

Music Inside of Us

By Kyria Abrahams



When I was four years old, I wanted nothing more in life than to play the piano. My best friend Bethany had a piano, but she didn't play it very often. I could barely contain my jealousy. I felt something tingle inside me when I played it. The piano was important. It was meant to be. Bethany hardly played it at all. She would rather play hide-and-seek. It didn't seem fair.

One day my mother came to pick me up from Bethany's house.

“Watch this!” I told her. Then I ran to play a song I had learned that morning. It was a Russian ballad called “Song of the Volga Boatmen.” It was a very easy arrangement of notes, and I learned it quickly. The lyrics went like this:

Yo-oh.

Yo heave ho.

One more time.

Once again.

I sang the song while I played it.

“Check it out, Mom!” I was so proud of what I'd learned. “I can play this song all by myself!”

“That's nice,” she said. “But we can't afford a piano.”

I cried a little, or maybe I even cried a lot. Then we went home. There was nothing I could do. There would be no piano on that day.

It wasn't that my mother didn't want to give me a piano. She just couldn't. In fact, we wouldn't have the money to buy a piano for almost 10 more years.

When I turned six, my mother bought me a recorder. The recorder is like a plastic clarinet. I learned to play "Three Blind Mice" and "Hot Cross Buns" but not "Song of the Volga Boatmen."

The problem was I didn't *love* the recorder. It was just something to play. The piano was special. When I played the recorder, I didn't feel anything special inside. I hated practicing. I was bored.

I asked my mother if we could have a piano.

"We still can't afford one," she said. "One day, I promise."

In the sixth grade, my mother traded in the recorder for a real clarinet. I liked the clarinet more, but it still wasn't a piano.

My brother asked if he could have a guitar. Instead, my mother bought him a flute. He didn't like the flute at *all*.

"It was on sale," she told him. "It's a nice flute! You should play the flute."

I never once saw my brother practice the flute. He left the flute lying around the house like he was trying to lose it. My mother would find it in the living room shoved under the couch.

"I just don't understand you!" my mother would exclaim. "A perfectly good flute!"

"But I wanted a guitar," he would say.

I taught myself a little bit of the flute as well as the clarinet. I thought it would make my mother feel better about spending money. But in my heart, I still longed for a piano.

Everyone said I had a very nice sound on the clarinet; that it was “smooth,” and I never squeaked or squawked my high notes. I liked being good at something, and I loved playing music, but I wasn't happy. It wasn't the music that was inside of me.

One day, when I was in seventh grade, my mother clipped an ad out of the newspaper. This was back in the 1980s, before computers, so if people wanted to sell something, they had to put an ad in an actual newspaper.

We drove to a stranger's home in Providence, Rhode Island, where I grew up. The woman had a beautiful, dark wood piano from Russia. It's called an upright piano because it was tall. It had a slick, modern design. It was so shiny it looked like it was wet.

“We'll take it,” my mother said. “It has a nice sound.”

After that, I played the piano every single day. I played it before school. I played it after school. I even played if I stayed home sick. On the weekends, I played all day long until my parents had to ask me to stop.

When I left for school in the morning, I would leave sheet music open on the piano. Sheet music is like a book with notes and lyrics in it. It tells you how a song goes. So I would plan it out ahead of time, before I left.

When I got home from school, I wouldn't even take my backpack off. I'd walk straight to the piano and sit down and start playing the sheet music I had left open that morning.

I had finally found the music inside of me.

We all have music inside of us, even if it's just what we listen to. Surely, you have a favorite band or a favorite song. You want to sing along with it, or dance to it. You move to the beat of that favorite song.

Or, maybe, like my brother, you want to pick up a guitar and actually play that song. It's been 20 years since my brother asked for a guitar. Now he owns four of them.

Do you struggle with music? Have you been given an instrument to play, but you just can't play it? Maybe like my brother, you were given a flute when you really wanted a guitar.

If you find that you are struggling with your instrument, remember the story of my clarinet. I wasn't happy with the clarinet, because it wasn't the right instrument for me. Remember my brother and how much he hated the flute? He loves the guitar and plays every day. He also sings.

Maybe you think you're just no good or that you don't have any musical talent. Don't get discouraged. It's not true! We all have music inside of us. Now it's up to you to find the right way to set that music free.

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

1. What instrument does the author want to own?

- A) clarinet
- B) piano
- C) flute
- D) guitar

2. This passage describes the sequence of events that led to the author owning a piano.

Which instrument did the author receive first?

- A) recorder
- B) flute
- C) piano
- D) clarinet

3. The author's mother supported the musical development of her children. What information from the passage supports this conclusion?

- A) The author's mother could not afford to buy the author a piano when she was very young.
- B) The author's mother would find her son's flute lying around the house.
- C) The author's mother clipped an ad out of the newspaper when the author was in seventh grade.
- D) The author's mother bought her kids different instruments to play even if they were instruments her kids didn't love.

4. Based on the information in the passage, what can be concluded about the author's musical ability?

- A) The author is a good musician who can play multiple instruments.
- B) The author is only good at playing the recorder.
- C) The author is only good at playing the piano.
- D) The author is not a good musician.

5. What is the main idea of this passage?

- A) how every person can enjoy making music if they find the right instrument
- B) how to play the piano
- C) why every person should play the piano
- D) why the guitar is a better instrument than the flute

6. Read the following sentences from the passage: "Do you **struggle** with music? Have you been given an instrument to play, but you just can't play it?"

As used in the passage, what does the word "**struggle**" mean?

- A) physically fighting against something
- B) easily learning a new skill
- C) having difficulty mastering something
- D) facing an impossible task

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

The author played different instruments when she was young, _____ it was the piano which she longed for.

- A) finally
- B) but
- C) initially
- D) for instance

8. Why didn't the author's mother buy the author a piano when the author was very young?

9. Why did the author's brother not practice the flute his mother bought him?

10. Describe what the author means when she uses the phrase “the music inside of us.” Use information from the passage to support your answer.
