

This article by Brenda Bowen Cox was first published in the June 2014 issue of the Sylvia Woods Harp Center e-Newsletter

You can find Brenda's PDFs at [www.harpcenter.com/Brenda](http://www.harpcenter.com/Brenda)

What an honour for me to be included in this powerful line-up of harp experts who compose and arrange music for the harp! When I was a little girl, I fell in love with the sound of the harp, but never got one until long after I had become an adult. My mother is a pianist so my first instrument, of course, was piano. I found out many years later that she had always dreamed of playing a harp. I have always enjoyed arranging and composing music and finally put my pencil to the paper for the first time when I was in high school, in an attempt to illustrate what I was hearing in my head. There were no computer programs in those days to play it back, so I sat at the piano and played as I wrote, measure by measure. I imitated Mozart, Bach and Schumann mostly. Just after college, I discovered folk music, including what we know as Celtic music which I am especially drawn to although my tastes in music genres are fairly eclectic.



My first two books are collections of tunes from Cape Breton. In the summertime on "the Cape" it would be difficult to avoid music. There are ceilidhs and dances every night all around the island. One of my favourite Cape Breton pieces to play on the harp is the *Glencoe March*. It is in my first book, ***A Cape Breton Bouquet***, an easy arrangement and a fun tune to play as well. The first time I went to the Thursday night dance at Glencoe Mills the directions I was given to get there were quite intriguing, and frankly, a little scary. I was told to go south out of Inverness, turn left at the Mother of Sorrows shrine and proceed as the road turned to gravel, taking the fork in the road to the right, and continue to drive on. Then I was told "when you think you have driven until you are hopelessly lost, you will be there."

It was exactly like that. Just before I got to the parish hall, I could see a small light where cars were parked. The little building was throbbing with the dancers' feet in rhythm to the music. It is mind boggling to think of all the talented Cape Bretoners who have played those dances - Buddy MacMaster, Jerry Holland, Brenda Stubbert, Natalie MacMaster, and the list goes on and on. Here is a YouTube clip of Neil Cameron, a young fiddler playing the *Glencoe March*. <http://youtu.be/OwIFDj6C1BI>

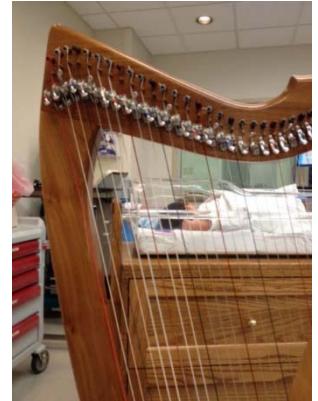
For more information, you can check out *Cape Breton Island - The Celtic Heart of North America*, and the *Cape Breton Media Historical Society* on Facebook. Also, *Glencoe Mills* has its own page which includes a photo of the parish hall where the dances are held. They call them "square dances" there, but they are not like square dances you may imagine in the US. These 2 photos were taken at Whale Cove.





My second (and easier) Cape Breton book, *Another Bouquet*, also contains some very light-hearted and simple tunes that really "dance" on the harp strings. I hope people will read the short explanations included with the tunes so they can feel more personally familiar with them. I always like learning something about a tune and/or the composer as it gives me more information for my interpretation of the music.

*Promise* by Natalie Sleeth. It was requested by a pediatrician in the NICU at the hospital where I play. I use it a lot for all ages and I am very glad the doctor asked for it or I might never have known of this piece. Here's a photo of my harp in the hospital nursery.



The most popular title in my sheet music collection has been *Hymn of*



Yes, I really do have a labyrinth in my backyard. Anyone is welcome to come play in my labyrinth!

Geordie can't decide which piece he likes most, but I think he likes the one with the picture of the cat on the front.



- Brenda Bowen Cox