

My Life With The Violin

At five years of age I lived in the West End area of Atlanta, Georgia. When my mother would walk me to school, we would pass a shop which had several small violins displayed in the window. Naturally, I had questions about them. I became Interested in learning how to play this instrument. so mother made inquiries and found a teacher for me, Ruth Dabney Smith. I soon began taking lessons once a week. I learned that you move something called a “bow” across the strings to make a sound and at the same time place your fingers on the strings to change the pitch, and in this way, create music.

At the end of each year, my teacher presented a recital of all her students, each of whom, accompanied by piano, would play a selection from memory before an audience which included the parents. This required, in addition to practice, great concentration and poise. I recently found a printed program of such a recital, dated May 25, 1948. I was the third student to perform out of seventeen, playing a selection called “Concertante in G by Ruegger.” Before performing, I was nervous. While playing, I was lost in concentration, and after finishing the selection I felt very good about the experience. As time went on, it became easier to stand in front of an audience and perform.

After a few years, I began to play with other students in larger groups such as orchestras and, later, what I was told was a “string quartet.” This was a group of four players – two violinists, a violist and a cellist. I have an old photograph of a string quartet group that I organized in 1955 for a wedding reception.

In the summer of 1952, I had the opportunity to attend the Transylvania Music Camp in Brevard, North Carolina. There I played in the orchestra composed of some 70 student musicians and faculty members. Each week a new program would be rehearsed and performed the following weekend for an audience. From time to time, the orchestra would actually give it performance over a local radio station. I made many friends during that first summer.

During the next 3 years, I returned to Transylvania each summer. The last year, 1955, I gave a solo performance of a Tartini Sonata, and as a result, I was chosen to be concert master of the orchestra for the final performance that summer. It was a great way to finish my four-year experience at Transylvania.



The following year, 1956, my teacher made arrangements for me to study at Meadowmount Music School in the Adirondack Mountains of New York State. The school was run by Ivan Galamian and his wife. Many fine violinists attended this school and studied under Galamian and other great teachers. Each morning after breakfast I practiced alone for four straight hours. During that summer, I made many friends.

