

# Stories of the Clan: Pianoforte

By : Delphine

I began studying classical piano at the age of six and I still love the piano.



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## Stories of the Clan

### Pianoforte

From the Italian â soft and loudâ

A Memoir

by

Delphine

When I was in first grade, a teacher came to my classroom one day and asked if any student would like to learn to play the piano. I put my hand up without thinking. I didnât know if I had musical talent, but my Aunt Esther played the piano and I wanted to be like her.

The school district had employed what they called an â itinerantâ music teacher, who came to each school in the area once a week, and worked with the children who wanted to study the piano. There was a piano available in school for these sessions, but we did not have one at home at that time. I was given a folding cardboard facsimile of the keys on the piano and I practiced at home during the week. Then, when the music teacher visited my school the following week, I had the chance to hear what I was playing.

From the beginning, I was happy because I was getting to be like my aunt. I enjoyed making music, and I was able to learn, early on, to read music as well. My hands seemed to know what they were doing, independent of my conscious mind. And I feel a little impressed with my child-self, that at the age of seven I was able to persevere, practicing the piano for week-long intervals on the cardboard piano, not hearing what I was playing until the itinerant music teacher arrived at school.

My mother and father were proud and happy. Like all Jewish parents, they liked seeing their children show an interest in playing a musical instrument and reading. When first grade ended, my parents bought a used upright piano for \$50, a lot of money in 1958; I started studying piano with a private teacher. I had to have piano books, so my mother took me to downtown Pittsburgh to the music store there. The piano books had thick yellow paper covers, the paper almost as thick as cardboard, with words printed, â *Beethoven Simplified for Beginners*,â etc., in dark green-- and I loved my new piano books. I was a booklover in general even by then, so the clean pages, covered with staves and notes, the â new book smellâ that came from the paper covers, all intoxicated me, and I knew I was meant to learn to play the piano.

There were plenty of children on our street to play with, and nobody got bored. Some, myself included, got into trouble in minor ways but we were all good kids, raised by conscientious Jewish parents, and everybodyâs mother was at home. I had two friends, Arlene and Naomi, and when I think about playing the piano and wanting to be like my aunt, they come to mind.

Although school was out for the summer, I still took piano lessons and had to practice, sometimes when all the other kids were running around outside, playing cops and robbers. However, one memorable early summer evening, I was sitting at the piano, getting ready to play â Spinning Song,â â a favorite with piano teachersâ when Arlene and Naomi came stomping up the wooden back steps to get me to join in a game of softball. My mother told them I had to practice my piano pieces first, so they offered to wait for meâ and

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they asked my mother if they could come in and listen to me playing. My mother happily agreed, and as I played "Spinning Song" three times over, my two friends danced around the living room making ballet-like bends and turns. When I was finished, the three of us went out to join the other kids in our street's version of softball, with an old tennis ball that made a hollow sound as it hit the plastic bat, and using folded-up, brown paper shopping bags, held down by stones, as the bases and home plate.

Even after decades of neglecting my musical training, I can still play the piano. Thanks, Mom and Dad.

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