

This article by Gelsey Hughes was first published in the July 2017 issue of the Sylvia Woods Harp Center e-Newsletter

You can find Gelsey's PDF at www.harpcenter.com/Gelsey

I'll begin with a confession: I have barely touched a harp in 17 years.

As with many of the truly great composers and musicians who have worked with Sylvia Woods over the years, my harp journey began when I was very young. Unlike them, I eventually wandered off the path of professional harp playing. I sold my concert grand Salvi Aurora to help pay my college tuition, and got a degree in International Development.



I joined the Peace Corps in 2010, and went to Rwanda, Africa. There are no harps at all in Rwanda, so I acquired a travel guitar and used my knowledge of stringed instruments to teach myself some basic chords and scales. So it was I kept myself company at night when the village was dark and I didn't want to waste candles on reading.

Now I have a Master of Public Health degree and I work as a strategy consultant for the federal government's health agencies. I still have a guitar, and I still compose -- secretly, and only when I won't disturb my apartment neighbors -- but I do not play the harp.



*Thanks to Sylvia, the harp never left my life altogether. In many ways, my harp journey began with her, too. When I was first learning the harp, I rented my instrument from her. I met my wonderful teacher, Carolyn Sykes, through her. Perhaps most importantly, when I found I had a penchant for composing simple pieces, Sylvia was one of the team of amazing women who convinced me to compile them into a book. With Carolyn's help transcribing, my mother's design for the book, and Sylvia's support, I created a compilation of my work - *Midnight Fairies* - and printed it for distribution at Sylvia's harp store in Glendale, California.*

The book still exists in print (from Kolacny Music in Denver), but it mostly lives on as a PDF through Sylvia. It continues to brighten my life and remind me of my old passion for composing whenever a coworker or a friend Google searches my name and finds this strange relic of my past.

The pieces are simple -- they are written by an 8-to-11-year-old, and reflect my knowledge of music theory and my breadth of musical taste at that period in my life -- but they are heartfelt and written with a deep enjoyment of the instrument, and for that reason, I believe this book sets itself apart from other teaching books designed for young harpists. It is a book by a young learner, for young learners. I hope that young harpists who use my book see my 11-year-old face on the back cover and realize that if they, too, have the desire (and perhaps the support of teachers and mentors), they, too, can create something unique and put it out into the world for others to enjoy.

- Gelsey Hughes

