

Getting to Know

Gini Hawes



“Is it Mozart or is it Hayden? One can’t always be sure.” noted Lord Kenneth Clark in his television series “Civilization”. Well, throw in a little Cole Porter, Count Basie and Duke Ellington, and we have a person in our congregation who is always sure. Gini Hawes has been such a prominent part of the life of our church community that she is already well known. And yet ...

Where was your home? I was born in Strafford, New Hampshire, where I grew up in a farmhouse built by my grandfather. I started in a one-room schoolhouse and eventually graduated from high school in a class of eight. I was the salutatorian (by a half point!). My father was an accountant and my mother was a teacher and later served on the school board.

Interestingly, they met at a choir rehearsal. I grew up in a Free Will Baptist Church and since then church has always been a central part of my life.

Was yours a musical family? Oh, yes. My grandmother, father, and mother all played piano, and grandmother and father played by ear. In fact, one of my memories is of us all getting in the family car and taking Sunday afternoon drives. The “folks” were in the front seat and my sister and I would be in the back. We sang all during those drives—World War I songs and hymns and the like. Family legend has it that when I was 18 months old I stood on the top step and sang *God Bless America*.

What were your instruments? I began taking piano lessons when I was five years old along with violin lessons and organ lessons later. I am afraid my violin career was short lived because I once put my violin case on a radiator. I don’t recommend it; no matter what we tried, the violin still fell apart. I pretty much developed my own piano technique, which follows my grandmother and father in that I play primarily by ear rather than sight reading.

When I was in school I began to play for all sorts of school events and town functions. In fact, the first time I ever played as an accompanist, it was for a singer in the local Catholic church. Later during college I played Sunday morning services for a Unitarian church.

Do you have a favorite style? Improvisational jazz is my favorite. I love Miles Davis, Erroll Garner, Dizzy Gillespie, and Ella Fitzgerald. I also enjoy Broadway show tunes, traditional hymns, and Gospel music.

Did you have any special desires as a young person? Yes, I always wanted to travel. I always loved going from place to place and I am very good at packing. A good bit of this wish was fulfilled during our years in the Air Force, and even today I am ready to help any of my family pack things up if they need help.

How did you meet your husband? He is a Hanover boy, but we met in college at the University of New Hampshire, where he was a couple of years ahead of me. We met on a blind date (almost literally on my part!). I wasn’t wearing my glasses or contact lenses and couldn’t see well. When he arrived at the house, I asked my girlfriend to go downstairs and see what he looked like, then come back up, help me down the stairs, and push me toward the right person. We were married in three months and have celebrated our 59th anniversary, not to mention having six children.

You might be interested to know that we eloped and married on a Saturday night after final exams and the following morning I had to play for services at the Unitarian church I mentioned earlier.

Tell us a bit about your family's Air Force years. We had a wonderful time. We were stationed in Florida, England—where we were stationed with many Royal Air Force people and their families and where we were quartered in a full house—Texas, Montana, North Dakota, Alabama, California, Strategic Air Command Headquarters in Nebraska and finally Arizona. I still have friends from our duty in England. John was in strategic missiles, which made for very interesting and important duties at that period of history. We retired and came to Hanover in 1981.

Back in the early days of our service, there was a great deal more formality in service life than later. For example, service etiquette was very regimented, down to the type of silver service you had, the type and length of gloves the ladies were expected to wear, the social obligations of the wives, and the separation of officer and enlisted rates. Nevertheless, there was still great camaraderie.

How about your post-service career? I went to nursing school and achieved my RN while we were in Nebraska. When we “retired” to Hanover, I went to work at Dartmouth-Hitchcock in the OB-GYN service until I left in 2010. Those were wonderful years and the staff had such great professionalism and a real sense of fun. Of course, after I left Dartmouth-Hitchcock, I did visiting nurse association work and worked in a nursing home for a while. Then, almost by chance, I had an opportunity to begin babysitting, which I do now. Currently, I babysit for a lovely couple from Morocco.

How did you come to the First Baptist Church? A former minister at my home church had been the minister at the First Baptist; so I migrated to it. I felt very comfortable in a “country” church. I joined the choir and then, when the opportunity came about, began to play the piano and organ for many years.

If newcomers to the area were looking for a church home, how would you describe our church? I would tell them that it is a very friendly place with relaxed services, a fine Sunday School program, and a good musical ministry.