

This article by Louise Trotter was first published in the April 2015 issue of the Sylvia Woods Harp Center e-Newsletter

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

This month we're featuring one of the *grandes dames* of the harp, Louise Trotter. Louise has been awarded two Lifetime Achievement Awards; one by the International Society of Folk Harpers and Craftsmen in 2003, and a second by the Somerset Folk Harp Festival in 2014. We're proud to have her contributions to our website and our newsletter.



From the age of six music was a big, BIG part of my life. That is when I started piano lessons, under the watchful eye of my father, a high school band director. I practiced and played in recitals with average interest and was motivated by my practice chart. I got gold stars at the end of the week if I got in my practice time, which resulted in a prize of some kind for motivation.



When I was about 12 a famous harpist came to give a concert in my town, (Port Arthur, TX. an oil refinery town on the Gulf Coast.) She was Mildred Dilling. I was inspired by her rippling arpeggios and came home wanting to play the harp. My dad just could not afford to buy one, so he decided he could MAKE a harp. He looked at photos of the style 15 Lyon and Healy and decided he could do it. He had gone to music school in Chicago and visited the Lyon and Healy factory for measurements and advice. He ordered Sitka spruce and other fine woods and got busy in his workshop. He managed a single action pedal harp that took him a year to build. I started lessons and continued piano.

My dad put me in every kind of program and performance, so I got used to being before an audience early on. I loved the applause and decided this was a fine thing! In high school I played in an all-girl swing band and used piano arrangements for harp parts. We played pop tunes of the period and I also played piano and alto saxophone with the group. That is when I began to improvise from necessity. I went to a summer band camp a few years later in Woodstock, NY and took lessons from Mildred Dilling. She pushed repertoire at me and had me learn Zabel's *La Source*, and many other standard showy recital pieces.

My dad would have various students come rehearse at our house. He used me as an accompanist on piano quite often, which acquainted me with accompaniment figures, and harmony. I also played in the school band for stage concerts when we played overtures and classical pieces. I don't remember complaining about rehearsing and enjoyed all types of music.

One summer during college, I was picked to join a variety show that toured for the summer with a stage band and various solo acts. My "act" consisted of 2 pop pieces with stage band accompaniment; four shows a day for 2 solid months without a day off. We traveled all over Texas giving hour-long shows between movies in theaters.

All those experiences made it necessary for me to write parts for the harp, whether I knew much about theory or not! About 30 years later I was able to attend the Salvi Summer Jazz schools in Santa Barbara at the University of California campus. The best of the jazz/pop harpists were teachers, and I was thrilled at the opportunity. Carroll McLaughlin, Harvi Griffin, Park Stickney, DeWayne Fulton, Stella Castellucci, were some of the teachers----the cream of the crop!



Later in my home teaching, it was necessary to write out easy little parts for students, and that is when I began to arrange. A little later I also began to compose, inspired by various travels. My book and CD *Scenes from the Southwest* came after many visits to New Mexico. Each time I went, the terrain and scenery inspired me to write more. Then I decided to write a beginner's guide to pop music, and soon I had built up quite a collection. Writing is a tedious job, and I enjoy recording more. However, writing enables others to enjoy my stuff, and that is a thrill in itself!

Improvising with other instruments is my biggest treat, and I enjoy attending harp festivals to find others who will "jam" with me.

I am grateful to my father who stood behind me with those many years of lessons and practice, and vision enough to spend one whole year working on building my first harp!

Being a wife and mother of 3 children were the most satisfying elements of my life. But I am grateful for the music training that has helped fill my years after the kids grew up and I became a widow.

-- Louise Trotter

