

## Susan Willanger-Cady

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College in NY got job at Ford Piano. She wanted to stay there, but they said, no, you can't work here anymore. She had a friend in Issaquah who had horses. She was a horse junkie. Across the field was a piano technician who hired Susan to shape hammers and replace bridle straps. She attended a PTG meeting where she met Ed. Ed taught her how to tune solidly.

Then she got a job at A-1 Piano. Flaubert was a big guy who moved pianos. Susan spent a year in the back room tuning Aeolian spinets. Then she tuned at the Northgate Sherman Clay for a couple years. Then she had two babies in two year, after which she returned to A-1. Finally, she took her exam. Steve Brady gave her one part and Doug Wood gave her the other part. Doug Wood had her come to Sherman Clay.

She went to Steinway four separate times and went to all the seminars and worked in the basement. There is a big event every week. Only six times a year would they take one technician down there for a whole week. The biggest test was for tuning. The first thing the technician would have to tune a piano. If the tuning was not good enough, the tech would have to tune pianos all week. Susan was done with her tuning by 10 am and was ready to move on to the next tasks.

UW with Steve Brady, then Doug came on, and Steve left. At the UW the work is mostly tuning, voicing and regulation. Steve mostly does rebuilding, whereas Doug prefers tuning and voicing. Some people are harder to work with than others, so they worked out who got along best with whom.

### Scary Experiences

Sometimes artists are upset about something. Be spare in what you say, stay way back. It's not about you. Musicians often freak out if something is bothering them. Sometimes they are mad because they want more attention, better reviews, or something else. It is really exciting to be next to someone who has command of the keyboard.

Susan tunes for a lot of concerts, chamber music festivals, Bob Dillan for at least fifteen years, Town Hall,

So many times, she is stuck in situations where there is no time. She has to feel what has happened to the piano with humidity, moving sharp and flat quickly with changes in the room. At the UW there are some early period instruments: a harpsichord, a Chickering square, and more. There are about 120 pianos, and fifty of them are Steinways. Most of the time is spent putting out fires. The faculty thinks the technicians are just sitting by the phone doing nothing, and will call, "Oh, I need a harpsichord tomorrow."

Susan's mental set when going into a high-pressure situation, she has to totally focus. She purchased a \$300 Bose noise reduction earphone set that eliminates outside sounds and yet enables her to hear the piano. Her tuning can be more solid by vanishing any fear of the piano. Pianos are large and heavy and are sometimes like wrestling with an animal.

Scheduling is hard. Things happen, visiting artists are coming, people get sick, there might be a month-long opera performance.

Susan was so incredibly determined to become good at pianos that she ignored any references to her being a woman. She has so much fun at this. She meets amazing people, and enjoys working on pianos.

Susan had one student. Harley knocked on her door five years ago. He had graduated from Cornish in composition and was persistent. He would ask her a question and he would get it. Susan would teach him something once and he would get it.

Bill Smith was huge for helping Susan.

Pedal problems happen because the pianos are played twelve hours a day and the pianos are moved around a lot. Hammers wear out within a year. There are two dedicated rooms for piano majors. They're always busy. There are also two concerto rooms. They take the worst of the worst out to work on, and rotate the pianos around. Doug is such a great rebuilder. Susan has gone out begging people to donate pianos. Right now the UW is in better shape than they have ever been because they have better pianos.

Susan has carte blank on anything the pianos need: they can fix anything. The UW gives her a credit card. They are welcome to buy any tools or parts they need, because their supervisor knows how much they work. He harassed the director to fork over to buy three new Steinways, because all the others had been built in the 60s.

There is a small shop at the school, but Doug likes to stay home. It is less than half of what it used to be.

Susan goes to the UW when she has to. Sometimes she has 10-hour days there. However, the UW doesn't pay much so Susan makes most of her money doing outside jobs. The Chamber Music organization has been a great contact. Working for the UW or the Chamber Music Society gives a lot of credibility.

Susan would shrivel up and die if she doesn't have pianos. She was a single mother for twenty years. If she could tune a piano it would keep her going.

The first Steinway Susan played made her gasp: it was music! She has a farm in Kitsap with a horse. She has grandchildren who play the piano. Susan has her own Steinway B. Finding it was one of those moments when you play a chord and you say, "This is it!"

The UW now has 4 Steinway B's (2 in Meany Hall, 2 in music). There are quite a few (30 or so) old uprights around the campus.

Susan tunes so fast that she doesn't like she even did anything. She can tune a Yamaha C3 in 40 minutes. She uses an RCT. The hardest thing for Susan to do is bedding a key-frame by pounding on it. The worst one she ever had was when Shepherd was playing to a full house. He stopped and told the audience that there was a fly in the piano buzzing around inside and he had to call Susan. She came out with her screwdriver, pulled out the action and the fly flew out. As the fly flew off, everyone in the front row pointed, "There he goes!"

A pianist from Poland came and looked askance at Susan because she was a woman. However, after the concert, he clicked his heels, did a little and thanked Susan.

One thing that scared Susan was when Murray Bryant one of the most famous pianists in the world at the time. He and Gerard Shwarz came out saying there was a terrible buzz in the piano. Susan took off the music desk and set it down, and they said, "Oh, it's gone!"

A lot of times the technician doesn't have to do much, but there are times when something goes wrong and you have to pull a rabbit out of a hat.

Temperature and humidity changes can be felt by being aware of it. Susan begs and pleads that the lights be on when she tunes. One time she was in a baking hot room, the piano was out of tune, and she had ten minutes; she did her best and then a train went by. She did all she could do and left.

One time a lady said the piano kept kicking at her. It was the rest spring. Simone Dearstein commented that there was something wrong with the whole section: she couldn't get it to respond. Susan asked, which note was it, and she narrowed down the notes, and then found that it was one note. Susan fixed the loose flange. Almost every pianist will focus on the fifth octave.

Susan thinks her hearing got better, especially for voicing. Now she can both hear and see it. She uses a single needle.

At Steinway, the hardest class Susan took was a damper class. It took a week. Then they tell you that the damper guys do it in three hours.

For apprentices, follow your bliss. All kind of lucky things happen. Follow your passion. If this is really your true calling, go for it. Susan hadn't seen Ed for years. She was out working in the field when she was about to go in and massacre an old upright. She went home to get a tool she mentioned to Ed, "Hey, I have a problem here." Ed said, "Don't bend anything," and she was saved.

When someone calls for a tuning, she asks a lot of questions. However, she has so many repeat customers that they ask her to come early so they can have lunch.

Lois Heinzelman was very helpful for Susan. Back then she was the only woman technician. Once a Russian woman called Susan and said, "I don't know if I can trust you because you're a woman." If they haven't tuned it in ten years, so why are you tuning it now?

Roger remembers a child being fascinated by pianos at five years old. Susan became interested at 24 and did not play the piano at the time. When she had the epiphany about pianos she knew a few things about herself. She knew she did not want to work for someone else, she knew she liked pianos,

Bill Smith was originally from Wenatchee where he had a piano shop where he sold parts. In WWII he landed in France born in 1920. He was blown up into the air and was damaged physically. He went to Europe at the concentration camps and was Mensch. He returned from the war and the admin gave him a note<sup>3</sup> to get a job. He worked on the fourth floor where he sold hardware. He worked for a Scottish guy who spit all the time. One time he cut a pin-block lengthwise with a hand-saw because the guy didn't believe in power tools. Bill set up a shop in west Seattle where he sold piano supplies. He was always there for Susan. Susan lived near him. When he got old he moved to Merrill Gardens.