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I don't remember my first harp lesson. I had just turned four and we were spending the summer at my family's little cottage in Onset, MA, near Cape Cod. Our next-door summer neighbors were Gladys and Kenneth Custance, harpists from Boston. They were also Spiritualist ministers, Onset having been a hotbed of Spiritualism since the late 1800s, and had a little church one street over. The story is that I went to the church to have a piano lesson, as Kenneth was also a pianist, but came home having had a harp lesson instead. They rented me a Clark Irish harp, probably the only kind of harp available for children in 1944.

My parents were both musical, Dad a violinist, Mom a jack-of-all-trades who began with piano then learned whatever instrument was needed, like saxophone in high school, then violin, viola and oboe. She co-founded the Hingham (MA) Civic Orchestra in 1946 and I was its harpist from age 9, having moved to a pedal harp at 7 -- what terrific experience that was, and set me up for a lifetime of playing with orchestras wherever I lived.

I continued lessons with the Custances, traveling into Boston in the winter and walking to the church in the summer, until I was 14 when I changed to Bernard Zighera, harpist of the Boston Symphony and from a different school of playing. He was a true taskmaster, speaking sternly in French and pounding me on the shoulder, but after a year I finally got it, changing finger and hand position to his liking, and we became friends.

One day when I was 15 or so his wife asked where I was thinking of going to college. "Um, Julliard?" I proffered. "Don't do it!" she said. "All Bernard thinks about is music, morning, noon and night. Go somewhere else!" So, being an obedient girl, I went to Wellesley and majored in music.

After college I spent the next decades being a freelancer and teacher as well as wife and mother. By 1991, after 16 years in Amherst MA where I had a full complement of students (about 28), had long been in a flute and harp duo, had helped start and played percussion in a town band, and had free-lance contacts all over Western Massachusetts and into Vermont and Connecticut -- we moved to Los Angeles!

Suddenly my days were completely empty, and just as suddenly, little tunes started creeping into my head. I wrote them down and then decided to try to write some more with certain students in mind whom I'd left behind in the Pioneer Valley of Western MA. I bought and learned a little computer music program (soon obsolete, alas) and off I merrily went. This resulted in "Valley Tunes," my first collection.



Around that time Sylvia Woods opened her Harp Center in Glendale and I was lucky enough to be offered a job there. What an education I got! Sylvia's was a big-time distribution center where I learned about ordering, mailing, keeping records, and so on, as well as little tricks to make my music look better. I also saw how choosy she was in selecting music to sell.

In 1993 we moved back east and I wrote some little pieces for beginning students called *Petty Larcenies* and then *Petty Larcenies Two*, as well as some solo pieces. I loved having fun with the music, whether in style, rhythm or title, and others have enjoyed them, too.

I also wrote up a lot of notes from harp teachers and other harpists, added my own research, and produced *Teaching the Lever Harp* that has proved to be a popular text.

A medley called *Moonbeams* followed, and a collection called *So, How Was Your Day?* as well as several ensemble arrangements.

These days, in Seattle since 1995, I take care of lively grandchildren and direct the Harp Spectrum website, and am the secretary for the Greater Seattle AHS Chapter, preferring to write about our instrument than fight Seattle's nasty traffic to free-lance.

-- Joyce Rice

