

LESSON IN LIVING

BUSTIN' THE BLUES WITH MUSIC

Rima Allen Milano

I can honestly say that I have never known a member of our Allen, Lillywhite, or immediate Milano family, to suffer from chronic blues attacks. In analyzing why this is so, I determined that music played a big role in cheering our lives.

Both of my grandparents enjoyed homemade music. The Lillywhite daughters played piano well, their brothers played horns in the school band. The father, Charles W. Lillywhite, was a hard-working pioneer who played no musical instrument, but had a fine tenor voice. When he took the family camping, they could plan on him filling the air with hymns as they sat around the campfire. Music added spice to their lives as they worked and sang side-by-side.

My grandmother, Barbara Phelps Allen, had a natural talent for music. She not only sang and harmonized beautifully, but also played the organ and concertina by ear. Life was challenging as she raised their 12 children on farms and dairies. The more difficult life was, the more energetically she sang and whistled. My father, Charles Ashael Allen, was her eldest child. He not only looked like she did, but also whistled continuously like she did. In fact, while serving on the Los Angeles Police Department during the dangerous prohibition years, he was known all over the city as the "Whistling Cop." He was the one who brought a large, old, upright piano into our home and started me on my music career. The following Christmas, he placed a little purple accordion under the Christmas tree. We kept so busy there was no time for self-pity or blues in our family.

In my desire to have our offspring excel us, I taught all six of our children to play the accordion. We arose at 5:00 a.m. and each child went into a separate room to practice. Soon, sounds of struggling musicians filled our home. When we were capable of doing so, we met and performed as a group. How we did enjoy making happy accordion music together!

There are many songs that came into being to help "Bust the Blues" during their era. Some were composed during wars, such as: "Smiles," (*"There are smiles that make us happy... "*). Others came into being during the Big Depression, such as: "Now's The Time to Fall in Love," (*"Tomatoes are cheaper, potatoes are cheaper, now's the time to fall in love... "*). Most musicals send cheery messages, such as: "Put On a Happy Face," from Bye Bye Birdie, (*"Gray skies are going to clear up, put on a happy face... "*). Why not fill our lives with refreshing melodies and steer clear of depressing sounds? I am so grateful for the way music has helped "Bust the Blues" for my loved ones and me.

This is the first in a series of UL on Bustin. the Blues. It was written in 2004, during a time of war. when E/ma was 84-years-of-age. The entire LIL series may be found on Lintonmilano.com. She hopes you benefit from her experience and advice.