

The Old Upright Piano

By Marilyn Reeves

In 1945, when we first moved to Salida, Dad partitioned off the back end of his sporting goods store as an apartment for the family. I remember the day when I was five years old and a brand new upright piano was delivered to us there. It shone with a rich, reddish-brown mahogany veneer. When it was new, that piano, with its matching bench, was the most beautiful piece of furniture ever to grace our home.

Dad was good at playing by ear, and in the evenings would regale us with some of his old favorite songs like 'Good Night, Sweetheart,' 'Stardust' and 'My Blue Heaven.'

Mom couldn't play, but she wanted us girls to learn, so within a matter of weeks, Janet and I started taking lessons. We learned how to read music and practiced our scales and arpeggios. My hands were too small to reach a full octave, but I did learn how to manage a few simple chords. We learned to play tunes from the Schaum tutorials for beginners, and later graduated to more complex pieces. Many of them came from the ten-volume set of classical music called the Scribner Radio Music Library, which Dad had purchased for us girls. Those tall, slender books with their now faded red covers still sit on top of that old piano.

When I was in high school, I spent many hours venting my pent-up emotions by playing the soul-stirring rhapsodies and sonatas of Beethoven, Chopin, and Franz Liszt. After leaving home in 1960, I would still attempt to play them whenever I went home for a visit, but my skills had become a bit rusty.

When my grandmother passed away in the early 70's, Dad inherited her cherry wood piano, the instrument he had learned to play on as a boy, so the old family piano was passed on to me. Over time, my skills improved and I was able to entertain myself by playing my favorite tunes once again.

Wearing the battle scars of nearly a dozen moves, that venerable old upright piano now sits in my living room at Windsor Gardens. Its veneer is faded and no longer shines. Its keys are yellowed and uneven, like the worn-out teeth of an old woman. But it is the only remnant I have salvaged from my childhood. It is the repository of a lifetime of memories. Over the years, it has seen me grow up and grow old. It's so out of tune it can no longer be played, but its ancient strings reverberate with the passions of my youth, and the music of a lifetime.

I am loathe to part with it, as it has been a part of my life since I was five years old. And like a dear old friend, it will always have a place in my home.