integrity, and the quality of their 'product'...Happy Birthday Don Gallagher!!!

-- Posted by **dkd57** on Sun, Sep 2, 2012, at 9:01 AM 

The Custom that Don, Stephen and crew built in memory of my late son, Ward, is a prized possession of mine. I feel Ward's spirit every time I pick it up. I think it is a direct reflection of the care and craftsmanship put into its creation.

-- Posted by **James Anderson** on Mon, Sep 3, 2012, at 9:03 AM 

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