

MUSIC IN FAMILIES
BY ARIEL DYER

The Woods family were always lovers of fiddle and old-time music. When my son-in-law, Mervyn McLeod Woods was seven years old, he made a fiddle for himself out of a cigar box, a ruler, a spool and some rubber bands, (for strings). He wanted to have one of his own like his father and uncles!

He soon was taking lessons from Mrs. Lamb and learning very fast! By the time he got to High School he organized a band for the school dances!

He also played in a community orchestra that Evan Stephenson organized. They played semi-classical and popular music for church and social gatherings and became quite popular in the area.

Mr. Woods wanted Mervyn to have a good violin so they went to Hillsburg to see Mr. Charlie Dyer who was a well known fiddler and owned several good violins. Mr. Dyer was one of the Dyer Family orchestra who were famous before the turn of the century. They played for weddings and garden parties around the Garafraxa and Erin area. Their father, Ephraim, had taught Singing Schools in Fergus, Erin and Caledon. The six sons all learned the violin and the girls played the organ. If there were two weddings on the same day they divided. These house parties usually lasted till early morning. They let the horses lead them home while they dozed--they had to start "the chores" as soon as they got home.

Mr. Charles E. Dyer, (my father-in-law after 1939) learned to read music and he sent to the George Root Music Co. of Chicago for music for new tunes. Soon the other fiddlers around were learning and indeed, some of those tunes are still used today. "Charlie" was a skilled player and went on to be a winner in all local contests. He even won 9 gold medals at the Canadian National Exhibition at Toronto.

Well, Mr. Woods finally persuaded Mr. Dyer to sell him his best violin and it is still in use in Mervyn's family band.

After High School, Merv' was employed at Beatty Bros. in Fergus. When he found a few others who were interested, he set up the "Merv Woods Orchestra." My husband, Carl F. Dyer was practicing with them but he suffered a severe hemorrhage and by Dr's orders

he had to give up his beloved instrument. I said, "It is worse than taking candy from a kid" but Carl said, "Oh, it's much worse than that!" Carl had an excellent "Ear for music" and could play the harmony note even for all the fast fiddle tunes. After we had moved to Fergus, Mr. Woods invited "Grandpa Dyer" to visit them and so Merv and he became good friends and traded tunes.

Merv needed a good piano player and *our daughter* Carolyn Dyer became his piano player. She could play very well and had her Grade ten in piano. She also had a remarkable good ear and she too could play the harmony parts for the old-time tunes. She accompanied Grandpa at the Shelburn Fiddle Contest when she was twelve years old. It seems that Merv became quite interest in Carolyn and she became fond of the handsome band leader! They were married in 1960 and they started raising a family who of course all developed a talent for music. The two girls and two boys were all given the best of instruction and were provided with valueable violins. The orchestra became *the* Merv Woods Family and Friends orchestra.

They have played throughout a wide district. This year they have played for dances in Flesherton, Sunridge, Barrie and London. They also have entertained in two Toronto Hotels and at the International Ploughing Matches. Also several times in Buffalo and Niagara Falls.

The four children have competed in Fiddle contests all across Ontario, in Maritime Canada, Western provinces and Vermont, New York, ~~the~~ Pennsylvania states, winning many prizes and trophies. In fact the Woodshome contains several dozen handsome trophies. Mrs. Carolyn Woods accompanies her talented offspring. All are now adults and compete in adult classes. *Carolyn* She has become a favourite player for many contestants in the over 20 contests in Ontario.

The eldest daughter, now Dr. Elizabeth Noulty, M.D. has Grade 10 in both piano and violin and plays in the symphony orchestra at Deep River where she practices Family Medicine.

The second girl, Mrs. Kendra Norris, Bac. of Mus. and B.E. teaches music full time in the Elmira schools. Her $\frac{7}{6}$ year old Benjamin has inherited a talent for music which has been seen in the Dyer family through 7 generations. He plays in the 12 and under contests and has won several times. Kendra has won

in Ladies classes and plays with brother Scott in Duet classes. In fact they have won this class three times at the Shelburn contest. She has in the Intermediate class too. At Bobcaygeon a few weeks ago Benjamin won \$60.00 and this an incentive to keep on practicing! He is now taking lessons from Uncle Scott.

The elder brother of the family, Bruce Woods, graduated from Connestoga College in Business Administration and took out his Brokers License when he joined his Father's Real Estate business in Fergus. He was a very good fiddle player too and has won many trophies. He is married to Roberta MacIntyre, a beautiful soprano soloist who won scholarships at Kiwanis Contests in Guelph. They are now operating a Ski Resort at Canmore, Alberta. Roberta has become known as a soloist ever since she worked at Banff Springs Hotel.

Scott MacLeod Woods was born into this fiddle-saturated family and showed his love for it at an early age. He won Junour championships through the several different classes until last year, 1993, he won the Open class Championship for Canadian fiddlers! He has been recognized in Ontario, Manitoba, New York state and performs at many illustrious functions. He placed third this year, 1994, at Shelburn but placed first at Stratford, Penetanguishene, Sunridge, Norlville, (near French River) and at Caledonia's Golden Horseshoe Days. He placed second at Duoro, (east of Peterborough) at his first competition this year. Shelburn is still the most prodigious so his third place is also a victory.

Mervyn calls me his "favourite mother-in-law" because I'm the only one he's got and he is my favourite son-in-law because he's the only one I've got! So--I guess I should tell you of my family and music. They were not instrumentalists but were all Singers and sang in good choirs. I took vocal instruction to Grade 9 and have sung in several good choirs. My father, the late Charles Smith, studied Elocution and before the turn of the century, he was well known as an entertainer at tea meetings and garden parties. He especially like doing dialect readings and could do Irish, Scotch, Negro and Dutch dialects. He had a marvelous sense of humour and this added to the effectiveness of his numbers. My Mother played the piano especially on Sunday nights when we all gathered 'round and sang in harmony.

I play piano & sing & recite