

Autoharp Clearinghouse - August 1991 - Carol Stober

The *Autoharp Clearinghouse* is honored to dedicate this issue to Carol Stober and her family band Maiden Heaven. An Iowa farm girl, autoharpist Carol Stober was raised in the 1940s with traditional rural values. She is a modern-day grandma who brings her children and grandchildren closer to her through the love of music.

It's a story of the women and girls in a family often separated by miles on the map, but swapping tapes by mail and songs by telephone during the winter months in anticipation of the excitement of the music coming alive during summer season performances. This will be the fifth summer the women have traveled together in their GMC motorbus singing and playing a combination of musical favorites drawn from three generations. They call it American Music, which basically includes bluegrass, folk, country, swing and gospel. The band consists of Carol Stober (autoharp and guitar), Vicky Stober Beall (autoharp and mandolin), Jackie Stober (bass) and Rebekah Stober (fiddle and clog dancing). A granddaughter, Jennifer Beall has traveled with the group and a grandson, Oliver Beall, has joined the band playing banjo and handling the sale of tapes and albums. At age 12, he also plays drums in the school band in Easton, Kansas.

While most bands have problems sticking together over a period of years, Carol's string band keeps growing, changing and challenging each other to reach out individually and then come back together with stronger musical skills to share with one another. Carol will book solo, duo, trio or the entire band, depending on the event and the season of the year. They have a growing number of fans from South Carolina and Georgia across the southern states, up into the Midwest and into west Texas.

An old chorded zither is probably the single most-important ingredient in this multi-generation drama. It began in Kansas with a used ChromAarp purchased from a neighbor's garage sale, somewhere around 1975. The instrument was a dust collector until a year or so later when the Stober family moved to eastern Kentucky. In the hills and hollows of Kentucky and West Virginia, Carol began to hear autoharp music performed at weekend festivals, and developed a taste for mountain music. She remembered the 'harp, now in daughter Vicky's possession in Kansas, and asked for it back.

Although Carol was teaching business subjects and career education classes in Boyd County, Kentucky, she began to incorporate projects using music into her classroom. She often carried the ChromAarp to school to accompany student's creative exploration and learning adventures.

In 1980, the Stober family was transferred to Chicago where Carol's husband, Al, was employed by the U.S. Justice Department. Carol decided not to teach school or work a day job since her four children were all graduated from high school by this time. Instead, she decided to finally pursue one of her hobbies...music. She became involved in the activities and fun at The Old Town School of Folk Music in the "Windy City". For the next three years, Carol progressed through the guitar classes there and became a guitar instructor, songwriting coordinator and Editor of The Lead Sheet, a monthly newsletter to the members and supporters of the school.

Paul Bowes, autoharp instructor at OTSFM, always seemed to find time to teach Carol new songs and techniques on the instrument. He even helped her to rebuild an old black Oscar Schmidt 'harp purchased at a flea market. Eventually, Paul encouraged Carol to begin accepting autoharp students.

Attending the Walnut Valley Festival in Winfield, Kansas in 1982 put Carol in touch with autoharpers on a national level. She has been an Advisory Board Member of *The Autoharpoholic* magazine for several years.

Carol has taught autoharp workshops at various festivals across the country. After moving to Talladega, Alabama in 1983, Carol continued teaching private students on autoharp, dulcimer and guitar in her home studio. She became an Alabama Arts Council Artist and performed in schools across the state, as well as in libraries, museums and theaters.

In 1982, granddaughter Rebekah was born and came to live with Carol. Little Rebekah was always hanging onto grandma's skirt tail when students came for music lessons. She listened and learned many songs at an early age and even played around with a child size autoharp. Then, at age 5, someone mentioned to Rebekah that she wouldn't always stay little and cute and that she would do well to get a skill. To that, Rebekah informed her family that "she was born to play the fiddle". Carol located a Suzuki violin teacher in Birmingham for the young would-be fiddler, which required adult participation and two weekly lessons in a city 75 miles from home.

Last year, Rebekah learned to clog dance and has since expanded her dance instruction to include tap, jazz, ballet and baton. Since January 1990, she has won thirty seven trophies and many medals and ribbons in competitions. Rebekah is featured on an album of eleven songs (with autoharp accompaniment) recorded when she was just 6 years old. She currently performs weekly on Channel 6 television in Birmingham on the *Country Boy Eddie Morning Show*, which airs on cable throughout the U.S. and in many foreign countries.

Vicky Stober Beall resides in Easton, Kansas and is Carol's oldest daughter. She is married and has three children. Vicky learned to play autoharp from Carol's Autoharp Instruction Book and Tape Set. Her previous training in music included a few piano lessons as a child. Vicky is self-taught on the mountain dulcimer, and used that instrument, as well as the autoharp, while teaching preschool children for six years at St. Mary's College in Lansing, Kansas and while she was Director of Easton Manor Daycare Center in Easton. Last year, Vicky added bluegrass mandolin to the Maiden Heaven sound, and is attending Kansas City Community College studying classical voice and piano.

Daughter Jackie is Rebekah's mother. She and Carol began singing two-part harmony when preparations were beginning for Carol's first commercial recording in 1976. It featured old timey music done on autoharp and bowed psaltery. The cassette was entitled *Patchwork*. The songs chosen were recorded mainly to supplement Carol's workshop demonstrations of the autoharp, and to give participants something to take home for listening purposes. A year later, *Country Sampler* featured mother/daughter harmonies with Carol on autoharp and Jackie, self-taught, on electric bass.

Last year, Jackie attended South Plains College in Levelland, Texas, where she received a scholarship for the Bluegrass-Country Music Program. She plans to return for a second year when Maiden Heaven completes their summer tour in August. Jackie is studying both performance and sound technician skills. Maiden Heaven plans to record a bluegrass album within the next year, and they already have some bookings lined up for 1992.

Carol now has at least eight autoharps in her closet, with an Oscar Schmidt F-C-G Festival diatonic 'harp being her favorite instrument for performing and recording. Sharing the stage with her talented family creates a feeling of satisfaction and a belief that family values are possible in the 1990s. If you ask Carol for grandmotherly "how to" advice, she'll first suggest finding a competent teacher for family members. Then, she would encourage you to go with your youngsters to lessons, and to practice together daily.

NOTE: Carol was the Interaction Lesson instructor for the October 1989 issue of *Autoharp Quarterly* magazine. The song presented, *Down Home Family Band*, was composed by Jackie Stober and arranged for autoharp by Carol. **ER**

2008 Update from Carol:

I am still playing autoharp music and plan to go on the Autoharp Cruise to the Caribbean in January 2009.

Cowboy Songs for Autoharp is out-of-print, but I still have a few in stock. All can be ordered by sending check or money order in the amount plus \$6 postage, to Carol Stober, Box 1275, Talladega, AL 35161. My new e-mail address is <CStober@charter.net>

Books (standard notation & tab)

Love Songs for Autoharp Book \$14.95
Appalachian Autoharp Book & Cassette \$21.00
Appalachian Autoharp Archive Edition Book 14.95
Autoharping the Gospels Book \$14.95
Cowboy Songs for Autoharp Book \$14.95

DVDs or VHS (Instruction)

Easy Autoharp for Beginners \$29.95
Melodic Autoharp \$29.95

Recordings CD or cassette

Country Sampler \$10.00
Down Home Family Band (children's songs) \$10.00
Patchwork (autoharp & bowed psaltery) cassette only \$7.50

