

## The Vanderveen Violin



My mother, Joyce Vanderveen, was a prima ballerina, violinist, painter, and author (1927-2008). She was born and lived in Amsterdam in the early part of her life. From an early age, aside from being a straight A student, my mother showed signs of being a child prodigy in the arts. She became known in the neighborhood since she danced and played the violin in all the local festivals. She was so good that she conducted the children's orchestra at the age of nine. The second-hand violin was a gift from my grandfather, who chose the instrument for her for three reasons:

- It was a small, and my mother was very petite
- It was elegant
- The color of the wood matched her complexion – that of a redhead

When the Nazis invaded Holland in 1940, my mother was barely 13 years old. Much of my mother's memories of the war remain unknown to me. She barely spoke about it. What I do know is this: The Nazis raided their home in the middle of the night and captured my grandmother, who was taken to Westerbork transit camp. But she was able to escape. Joyce continued her ballet and violin lessons until forced to flee Amsterdam. She always took the same route home, and one day after her violin lesson, one of the shopkeepers grabbed her and told her to run in the opposite direction. The Nazis were rounding up Jews on the next street and shooting them. Finally, faced with starvation, my mother, her sister, and my grandmother rode on two bicycles with no tires to the remote reaches of Northern Holland to hide and find food. The one possession she took with her was her violin. They found refuge with three impoverished farm families. My mother was bone thin and suffered from scarlet fever. But she survived, as did her mother and sister. They later reunited with my grandfather. The rest of her family was murdered by the Nazis.

After the war, my mother continued her great love of dancing. She toured 19 countries and performed before the crowned heads of Europe as a prima ballerina. In Paris, she was seen by a member of the Kennedy family who arranged for her to come to America. She received a special artist's visa signed by Senator John F. Kennedy. Later, she was offered a movie contract with Universal Pictures where she met the love of her life, my father Louis Blaine, head of International Press and Publicity for the studio. She proceeded to do many television shows and several movies, including *The Ten Commandments*. In 1997, she received a surprising call from one of her childhood friends who discovered that Joyce's picture is on the wall above Anne Frank's bed in the Anne Frank House, which is now a famous museum. Her picture on Anne's wall remains there today, an image of a carefree, happy young girl that Anne had cut out of a magazine.

After she retired from performing, Joyce devoted her life to training professional dancers. One dancer in particular became her prodigy; an 11-year-old boy from Russia named Ilya Burkov. Ilya needed an instrument for music lessons, so Joyce loaned him her violin. When he and his parents were forced back to Russia, Ilya returned the violin and it remained under her bed for 19 years. It was not played again. Years later in 2021, thanks to a chance high school reunion party including Dr. Noreen Green, Maestra of the Los Angeles Jewish Symphony, a miracle happened. As she was leaving she shouted, "don't forget to buy your tickets to the *Violins of Hope Concert*". It immediately caught my attention and I asked, "What's that?" She proceeded to tell me about the amazing organization and it started me on a journey to research the story about my mother's violin. I was catapulted into a search for Ilya, who I located in London, and learned some of the mystery of the violin. Because of him and Maestra Green, I know now about the violin's past. In October 2021, Maestra Green and I traveled to Washington DC as guests of the King of the Netherlands Embassy. Amnon Weinstein, the restorer was being recognized for his work by the Anne Frank Special Recognition Award. His son, Avshi Weinstein was present to accept the award, and I was able to donate my mother's violin formally in a ceremony at the Library of Congress. It was a most humbling and proud honor. May the violin's strings and players now continue to bring joy to all who hear it sing!