

## My Hammer Dulcimer Story

My earliest childhood memory is sitting on my Daddy's shoulders watching a parade in which many of the young people from our church (of which my Daddy was pastor) were marching in the high school band. I've been told that I expressed my wholehearted pleasure by exclaiming, "Daddy! I LIKE that noise!" From that first musical experience I have arrived at a place in my life in which music takes much of my time and energy. Because my mother was a musician it seemed natural to follow in her footsteps and prepare for a career in music.

After many years in the public school music classroom I am now teaching and performing music on the Hammer Dulcimer and Appalachian Mountain dulcimer across the USA and abroad. I've worked hard to sharpen and polish my skills. I started going to festivals and attending workshops, and my hard work paid off after several years when I won both the Texas and the Southern Regional Hammer Dulcimer Championships. I auditioned and was accepted as a performing artist under the auspices of both Young Audiences and the Texas Commission For the Arts.

Let me give you a little background about how I got interested in playing the dulcimer: I married Chuck Carter, and though we were living in Houston we went on a vacation trip to Chuck's hometown, Asheville NC, and attended the Bascomb Lamar Lunsford Folk Festival. I was absolutely captivated by the music of the mountains! We soon owned our own Mt. dulcimer, and a few years later it was joined by a Hammer Dulcimer.

In the 70's we left Houston and moved to Asheville, NC where I became Choral Director at North Buncombe High School. While living in Asheville we attended the Southern Highlands Handicraft Guild Fair and somewhere in the distance I heard the most intriguing sound I'd ever heard. Following the sound I discovered Jerry Read Smith and the hammer dulcimer. Jerry explained the basics and soon I was playing a few simple tunes and of course we placed an order for a hammer dulcimer before we left. Within a few months I was playing a beautifully crafted instrument which Jerry designed and built. I believe it is the most beautiful dulcimer I have ever seen. A curator from The North Carolina State Museum saw it while it was still in Jerry's shop and asked if he would make another just like it to place in the Museum. You can see it on my home page. [www.peggycartermusic.com](http://www.peggycartermusic.com).

The popularity of the hammer dulcimer in that part of the country allowed me the opportunity to begin playing solo performances for churches and community events including Shindig-On-The-Green. Western North Carolina was a big influence on my musical development with many rich experiences listening to and playing with some

excellent old time players, including Chuck's Uncle Elmer Carter who played the fiddle and his cousin Bo Carter who played banjo. (Bo's son continues the tradition and plays in a bluegrass band in Asheville.)

On a trip to Grandfather Mountain near Boone, NC. Chuck and I noticed a small sign on the side of the road that said, "Bluegrass Tonight!" We followed the signs up a mountain road. We asked who was playing and were told that it was just some local musicians. We were surprised to find that Doc Watson from Deep Gap, NC was one of the locals. I was asked to sit in and play, and I learned some great tunes from Doc Watson. One of the tunes, "Pear Tree" can be found on my lesson page.

We moved back to Houston, Texas in the '80s and I took a teaching-job as a middle school choral director. I realized what a great tool the dulcimer is to teach musical skills to young people, and in 1990 I secured a grant to buy dulcimers for the students in my middle school General Music classes. My students performed for other school groups in our district and began getting invitations to perform for many events all around Houston. For ten years I used dulcimers in my general music classes and helped some of the elementary music teachers get started with the dulcimers in their schools. My dulcimer students and Mixed Choir produced two videos featuring their singing and playing. After my dulcimer class received so much recognition I was invited for the next three years to be a presenter on using the dulcimer in the classroom at the Texas Music Teachers' Convention. Today there are many music teachers throughout Texas using dulcimers in their music classes.

While continuing to teach full time I began writing dulcimer and choral arrangements and some original music which my students performed. My choral arrangements are today being published by BriLee Publishing Co. a division of Carl Fisher Publishers.

I sang in the Houston Symphony Chorus and continued to perform with my dulcimer... In Germany, Austria, The Czeck Republic, and in twice in Ireland. Over the last several years, I have performed and taught workshops all the way from Florida to California, and from North Carolina to North Idaho.

My husband Chuck and I joined the North Harris County Dulcimer Society and enjoyed playing with other dulcimer players. In order to increase our opportunities to play with other acoustic musicians we formed the Houston Area Acoustic Music Society (HAAMS), and put together the Summer Acoustic Music Festival (SAMFest). We organized "Strings and Things" a folk ensemble made up of many acoustic instruments, and we organized a monthly acoustic showcase and jam session at Hickory Hollow

Barbecue Restaurant in Houston. We even organized an acoustic music tour to Ireland and dulcimer cruise to Cozumel.

I have taught the hammer dulcimer at Houston Community College, and North Harris County College. I also teach private lessons at my home and offer correspondence lessons to many who have no teacher available. Several of my students enjoy dulcimer competitions and one of them, Josh Messick, won the Texas state hammer dulcimer championship when he was only 15 years old, and at 18 he won the National Hammer Dulcimer Championship.

Since dulcimers are hard to find at music stores we started a small business to provide these instruments and accessories for my students in the Houston area. We expanded our business by going to festivals as vendors, and [we offer our instruments on line, along with my books and Cds.](#)

Currently, I enjoy playing in two bands which feature the hammer dulcimer..... "The Merry Waits of Windsor" and "Texas Bound". We play dance music for Ceilidhs, Socials, Balls and Festivals in and around Houston. We've been featured on stage at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, the Texas Folk Life Festival in San Antonio and the Kerrville Arts & Crafts Fair. In addition we've performed at several Ranching Heritage Festivals and Country Peddler Shows throughout Texas and Louisiana. For ten years we performed on stage at Home-For-The-Holidays in Old-Town Spring, and other festivals, and for 18 years we've played at Dickens On The Strand in Galveston.

Singing and playing the hammer dulcimer for shut-ins and at nursing homes and retirement communities keeps me busy. We're still enjoying traveling all across the US to teach and perform at dulcimer festivals, churches and community events. My day is filled with teaching private lessons and preparing web lessons for members of my [Dulcimer Circle](#). I'd love to hear from you. Email me: [peggycarter77@gmail.com](mailto:peggycarter77@gmail.com)

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