



## Donald Alfred Bajus

March 25, 1933 - October 29, 2021

Bajus, Donald Alfred Animator, business owner, painter, jazz music devotee, dancer, jokester, and lover of life, passed away at age 88 on October 29, 2021. Please see his tongue-in-cheek self-portrait, titled "Minnesota Summer," at Star Tribune online obituaries. Don was born on March 25, 1933, and grew up in Neepawa, MB, Canada, with parents who encouraged his dual after-school passions: playing defense on championship hockey teams and playing trumpet in community jazz bands. Also a gifted young cartoonist, Don wanted to become an animator like Walt Disney, so he moved to Minnesota to study at Minneapolis College of Art and Design. In the early 1950s, the art school didn't have motion drawing instruction (today it's nationally recognized for its media arts), so Don created his own style of animation. His first effort was inspired by Disney's dancing broomstick! Don left MCAD in 1954 to further his animation education as an apprentice, and later as director, of Phillips Gutkin & Assoc. in Winnipeg. In 1958 Studio One, a Minneapolis graphic arts firm, recruited Don to establish the first commercial animation production studio in the Midwest. In 1970, he and partner Mike Jones launched Bajus-Jones Film Corporation, also a 2D animation studio, later expanding to Sounds Like Bajus Jones. Don Bajus Film Corporation and Don Bajus Unlimited came later. An early Bajus-Jones promotional piece claimed that "Animation can do anything, except save a bad idea." His firms' animated television commercials for many well-known local and national brands won numerous awards including a 1985 Clio Award (for excellence in advertising) featuring a giant runny nose for a Kleenex commercial. Don's mind was ahead of the times, he was always looking for new technology. In 1993, he became a founder, partner, and creative director in the launch of Windlight Studios. In a basement in downtown Minneapolis, Windlight pioneered computer-aided motion-capture animation; movements performed by live actors (including Don) were transferred to computer generated characters. The new technique allowed for greater realism and expression in animation and changed the industry. Scott Dyer, president of Windlight Studios, remembers Don as a unique spirit who possessed limitless drive and was so absorbed in his work that he needed to set an alarm to remind himself to eat. At his core, Don was a storyteller across multiple media . . . filmmaking, painting, sculpting, creative writing, music, puns, shaggy dog stories, and tall tales. He was known for an ongoing series of ten elaborate and highly

detailed time-travel paintings, each with a humorous twist, that showed him working alongside yet-to-be famous artists such as Vincent Van Gogh, Salvador Dali, and Frida Kahlo, and others as they painted what would become their signature artworks. The paintings illustrated a novel he was still pulling out of his vivid imagination and putting on paper. Don is well remembered as a kind and generous man with an irresistible smile, a perpetrator of gags and practical jokes, and an inventive thinker who enlivened every discussion with his wit, humor, and unrivaled intellect. He was an avid reader of everything from sci fi to scientific discoveries, a home repair enthusiast, a tree sculptor, a maker of hilarious greeting cards for his friends and family, and a mentor to animators and the less fortunate alike. He was proud of his dual Canadian/US citizenship and traveled often to Canada and Chicago (his second home) and around the world. Don kept up his trumpet embouchure and followed his passion for jazz his entire life. And his hands were never without a pencil. Upon Don's passing, Ron Pitts, former animation director of Windlight Studios, imagined Don stepping lively toward the Pearly Gates with a group of animated characters, avatars, and famous artists welcoming him to their heavenly art collective, and calling out in a perfect imitation of Don: "Greetings!" Don is preceded in death by parents Albert and Vera (McGinnis) Bajus, sister Phyllis (Bajus) and brother-in-law John Paulsen. He is survived by his life-long dancing partner and wife of 63 yrs, Beverly (Broughton), feline pal Salsa, loving nieces and nephews, members of the Minikahda Club, Never Too Old Artists, and the Fancy Foot Dance Club, and many, many friends. A celebration of life will be held at a later date. The family extends their gratitude to N. C. Little Hospice, Jones-Harrison Residence, and Baywood Home Care. Memorials preferred to the Don Bajus MCAD Animation Program Fund at Minneapolis College of Art and Design, 2501 Stevens Ave, Mpls., MN 55404 or [mcad.edu/support-mcad/give](http://mcad.edu/support-mcad/give).