

# **James L. Holly, M.D.**

**James L. Holly, MD's Summary of the Luncheon and Dedication of  
The Sara and Hugh Thompson Steinway Grand Piano  
Made possible through the generosity of  
Dr. & Mrs. Larry Holly  
Wednesday, October 31, 2018  
Rothwell Recital Hall  
James M. "Jimmy" Simmons Music Building**



## History of the Steinway Grand Acquisition

The preparation of this article is a part of the “discipline of giving,” learned by one, who was given by God the “gift of giving” and who fifty-four years ago married a woman who also has a big heart. The story of this gift can be instructive to others who are presented an opportunity to continue to be make “a life,” which Sir Winston Churchill famously said, “Is a product of “what we give.” The story and the pilgrimage of the “love of music” is told from my personal perspective. While that story is “our story” for the past fifty-four years, Carolyn’s first nineteen years preceded our relationship. One day, I will get her to write “her story,” before it became ours.

The following story puts the purchase of the new Steinway Concert Grand Piano into a personal context. Carolyn and I have enjoyed trips to New York City and to the Metropolitan Opera on a number of occasions.

Our itinerary has always included a visit to Steinway Hall where we became friends with Betsy Hirsch. In addition to purchasing two pianos from Betsy, we have enjoyed the history of John Steinway’s work table and the tools which he brought from Germany, as well as enjoying Betsy’s playing and music.

On one visit, a Steinway Concert Grand Piano had been placed in the rotunda of the Hall. It was stunningly beautiful. It and Lamar’s new piano are beautiful works of art in appearance as well as magnificent musical instruments. In New York, I was tempted to buy the Concert Grand. But, I realized that it would be a waste, as none of us could do it justice with our playing.

I, also, remembered Mr. Otto Oberkugen. He owned a music store, and he owned a Stradivarius violin which he played poorly. In the course of the 1949 movie, *In The Good Ole Summertime*, he came to realize that such an instrument should only be possessed by an artist. He gave it to one.

So it is with a Steinway Concert Grand Piano, it should only be owned by a master artist. Today, Carolyn and I “own” such an instrument in the only way we should, as a gift to Lamar University and to multiple generations of master musicians.

I met Dr. Jacob Clark on February 26, 2018. During our visit, he mentioned that Lamar was trying to raise the funds for a Steinway Grand Piano. (After the piano arrived, I learned how pivotal this instrument is to the School of Music and to the recruitment of the best and most talented students.) The Grand Piano only came up because I pressed the conversation about music with Jacob. Dr. Robert Culberson, Lamar Professor of French horn, has suffered that experience in our relationship for 41 years.

Early on the morning of March 1, 2018, I received a note from Dr. Jacob Clark. I responded to him with a copy of my communication with Mrs. Kim Steinhagen, Lamar Development Officer and Co-Chair Public Art Committee, about assisting Lamar’s Department of Music in acquiring a Steinway Concert Grand Piano.

Previously, during that first visit, Jacob had mentioned that Lamar had been unsuccessful in obtaining a grant for the purchase. I told him at that time that we could probably give \$5,000 to that end. By the end of the day, I realized that we could do more than that. Additionally, our son is a graduate of Lamar University, we have a granddaughter who is currently a Lamar student, and we are very proud of Lamar.

**From Dr. Jacob Clark to Dr. Holly, 7:28 AM, March 1, 2018**

“Dear Dr. Holly, Thank you so much! Wow, this very generous and not something I would have ever thought would have happened. Ever since I started at Lamar 4 years ago, I had been trying to make the case for a new concert piano, but had made little headway. With the grant denial recently, I thought it was dead in the water again. I really appreciate this, and I know the Lamar music students and faculty will appreciate it too.”

**From Dr. Holly to Dr. Jacob Clark – 9:13 AM, March 1, 2018**

“I have spoken to Mrs. Steinhagen and we are working on getting the \$50,000 moved to Lamar next week. My conditions:

1. “I don’t want this broadly publicized
2. “I want the gift given in honor of Hugh and Sara Thompson and if my gift is sufficient to warrant it I would like the piano to be named The Hugh and Sara Thompson Piano
3. “If the university has not purchased the piano in two years they have to refund my money. This is just a gimmick to make sure they get this done and raise the rest of the money.
4. “I would like for Betsy Hirsch, a staff member at Steinway Hall in New York City to sell you the piano if it is possible – this is not a requirement but a request if possible.
5. “If all goes well and if Lamar has not raised sufficient funds to buy the piano, I will give up to another \$50,000; this is a goal not a pledge.”

**From Dr. Clark to Dr. Holly, 9:23, AM**

“Again, thank you so much for your generosity. I will do all I can to honor your conditions, and I am sure the people at advancement and our music department chair, Dr. Shook will do so as well. I think it is wonderful you would like to name the piano for Hugh and Sara Thompson. I never had the pleasure of meeting Hugh since he passed away before I came to Beaumont, but Sara is a wonderful friend and still an important piano teacher in the area. Jacob”

**From Kim Steinhagen to Dr. Holly, 2:12 PM, March 1, 2018**

“Dear Dr. Holly, “I very much enjoyed our phone conversation this morning, particularly the story about Van Cliburn and the Thompsons.

“I have been in contact with quite a few individuals at Lamar, including the Dean of the College of Fine Arts and Communications and Dr. Brian Shook, head of the Music Department. We are all thrilled about your gift of \$100,000 toward the purchase of a new Steinway concert piano. I learned that we have another donor who has committed \$35,000 toward the purchase, and

possibly a third to make up the balance as needed. We understand that your money would be returned to you if we do not purchase the piano within two years. We also understand that you would like to have a plaque placed on the piano or in one of the music rooms stating that your gift is in honor of Sara and Hugh Thompson.

“Dr. Jacob Clark is going to get a current quote from his source in Houston, but if you will send me the contract information of your friend at Steinway in NY, we will also obtain a quote from them.

“If you would, please make out your initial check of \$50,000 to the Lamar University Foundation and mail it to the LU Foundation at PO Box 11500, Beaumont, TX 77710. It is our understanding that a second check for \$50,000 will be sent in approximately 18 months. I am copying Karen Nichols, COO of the Foundation on this email, as well as Dean Holtzhausen, Dr. Shook and Dr. Clark from the College, and Juan Zabala and Floyd McSpadden in the Advancement office.

“Thank you again for your generosity, Dr. Holly. We have been working for several years to raise funds for a new concert piano, and this is very exciting for us to finally see a light at the end of the tunnel with your gift. It is wonderful to have donors who have such a love and appreciation of the fine arts. We look forward to continuing this journey with you as we see this venture through. All the best, Kim”

#### **Dr. Holly’s Response to Mrs. Steinhagen**

I sent a note to Mrs. Steinhagen clarifying that the second gift was not a pledge but a hope. It turned out to be an unnecessary clarification because twenty-six days later, I received the following note from Kim.

#### **From Dr. Holly to Mrs. Steinhagen, March 27, 2018, 3:45 PM**

“Dear Dr. Holly, I am CERTAINLY smiling ear to ear after reading your email! Thank you for making my day. We are thrilled to have you give a second \$50,000 toward the purchase of a new Steinway grand concert piano. I don't believe it will take us the full two years to finalize the fundraising with this additional gift. We already have two other donors willing to give significant amounts, and I have been told we should be able to obtain the balance through other university funding sources sooner rather than later.

“We can certainly name the piano for the Thompsons and recognize this honor with a plaque on the wall of the recital hall. We will also need to recognize our other donors, but will mostly likely do so with smaller plaques. We will consult with you prior to purchasing the plaques. As per your wishes, we will not widely publicize your gift.

“As to the bidding process, I would like to have Dr. Jacob Clark reach out to you with the details on how the purchase process actually works since he is more familiar with it. I have included him on this email.

Thank you again for your generosity, Dr. Holly. We have been waiting for this moment for a long time. It is exciting to see us getting so close. We will keep you in the loop as we move forward from here. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns in the meantime. All the best, Kim”

**From Dr. Jacob Clark to Dr. Holly, 4:44 PM, May 23, 2018**

“Dear Dr. Holly, I hope this email finds you well. I just wanted to give you an update regarding the new Steinway concert piano purchase. My wife and I will be leaving tomorrow to NYC to visit the selection center at the Steinway factory and will choose the new piano on Friday morning.

“Thank you again for your generosity to make this happen. This is the first time I have visited the Steinway factory for a selection, and this could very well be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity experience for me.

“Once the piano is delivered I will work with Lamar advancement to make sure Hugh and Sara Thompson are properly honored per your wishes. Best, Jacob”

**Dr. Holly to Dr. Clark, March 28, 2018**

The following is my understanding of Harmonics and the value of the sounding board in the piano. Hope you both enjoy it. Larry

**Thoughts About Things  
Harmony of Life  
By James L. Holly MD  
*The Examiner* Volume III Num VI February 18, 1999**

Two weeks ago, I began teaching my ten-month-old granddaughter about harmonics. You laugh? Harmonics is one of the fundamental aspects of nature. From it we get the multifaceted concept of harmony and from harmony we get our word “philharmonic,” which literally means “loving harmony.” But, I’m getting ahead of my story.

Each of my grandchildren and I have a special and unique relationship created by special and unique shared experiences. One of these is the sharing of Tchaikovsky’s Piano Concerto Number One. When my daughter was six, her mother, brother and I sat with her piano teacher, Mr. Hugh Thompson and listened to Van Cliburn play that piece at the Julie Roger’s Theater. For Christmas the following year, I bought a Swiss music box, which played that piece. Often, as I turn the lights out, preparing for bed, I will wind that music box and listen to its refrain echo through our home, as I climb the stairs to bed. Through the years that music box has brought a great deal of pleasure to my family, and it has been a significant focus of my relationship with each of my grandchildren.

In turn, I have taken Beau and then Hannah Catherine into our living room for “little chats.” As infants, I would hold them and tell them what I believe to be important about life. I would “love on them” and then, I would introduce them to Tchaikovsky. They loved the music – sharp and clean, and they would reach for the music box. Of course, I would let them hold it. But, now it was Holly Victoria’s turn.

She and I went into the living room before Sunday lunch several weeks ago. I wound the music box and let it play. She was fascinated. But then I did something, which I had never done with Beau and Hannah Catherine. I took her little hand – it is a precious and beautiful hand – and placed it on the piano top where the music box sat. I wanted her to feel the vibrations. You see that little music box produced an effect, which moved that large grand piano.

Our little music box is a great teacher of harmonics and its affects. You see, held in your hand, that music box is pleasant, but placed on the large top of a grand piano or of a dining room table or of a desk, it becomes a resonant and melodious instrument, because the music box adopts the wood surface as its “sound board.”

In the Bible, the Apostle Paul commended a small church, which was in the city of Thessalonica located in the northern providence of the Grecian peninsula, Macedonia. He said that the Gospel of Jesus Christ “sounded out” from them. Dr. J. B. Phillips paraphrased this passage and said,

“For you have become a sort of a sounding board.” Paul said that the lives of these people harmonized with the Gospel. Their lives “resonated” with the Gospel in such a way that others could see and understand the Christian message.

To communicate this message, Paul chose the Greek word *execheo* from which we get our word *echo*. Paul said that the lives of the people of the church at Thessalonica “echoed” the Gospel. Their lives repeated and repeated the Gospel message to make it available to many others.

The most important component of a piano is the “sounding board.” In fact, when the harpsichord’s keyboard was expanded by two octaves, it was called a pianoforte, which was eventually shortened to piano. The addition of the extra range and the larger and more resonant sounding board changed the entire character of the pleasant, but somewhat harsh harpsichord, into the beautiful instrument we know today.

The sounding board resonates with the harmonic of the piano string struck by the hammers. The sounding board sustains the harmonic of the strings. It focuses and defines that harmonic. It projects and sharpens that harmonic. That is the nature of a “sounding board.” Without the sounding board the piano strings may clank away, but they are not beautiful, even though they resonate at the same harmonic as when the sounding board is present. So our little music box sounds pretty good when held in your hand, but placed on a piece of wood, it can fill an entire house with beautiful music. And, like our little music box, our lives will “echo” some message from someone or something.

As Holly Victoria and I chatted on Sunday, as we listened to the music box, as we felt the vibrations of the top of the piano it created, we agreed that we wanted our lives to “sound forth” – to be a sort of a sounding board – just like the people of Thessalonica. Holly Victoria’s life already vibrates with the harmony created by the resonance of the lives of her mother and father, her brother and sister, her aunt and uncle, and her grandparents. Someday, her life will resonate with the Christian faith which she will take as her own. Then the world will be filled the melody of a life lived in harmony with her God and Savior. Her life will echo throughout her world with the music of her faith.

**To Dr. Brian Shook from Dr. Holly, 7:08 AM, August 29, 2018**

### **My Journey as a Music Lover**

Dr. Shook, Thank you for your kind note. I thought you might be interested in the history of how a “country kid” came to love classical music. I grew up in a loving family but one without exposure to anything but country music. The closest thing I came to opera was a family visit to the Grand Ole Opry and Saturday nights sitting around the radio listening to the Opry. I still enjoy that genre of music but in very small doses and only the classics like Hank Williams, Ernest Tubb and that generation.

In 1949 at five years of age, I started the first grade in Tiago, Louisiana. We lived deep in the woods of Camp Livingston. The school bus brought us to within a mile and half of our house and our mother picked us up and took us home. One day, she told us that our Christmas present had



been delivered. We were very excited and found when we got home a large radio in a cabinet. It became our “cultural center.”

My exposure to classic music was in cartoons at the Saturday afternoon movies in Natchitoches, Louisiana where we moved in 1950 when I was six years old. It was not unusual not only for a classical composition to be the theme of a cartoon but for the name of the cartoon to be a caricature of the title of the composition. As a typical kid, I loved the hijinks but I also fell in love with the music. I began to “see” orchestrated music everywhere, particularly in sound track to movies, even westerns. I was older before I knew that the William Tell Overture was the title of the music I thrilled to and that it was composed by Gioachino Rossini.

In 1953, when I was ten years old and in the fifth grade at East Natchitoches Elementary in Natchitoches, Louisiana, my class attended a concert at Northwestern State College in the Fine Arts Auditorium. The conductor of the symphony was Dr. Joseph Carlucci. I never forgot him. It will not surprise you to appreciate my amazement that when my wife and I attended the Beaumont Symphony in 1976, the conductor was Dr. Joseph Carlucci. We became good friends.

I started college at Texas A&M in 1961 at 17 years of age. That year the College presented a concert by Ferrante & Teicher. My musical world expanded. Throughout college at Northwestern, graduate school at Baylor and finally Medical School at UT Health San Antonio, Long School of Medicine, Carolyn and I experienced music in many venues.

After moving to Beaumont, Texas where I began my medical practice, I was walking through our den. The TV was on Public Television and a man was singing. I had never seen or heard an opera but my attention was arrested. I sat down and did not move until the presentation was over. This was March 15, 1977, and what I heard was the first live broadcast of an opera from the Metropolitan Opera in New York City. The performance was of *La Bohème* in which a young Luciano Pavarotti was singing the role of Rodolfo. I was “hooked on Opera.”

When my wife and I attended our first opera at the Metropolitan in New York City in 1986, we experienced our first live performance by Luciano Pavarotti, he sang the role of Rodolfo in *La Bohème*. At Pavarotti’s last solo concert in Houston, there were two children in the audience, my daughter and son. We sat on the second row center. After his first aria, my daughter leapt to her feet and was applauding and shrieking with delight. Pavarotti walked over, stood in front of us, bent over and blew her a kiss. For the rest of that concert, he stood in front of us. People began whispering, “He’s singing to that child,” and so he was. After the concert, I took my daughter back stage and we met Pavarotti. There was a piano there, my daughter played and he sang. It was a wonderful experience. And, Pavarotti became “ours” for life. We had the same experience when for her thirteenth birthday, my daughter and I attended a concert with Itzhak Perlman in Houston.

When Horowitz played his last concert in Houston, Carolyn and I were in the audience with Hugh and Sarah Thompson as our guest. It was another great experience.

Opera, ballet, symphony became the cultural center of our lives. In 1981, I bought a John Broadwood concert grand piano. It was built in 1874 and was not built to an A440 pitch. A



local piano mechanic, Henry Neff, rebuilt the piano to the standard pitch. He found a program from a performance in 1875 in the piano. We learned that when the Harpsicord was expanded by two octaves to create the Piano Forte, Broadwood gave Beethoven his first Piano Forte.

In 1983, Henry called me and said that there was a 1937 Louis 14<sup>th</sup> Steinway for sale but that if I wanted it, I had to buy it without seeing it. I did. The rest of that story will await a telling at a future time. We still have it in our home today. Someday, it will go to my daughter.

One of favorite stops on visits in New York is to Steinway Hall. It was there that we bought pianos for both of our children. I think every home should have a piano. When my wife and I married in 1965, we lived in Golden Meadow, Louisiana. We could not afford to buy a piano but I rented one for that year. I can't play but my wife does.

This brief journey is concluded below with a copy of the piece I wrote for the Metropolitan Opera upon the death of Pavarotti. One last amusing story. My favorite opera is a French composition, *Lakmé*. In 2010, I was curious if the Met had ever produced *Lakmé*. Carolyn and I had been patrons of the Met so I called them and asked. They said that they had not but would I like to support their doing so.

One thing you must know is that I have a bad habit of answering the question that I am asked. In this case I said, "Yes, I would." I quickly told the lady, "Now, I must answer another question, 'Do I have the ability to do so,' the answer is no." We both had a good laugh. When my father died in 2005, as I drove to Natchitoches where he had died, I intentionally listened to *Lakmé*. I wanted for the rest of my life to enjoy the remembrance of my beloved father and particularly to do so when I listen once again to this beloved opera.

Thank you for your listening to my stories of how a non-musician learned to love classical music and how he has practiced that love with this beloved family and community. I look forward to meeting you.

PS: There was no place in this note for me to state that the French Horn is my favorite instrument in the orchestra, Mozart is my favorite composer and his Clarinet concerto is my favorite composition, although is four French Horn concerti are a close second.

The following is the piece I wrote for the Metropolitan Opera upon Pavarotti's death

Luciano Pavarotti has died. It is uniquely human that one can experience sadness at the death of a person whom you only met once and that briefly. Yet, more than that brief encounter this delightful and incredible man touched my life and the life of my family.

In 1977, only two years after moving to Beaumont, I was walking through our living room where the television was on the public broadcasting station. A man was singing and I was mesmerized. I sat and listened not knowing what I was hearing until the first intermission at which time I discovered that I was listening to Luciano Pavarotti singing the role of Rodolfo in *La Bohème*. I was hooked. It has often been said and it is true, you don't love opera because you understand it, or because you study it, you love it because...well, because you love it.

It would be almost twenty years before I realized that this performance, which introduced me to a new world of music which I had never known, was the first live broadcast from the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City. Not surprisingly, I learned this as I sat with my wife in the Metropolitan Opera House and awaited the beginning of a performance of *La Bohème* and, of course, Luciano Pavarotti was singing the role of Rodolfo. In reality, you don't even have to love opera to love visiting "The Met." It is a unique experience. My wife and I returned as often as we could and we heard Pavarotti sing again and again. Over time, even our untrained ears could hear the weakening of his voice but the passion was always there.

Yet, the experience which made Luciano Pavarotti "ours" occurred in Houston, Texas. Pavarotti gave a concert and my wife and children were there – second row center. Jones Hall was packed and to our observation only two children were there, an eleven year old girl, our daughter, and an eight year old boy, our son. We received some glances, as if some in the audience were asking themselves, "Why are these children here?"

The answer came after Pavarotti's first aria. Our daughter, Carrie Elizabeth, leapt to her feet, and shouting with joy, applauded as loudly as she could. Ever the showman, Pavarotti noticed Carrie. He walked to center stage, bent over toward her and blew her a kiss. After his fourth aria, it became apparent that for Pavarotti there was one person in that audience. People sitting around us became whispering, "He's singing to that child," and so he was. After the concert, I carried Carrie back stage and when Pavarotti saw her, he said, "I see you; I kiss you!" At that moment, though already captured by his music, he forever endeared himself to the heart of this father.

I have heard the great tenors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some in live concert, most on recordings. I have loved each of them, yet, Pavarotti's preeminent place is unchallenged. As I watched and still watch the Three-Tenors performances, I enjoy noticing the enthusiastic applause for Jose Carreras, and the increased applause for Placido Domingo. But, when Luciano Pavarotti comes on stage there is always a deafening, almost rock-star response from the audience. No one "liked" Pavarotti; they loved him.

I am sure music and voice experts can explain why other tenors are superior to Pavarotti, but for me, in addition to the excellence of his voice, Pavarotti projected a passion and lyricism which was unparalleled by any other singer. The only singers who come close are Irish tenors who often also possess that almost palpable fire and passion in their singing. In addition, Pavarotti had, in my judgment a stage presence which invited intimacy with each member of his audience. There was in his voice and manner what to me can only be described as mirth, as gladness and gaiety.

I am sad at the passing of Pavarotti, as I was sad when other "strangers who were friends" died; friends such as Jim Elliot, Dawson Trotman, Winston Churchill, Johnny Unitas, Paul Robson, Martin Luther King, Jr., John F. Kennedy, Carl Chessman, Robert Kennedy and others. Many people touched our lives, some briefly and others only indirectly.

Pavarotti was the friend of my family, even though he did not know it. It is our prayer that he has found eternal peace in the love and mercy of God. We will miss him but will visit with him often as we enjoy the passion, the beauty and yes, even the mirth of his music.

God bless you, Luciano. James L. Holly, M.D.

**From Dr. Brian Shook to Dr. Holly, 8:28 AM, August 30, 2018**

“Dr. Holly, Thank you for sharing your musical journey with me—it is as interesting as it is inspiring! As I’m sure you know, administrators wear many hats. This week—the first week of classes—I wear a fireman’s hat. There are so many fires to put out and urgent situations to attend to that it is very easy to lose sight of *why* I do what I do. Your story of how music has weaved it’s way through your life is truly inspiring and serves as a terrific reminder for me that what I am doing *really* is important and *really does* impact the lives of people in ways that I don’t even know (even if I am sometimes disconnected from the music itself).

“That being said, I am still very involved as a performing musician and educator, despite my administrative status. I have been fortunate to serve as principal trumpet of the Symphony of Southeast Texas for the last nine years, which continues to be a tremendously rewarding experience.

“Regarding Juilliard, it sounds like we both have some ties to that famous institution. But, much like your story about the 1937 Louis 14th Steinway, my story will also have to wait for another time.

“Perhaps you would like to get together for lunch, or maybe you and your wife could join me and my wife (Kristin) for dinner sometime. I don’t think we would have any difficulty finding things to talk about!

“I’m sure you are very busy, but if you ever have some time to get together, I would jump at the chance! Best, Brian Shook, DMA”

**From Kim H. Steinhagen To Dr. Holly, 3:01 PM, September 6, 2018**

“Dear Dr. Holly, I wanted to touch base and let you know we are in the process of ordering the dedication plaques for the piano - a larger one for the wall and a small one to go inside the piano. We are planning an hour-long Friends of the Arts Music Showcase on October 15th that will feature two pieces performed on the Steinway. You will receive an email invitation for the event. It will start around 6 or 6:30.

“I don't believe Sarah Thompson is aware yet of the naming of the piano. Would you like to be the one to tell her or would you prefer that we do it? We could invite her to the October event and make the announcement then. We would also very much like to host a thank you luncheon for you and your family. We could include her at that if you prefer. We weren't sure if you wanted her to know the gift came from you though, so we want to get your thoughts before doing anything.

“I had a chance to see the piano a couple of weeks ago. It is beautiful. I can't wait to hear it played! Kim”

**From Dr. Brian Shook to Dr. Holly, 8:25 PM, September 6, 2018**

“Dr. Holly, I just walked out of a student voice recital and truthfully cannot put into words how beautiful the new Steinway sounds. I have been used to such an inferior instrument for so long that I have grown accustomed to the sub-par quality. The addition of the new Steinway has been a reawakening for my ears. Not only does the piano sound better, but obviously the overall performance experience (for everyone) has dramatically improved!

“Again, thank you so much for your generous contribution. It is making a difference in so many ways on a daily basis! Best, Brian Shook, DMA”

***From Dr. Jacob Clark to Dr. Holly, 10:08 AM, September 7, 2018***

“Dear Dr. Holly, Thank you for the kind words, however I really didn't do anything except show up in your office with the flu. On a somewhat related note, I was saddened to see your retirement announcement; I was hoping that you were going to be my physician for the next several years. But in any case, all the best for your retirement, and I hope to see you at music department events so you can enjoy the wonderful piano you have given to the department.

“My wife and I will be performing a duet recital on Friday November 16th at 7:30 in Rothwell Recital Hall. We will be performing 3 Marches op. 45 by Beethoven, 12 Waltzes by Marie Jaell, the Mother Goose Suite by Ravel, and 5 of the Brahms Hungarian Dances. Hope you can make it! Jacob”

**Mrs. Steinhagen to Dr. Holly, 1:26 PM, September 12, 2018 – The SETMA Foundation Endowed Scholarship at Lamar for Nursing and Pre-Med Students**

“Dr. Holly, you are just full of wonderful surprises! Thank you very, very much! I am copying Joanne Brown in this reply. She is the development officer for the nursing area. Pat, I will have her reach out to you with directions. Karen Nichols, Director of the LU Foundation will also need to be included in the conversation and I have copied her as well..

“Thank you again for your most generous offer, Dr. Holly. You just made my day, as you have on a number of occasions over the past few months. All the best, Kim”

**History of the Naming of the Steinway Piano in Honor of  
Sara and Hugh Thompson**

Few people have so richly deserved an honor as Sara and Hugh. Life-long residents of Beaumont, they have been the consummate master teachers of piano to several generations of students. Their love for and knowledge of music and music education are unexcelled.

The absence of Hugh from this celebration was diminished somewhat by our recollection that when Carolyn and I bought our son and daughter-in-law a 5'10" Steinway grand. When it arrived, Hugh and Sara came over to "expect it." After examining the instrument and after playing it, Hugh judged that it is an excellent instrument, with excellent action and a wonder, rich sound. As we experienced Lamar's new Concert Grand, I remembered that evening while Hugh was still with us.

Our family's history with Hugh and Sara includes our attending the last concert of Vladimir Horowitz in Houston, Texas. I told friends, we were going to "see" Horowitz. They corrected me and said, "You mean you're going to hear him." I responded, "I can hear him at home as I have an audiophile stereo system but I will see him in Houston." Hugh and Sara went with us. It was during an ice storm but we made it. It was a magical performance which we have never forgotten.



When Van Cliburn play his last concert in Beaumont, Hugh and Sara attended with us. We were on the second row right at the keyboard. It was a lackluster performance, near the end of Van Cliburn's career. At one point, I whispered to Hugh, "Is he bored or is that piano out of tune?" Not one at a loss for words and not whispering, Hugh said loudly, "My God, it's awful." Everyone around us, including Van Cliburn heard him. I smiled and thought, "That's our Hugh." Music drove him and he was superb, yet he was patient with his young pupils and loved to teach as much as he loved music.

### **Peculiar – Hugh Thompson Was**

An incident with my father reminds me of Hugh. "What is your peculiarity?" In 1983, as I rode in the back seat of a car on the way to Golden, Colorado to attend the annual meeting of the Christian Ministries in the National Parks, this question was asked of an Assembly of God minister by Cotesworth Pinckney Lewis, Rector of Bruton Church at Williamsburg, Virginia from 1956 to 1985. The question was not asked with malice but it seemed challenging until the Assembly of God minister answered. He said, "We handle snakes!" As three of the car's occupants doubled over with laughter, Cotesworth said, "Oh, really?" While we commonly use the word "peculiarity" as a synonym for "odd," its primary meaning is "distinguishing characteristic."

In 2004, as my father's illness progressed, my brother and I sought the counsel of an attorney. In Natchitoches, Louisiana few things are not commonly known and almost everyone knows everyone. My father lived in Natchitoches from 1949 until his death October 7, 2005 and was well known. While talking to the attorney, he said, "Your father is a peculiar man." I took offense to the comment and received a lesson in the preciseness of language. When I told the attorney that I was offended by his reference to my father as being peculiar, he said, "Well, let me see, maybe I chose the wrong word." He then read from the dictionary, "peculiar - characteristic of only one person, distinctive, different from the usual, special."

He smiled, as I did. I had been reminded of a very important lesson and I had learned a very important fact about my father. Other than the Bible, the most important book on my desk is the dictionary, which I consult to make certain that words which I commonly use are being used accurately and precisely. I had always used "peculiar" in its secondary sense as "odd or eccentric," rather than its primary sense which, though it may have fallen into disuse, is nonetheless the precise meaning of the word. I thanked the kind lawyer for the lesson.

It is approaching fourteen years since that conversation took place and it has been thirteen years since by father's death but I regularly think about the language lesson and almost as often of Cotesworth's question. As I think of my father as a "peculiar man" -- "a special, one-of-a-kind, different-from-the-usual" kind of man -- I think, "What was his peculiarity?" The answers have surprised even me because I realize that my father was a man of contentment, of character, of commitment, of constant activity, of compassion, of confrontation and of the love for children.

Hugh was a "peculiar" man in this wonderfully distinctive and distinguished manner. He was his own man and marched to his own rhyme, rhythm and meter. He was a delight to know and the piano and organ were the "tools of his trade." I wish he could have been there on October 31, 2018.

### **Sara Thompson**

If the energizing bunny had a incarnation, it would be Sara Thompson. She is the only person I know who could have matched Hugh in her love of music and of the piano. The beauty of their art, passion and profession was that they "worked at home." Their piano room was large and spacious with two grand pianos in place. The house was arranged so that the "job" did not interfere with the family. Yet, the reality was "the family" as each of their students and especially the great ones, were like family.

## **Conclusion**

### **Joanne Brown's Prayer before Luncheon**

Please bow your heads and join me in a moment of reflection and thanksgiving.

Heavenly Father,

We join together today to celebrate one of your greatest gifts: music. Music has the unique ability to transcend race and creed, gender and age, and all of the other obstacles that can so often divide us. Even as we arrived today, we were welcomed with sounds and melodies that we all experience in unique ways, but we also experience them together.

Music is a powerful force, and that gift has been shared with so many by Sarah and Hugh Thompson, whose names and spirits will be a part of this gift for years to come. This gift will also further the love of music and caring for others that so many of us have been shown by Dr. James Lawrence "Larry" Holly. Allow us, represented today by Dr. Ken Evans, President of Lamar University, to accept this gift with open and eager hearts.

Hans Christian Andersen said that "Where words fail, music speaks." Give us ears to hear the beauty all around us and the melodies and rhythms that unite us.

Finally, we ask for your continued blessing on this beautiful Steinway Piano and all who enjoy playing it and listening to it for years to come. We ask for your continued blessing on the Thompsons, the Hollys, Dr. Evans, all who took part in making this gift a reality, and all of the guests here today. And we ask for your continued blessings on our great University and all the lives shaped and changed here, and for all those still to come.

Amen Joanne Brown

### **My Comments about Luncheon**

The luncheon yesterday was wonderful. It was particularly so because we were joined by my son and his wife and his youngest son. Sadly, Carolyn missed the event due to her mother's illness.

The dedication of the Sara and Hugh Thompson Steinway Concert Grand Piano in Rothwell Recital Hall in the James M. (Jimmy) Simmons Music Building at Lamar University. Carolyn and Larry Holly gave the major gift to make this possible. It was dedicated to Hugh and Sara who have been master piano teachers for almost 50 years.

Van Cliburn and Steinway

<https://www.facebook.com/1073053942/posts/10214785369882501/>

As I continue to revel in our gathering today, my ears ring with the notes from your new piano.

As humans we honor ourselves as we honor others. The honoring of Sara and Hugh Thompson brings honor to each of us.

The greatest surprise to me was to learn of the great value this new instrument has for the recruitment of excellent students. Now that Lamar has a Steinway Music Department... just typing this makes it more dramatic.



Mel, thank you for all that you did to make this day happen. Kim, Joanne, Juan and Dr. Evans, thank you the lunch. Jacob and Sujung, your playing was wonderful.

Carolyn and I are looking forward to November 16th.

The gift of giving is a blessing of God. The discipline of giving is a skill we develop. This noon, I saw another element of giving: genuine gratitude expressed warmly and sincerely. Thank you.

In my mind's eye I see that magnificent instrument which itself is a work of art. And, which in the hands of Jacob and Sujung lets us all experience MUSIC. Thank you.

**Dr. Shook's Response to Luncheon, November 1, 2018, 7:38 AM**

"Larry, It was great to finally meet you and several members of your family yesterday! We had such a wonderful time of sharing stories, laughter, and enjoying beautiful music together. Thank you not only for your generous donations, but also your genuine sincerity in giving. Your contributions have brought us two giant steps closer to becoming an All-Steinway Music School-which has been a dream of ours for many, many years.

"Hearing our students perform on, and with, the new Steinway has made a world of a difference in their performances and has breathed the new life into their musicianship!

"I look forward to seeing you again in the very near future! Best, Brian Shook, DMA"

**Mrs. Sara Thompson**

Dear Dr. And Mrs. Holly

I should have written to you sooner...I am still speechless over your magnanimous gift to Lamar dedicated to Hugh and me. Dr. Clark was appalled at the piano situation when he first came five years ago. Nothing had been done for twenty years. Since they let DR. Melanie Foster Taylor go. Hugh helped her prepare literature for auditions and she got three places wanting her to come and audition for a job. She got a good one.

I remember your helping Dr. Ramos in his final days. He was baptized and I recall that you conducted his final service. We taught him and his daughter. When he started piano he mastered the first book in its entirety! No one has ever done that I left out that he did it in one week.

Thanks again for all that you are and all that you have done for so many.

Sara Thompson