

This article by Sharon Thormahlen was first published in the May 2021 issue of the Sylvia Woods Harp Center e-Newsletter

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

My musical journey began listening to my parents play music in our living room. They both played mandolin, and my dad also played harmonica. When I was 12, our family visited my mother's cousin and her husband, who played the guitar. I loved watching him play, and I had this feeling inside: "I want to do that!"

My cousin, Helen, and I sat around for hours singing folk songs while I played the guitar. My parents took us camping, and we sang around the campfire. My dad also took me to retirement homes, accompanying my guitar on mandolin or harmonica.

When I was about 14, another cousin asked me about the notes I played on the guitar. We mapped out the guitar fretboard and discovered that three notes made up each chord! This was my introduction to music theory.

I took some music theory classes in college. I saw people playing harps in the practice rooms, never thinking that I would ever play one. Little did I know what was in my future.

I played music with my friend Paulina in a duo called "Sweet Harmony," and then also formed a duo with a guitar player, Ian. My dad even joined us a few times.



I met Dave Thormahlen in 1984, and my life changed forever!

Two years before we met, Dave was building mandolins and hammered dulcimers. He first heard a Celtic harp when he saw someone playing at a local restaurant. While teaching an instrument-building class at the Oregon State University Craft Center, one of his students wanted to build a harp. The only harp makers that Dave was aware of were Chris and Teresa Caswell, Jay Witcher, and the Robinsons. After crafting a harp in his class, Dave visited the Caswells in California and saw the possibilities of harp building as a career.

Dave and I formed the duo "Oak Shade," playing guitar and mandolin and singing at local restaurants and festivals. I later learned to play the bass, and we added Lentil Bean on guitar and Dave Burham on fiddle as the "Swing Beans." We played together for about ten years, creating two excellent recordings: "Groovin' in the Garden" and "Dessert First." But, the harp still waited for me.

Dave and I got married in 1990, and our daughter, Rosiee, was born two years later. In 1996, we went to the harp conference in Olympia, Washington, where Dave exhibited his harps. As we watched the harp concerts, I again had the "I want to do that" feeling! I began taking harp lessons with Laura Zaerr here in Corvallis, Oregon. Over the years, I've also learned from many top performers and workshop leaders at harp conferences.



I currently teach harp lessons through Zoom, and a few students come to in-person lessons at my studio. I have published 19 books of harp music, including original compositions, traditional arrangements, Latin music (with Nicolas Carter), and duets (with my cousin-in-law, Anna Thormahlen Jenkins). I just released a new book of originals called [Beneath the Pines](#). Order one; you'll love it!

We have made over 1,700 Thormahlen Harps. Most of them are in the U.S., but we've also sent harps worldwide. We have five models that can be strung in nylon, gut, or fluorocarbon. Visit our website at [www.thorharp.com](http://www.thorharp.com) for more information.

Due to COVID restrictions, we can't perform at our usual venues, so we play music in our living room. Hopefully, we will soon be able to share our music with live audiences once again.