

THE HARP MIRACLE

This is the true story of a young girl who desperately needed a harp, and of the miraculous harp which appeared. Beautiful Sheriff is a multi-talented Fort Valley Middle School honor roll student who plays the saxophone and harp, sings in the school choir, and performs with the Starlite dance group (Phillis Blassingame, director).

Beautiful began her harp career in the Rainbow of Sound Youth Harp Choir program, which is part of the "Spiritual Respite" mission of the Blue Heron Lake Nature Conservancy (a 501(c)3 organization). The program involves teaching inner city children to play the Celtic lap harp, thus providing therapeutic music for both physical and emotional healing. The program is run through the Peach Co. Family Connection After School Program in the targeted inner city neighborhood of Tabor Heights (Fort Valley, GA).

After the initial harp course of 8 lessons, Beautiful learned so fast she soon joined the advanced group, which had been playing for a little over a year. She quickly surpassed them. Beautiful showed so much obvious talent that Sondra Franceil, who teaches the Rainbow of Sound program, arranged for Beautiful to take advanced harp lessons with Mrs. Calista (Waddy) Koch, Adjunct Professor at Mercer University, Macon, Georgia. Mrs. Koch was impressed with her talent, and told Ms. Franceil to begin looking for a larger harp for her, as she was outgrowing the little Harpsicle lap harp.

Beautiful made great progress in her lessons with Mrs. Koch, and after only a few months she was invited to join the Middle Georgia Harp Ensemble (an invitation-only group). A floor harp is a prerequisite for that, but how to acquire one with no funds on hand? Ms. Franceil applied for grants and conducted a fund raising campaign through local churches, the news media, and the Georgia Gives Day website. Only enough money was raised for a down payment on an inexpensive, student entry-level floor harp, and there was no money forthcoming for the monthly payments. But apparently God had other plans for Beautiful.

Ms. Franceil, Mrs. Koch, and Ms. Christina Tourin (developer of the Rainbow of Sound/Color My World with Harp Curriculum) sent out urgent pleas for a harp donation to all their harp contacts (over 5,000 world wide!). Only one person answered the call. Mary Anne Brundage from Virginia, agreed to donate her professional quality Steen Minstrel floor harp to the BHLNC Rainbow of Sound program for Beautiful's use (and for other deserving students who might follow in her footsteps).

God works in mysterious ways. Mrs. Brundage had been praying for an opportunity to be of service, and when she read about Beautiful, she knew this was her chance. In addition to the harp itself, she donated the harp case,

a harp cart for transportation, and extra strings. She even agreed to deliver the harp to Mrs. Koch's house in Macon, where the Middle Georgia Harp Ensemble was to meet for rehearsal the following week.

The moneys initially raised for a harp were just exactly enough to purchase a harp bench, a music stand, and an electronic tuner--all of which Beautiful needed for her professional performances. The miracles kept on happening, as the harp bench was purchased at a discount from another harp ensemble member, and the harp stand was on sale! Furthermore, when Ms. Franceil went looking for a sleeping bag to function as a harp dust cover, she found one --also on sale--in Beautiful's favorite colors of pink and purple.

Beautiful was presented the harp on Feb. 2, 2013 at the rehearsal of the Middle Georgia Harp Ensemble. She played the harp in public for the first time when she played a solo performance on Feb. 16th at the Starlite "Shining Star Awards" Black History program in Fort Valley, attracting the attention of Annette St. Claire, Channel 13 TV news anchor. Beautiful made her debut performance with the Middle Georgia Harp Ensemble on March 2nd (the day before her 13th birthday!) for the Peach Blossom Festival at Lane's Southern Orchard in Fort Valley.

Beautiful is scheduled to play on Thursday, May 16, 2013 at the Fort Valley Middle School Band's spring concert (Larry Alexander, director), and on Saturday, May 25, 2013 she will perform in a student recital at Mercer University. She is applying to participate in the FAME summer music camp at Fort Valley State University.

Mrs. Koch believes that within 12-18 months, Beautiful could audition for the Mercer-Macon Youth Symphony Orchestra. This could hopefully help her win a music scholarship to college. May the miracles continue in her life!

PHOTO CREDITS:

"Beautiful Portrait"---Shirlee Kempf-Symicek

