

A CHILD'S DESTINY – ORDERED BY A MOTHER'S DREAM.

My mother decided when I was four years old that I should play the piano. We had an old roller upright piano in our living room for a long time. Mom loved antiques and she probably brought it for a song before I was born. As a toddler, I loved to hear the rollers play songs as old as the piano. However, my mother could not sing or play a note.

I remember at the age of four, my mother took me to a private piano teacher in town who had many students. This was her decision, not mine. In the nineteen thirties, children didn't question or refuse their parent's dictates, they just did what they were told. This music teacher had a recital each year, and regardless of age, all students were required to participate. I soon found out that memorization was a big factor in playing the piano. First you learned the seven basic keys, and middle "C" was your focal point. Next were the Bass and Treble Clef signs, and next the scales. All of the above required memorization. That was quite easy because mom helped me with that homework. Finally, I was given the beginners children's songs such as "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star," "Brother John", etc. These songs led into learning time signature signs, rests, major and minor keys. More memorization. You were then given a special song to learn to play at the annual summer recital, and again memorization and expectation to be perfect.

After several years with this teacher, my Father became acquainted with an African-American Master Piano Teacher who graduated from Julliard, Professor William Speight, (deceased). After auditioning me, he was horrified that I had not been taught some techniques, and agreed to accept me as his pupil. Professor Speight taught many students to be concert ready, and many obtained positions in the musical arena. His teaching was entirely different from my previous teacher. He was very strict, and left no room for error, not only with notes, but also tempo and style. He was a task master, but perfection was his motive. When I was fourteen years old, he would send me to perform for groups that requested a pianist for an event. However, at age sixteen he wanted my Father to give his permission for me to give a concert at Carnegie Hall in New York.

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My Father said no because he could not visualize me, a “Colored” girl having a future as a classical pianist, in the 1940’s.

Remember, this was Mom’s idea, but I wasn’t disappointed. At the age of twelve, I began playing the piano and the three manual Hammond Organ for choirs, starting with my home church. My first position was directing and playing for the youth choir, and I was in my element. I enjoyed playing for churches immensely and I continued for fifty years. Now, I can appreciate Mom’s orders for me to learn to play the piano because it served me well.

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