

My Story:

I was born in Detroit Michigan on Jan 25, 1945. My Father was a truck driver for his occupation. My Father was also a brilliant mechanic; he could analyze a problem and make the appropriate repair with ease and efficiency. He should have been an engineer. Dad had to maintain our home, the two homes belonging to my two grandmothers, and a forty acre farm near Lansing Michigan. All this time I was his best helper (or so I thought). When you work on that many homes, cars, everythings you acquire a great many skills. I guess you could say you get a good pair of hands. I guess I have to say thanks Dad for all the help.

I began my education at the Michigan School for the Blind (MSB) in the sixth grade after transferring from the Detroit Public Schools, thinking that the education there would be more well-rounded. I had no idea how much. Not long after starting school at MSB I met Jesse Manley, the man who would put my life on the wonderful track that I have enjoyed all these years. My first experience with Jesse was taking accordion lessons from this kind and demanding teacher. I started dropping in to his office in the afternoons because both Jesse and the piano shop were very interesting; after all I was a nuts and bolts kid. I signed up for my first semester of piano tuning in the 8th grade. I was 13 years old and I loved every minute. I couldn't stay out of the shop; I used to go there after school just for fun.

Jesse Manley and Emil Fries were dear and life long friends. They were in agreement on most issues. They both held several degrees and were passionate promoters of piano tuning for the blind. I think that they both started piano tuning in high school, except Jesse was in Georgia. Jesse always seemed to enjoy piano work and teaching others how to learn the trade. I remember all those evenings and weekends going tuning with my friends and Jesse and his wife Barbara, what a learning experience. Every situation was a learning opportunity and you better pay attention. Jesse Manley was like a Father to all of us and I think that we all loved those two devoted people. Was it always easy? God no. That man was a brilliant teacher, but could that man give you pure-T hell. He always impressed upon his students exactly what the real world expected, and by gum you were going to do that well or else. I remember taking out an action for repairs fixing it re-installing it, breaking something taking it out again and fixing it and (you guessed it) broke something else. That continued for a day and a half before I got it right; but I learned how to get that action back in there without breaking things. Several of the older boys in the upper classes were tuners and we underlings longed to tune like lightning as they could. And when they got jobs at Story & Clark piano company, where there were 22 blind tuners who it is said could tune a piano in 15 minutes, we wanted to be like them.

After graduation in 1963 I went back to MSB to work fulltime with Jesse on the finer points of grand regulation and the like. Then in November I got the call from Story and Clark, a fellow had a heart attack and they wanted some one to fill in, I was on it right now. The job only lasted for two weeks and then the fellow came back to work so they didn't need me any more. However their sister company (Lowrey Piano Company)

was just starting up, they needed a tuner. So off I went again. What a job; sixteen pianos to tune per day and the pay was \$1.75 an hour. I was the only blind tuner there when I arrived but when I left the following August there were 5. Blind tuners rule. My stint at Lowrey ended abruptly when I was laid off for union activities; I guess they didn't like it when a bunch of us attended union organizer meetings.

Next stop Detroit, my home town, and I didn't have a job. I spent the next 15 years there as a self employed technician. I worked for J L Hudson Company, a very large department store chain, tuning and servicing pianos in the warehouse where pianos were being shipped out to the customer's homes. I was also tuning on the sales showrooms where there were around 120 pianos more or less. I then had the good luck to acquire a plum, a Detroit Public School contract. I was to service pianos in various schools all over the City of Detroit. There were 500 of these Public School pianos to be serviced each semester. Then Hudson's and the Public School work lead to two other suburban school system jobs and a contract with the City of Detroit to tune pianos for the symphony and two other city facilities. Of course there were also always churches and customer's homes. In addition, acquiring, reconditioning, and then selling used pianos also became an important part of my income. Over the years I (and my sons) have probably handled 100 or more pianos in this way. Needless to say, it was a busy time, to say the least.

One Saturday night in 1967 I went to a party and met this lovely woman that I am still married to. Oh boy; then came 3 boys, we were truly blessed but oh boy were we busy. During the 1970's things were getting rough in Detroit, crime was getting worse and we started looking for a way to make our life easier and safer, we thought that a university tuning position might be the way to go. So we started looking around and in 1978 I was hired as piano technician at East Carolina University in Greenville North Carolina. That was a big step for us because we were leaving our home town and our home state and didn't know anybody in this area. I have to say I learned a lot about working in a close nit community. Well the people were friendly and Greenville has been a delightful place to live, work, and raise a family. Fortunately, we have been able to become accepted and successful members of the community.

Well we have been here for almost 30 years now and our 3 boys now have degrees, wives, jobs, houses, and mortgages. Guess what, now we are grand parents. Well maybe now we can share the faith and help others to build successful lives through piano technology. As I look around at the piano tuning education situation. It looks to me that the best place for a capable blind person to learn piano technology is the Emil Fries School of Piano Technology, located in Vancouver Washington. The school that Emil Fries founded in 1949 has the best facilities, competent and devoted instructors, and great management. Plus, the school has almost 60 successful years of history. In addition an extensive network of alumni and non-alumni that stays in touch to help each other and students of the school as well as other blind and sighted piano technicians from all over the world. It's a great life! Call us some time and we will gladly tell you all about it.

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By all means contact the school for much more information.

www.pianotuningschool.org