

Colleen's Retirement, July 8, 2001

I thought today might be an appropriate time for me to retire from my position as assistant organist at the First Baptist Church of Austin. Had my father lived he would have been 103 today. In 1936 he gave me a piano.

Mother never admitted it, but I'm sure I was born in the Cradle Roll Department of the First Baptist Church in Tulia, Texas. My first recollections are the sounds of a piano accompanying voices singing "Jesus Loves Me," "Jesus Loves The Little Children," and the great gospel songs of B.B. McKinney and Fanny J. Crosby.

Mother had played a little reed "pump" organ where she was a teenager as she accompanied her father, a Baptist minister, on his preaching journeys. As I grew I wanted to be able to play those same songs, but we had no piano. Emma Ford, who lived two houses down the street from us, could play "Standing On The Promises" and "When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder" better than anyone. In the summer time I would sit on my knees on the living room sofa at an open window and listen to her play those wonderful hymns.

I begged my Dad to let me take lessons and finally Aunt Ruth, who was a very fine musician, said that she would teach me. I took lessons in her home but when I returned to my house there was no piano, so I decided I could "play" our little wooden footstool. My music books had fingering printed under each note so I sat with the footstool in my lap and "practiced." My first piece was 1 2 3 rest, 1 2 3 rest, -- 1 2 3 4 3 2 1 rest. This went on all summer until I progressed to "both hands on the footstool."

My Dad finally realized that I was serious when he heard me play some pieces I had learned at Aunt Ruth's house on her real piano. A few months later he came to me and said, "Let's go to Amarillo and buy you a piano." I can't tell you how excited I was when we entered Tolzein's Music Store and picked out my piano.

Those were the depression years and in our area of the Panhandle of Texas it was also the "dust bowl" era. There was no extra money for frivolous things. If you had a doll, you played with it, if you had a bicycle, you rode it, and I knew that if I had a piano I was going to have to play it. So I put my footstool aside and lovingly practiced on my new real piano.

Aunt Ruth was a good teacher and I soon progressed well enough to actually play some hymns. I didn't use octaves in the left hand or trills in the right, like Emma Ford, but I was at least hearing those melodies come out of my fingers. What a thrill!

I had promised to practice daily and did so faithfully until the "terrible teens." Mother finally sat down with me and explained how my Dad had sacrificed to buy that piano. He had paid \$90 for it after saving for months. That was almost two months salary for him. I was ashamed that I had become negligent about my practice and vowed to never let it happen again. If he had that much faith in me I was going to make him proud of me.

It was difficult for me because my natural musical abilities were limited. However, my desire was huge. I needed twice as much practice time to learn a piece as most musicians but I was determined to be a good player.

Later on, when I was a sophomore in high school, our pastor's wife bought an organ for her home. One day she called me to come over and see it. I ran out of the house yelling, "I'm going to see Mrs. Clark's new organ." I jumped on my bike and peddled in record time to her house. When I got there I couldn't believe my eyes. That organ had two keyboards and a pedal board, and all those buttons to push. Mrs. Clark played some pieces for me, showed me how the various sounds were made, and then asked, "Would you like to try it?" Of course I said yes and climbed on the bench. I didn't know what to play but I just opened her hymnal and there was one of my favorites – "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." So that was the first piece I ever played on the organ, and for some reason I will never understand, I even played the pedals. I was hooked!!

I became the organist at the First Baptist Church of Tulia at age 15. I graduated from Baylor University as an organ performance major in 1949, then did one year of graduate school followed by another year as Dr. Markham's first graduate assistant. My husband and I moved to Vernon, Texas, where for several years I served as interim organist in various churches until a position opened at First Baptist Church. I served there for thirty years. I thought I had retired when we moved to Austin 15 years ago but a few months after joining this church Bob Downer, then music minister, called and asked if I would consider being assistant organist. I couldn't believe it -- me playing that grand 64 rank Casavant! Most organists my age end up playing a

Hammond organ in a funeral home. He said the job would be only temporary – and it was -- only twelve years.

I have told you more than you really wanted to know I'm sure, but I wanted to say this especially to young people. I had only an ounce of talent when I needed pounds. But I dedicated that talent to God and asked Him to put me in places where I could be of service. If you will do that with whatever talent you have He will give you the most joyful journey you can imagine all through your life.

It has been a wonderful 58 years in church music and I would not change a thing - - - unless I could have been a starting pitcher for the St. Louis Cardinals.

COLLEEN'S PRAYER

Concordant Sunday School Class

First Baptist Church, Austin, Texas

April 28, 2002

Our class is rich with gifts and giving. One of the greatest gifts is the gospel music we sing each Sunday morning. We have had many composers who put pen to musical staff and lyricists who fit the gospel to those tunes. B.B. McKinney, Fannie Crosby, our own Joe Martin and many, many others should be thanked for their inspired work. Let us bow now to remember their lyrics as they still *Tell the Old, Old Story*.

What a Friend we have in Jesus. O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing My Great Redeemer's Praise. I am Thine, O Lord. My Hope is Built on Nothing Less Than Jesus' Blood and Righteousness.

Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah to Have Faith in God. Let us Praise Him, Praise Him – The Lily of the Valley, and give us Blessed Assurance that Bye and Bye, When the Morning Comes, we can say we have done Our Best to Rescue the Perishing.

Let Others See Jesus in Us, oh Lord, and Send a Great Revival. Let us always Serve the Lord with Gladness and always think of Others.

Speak to our Hearts now, Lord Jesus. Bless our class, each member and keep us Close to Thee.

Amen

An Ode to Colleen

There once was a lass named Colleen,
At playing the organ, 'twas keen;
Her Swell, it was great,
Her Great was first-rate,
Her pedaling skill was supreme.

Bob Downer said, "Play...just a while",
She should have suspected that smile;
Colleen said, "okay",
And until this day,
She started each service with style.

But a wee bit of mischief she'll play.
When, on any given Sun-day,
Just listen, you'll find
That "The Old Baylor Line"
Has into the prelude, made way.

The Cassavant sometimes gives grief,
Frustration, it is positif;
A cypher will sound,
Pre-sets can't be found:
But Colleen stays cool – it's so neat.

At eleven o'clock comes the feat
That Indy could scarcely repeat;
The hand-off to Susan.
Not a beat they are losin'
The ba-ton is passed, and toute suite.

One memorable Sunday 'twas yucky
The weather outside, it was ducky;
On that rainy day
When the ceiling gave way.
That she didn't resign, we were lucky!

For to each of her jobs, she gave all,
Whether grand the occasion, or small:
Ancora's her fan,
Kid's choir thinks she's grand.
For 'tis not a job, but a call.

Colleen , what a journey you've trod:
Next Sunday without you, how odd:
Buts forever, 'twill be
In thinking of thee.
We'll say a great "thanks be to God!"

July 29, 2000 – With loving appreciation from your church family.

By Barbara Clarke

ODE TO A TOAD

By Colleen Hightower

(Read at the November, 1993, meeting of the Sierra Verde Garden Club of Austin.)

Where did they come from?
 Out of the snow?
With the first warm rays
 And things began to grow
I didn't know – I just didn't know.

Those funny little creatures
 With a pre-historic face
Suddenly appeared all over the place
 They didn't bother anybody
 They were really quite bland
Like an honorary mascot
 For our Texas prairie land.

We had no Toys R Us
 Or Barney on TV
So we used these little fellers
 For our entertainment – free

We had some great toad races
 The winners – they got fed
At their favorite dining places
 Like the "All-You-Can-Eat-Delux Red Ant Bed."

As a general rule
 When the weather got cool
They began to disappear
 By the first of December and it began to snow
Where they went we didn't quite know.

Always wondered where they came from
 And why they were sent –
It racked my brain
 But I didn't have a hint
With the first warm rays
 And things began to grow –

I just don't know – I guess I'll never know.