

Cynthia Cooper



Cynthia Ann Lancaster Cooper was born October 7, 1924 in College Station, Texas. She was the second of five eventual siblings and the only girl. Her father, Robert Roy Lancaster of Nevada Missouri, worked for the local U.S. Government agricultural "Extension Service", associated with Texas A&M University, keeping up with the latest in farming science and teaching that information to local farmers. Her mother, Helen Erma Douglass of Fort Collins, Colorado, was also initially with the Extension Service and later homemaker and music teacher in piano.

Mother Erma and her sister Wilhelmina "Aunt Mina" played piano and organ in the First Baptist Church in Fort Collins so Cynthia had strong musical influences from the beginning. Erma's family also had a little piece of property in the mountains west of Fort Collins with a small old miner's cabin on it. Erma would take Cynthia and brothers to spend summers in the cabin – with no indoor water or plumbing! And the 'refrigerator' was a snow fed stream near the cabin. Eventually the church got a new organ and gave the old foot pump organ to the Douglass sisters and they managed to haul it up into the old cabin where Cynthia and brothers spent many cool summer mountain evenings happily pounding and pumping away songs on the poor old thing - ALL getting their initial music 'educations'. (And today that same organ sits in our living room :-). Yes her brothers were also musical with different instruments and for a while they had their own little family orchestra under the direction of mother Erma.

After piano and organ, Cynthia took up the violin, but after seeing a demonstration harp performance that came through College Station in the 1930s put on by Houston harp teacher and promoter Mildred Milligan, her musical fate was sealed and she changed to harp. Her mother would regularly drive her 90 miles to Houston on all dirt roads for lessons with teacher "Mill". Cynthia attended A&M Consolidated High School and she and another Milligan student Lois Breaker were the first (possibly :-). women to play with the Texas Aggie Band, though it was actually the 'Aggie Orchestra', a sitting orchestral instruments subset of the Aggie Band – they didn't actually 'march' their harps on the field!

After high school Cynthia attended 'TSCW' Texas State College For Women in Denton (now 'TWU' Texas Woman's University) and finally The University Of Texas at Austin where in 1946 she received a degree in music and harp under Dorothy Dragalla. In

1947 she married her husband of 66 years Rex Lon Cooper on the evening of August 30 under a full moon and under the trees on the side of Cynthia's family home in College Station. Shortly thereafter Cynthia and Rex moved to Houston for Rex's work and after raising five children she returned to the harp and spent the remainder of her life devoted to her music, church, family and friends. At one time she bought herself a Vespa motor scooter and scooted around town on that! She was also a long time active member of the local Houston chapters of The American Harp Society (Greater Houston Harp Chapter, formerly The San Jacinto Chapter), and the International Society of Folk Harper's and Craftsmen (locally the Gulf Coast Harpers), and served in various officers positions in those organizations over the years. A granddaughter Sonja Marie has also taken up the stately instrument.

Cynthia was a long time member of Berachah Church under Pastor 'Colonel' R.B Thieme, Jr. and then West Houston Bible Church under Pastor Robert Dean - and spent the years of her childrens' youth teaching home Bible clubs for youth and children (and 'wrestling' with the related story board flannelgraphs :-). In the last year of her life she began to decline but had a very happy time at her 90th birthday party October 7 in the home of her son Bruce in northwest Houston surrounded by family and friends.

In the early morning hours of Saturday November 8th, aged 90 years and 32 days, after a long and loving life, she was quietly called to her eternal rest by her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the home that she and husband Rex first provided for their family in 1960.

She is preceded in death by husband Rex Lon Cooper, father Robert Roy Lancaster of Nevada, Missouri, mother Helen Erma Douglass Lancaster of Fort Collins, Colorado, brothers Doug, James and John Lancaster, and nephew Thomas Younger Flynt III.

She is survived by her five children, Rex Lon Jr; Robert Roy; Bruce Tyre; Cynthia LaFaye; and Susan Marie Loy; grandchildren Brian Andrew Cooper, Brandon Collier Cooper, Daniel Diaz, Christopher Carter Loy, Jr., and Sonja Marie Loy; great grandchildren Samantha Renee Cooper and Andrew Joshua Cooper - and brother William Bradford Lancaster of College Station, Texas - as well as more extended family, nieces and nephews.

MY MOTHER THE MUSICIAN

prose piece - for Cynthia Ann Lancaster Cooper and 66 years of being a wife and mother

--by son Lonnie Cooper © 2014

My Mother was a musician. She played the harp, a great golden crowned instrument with a hundred stringed voices. When I was a child, she would practice downstairs at night after bedtime, and my brothers and I would drift into sleep above to the strains of traditional Irish and Scottish folk songs, or the joyful classical melodies of Handel's Concerto, Corelli's Gigue, Bach, delicate, turning, Jesus Joy of Man's Desiring, Sheep May Safely Graze... - pieces seduced from the charmed strings under the ministrations of her skilled hands. The music wafted tangibly up the stairs, wrapped itself around our sensibilities, and gently shepherded our minds up over the high mountains of consciousness and down into the peaceful green valleys of sleep. What would it cost to go into the marketplace and buy such evening serenading? But for us it was a nightly free gift.

They say that in extreme old age, when one can no longer remember what happened even just yesterday, the memories of long ago childhood may strongly come back to us in brightly encircled detail. So I hope that long after my Mother and her instrument have been transported back to their original sphere, and the downstairs music room in the old family home has fallen dark and silent in other hands, and I am in some facility myself, many miles and years away, drifting in and out of consciousness, perhaps I will escape in my mind once again, and vividly return to the golden cascading days of childhood, and again hear my Mother playing the harp downstairs in the warm summer night, with my brothers and I tucked safely into the cool sheets above, sailing away into sleep, under the bright stars, with Mother Goose and the owl and the pussycat put out to sea, departing for children's dreams, on the billowing gentle waves of her music.

And she will never be completely gone. She will last even until the destruction of the universe and the end of time itself. For God has preserved her image in the night sky, sown in the stars, described by the ancient Greeks, and one may always visit her merely by lifting the eyes after sunset to the northern hemisphere, and searching into the dark heavens for the rising bright, twinkling points of Cassiopeia, the seated lady, reaching for Lyra, her lyre, and whenever I find them, again I see her playing, and hear her music, drowsily, dreamily, downstairs, in the warm summer night.