

A Sour Note

By Cindy Peters

I dreamed of having dance lessons and becoming a ballerina. However, there were no dance studios in my small town and my parents were music lovers. So, by default my brother and I were signed up for piano lessons. My parents bought an upright, former player piano from a farmer for \$12. They hauled it home where they proudly stripped and varnished their new gift to us. They even hired a piano tuner who removed the player and tuned the piano. The piano was beautiful, and it had a lovely tone. The only problem was my brother and I never wanted piano lessons. My brother was able to beg off as he stated it was a sissy thing for a boy.

There was a problem finding a piano teacher so I thought this passion for lessons would pass. However, my hope was soon dashed when my mom found a piano teacher named Mrs. Burkman. I felt obligated to take the lessons since my parents put so much effort into this project. So once a week for \$1 an hour I attended my piano lessons with Mrs. Burkman.

Mrs. Burkman was an eccentric old lady. She was surprisingly distinguished with her slender body and long, tapering fingers. She always wore a printed house dress and slippers. She wore her gray hair in a bun behind her head.

Her home was a bungalow with a picket fence on the old main street of town. The home and fence were badly in need of a coat of paint. However, her front and backyard were a gardener's delight. In the Spring she had every imaginable kind of flower in full bloom. One could smell the fragrance of her flowers blocks away. The inside of her house had an enclosed porch. Her living room was converted into a music room filled with an upright piano, organ, accordions and music stands. Her drapes were always drawn, and her home was always musty and dusty.

Mrs. Burkman was a wonderful musician and teacher. She could play anything from classical to ragtime to pop music. She was a very patient teacher as a natural pianist. I was not. Music to me was a difficult and foreign language. It was quite a challenge for me to stretch my tiny fingers across the keyboard. No matter how much I struggled to master the piano she never gave up on me. One time I played at a piano recital and Mrs. Burkman was so proud that I did not miss a single note. Another time she had me play the accordion with other child musicians for an outdoor concert for handicapped children. It was so rewarding to see the smiles and hear the clapping from those handicapped children.

One day I finally had the courage to ask Mrs. Burkman what lay beyond those wooden doors from her music room. With pride Mr. Burkman opened her drawing room. To my shock and horror behind those doors was a room filled with taxidermist stuffed animals. She explained she simply could not part with her deceased pets. So, in that room was several stuffed dogs, cats, two parrots and a rabbit.

I left for college and lost contact with Mrs. Burkman. However, I later heard that Mrs. Burkman lived to be over 100 years old in a nursing home. To her final days Mrs. Burkman would entertain the residents and fill the rooms with her beautiful piano playing. Thanks so much for the memories Mrs. Burkman!