

MUSIC WAS HERMAN SANDQUIST'S PASSPORT TO AMERICA

Herman Sandquist is one of those lucky people who was fortunate enough to be able to make his living bringing happiness to others through his music.

Herman came to America from Huskavarna, Sweden in 1923. He was able to pick up jobs immediately because of his ability to play the accordian by ear.

"I soon found out that playing by ear wasn't enough if I wanted steady employment with a band," the eighty four year old musician said. "I had to be able to read notes so I could follow a score."

Herman laughed as he recalled his childhood in Sweden as the baby of a very musical family.

"I was the youngest of six children. My whole family was musical but I was referred to as the baby--always too little to do anything," he said.

"Mother had a small two key row accordian more like a concertina. She would hide it from me but when she left the house, I would snoop in the closets until I found it."

Herman was only six years old when he began picking out tunes on the small accordian and he taught himself to play it without the rest of the family catching on.

"I longed to get my hands on the big accordian my brother had", he recalled. So, once again, when everyone had left the house the little boy would sneak his brothers accordian and practice.

"I got caught once. Instead of encouraging me my brother gave me a licking that I didn't soon forget", he said. "I think

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it's funny now but it wasn't so amusing then."

Finally, big brother and a fellow musician named Shogren bought a very expensive accordian together and formed a dance band. Herman, as a present to his brother and perhaps with the idea of softening him up a bit, had a wooden box made for the instrument.

"The carpenter did a good job," Herman said. "He even put a lock on the box."

When the accordian was not in use the box was locked foiling all attempts Herman might make to play the instrument when his big brother was not at home.

"One day he forgot the key on the kitchen table when he went to work," Herman said.

Desperate to play the expensive accordian, the sly Herman snatched the key, ran to the nearest locksmith and had a duplicate made.

A year passed and Herman continued to practice in secret. He became very good and yet, no one in his family suspected.

One evening his brother was playing for a group of guests at a party.

"When he took a break to go to the outhouse I seized the opportunity to play," Herman said.

Encouraged by the party dancers he swung into one polka after another forgetting his brother would soon be back.

"When I heard his footsteps on the porch I got scared and hid under the table."

"Where's Shogren?", his brother called out as he entered the house.

"He's not here," the guests replied.

"He's not here. I just heard him playing the *accordian*."

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the brother said.

And that was how he discovered it was not his professional partner Shogren whom he heard playing but his little brother Herman.

"Right then and there I became a member of the band," Herman said grinning as he recalled his victory.

Each time he played he turned over half his earnings to his brother to help pay for the accordian.

"When I came to America my brother wanted to give me that accordian to take along because he said I had practically paid for it," Herman said.

" At that time I believed money could be picked right off the trees in America so I declined his offer."

It was over a year before Herman got another accordian and through a friend he met in America he learned to read music.

"My firstteacher was a very impatient man and I learned more than notes from him. I learned that you must have patience with a pupil," Herman said.

One day the impatient teacher blew up and suggested that Herman get a self teaching book and learn notes by himself. He did but admits it was the hard way of doing it.

Herman and his wife Bertha came to Pine City in 1934 right in the midst of the Depression.

"At first I toured the county in a model A Ford giving lessons to pupils in their homes. My first student was in Beroun," he said.

Eventually his students came to his home and he taught 70 in a week plus repairing accordians and playing dance engagements

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with his five piece orchestra.

youngsters
In his lifetime he has taught the accordian to over a thousand ~~kids~~ in Pine County alone. He can tick off a list of those students who went on to be professional musicians themselves.

Among his keepsakes is a letter from Gary Kent thanking him for the influence he had on Kent's career in music.

"Gary started taking lessons from me when he was just eight years old," Herman said. "He wrote that letter when he was in college and began playing with Tony Jambor's Polka Jamboree show on WTCN television.

Eddie Pangerl was another pupil of Herman's. He went on to become a professional entertainer with his popular Millionaires band.

"I taught Eddie, his mother and even taught his wife long before Eddie knew her," Herman said.

He is still teaching a few exceptional students.

"I learned just as much from my students as they learned from me.

Many people his age complain they have outlived their contemporaries and young people don't care to bother talking to them.

Not Herman. He says, "No matter where I go someone comes up to me and says, 'Remember me?'. Then we have a good visit."

His wife Bertha keeps the coffee pot hot for the steady stream of visitors that drop in to say hello to their old friends. A house filled with music is a happy home and Herman and Bertha Sandquist intend to keep theirs just that way.

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