

Letter of tribute...

To the Editor:

I would like to write a letter of tribute to the memory of my piano teacher, Thelma Justice. I was saddened to learn of her recent death and passing on to eternal life. While I was unable to attend her wake or funeral, I was thinking of her and how her gift of teaching music changed my life.

I started piano lessons from Thelma when I was in the 3rd grade. My cousin Judy Casey and I started together in the month of February. Judy's mom, Maureen, and my mom, Kathryn took turns driving us out to the Justice farm S.E. of Griswold. I remember our first lessons were only .50 for a half hour lesson. My how times have changed.

How I loved my piano lessons. I studied the piano for 8 years and learned so much. Thelma also gave me organ lessons at "Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church" in Griswold. I was happy to be able to play for Mass during my 4 years of high school because of her help.

I loved to practice and enjoyed playing duets with my best friend Kathy Jenkins who also took lessons from Thelma. We played in many recitals and school events.

I will always remember the time my mother played an April Fool's joke on me when I was in about 7th grade. She told me Thelma wasn't going to be giving lessons anymore and that I would have to quit the piano. I ran to my room and started to cry before Mom could tell me it was just an April Fool's joke. She knew then I was really serious about my music. She never joked about me quitting again.

I went on to learn other instruments because of the wonderful foundation Thelma gave me in the study of notes, rhythm, expression, and careful counting. I later learned the clarinet, the guitar, the lap dulcimer, and the piano accordion, because of the start Thelma gave me in music.

I have gone on to teach private lessons myself in piano, and all the other instruments I play. I have done this since 1973, for over 23 years. I have probably taught over 400 different students myself all because I had the good fortune to have a good teacher like Thelma Justice.

I remember the time when I was in 5th grade and we had just purchased a new little spinet Wurlitzer piano. I was so proud of that new little limed-oak piano that I had to have my piano teacher see it. We invited her to our home for dinner and then she gave me my piano lesson on my own new piano.

She cared about her students and was a very special lady. I remember the time when she moved to town after losing her husband Grant. She had to take care of her son Bob and made a nice home for him as well as her elderly mother. Yet, she always found time to teach her music students and would always give her most to keep her scheduled lessons on time and give us new and challenging music to play.

She would always remember her students at Christmas. I still have one of her Christmas gifts, a blue cracked marble necklace that she made for each of her girl students one year.

She once wrote in my autograph book. Don't B (Flat), Don't B# (Sharp), Just B (Natural). I think this little musical saying could very well describe Thelma as she was a naturally, talented musician who shared her gift with me and many others.

I will close this letter with my sincere sympathy to all of her family and friends and also a sincere thank-you to my special music teacher and friend. I will be forever indebted to her for passing on to me the great gift of music, the gift of service to God and other's through our music, and the love of the piano.

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