

Tune-Agers Revisited

By Betty (Belknap) Stirling

I spent my wonderful childhood in Elmwood, a suburb of East Bridgewater. In the late '40s Madge Wainwright Alger of Vaudeville fame moved to Elmwood. In 1950 Madge decided to form a musical group consisting of six local girls, four from Elmwood and two from Westdale (another suburb of E.B. at the time). Madge named us "Elmwood Lost Chordettes." There were two sopranos (Carol Craig Owen and Sally Flagg Aldrich), two altos (Bette Brown Murphy and Sandra Doten Harlan), and two tenors (Marie Leonard Bowen and Betty Belknap Stirling). We recorded our first phonograph record at Ted Baker's recording studio in Brockton on March 14, 1951. We made a few more records after that. When Marie graduated from high school in 1951, she dropped out of the group, so that meant that I was the only tenor. We sang at local places with Madge accompanying us on her steel guitar. Later on, we branched out on our own. Lucile Flagg, former Postmaster at Elmwood P.O., suggested we change our name to the "Tune-Agers," which we liked. We continued singing at local events, a cappella 3-part harmony. We sang at various churches in Bridgewater, East Bridgewater, West Roxbury, and Abington. I specifically remember that Congregational Church in Abington because that was the place where I drank my first cup of coffee!

We sang at an MCWG meeting, which was held at the E. B. Town Hall. We sang at Girl Scout and Boy Scout events in town and at Eastern Star, Rainbow, and DeMolay occasions in Brockton. We sang in two talent shows and tied for 2nd place at the Horace Mann Auditorium in Bridgewater and 3rd place at the Lion's Club talent show in Stoughton. Other events included school minstrel shows, the Howard School in West Bridgewater, Middleboro High School, Pembroke High School and our very own 9th grade graduation at EBHS in 1951.

We sang many times on Saturday mornings at WBET in Brockton for the Grange Program with Gus Sullivan and Helen Rollins. We also sang occasionally at WPEP in Taunton, also on Saturday mornings. Lew Owen had a weekly musical slot on Saturdays and asked us to join him a few times. One particular Saturday Carol drove us from Taunton to WBET in Brockton, arriving at WBET on East Ashland Street just as the red light came on in the recording studio! We were out of breath but did make it just in time for our performance. We were invited to sing at Don Colo's Testimonial in 1954. Don joined the Cleveland Browns football team in 1953, so that was quite an honor for us.

One of our biggest fans was Stanley B. Goldman, the Principal of EBHS at the time. He dismissed us from school twice to sing at two different events. One was at Middleboro High School and the other was to sing a few selections for the Christmas program at the Power Plant on Spring Street in East Bridgewater. I think we entertained only about half a dozen men. Mr. Goldman also requested that we sing at our 25th high school class reunion at the Ridder Country Club in

1979. We quickly rehearsed in the ladies' room and sang "Halls of Ivy" for him. (Our teachers were invited to our class reunions.)

Perhaps the greatest thrill of all was auditioning for Community Auditions on WBZ-TV. We got accepted and appeared for the first time on January 10, 1954. We sang "Charmaine" and won First Prize! We had to split a 25-dollar war bond among five of us! What we all remember most about that Sunday morning was that we got into an auto accident on our way to the studio! A car came out of Longwood Avenue in Jamaica Plain and hit us broadside. We were fortunate that none of us was seriously injured. I was sitting in the back seat on the left-hand side, so my hip got slammed into the door handle. I remember trying not to limp onto the stage when our name was called to perform our number.

We appeared the following week for the semi-finals but did not win that time. However, we felt that we, along with Don Colo, had helped to put East Bridgewater on the map! Those were wonderful years and wonderful memories!



Bette Murphy, Sandra Harlan, Sally Aldrich, Carol Owen, Betty Stirling