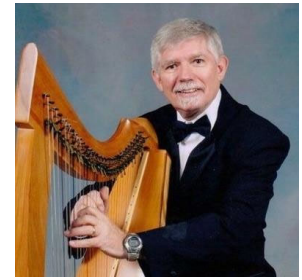


This article by Hugh Callison was first published in the March 2023 issue of the Sylvia Woods Harp Center e-Newsletter

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

I'm a guy who "never met an instrument he didn't want to play!"



It all started in 1947 when, at age three, I lost the end of my middle finger in an old horse-drawn field mower accident. My older brother pulled up the cover to the gearbox; I reached in to see what the grease felt like, my brother lost his grip, and I didn't get my hand away quickly enough. I don't remember any of this, but that's the story my mother and my eye-witness brother have told me. Mom said that after the doctor trimmed things up a bit, I held the finger stiff and wouldn't move it, which concerned her. My older brother took piano lessons, and I wanted to learn too, but the piano teacher said, "A four-year-old is too young to learn to play the piano." My mother didn't give up easily, so she told the piano teacher: "I don't care if he learns to play the piano. I just want him to move that finger." And so, my lessons began with "Teaching Little Fingers to Play."



For me, this early music education resulted in "perfect pitch" and a great love for music. As time progressed, the piano lessons continued. I played clarinet in the band in fifth grade, switched to trombone in ninth grade, and sang and played piano with the Crystalaires Gospel Quartet. I started college as a music education major at Michigan State University, majoring in trombone. My goal was to be a band director. And so my favorite classes were the instrument methods classes, where I learned to play all of the brass, woodwind, and string instruments.



As I started my career as a band director and church music director, I tried my best to stay ahead of my beginners on every instrument. I finally met my match in my third position as Director of Bands at Highland High School in Anderson, Indiana, where I had students playing bagpipes. True to form, I taught myself to play the pipes, which led to a fourth position as the Director of the Marching Band and Assistant Professor at Edinboro State College in Edinboro, Pennsylvania. I was hired to start a Pipe Band, and I did! My next position as Assistant Professor of Music at Manchester College in Indiana allowed me to complete my doctoral studies with major cognates in Trombone Performance and Conducting.

Much later, when I was at retirement age, my final teaching position was at Veritas Preparatory Academy in Phoenix, Arizona, where I taught recorder and choir. As fate would have it, I had a student with a thirty-string folk harp who wanted to sell it since she was moving up to a larger harp. I bought it and, of course, started teaching myself to play the harp. Still heavily involved in church music, I naturally wanted to learn to play hymns, so I arranged my own. Thanks to Mary Radspinner, Afghan Press agreed to publish [all five volumes of my three-hundred-plus hymn arrangements](#). An interest in Celtic music also led to the publication of another smaller collection titled ["Celtic Folk Songs and/or Folk Hymns"](#) for all harps. Currently on my "drawing board" is a collection of "Jacobite Rebellion Songs for Harp" and "Healing Hymns for Harp."



I've been retired for several years and now spend time accompanying my granddaughter, a ten-year-old violinist and fiddler. She recently became the Junior-Junior National Fiddle Champion and won the Houston Civic Symphony Concerto Competition. In my role as "Grampy," I'm now keeping busy practicing the accompaniments for the violin repertoire and learning to accompany "Western Swing Style" fiddle playing on my vintage Gibson guitar. Our most recent multi-generational performance was at the Brookwood Community, a campus for adults with disabilities. My granddaughter, my daughter, and I performed selections from "The Sound of Music" arranged for two violins and harp. I also accompanied my granddaughter and daughter on some pieces for classical violin with piano.