

This article by Shawna Selline was first published in the August 2015 issue of the Sylvia Woods Harp Center e-Newsletter

You can find Shawna's PDFs at www.harpcenter.com/Shawna



Though I can't explain it, I know it is true. Even a single note on the harp deeply affects us on an emotional, physical, almost cellular level.

A few years ago, as I was playing in an intensive care unit at Kaiser Hospital, a family was tragically having to endure the "terminal wean" of their son who had been in a motorcycle accident. I had no idea at the time, but the following week, the doctor came to me with gratitude for having played. He told me that as the beeping machines were turned off, the chaos of alarms was replaced with the peaceful, gentle sound of the harp and that it had transformed the experience. Is that not a strange gift to offer at such a time of sorrow? And yet I know it is deep and true.



One morning at the Art Museum...

I was eleven years old, walking with my beautiful mom. We came upon a street musician busking. It was Sylvia Woods playing her Celtic harp. I remember feeling transparent as the sound went straight through me. We were not well to do and some said, "Don't buy her a harp, she'll give it up in two weeks." Well, Mom did scrape the money together, and Sylvia began teaching me to play my 25-string Witcher Harp.

I began playing at the Renaissance Faire and proceeded to find my community of hippies, artists, heathens, vegans and libertines who are my extended family today. Regarding the harp and learning, like knitting for some, I enjoyed busy hands. My mom would never tell me to practice, because she wisely knew that it was my choice and a relationship between the harp, myself and my teacher. I travelled with my mentor, Sylvia, played at conventions and festivals and eventually won the All-Ireland Competitions in '84.



A note on technique

Having taught now for many years, I see the effect of early technique enabling fast clean playing. Perhaps some will find use in this short YouTube video lesson: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yl7m4Az2ohk>

Woldsong Harps

Paul Culotta "Papa" was a mathematician and gifted school teacher. He loved woodworking and began building harps when I was about 13. He taught me how to build harps too. His designs were beautiful and based on the physics of sound. When people asked, "How long does it take to build a harp?" he liked to answer..... "About 60 hours plus another 500 to find the tool I just put down." The photo shows Bobbie Jo Curley and her daughter with some Woldsong Harps.



Support your artistry with love and compassion

Humans are artists. Artistry comes with living, breathing and seeing. We are part of the natural world at work. As we create, we learn and as we learn, our knowledge expands to other facets of life. When considering art, I think back on two teachings, "Balance in all things", meaning that artistry has it's place in my being, and "What would love do?" Nurture myself/yourself that we may learn, grow and support the garden of our extended community.



My husband Mark and I have three beautiful kids. As they grew, they were my life's work while the harp remained constant and supportive. The picture on the left was the day my dear friend acclaimed harper/singer Bobbie Jo played with my three kids in the back yard so that I might record my *Meditation* album. This recording even today, is to me, a pure expression of peace.



Now the beautiful ones are grown and off to college. Music is a joyful endeavor for all of us. I love having the opportunity to focus deeply on music and I am ever grateful.

July 2015, I was delighted to play with the Chieftains!



The Chieftains are the most famous Irish band. They asked me to play with them for a concert at "Taste of Chicago". I was thrilled! Just a week before the performance, I received the "proposed" set list. I locked myself in a room and became one with those jigs, reels, set dances and ballads. I flew to Chicago and met Paddy Moloney and the rest of the band in the hotel lobby. We had one rehearsal. It was extraordinary to hear this beloved music from my childhood start up on stage next to me, and I was the harp player! What a joy! With good preparation, the concert was a breeze!

This summer has been amazing. I am teaching and performing at several festivals. I continue playing for events and through music, support varied art and film projects as opportunity allows. This year, one of my goals is to work on a new recording to accompany a video of the Big Sur coastline for relaxation and healing. With Lisa Lynn's program, Harp for Hearts we provide harp music in hospitals and in therapeutic settings. I have also been working with my fantastic folk revival group, The Story Wrens, curating historical story songs and bringing them to life!

