

My Mt. Dulcimer Story

My life virtually began with music. My mother majored in music at Baylor University and later attended Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, which ultimately led to her being pianist and/or organist (and sometimes Choir Director) for a church at which my Daddy was pastor. My earliest childhood musical memory is sitting on my Daddy's shoulders watching a parade in which many of the young people from our church were marching in the high school band. I've been told that I expressed my wholehearted pleasure by exclaiming, "Daddy! I LIKE that noise!" From that first musical experience I have arrived at a place in my life in which music takes much of my time and energy.

I have taught both mountain dulcimer and hammer dulcimer at Houston Community College, and North Harris County College, and at festivals and events all across America. I also teach private lessons at my home and offer on-line web lessons to many who have no teacher available. Several of my students enjoy dulcimer competitions and one of them, Josh Messick, won the Texas state hammer dulcimer championship when he was only 15 years old.

I can't tell you how hard I worked to sharpen and polish my skills. I started piano lessons at age 5, and soon began playing the piano for my Sunday School Department. In High School I joined the Band and the Chorus, and was in several vocal and instrumental ensembles. Majoring in music was the next step followed by a career as a Church Music Director and Public School Music teacher.

My interest in the dulcimer prompted me to start going to festivals and attending workshops, and my hard work paid off after several years when I won both the Texas and the Southern Regional Hammer Dulcimer Championships. I auditioned and was accepted as a performing artist under the auspices of both Young Audiences and the Texas Commission For the Arts. My choral arrangements are today being published by BriLee Publishing Co. Division of Carl Fisher Publishers.

Let me give you a little background about how I got interested in playing the dulcimer: Chuck and I were living in Houston in the '60's, and on a vacation trip to Chuck's hometown, Asheville NC, we attended the Bascomb Lamar Lunsford Folk Festival and I was absolutely captivated by the music of the mountains! I met Jean Ritchie whom I've come to consider as the "mother" of modern-day dulcimer playing. I also met Homer Ledford, an old-time musician and dulcimer builder from Kentucky, and bought my first Appalachian dulcimer. It had wooden friction tuning pegs, only 3 strings, and wire frets that were only under the melody string. On the train trip back to Houston, I learned to

play with a noter and a turkey quill, and I performed this style of playing for the next 20 years.

In the 70's we left Houston and moved to Asheville, NC where I became Choral Director at North Buncombe High School and began playing solo performances with the mt. dulcimer for churches and community events including Shindig-On-The-Green. On a trip to far Western North Carolina I met Frank Profitt, Jr. and added more old-time mountain tunes to my repertoire.

Western North Carolina was a big influence on my musical development with many rich experiences listening to and playing with some excellent old time players, including Chuck's Uncle Elmer Carter who played the fiddle and his cousin Bo Carter who played banjo. (Bo's son continues the tradition and plays in a bluegrass band in Asheville.)

We moved back to Houston, Texas in the '80s and I took a day-job as a middle school choral director. I realized what a great tool the dulcimer is to teach musical skills to young people, and in 1990 I secured a grant to buy 10 cardboard Mt. dulcimers for the students in my middle school General Music classes. My students performed for other school groups in our district and began getting invitations to perform for many events all around Houston. For ten years I used Mt. dulcimers in my general music classes and helped some of the elementary music teachers get started with the dulcimers in their schools. My dulcimer students and Mixed Choir produced two videos featuring their singing and playing. After my dulcimer class received so much recognition I was invited for the next three years to be a presenter on using the dulcimer in the classroom at the Texas Music Teachers' Convention. Today there are many music teachers throughout Texas using dulcimers in their music classes.

While continuing to [teach](#) full time I began writing dulcimer and choral arrangements and some original music which my students performed. Over the last several years, I have performed and taught workshops all the way from here to California, and from North Carolina to North Idaho.

My husband Chuck and I joined the North Harris County Dulcimer Society and enjoyed playing with other dulcimer players. In order to increase our opportunities to play with all other acoustic musicians we formed the [Houston Area Acoustic Music Society \(HAAMS\)](#), and put together a Summer Acoustic Music Festival (SAMFest) and a monthly acoustic showcase and jam session at Hickory Hollow Barbecue Restaurant in Houston. We also sponsor many workshops, concerts, jam sessions, and we even organized an acoustic music tour to Ireland and dulcimer cruise to Cozumel.

Since dulcimers are hard to find at music stores we started a small business to provide these instruments and accessories for my students in the Houston area. We expanded our business by going to festivals as vendors, and [we offer our instruments on line, along with my books and Cds.](#)

Currently I'm involved in the ministry of music by providing music to shut-ins and nursing home patients thru my church and a group known as Friendship Singers. I continue to play the dulcimer for festivals, churches and community events across the USA and abroad. My Dulcimer web lessons are available for those who join my "Dulcimer Circle." I'd love to hear from you. Email me: peggycarter77@gmail.com.