

**Oral History Interview of
Carol Masson Harris**

**Interviewed by: Elissa Stroman
October 3, 2011
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*Women's History Initiative***

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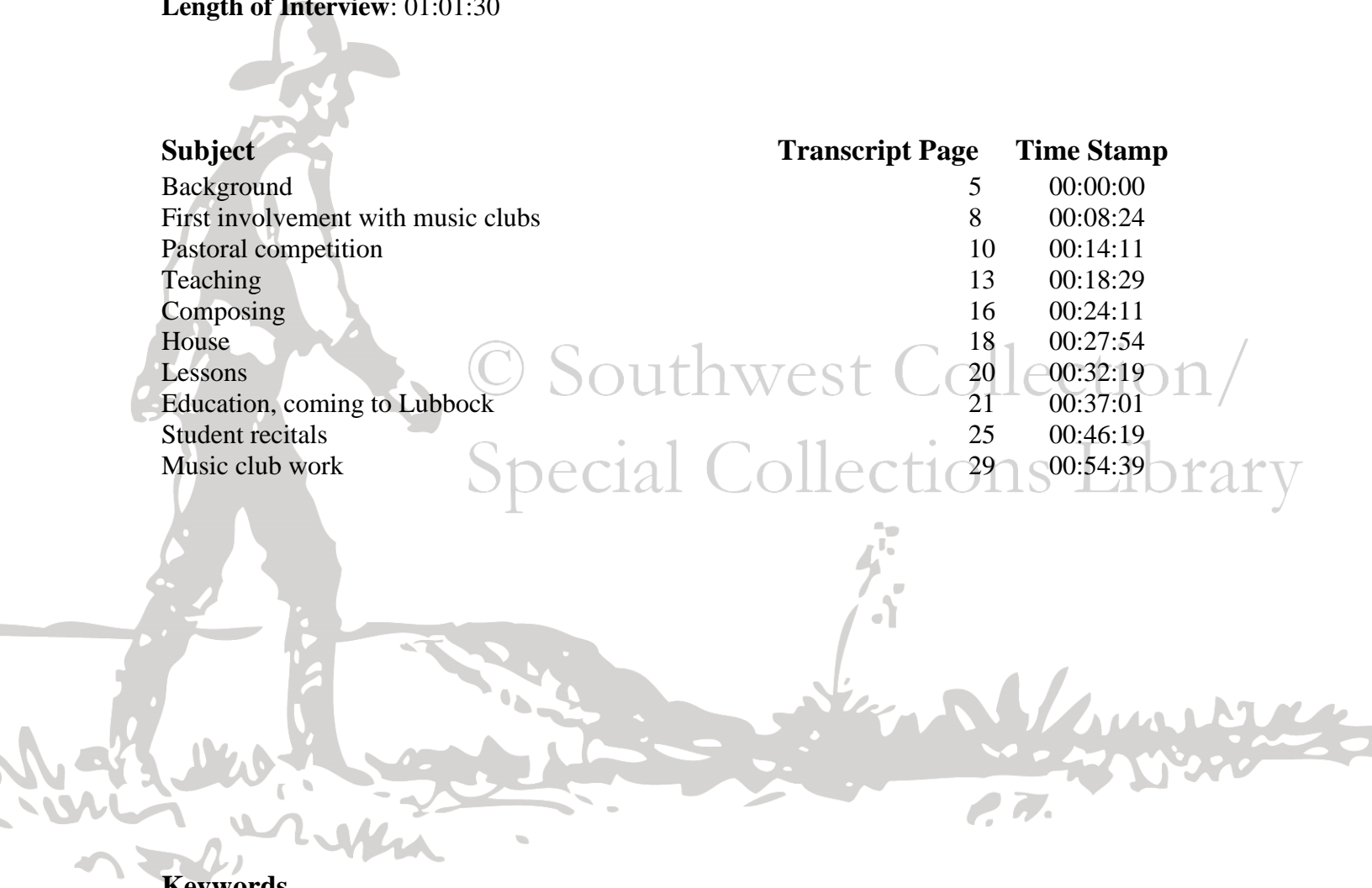
Interview Series Background:

The Women's History Initiative began formally in June 2015 with a concentrated effort to record the stories of prominent women from across the South Plains. The interviews target doctors, civic leaders, teachers, secretaries, and others whose stories would otherwise be lost.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Carol Masson Harris. Carol talks about her interest in music growing up and playing with her family. Carol discusses moving to Lubbock to study, teaching music lessons, and becoming involved in the Lubbock Music Club.

Length of Interview: 01:01:30



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Elissa Stroman (ES):

This is Elissa Stroman, and today's date is October 3, 2011. Today I interviewed Carol Masson Harris who is a Lubbock piano teacher. This interview was conducted at ten in the morning at her piano studio located [REDACTED] in Lubbock. This interview is a part of a series of interviews and discussions with members of the musical club communities of the South Plains. Ms. Masson Harris has been a member of the Lubbock Music Club for only about two years now, so we talk about her musical background and briefly her experiences with the Lubbock Music Club and primarily also her piano studio and her teaching methods throughout the years. What is your date of birth and where were you born?

Carol Masson Harris (CMH):

My date of birth is 1940, and I was born in a little town in South Texas called Benavides.

ES:

Benavides

CMH:

And I will spell that for you.

ES:

Yes please do.

CMH:

B-e-n-a-v-i-d-e-s.

ES:

And is it still around down there?

CMH:

As far as I know. it's in Duvall County, and my father was a band director there for one year and it just happened to be the year that I was born.

ES:

So tell me a bit about your family. Did you have siblings, what did your parents do, band directing?

CMH:

I'll back way back on that. His mother was a music and allocution teacher. They came to Bishop, Texas, oh dear, listen to that. They came to Bishop, Texas, as it was a town that was being built by a prospector. That was just about the end of the train line and back then it was semi-tropical,

lots of orange trees and palm trees. So anyway, they arrived there in probably about 1905 or something, and my father was born in 1912, had this very strong background. He was the youngest child and his mother's darling. He was extremely talented in a lot of things. He sang well, played the trumpet, played the piano a little bit, was on the football team, you know, one of these wonder boys. So anyway, he got a degree in teaching, but not in music. He ended up—teaching music was his first love and so he ended up eventually back in Bishop and was band director there for years. He was president of Texas Music Educators Association back when I was a little girl and quite a mover and shaker. He spent World War II in the Philippines where he formed a band.

ES:

So he had some down time.

CMH:

Yeah, so anyway, I came from that very strong background and it took on most of us. One brother was band director for quite a while and ended up teaching marketing in a university. My second brother is band director emeritus at Kansas University. He's been there for many years, also has a publishing out and his fingers in lots of pies. He was president of the American Band Masters Association and the other band masters association at the same time. So anyway, I come from this really, really strong background of music and this has always been my first love.

ES:

So what are some of your memories of music making when you grew up? Did y'all like sit around the piano and play or what did y'all—?

CMH:

Well, we had a family band.

ES:

Wow.

CMH:

My mother played the piano and I played the flute and one brother played trombone, one brother played coronet/trumpet. My father played clarinet usually; oh, he was a trumpeter. By then I had a little brother who just directed, but we would sing at the local music clubs and things like that, go caroling around Christmas time. And another thing I remember is every day, no exception unless Christmas or something like that, my father would sit down, and he would practice with the two older brothers, one playing trombone and the other playing trumpet. My second brother, the one who's in Kansas, made all state band in the fourth grade and the other brother was first chair in all state band in high school. So that daily practice with a pro really paid off.

ES:

That's amazing.

CMH:

It really was, and I felt so left out. You have no idea.

ES:

You didn't end up making All-State bands or—?

CMH:

I choked, I choked. The year I should have made all state band I choked.

ES:

In my experience, it's harder with flute players. There's a lot more. At least nowadays, there's so many of us that I couldn't compete no matter how much I practiced and stressed out.

CMH:

Yeah, it was also harder because of the pressure I had from the family. That made a lot of difference. By then, sadly, my father was being very erratic with a lot of different things, and he seemed like he was always angry and usually at me, but when I was pregnant with my first child he committed suicide.

ES:

Oh my.

CMH:

Which was left over from the Second World War, he was just never the same when he came back. Anyway, that's my family history.

ES:

So there's a lot of happy memories with music.

CMH:

There were a lot of good memories, there definitely were, but there was a sad streak that went through it, too. Do you want to turn that off for just a second?

Pause in Recording

ES:

And now we're back—with refreshments. So did you go off to college and study music or—?

CMH:

Yeah, I had one year at Abilene Christian College, which I thoroughly enjoyed, but I also, unfortunately, had really bad teeth and after that year my dad said, "You're going to fix your teeth or send you back, we can't do both." And so the next year and a half I went to Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, which is a very good college and I got married.

ES:

And so you got married and I'm guessing you continued to play piano, and how was music—

CMH:

I continued, yeah, I never did not teach, I mean from the time that I was in college I was teaching one or two students at least, and it's very much in my blood. But I didn't finish that degree until my three children were in school. I got the last one into kindergarten and went back.

ES:

Okay. So I guess kind of the transition is, how did you start getting involved in club work? I mean you said you played when you were little for clubs.

CMH:

Well, I am much more involved in Lubbock Music Teachers Association than I am in the music club. I've only been in the music club per se for two years and that was because I couldn't enter my children in the pastoral festival unless I was. So I'm not really a devoted member of that group, although I certainly admire them and what they do. I had entered my children in the Pastoral Festival ever since I came to Lubbock. I came to Lubbock in 1982 after just a devastating divorce. I came here because I heard about the PhD, and I studied for that until I realized that I had two kids who needed me worse than I needed that degree. At that point I dropped out and just taught full time. Anyway, back then I did not even realize that the Pastoral Junior Music Festival was part of Federation of Music Clubs. I knew a little bit about Federation of Music Clubs because my mother had been a member when I was a child for a couple of years, but I didn't realize that it was tied in with it. I thought it was just simply something that was started by this wonderful lady, Paula Bruschere. I'm sure you've heard that name.

ES:

I have, yes.

CMH:

If you haven't interviewed her, you absolutely must.

ES:

Yeah that was one of the names Ms. Reynolds gave me. She said, "You just have to call her. And she's involved with the Music Teachers Association, too, isn't she?"

CMH:

No, she's not.

ES:

Okay.

CMH:

No, she got involved because she had two children who were string players, and she started this junior music club out of which the Pastoral thing grew, but like I say, I did not even realize it because Paula handled it single-handedly, and I never heard, you know, who it was sponsored by. I thought it was Paula, but anyway, after she resigned there were two or three rough years when they didn't have a qualified person to run the festival and it nearly died. Then Linda King, bless her heart, came forward, and she has been managing it with the help of a group of us teachers and doing an excellent job.

ES:

Okay, so it's a requirement now if you're going to enter your students into—?

CMH:

It's a requirement that you must be a member of a local club. And so that's how I ended up being—and I am a somewhat reluctant member because it doesn't really meet my needs, but except in that one area, but I certainly admire the ladies, and I am enjoying getting to know them.

ES:

So that's something that I think's interesting because a lot of ladies talk to me about, "How can we draw in younger generations, younger women?" One of my thoughts is, we're not necessarily needing that. It doesn't—

CMH:

It meets the social needs of an older group of ladies, and incidentally have you ever heard such beautiful singing from a bunch of old ladies?

ES:

It's wonderful and I love talking to y'all. I don't think it's like, No, we can't go, us younger people.

CMH:

It doesn't meet your needs. Now, we've got several young members, bless their hearts, in Lubbock Music Teachers Association who are teaching, but I don't know. I think they'd just have to start a new club probably to attract younger people.

ES:

I was at the Allegro Club and there's one girl that was probably about thirty years old, but I think she was there with her mom. So she's a member because her mom's a member and that makes sense. I know there's this fear of club work dying off. Do you think that maybe even the Pastoral Competition has helped give the club a little bit of life?

CMH:

Absolutely, absolutely because it has attracted younger members, which I am not one, but there are several who are. There's a lovely Chinese lady who's very active in it. It's really amazing to see it work that way. And to think about it from that direction, I never really stopped to think about that.

ES:

Maybe if they have more outreach things in that manner then they can give—

CMH:

And there are a lot of individual competitions in the federation that are excellent that I never knew about until I got their magazine. So there's stuff going on and it's just a matter of our knowing about it and being encouraged, particularly on the local level to take part in it.

ES:

So tell me about the Pastoral Competition from your perspective. How does it work, how do you sign up your students and all that?

CMH:

When it started, it was for, I think virtually any instrument, but had a very strong string area. They even invited young orchestras to play for competitions. It was a big thing. Paula and Susan Schoenberg who was a violist on the staff at Texas Tech, were the two who worked hand and hand, and sadly Susan died of cancer at a pretty young age. So the string area gradually just died because there was nobody to take it over. Laura Deal was helpful from the Tech end in helping Paula keep it going. Paula finally just had to retire. She gave her all to that for so many years and did such a good job with it. The original question?

ES:

When did you become involved? I've been remiss to ask years.

CMH:

I got involved in about 1983 or so, I came here in 1982, maybe '84. Anyway, shortly after I came. There is a little book that has a list of all the music that is on their accepted list and you play one piece off the list and one contrasting piece. I've got the book in there if you want to see it in a while. So that would just simply be part of my teaching material. Everything in the book is written by an American composer, so that is one way that it strengthens music in America and encourages American composers.

ES:

And I saw that was one of the tenants of the music club was to promote American composers.

CMH:

That's very important to them. Have you heard anything about Edward MacDowell?

ES:

Yes.

CMH:

Okay, so you're aware of his influence?

ES:

I've been researching the Indianists of the early twentieth century, so like the Wa-Wan Press and some of that and he comes up in that discussion, that early twentieth century trying to find an American musical sound.

CMH:

Right, and now we listen to it and it's so trite.

ES:

It is.

CMH:

And the darky music that came out of different places?

ES:

Yeah, but there's a, you know, it's one of those things that you search for the kernel of what they were going for, it's cliché now, but—

CMH:

And the reason it is, I think, is because back then we didn't realize how colored we were by our own culture. A lot of things that we thought, you know, were maybe Indian music, really were maybe a combination of some of those sounds, but through our own culture.

ES:

Yeah, like a lot of those composers would take an Indian melody that would be collected but then harmonize it.

CMH:

But they would harmonize it.

ES:

Exactly.

CMH:

Now do you have David Guion on that list? He wrote some things.

ES:

No, I'll have to look into that.

CMH:

Yeah, G-u-i-o-n, and he lived in Kerrville, Texas, I understand.

ES:

Wow, a Texas boy, that's always interesting.

CMH:

Right and he wrote a piece that's still taught called "The Harmonica Player."

ES:

Okay. Some of those are just little gems.

CHM:

Yeah.

ES:

I just love them and most of them were kind of character pieces, so the students especially love them.

CMH:

And I haven't even thought of that piece in years so thank you for coming because I've got a perfect student for that piece.

ES:

So do the students have to have the music memorized?

CMH:

Yeah they do, to get that blue ribbon. Then the Gold Cup Plan is a big encouragement to those kids.

ES:

I'm amazed because Ms. Reynolds was telling me that it's a multiple year goal that they have to work for.

CMH:

If you get one every year, by the time you're in the twelfth grade, it's a big honking thing.

ES:

Yeah, she was showing me the pictures of some of those girls and the huge cups. I started piano in the third grade, but I never worked that hard to reach that sort of goal. That's just so amazing to me.

CMH:

Were you active or was your teacher active in the piano guild?

ES:

She wasn't, and she was one of the only in town that wasn't and maybe that's why I didn't develop the devotion to practicing that I should have because if we'd have had guild or if we'd have had some sort of competition, it seems like—

CMH:

That dose make a huge difference because it's something to prepare for.

ES:

Right and all the sports competitions, they have games and they have this. As a musician you just kind of sit alone in your room and maybe fiddle around, but it seems like that really engages the students to have these sorts of things.

CMH:

Yeah it really does to have that kind of a thing; playing duets helps if you're in a situation in your studio where you can do that, but I have always wanted, and I'm continually looking for—you know the stickers you see on the back of everybody's SUV with a soccer ball and the kid's name and the number? We'd got to get a music one. "My kid takes piano lessons."

ES:

Have like a little piano block, you know, or a silhouette of a grand piano there or something.

CMH:

And some day I'm going to find out where to get those. That would be so cool.

ES:

That would be awesome. So your studio, have you always had around twenty to twenty-five students or did you ever take on more?

CMH:

No, I kept forty students, you know, I was making a living you've got to realize, but I kept forty students for a lot of years, and I backed down two or three years ago to twenty-five because I can support the studio on twenty-five, and I'm not willing to give it up. My husband is a weird duck. He's almost blind, and I have to help him a lot with everything and I have to drive him, but he follows me around and he talk, talk, talks. I need this place. This is my outlet. This is where I can come to get away and be myself. I'll keep it as long as I can, but I developed some pretty serious health problems, mainly my back and also he had some real serious health problems, so I cut back at that point. I just stopped teaching on Friday and that was a pretty easy when he got back.

ES:

Get all the health appointments and all the things you need to get done on Friday and then you can have all the students the rest of the—

CMH:

Pretty much. Yeah, but of course, unless you have home study students it's really, really hard to teach in the morning or adults. Glenda comes over here for a lesson every week, so we have a good time.

ES:

I called her, and her husband was like, "She's in a lesson right now." I was like, "Is she teaching the lesson or is she having the lesson?" So the age range, you teach mostly youth now?

CMH:

I have grown up a class of the most wonderful kids. One family started when the baby was in diapers, and there are five kids spaced two years apart. I started with the older two and then added as the children got older. I teach all five of them now. The oldest is in high school. I say that to say that about the same time, I got some other students at about the same level. I have three or four high school students who are really good and then the youngest one is a second grader, no, first grader, but most of my kids are in elementary or junior high or high school right now, but I did teach—like fourth through sixth grade is when you get most of them.

ES:

Right and then they get involved in other stuff.

CMH:

Exactly, you're lucky if you keep them. I have one girl who's a senior who did drop out for a year or two, but she came back.

ES:

That's great.

CMH:

It really is. It's also wonderful when they come back on their own volition because you know they're going to practice. I started an eighty-nine year old man several years ago, and he got where he could read and play around middle C, and I would write out all of these just melodic lines of songs that he used to know and he just had a blast.

ES:

That's great.

CHM:

It was so much fun. It was so sweet.

ES:

I'm sure that's great to engage the mind and keep the dexterity of the fingers going at that age.

CMH:

It was; it's amazing. And I do a lot of arranging. I don't know whether you knew it or not, but I am a composer.

ES:

I did not know that.

CMH:

Yeah, I have a pretty good stack of things with my name on it.

ES:

I'm going to have to google you now and see what all I can find.

CMH:

Oh yeah, I understand that there's quite a bit of stuff on there. I need to google myself. I don't know what's there.

ES:

Every once in a while it's interesting, it's enlightening, and you're like, "Why am I on there for that?"

CMH:

I have some things published by Willis who is an old, I guess you'd call them a staple or—they have been around since I've been around I know. They publish a lot of music that's on the federation list. Back when Warner Brothers—it went through two or three name changes while I was writing for them. I'm still really good friends with the editor who has since retired. She started a little publishing company out of her house, and so I've got some things with her, which don't make me a penny, but they're fun. It keeps me involved, but sadly since I had this back surgery, it has wiped out every bit of originality and creativity I ever had.

ES:

Oh no!

CMH:

I think as I get better and things free up that I'll—hopefully it's not permanent. I talked with a good friend of mine who's a little bit older than I am and his wife's had some terrible health problems, and he was telling me that that same thing happened to him. He said, "Go to a national convention, and it'll all come back."

ES:

You need to be inspired again. You need to find some new inspiration.

CMH:

I do, I do. But anyway, that's an aside.

ES:

So you're an American composer, are you on the federation?

CMH:

I don't have anything this year, but I have.

ES:

Okay. I didn't know if you had to because they discovered you or did you petition? Did you let them know?

CMH:

Usually your editor takes care of that, and what happened this last year or this last book is that my editor missed the deadline. Anyway, that took care of that real quick.

ES:

Do your students ever play your compositions?

CMH:

Yeah, not as much as maybe I could, but I'm a little modest about that, I guess. Yeah, they do, and there's one called "Chart Frenzy" that's really popular and one called "Fastest Piano in the West" and some things like that because I usually end up running these for an individual student that I think would enjoy them or that needs a little bit of encouragement.

ES:

So you can say, "Look, I wrote this for you. You'll really enjoy it."

CMH:

And if you dedicate it to them and it shows up in the music store, you take them down there, "There's your name."

ES:

You better be able to play this.

CMH:

It's pretty exciting, yeah.

ES:

Yeah and you have the whole entire history of Beethoven dedicating symphonies and so you can show them that this is a long tradition. Your name will be remembered forever.

CMH:

I wish. But that's a very common practice these days among people who are writing for students—just to dedicate it to the students you wrote it for or somebody that you really want to honor.

ES:

Cool.

CMH:

It is cool.

ES:

So we were talking when we came in about the house, but I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit about the house on the recorder so that we have it—how the house was built and the different rooms that are set up because we're in your studio right now.

CMH:

We are in the studio; this is the all-purpose room, sitting room. Mommas and daddies take naps in the recliner; the kids play with the vintage Fisher Price toys, and we've got a big library of movies they can watch. It's quiet back here, so they do bother me in front. As you walk in—well first, the history of the house is this: in the late forties in Lubbock, Texas, there was a very big shortage of building materials, and people wanted to build houses, but had nothing to build them out of. So my husband's father ordered a kit that came on the back of a railroad car that had everything that was needed to build a house, the plans, all the wood, all the light fixtures, down to the smallest detail. And so there are two houses side by side here that were built under those circumstances, and both of them are still occupied and doing very well. They just look a little old fashioned. Anyway, I have the luxury of having the whole house as my studio. The front room has my Steinway and an electronic piano and bookcases all around the room. That's my main teaching area, but there is a smaller room that has an upright piano that can be used as a practice room. The kitchen is being used as a computer room. I've got an old Apple 2E, which we call the dinosaur, and then I have another PC that was put together out of different pieces and parts, so we call it Frankenstein. They have musical games and the kids can go in and play computer games before or after their lessons, or sometimes if I want to make a particular point, we'll go in and play a computer game during their lesson. It functions extremely well as a comfortable place for students and their families to come and have their lesson. It's just kind of interesting. Also, I have a set of like maybe three or four candy jars, and they know if they've had a good lesson, they can get five pieces of candy—gummy bears and that kind of thing. That motivates six year olds. You just wouldn't believe what that motivates.

ES:

I remember stickers motivated me. I loved getting stickers on my music.

CMH:

I've got a collection of stickers that you'd die for.

ES:

So you said you have a family that takes lessons. Do they come and camp out for like a couple hours or do they—?

CMH:

Pretty much—oh and another thing is, I give forty-five minute lessons instead of thirty minute lessons.

ES:

That was another question I was going to ask.

CMH:

You know, I'm short changing myself financially, but it is just so wonderful to have enough time to do what I think we need to do when I only see the children once a week. My family of five, four of the children come in the afternoon and the fifth one comes on Tuesday afternoon. When the four are here, they're here usually with their nanny. Mom can't do it all by herself. Some of the children are back here doing their homework with nanny while we're having a piano lesson with another one. Maybe sometime during the afternoon, Mom will drive by and they'll swap kids, but this is their hangout.

ES:

That's great.

CMH:

It's good.

ES:

It's a nice cozy place to be.

CMH:

Well, thank you.

ES:

So the lesson structures, do you start out with warm up stuff? Do you have anything in particular you require them to do every week or do you just—?

CMH:

I pretty much develop that student by student and what they're weak in and what they need help in is very important, but what is even more important in my opinion, is where they are emotionally and what I need to do to make them get over any emotional ups that they may have for the day. I always say, "How was your week?" And I'm almost always say, "What do you want to play first?" Which means usually it's going to be the piece that they're working on that they like the best; it's a good way to get started. Kids don't need to warm up as much as adults do. So we'll get to the scales later, and I've got a scale chart and as soon as they can do five finger patterns and all twelve keys, and we chart it, well then they get a little prize, cost me a dollar or two, but I've got some cool things. Then as we go up, right now several of my students are playing their major scales, hands together, two octaves, which I have found to be a hard thing for them to do. And so my one little spec of creativity have come up with a color-coded way to teach them to play their scales hands together. It seems to be working.

ES:

That was one of the requirements of my sophomore piano proficiency was two octave scales. I don't remember what tempo it had to be, but fluent in it. They'd just call out the most random key, and I'd have to be able to do it. I didn't necessarily—my piano teacher didn't hone that in on me when I was younger so it was actually—it's difficult even for a college student.

CMH:

It really is, although your mind is working a little bit different way by the time—

ES:

That's why I was wondering if you were a stickler on technique and skill or patterns or if just pedagogically I guess.

CMH:

You know, some students love technique books. I remember a long time ago when I was teaching, they would do anything to get out of technique, but with today's physical fitness craze, they see the need for it, and they do it and they love it. I have two or three students who just really love their technique books and they feel like they've really accomplished something. But here again, when I was doing my doctoral studies, I spent a lot of time studying learning differences, and it really made me aware that what might be great for one student is not necessarily for another. There is a certain number of situations where show and tell is the best way to teach. You know, whereas when I was growing up "Don't play the sonatina for them; let

them discover it for themselves.” Today’s kids wouldn’t know a sonatina if you held it up. So you have to teach them the style. It’s not a common style. So anyway, I probably have digressed again, but I do think that all students need a certain amount of theory, at the very least, they need to know all the key signatures and know how to play scales and chords and all the keys. They need to be able to count rhythms up through sixteenth notes. They need to understand six-eight, nine-eight, twelve-eight time, and once they get to that point, if they’re in high school and so covered up and involved in activities, that if I know they can do that, then we don’t need theory anymore. But there is a wonderful theory program through TMTA that is called the Whitlock Theory Test that is a graded test, grades one through twelve. Once they hit about the ninth or tenth grade, I’d give them a choice. [phone rings] Excuse me.

ES:

That’s fine. I’ll pause it, that’s more important.

Pause in Recording

ES:

Okay well that little break gave me a chance to think the other questions I wanted to ask you. You hinted at it, but I didn’t ever ask you solidly, your education, you got a bachelor’s degree?

CMH:

I got a bachelor’s and master’s degree in music. It’s supposed to be performance degrees, but I’m a weak performer. Anyway, I got those in ’77 and ’79 after my kids were grown.

ES:

From Tech?

CMH:

No, from West Georgia College.

ES:

Okay.

CMH:

Which you’ve probably never heard of and moved to Lubbock in ’82. I just had to get out of Georgia.

ES:

And so what brought you to Lubbock, Texas?

CMH:

Well, I was writing different colleges, particularly Christian type colleges looking for openings. Ruth Holmes who is almost retired from Tech—no, I mean from LCU. This is the last year she'll be teaching, I think. Anyway, wrote me the most lovely letter saying that there was a part-time opening at Lubbock Christian at that time and that there was a PhD program in fine arts. I started just doing research. I mean, it was fast research, but I have a cousin who lives here in town, so she was helpful. I, of course, talked to the people at Tech and all that, but to make a long story short; within two weeks of the time I heard about this, I had loaded everything in the back of a U-Haul truck and come from Atlanta to Lubbock.

ES:

Wow.

CMH:

And I've been here ever since.

ES:

And you started a doctorate. Did you do the fine arts degree?

CMH:

Yeah, I did all of the coursework, and at that point is when I finally realized that I just needed to at least put it on the shelf for a while. I had two teenagers at the time and they were quite traumatized—number one, by what had happened and number two, by moving from beautiful hilly Georgia to Lubbock, which is just this, like a table. My son, and this is the one I just talked to, was twelve at the time, and it just did a number on him psychologically. He said, "It's like I'm going to fall or something, there's no mountains, there's no trees to kind of latch onto."

ES:

It's the opposite of claustrophobia almost, the openness. I'm sure the color change, color palette, was different because it goes from green to brown—

CMH:

Oh we missed that a lot.

ES:

Well, that's why I was curious because coming from hilly Georgia, move to the hill country of Texas.

CMH:

Very similar to the area around Kerrville and just really a pretty area to live in, but things happen.

ES:

But you've made a home and I think you've done pretty well with this studio especially.

CMH:

It has been good. I've never lacked for students. Now, I've got a couple of openings that I would sure like to fill, but I've never lacked for students. About two years after I came, I met this guy and the thing about it, he was really strange. He talked a lot, and a lot of what he talked about is of no interest whatsoever to me. He's very engineering oriented and knew how things worked and all of that. He had this one wonderful trait and that is, he could fix anything. So anyway, this weird man and I just got to be pretty good friends, and I could help him do things, and he could help me do things, it worked out pretty well. His mother had Alzheimer's at the time, and that was a major problem. Anyway, to make a long story short, after a fifteen year courtship, we got married. The reason why is his mother told him that if he ever married a divorced woman, she'd take him out of the will. She was a real religious fanatic and just a real disagreeable person also. Anyway, so we had to wait until after she died to get married. He just doesn't meet strangers well, there's a lot of things he doesn't do well. I now realize that my husband has Asperger's Syndrome.

ES:

Oh, that makes more sense now.

CMH:

Now it makes sense, and now I know how to treat him and I know how to pick my battles. It's made life a whole lot nicer. And today is our thirteenth wedding anniversary.

ES:

Wow, yay.

CMH:

That's a little bit of personal history.

ES:

That's great, that's great. I was going to ask because you said you have a couple of positions open in your studio. How do you advertise that you're teaching?

CMH:

Pretty much by word of mouth. Now I did give a couple of cards to the Tarpley's and Jent's just so that they would have them and let them know that I need some students. Anyway, I think a lot of people thought I was quitting after I had surgery because I didn't teach for about three months or so. I did not lose any of my students. They all came back. I graduated a couple, and one little girl moved away, so I would kind of like to fill those spots.

ES:

Well, the reason why I asked is because Linda King was actually the first person that I was able to get in touch with about the Lubbock Music Club because she had a website about her studio. I spent days googling Lubbock Music Club and just trying to find any names associated with the club, and I couldn't find anybody. And then all of a sudden days later, somehow I put in some set of terms, and it came up with her studio and saying that she was a member. And so I e-mailed her, and she forwarded it onto everybody. So that's why I didn't know if you had a website or if you ever did anything?

CMH:

I haven't done that yet. I probably ought to, but I haven't even thought about it if you want to know the truth. I just never needed to. Anyway, I have, in a lot of ways have been brought kicking and screaming into the twenty-first century. It's really much more difficult for us to use a computer well, unless we do it every day, than it is anybody below thirty. They just grew up with it.

ES:

I was about to say, I remember at seven or eight years old getting our first computer and playing with it. It's one of those you learn it if you start earlier, it's more intuitive.

CMH:

Exactly, exactly. What I and my friends find, and we talk about that a lot, is that we can figure out how to do something, but if we don't do it for months, we don't remember.

ES:

That's my mom. She'll call me and she'll be like, "You told me this three months ago, but I don't remember how to do this." And so I have to talk her through some computer thing.

CMH:

That's great, my daughter has done that, but she right now, is on a four month odyssey with her husband. They restored a Volkswagen camper, and they and their two dogs light out in the middle of August and have gone up through all the national parks and are, I think in Canada right

now, coming across, going down to the west coast, and then they'll drive down that west coast highway and come back to Texas. So I can't get a hold of her.

ES:

That sounds like a lovely trip, though. I've always wanted to pack up my pup and go on a road trip like that.

CMH:

They just decided that they would make it happen. My daughter has lupus and her husband's vision is not good, and he is a prime target for macular degeneration when he gets older. So they decided that if they're going to do it, they better do it now.

ES:

Carpe Diem.

CMH:

Absolutely, absolutely and I'm glad they did.

ES:

At the end of the year do you do recitals? Do you do festivals other than just the Pastoral? Do you have a culmination of studies?

CMH:

Yes, yes, yes, and yes.

ES:

Switching gears again, I'm sorry.

CMH:

No, that's fine. These activities I do a lot of them through Lubbock Music Teachers Association. They have a sonatina contest every year. It's a great way to teach good literature, and here again, kids like competition. It's a contest where everybody who plays a certain movement of a certain sonatina plays against each other and they give them first, second, and third places, which you don't hear very much, and so I do that in February. They also take theory tests, the younger students, given in November and again in February and if they make above a ninety they get a medal, and that's exciting. I have several recitals. Around the middle of Christmas we have an open house kind of a thing down at Tarpley's. They've been really, really nice to let me do that and it does bring in customers. Anyway, it's just a real informal thing. We've got refreshments and kids play whatever it is that they've got learned, Christmas songs or their sonatinas or whatever, and it's just a lot of fun. You must come.

ES:

I will.

CMH:

And then the Pastoral Festival is always the Saturday after school lets out for Spring Break in March. This year they're going to be cutting off the heat and air conditioning the night before to work on the system, and so we're a little unsure as to whether to trust the weather. I think we'll be okay, but anyway, the kids do that, and then of course, we have spring break, and the next week they get their comment sheets and we go over that and that Saturday we have our big recital. We give awards and the kids' pieces, they all know two pieces just wonderfully because they've just played them for contests. The rest of the year we do whatever we want to do. We teach a lot of popular music, duets, and then just fun stuff.

ES:

And where do you have the spring recital? Do you have it at a church?

CMH:

I have had it at Jent's most years. Their situation, of course, is getting a little bit more precarious financially. They're not doing well. There is a new piano store across the street from the mall. It's the Pier One shopping center. Yeah, they put in a nice store there. It's a couple of people who had worked for Jent's, and I may have it there. Anyway, that's generally what I do is just hunt for a good venue, and if it can help somebody out in the process, that's great.

ES:

Well that's great because most of the recitals in Sweetwater at least were in churches, which is good and kind of homey, but it's a big venue for a small number of students.

CMH:

Usually there's a modesty piece of wood there or something, so you can't really see.

ES:

We'd always have to walk around.

CMH:

I was raised in the Church of Christ, so I didn't have that option.

ES:

That makes sense, yeah. I like the idea of the sonatina competition because I remember trying to be force fed sonatinas, and as a young piano student, they're not as exciting as popular music or something. It was hard to latch onto and, like you were saying, the style was hard to grasp, and it

was like one of those eating your oatmeal when you're little, and you're like, "I know this is good for me, but—" It seems like the competition aspect would get them engaged in a style of literature where they might not otherwise want.

CMH:

I think so, and another thing that I picked up from, number one, being a parent, and number two, a lot of the research, is not saying, "You have to do this," or even "I want you to do this." But here are two options, "Which one would you prefer?"

ES:

So they either have those two, yeah. That makes sense, yeah.

CMH:

But when we're choosing music for contests, they always have several options and they get to choose the one that they are the most excited about because they're not going to practice something they're not excited about.

ES:

Right, I remember that, shelving the ones that were a little more boring and focusing on the others.

CMH:

Did you have a notebook where everything was written down?

ES:

We'd have a spiral every year, and she'd give me little notes on there to tell me. I learned through various method books. Did you do the graded methods to start out at the beginning students?

CMH:

You just have to start off with the graded method, I think, make sure that everything is covered. I have several that I use, I don't have just one. It just depends upon the student and the maturity and all that. Finally, there is just a marvelous method for preschoolers. Are you familiar with Faber and Faber, Nancy and Randall Faber?

ES:

I've heard the name.

CMH:

Well they have come up with just the most marvelous series, and one of the neat things about it is a lot of the tunes that you learn, particularly in the third level, are melodies from the classics, and it is real cool. I collaborated with two other people several years ago, and we put together a method which never went anywhere, but it was a good experience. Anyway, I thought, Why didn't I think of that?

ES:

Yeah, and that's one of those instances I remember being in band and playing like a simplified version of the classical tune and then listening to the symphony performance. I'm like, "I played that." And it gives you some ownership, and so I'm sure as a little kid you're hearing these tunes and later on you're like, "I remember that."

CMH:

And I usually after they learn their version, I usually try to either play a recording and play for them and let them hear, "This is what it's going to sound like."

ES:

That must be exciting.

CMH:

I think it's really neat. And two characters that they introduced in the second book are Mozart and Beethoven, and they learn a lot about their lives, a lot of little melodies. Mozart's melodies are so simple.

ES:

And very memorable. Well, all that has led up to this, I'm guessing you kind of cater everything. I was going to say, do you teach them any particular Mozart or Chopin or Beethoven, but it kind of depends on the student and if they're interested in certain works and you just cater.

CMH:

I take pride in knowing how to teach to a lot of different learning styles.

ES:

That's great; you don't force it onto them, force any pieces.

CMH:

It doesn't do any good. You know what happens when you force something on a kid.

ES:

That's wonderful, that's great. Well, getting back to a little bit of the club work, I guess what could clubs do—one thing that I keep on wondering is how can—I come in, I'm an outsider, I'm coming into this club and I'm saying, "What's going on, y'all are aging?"

CMH:

"What are you doing that pertains to me?"

ES:

Yeah and I guess my question is, what could club work do that could be helpful, beneficial for you?

CMH:

Do you have any of the music club magazines?

ES:

I do, Ms. Reynolds gave me a couple of those.

CMH:

Well, you know, they are just packed with pictures of winners and all that. What our music clubs could do would be to publicize those events and encourage them, and if there needs to be some kind of a local festival to foster these events, they need to do it because I mean, here I am, lived in this town for thirty years and had my kids playing at the Pastoral Festival for twenty-five or more, and I didn't know these things existed. What they need to do is to publicize what they do offer because there's a lot of really important stuff out there. Evidently there are clubs who put more importance on it than the Lubbock clubs.

ES:

If feels like the Allegro Club was even harder. I don't know if you've heard much about the Allegro Music Club, but it was even harder for me to find one person to talk to them.

CMH:

Is that right?

ES:

It took talking to the Lubbock Music Club members and then casually mentioning to them, "Well is there an Allegro person that I could talk to?" And finally, is it Carla Johnson that was the state representative?

CMH:

Yes, oh she's a doll.

ES:

Yes, I got in touch with her finally and she gave me some numbers.

CMH:

Did you get a chance to actually pick her brain?

ES:

No, not yet, she's out of town, isn't she? She's in Austin?

CMH:

She lives in Austin, but I think maintains an apartment here in town or something.

ES:

And she's coming here this weekend for the district meeting, but I'm going to be out of town this weekend.

CMH:

Oh what a shame.

ES:

I'm going to call her this week because if there's one day of overlap I'd love to sit down and pick her brain and talk to her.

CMH:

That would be great and you would enjoy it so much.

ES:

Everybody I've talked to, they just say she's wonderful, and she was very helpful initially getting people. It seems like both clubs can offer a lot to the community, and I am very hesitant to ask people, but I want to say, "What can be more helpful to you? What can the clubs do?"

CMH:

Just publicize all of these programs; there's dance programs.

ES:

Really?

CMH:

Have you not seen pictures?

ES:

Yeah, in that magazine there's a dance competition and a poetry—

CMH:

Have you heard from Francis Christmann?

ES:

I was waiting to talk to her until she got back from that retreat, and I think she just got back, so that's another person to call this week.

CMH:

Absolutely, and her daughter has a dance academy I think. Why are they not entering dancers? Because there may just not be a way here in Lubbock to do that, I don't know. Also, I am really good friends with a former state president, and her husband's one of the ones that I was collaborating with on the method. Her sister is going to be the state president, the incoming state president. They live in Odessa. I don't know how far you're willing to go for your interviews, but Dortha is in horrible, physical shape. She's diabetic, and she's having to undergo dialysis, but she's a talker.

ES:

Her name's Dortha?

CMH:

Dortha Bennett, B-e-n-n-e-t-t. If you need an address and a phone number, I can produce.

ES:

Yeah, let's get that.

CMH:

Again, the coolest people—I'll be right back, I'm getting my—and they can tell you a lot. Like I say, just fun, fun people. They're older than I am, but they don't act it. And Ronald is a marvelous teacher and is, right now, publishing a lot of stuff.

ES:

I think this initial research I'm doing is focusing on Lubbock, but I think it's a wider issue that I could look at is all of these clubs and what we can do to help.

CMH:

Yeah. Okay, Ronald and Dortha D-o-r-t-h-a Bennett. Do you want an address or just phone numbers?

ES:

A phone number would be great.

CMH:

Okay, Ronald's number is 432-366-1994. Dortha's is 432-366-4070.

ES:

Yeah, I think in the long run what I'm hoping to do is interview as many women from this area that are making music as possible, not just club work, but just piano teachers and that sort of thing because they're talking about we're not getting enough interviews with musical ladies, and I just wanted to talk to as many as I can.

CMH:

I could just talk all day about being a musical lady.

ES:

Yeah, this club work stuff, I feel compelled to help out as much as I can.

CMH:

I think that's neat.

ES:

And not be the young 'un that's coming in and saying, "Y'all are dying off and I want to just chronical you. I want to help if I can."

CMH:

That's fantastic. It's just so good to see somebody your age who cares.

ES:

Well is there anything else you want to add to any of this history that you've given or anything else you want to tell the recorder so we have it for posterity?

CMH:

I can't think of anything other than the fact that I have so enjoyed talking with you.

ES:

Well thank you, thank you. Well then I will shut this off.

End of Recording



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