

CAMPER PROFILE
DOTTY WATSON WESTGATE
HAGAN 1961-1970; MILLER-HAGAN 1971-1973



You might think that a child who lived in a house with a swimming pool filled with cousins and aunts and uncles much of the summer would not need to go to summer camp. However, my mother had been a charter camper at Hagan (while Marygold's mom was there!), and maybe she figured it would be good for me to be with more kids my own age and have the sleep-away experience. In addition, she worked full time and probably didn't want to burden her mother (with whom we lived, because she and my father divorced when I was a toddler) with an entire summer of child care.

Living with my mother in my grandparents' house in Allentown, PA gave me lots of exposure to their artistic influences. My mother was an avid music appreciator, Grandma was artistically talented, and Papa was a car salesman who was musically inclined. I begged for piano lessons, and thrived.

Photo right: Age 3, at the piano with my grandfather

So why would a "sedentary musician" (compared with my more athletic friends) continue to attend, summer after summer, a camp with a high focus on sports? It was definitely the camaraderie and sense of belonging that grew and grew with each summer of spending 24/7 with all those Hagan Hags! At home, I was an only child, dressing my cat in doll clothes and playing board games by myself, "taking turns" as if there were other players there. At camp, I had dozens of sisters and almost constant activity! I literally counted the days every winter until the next camp session.



At Hagan, I especially loved the river, and, as a senior, managed to sign up for almost every canoe trip by sleeping in my clothes and magically waking up just before the first scratching sounds on the PA before reveille so I could be among the first campers to dart across the field to the rat trap to get my name on that list! I was often happier in the Arts & Crafts building than on the playing fields, partly because of that wonderfully cool, smooth cement floor, and because of the fun, colorful things I could do in there.

But the pianos in the Korn Kribbe and Great Hall constantly called to me, even though they were more horrible and most horrible. Their under-the-window locations certainly didn't do them any good. But they were still good enough to bang out Alley Cat for the dancing pleasure of the whole staff in Great Hall, Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band for the CITs, various Carole King songs, and whatever else came up, including playing for Funny Girl, How To Succeed in Business Without Really Trying, and parts of Music Man. I also remember hiding behind the curtain helping the barbershop quartet sing their harmonies, and playing the role of Professor Harold Hill.

These terrible pianos actually helped save me from choosing the wrong major when I went off to Skidmore, in Nancy Rosenquest's footsteps. I didn't know it, because I hadn't read the

paperwork well enough to see that I'd be facing an audition in the fall, but I was supposed to be polishing some audition sonatas over the summer before freshman year. This would have been nearly or absolutely impossible on those instruments. When I found out that piano majors generally practiced for about 5 hours a day and were aiming for Carnegie Hall and symphony orchestras, I was glad I'd failed the audition, making me ineligible for that grueling major. I instead chose the path of music education.

After two years, I transferred to Westminster because it had a wonderful reputation musically, and because it would place me close to my Camp Miller boyfriend, Barry Westgate, who was attending Rider College. (Yes, I married a camp sweetheart, just like Mary Goldsmith and Nancy Hartman.) At Westminster, I sang in a 200-voice choir that performed with major symphony orchestras in places like Avery Fisher Hall and the Kennedy Center. Thrilling!



After college, Barry and I married in 1975. The photo to my left is my wedding, with Martha Conboy (far left) as a bridesmaid. I turned down a teaching offer and instead began collecting as many part time, flexible jobs as I could find, in education, business, and the arts. Eventually, I tried something I had wanted to do for a long time—playing and singing in restaurants and at parties—and later in bands.

The biggest thrill yet, second only to becoming a mother. I considered myself fortunate to be able to spend a lot of time with my son, Harland Thomas (H.T.), by structuring my self employment hours around his naps, learning to live on very little money, and buying much of what we needed from church rummage sales and yard sales. These skills became especially useful after my divorce, when HT was a toddler. It became almost a sport for me, to see how little money I could spend so that I could spend more time with my delightful son.



**My son, H.T. (lawyer, age 32, living in Arlington, VA)
with his wife, Amy (an ICU nurse) and their dog Duke**

Although my early musical training and exposure had all been classical, when my mother remarried as I entered junior high school, I encountered a new influence from my new step-father—swing and jazz. I learned pretty quickly that if I played 1940s standards for my parents and their friends while they sipped on adult beverages, they would toss money into the piano.

However, it wasn't until years after college that jazz lured me in, and became a money-maker and a passion for me. I eventually started my own 6-piece Tigertown Dixieland band (see photo to right), in addition to playing with several swing combos. I've also been directing and/or accompanying five choruses, writing arrangements for them, teaching piano, singing in an *a cappella* trio, playing for seniors, accompanying dance classes, teaching ESL, proofreading, and dabbling with photography and various craft projects.



My *a cappella* trio with a singing telegram on Valentine's Day

Oh, and recent thrills include singing through every single song in the Hagan Songbook with various reunion groups, playing the piano for sing-alongs with friends (notably, Martha Conboy and friends, on various ski trips), and for a dancing/singing/background music session with a wonderful group of Hags at the recent Shawnee reunion.

“Have you heard that Hagan band? Oom-pah oom-pah oom-pah-pah?!”