

† Meet your church family †

Gail (Gigi) Gough

One day in the year of our Lord 1936, God stood in His workshop contemplating a new design. He began with His standard template filed under “Human/Female” but as His mood was particularly creative on this day, embellishments would surely be added. As He worked the clay, He hummed a tune recently wafted up from planet Earth, “. . . they are saints of God, whether rich or poor, and I mean to be one too . . . “ He lifted the formed clay high inspecting it carefully. Well pleased with His handiwork, He dispatched it to Earth for final realization. On January 23, 1937 a girl child arrived in Wellington, Texas in the home of family Williams. They named her Gail.

72 years passed. Gail stood on the steps of St Peter’s Square in Vatican City. Her clear soprano voice joined with the amassed international choir of 500 to serenade Pope Benedict XVI who sat before them listening raptly. They sang in Latin, a portion of Puccini’s *Messa di Gloria*, the sole Mass ever written by Giacomo Puccini, world famous for his operas.

Two days later, this same choir along with Italy’s Roma Tre Orchestra filled the apse of St Paul’s Basilica. On the conductor’s dais stood acclaimed conductor Sir David Willcocks, his presence there a great honor both to the assembled musicians as well as to the audience which filled the vast cathedral hall. They performed a varied program culminating with the resounding force of Handel’s *Hallelujah Chorus*, the last strains of which reverberated around the room for a hauntingly long seven second count. The grandeur of those moments echo in Gail’s memory even until today.

These two events along with the entirety of experiences included in the International Church Music Festival during that week’s Celebration in Rome understandably qualify as the pinnacle experience of a musician’s career, the grand crescendo. Gail considers it so.

One does wonder, though - how did she get there?

There’s quite a story behind that, literally a book full of reasons to prove how supremely qualified she was as a musician to take part. Musical ability, however, was not the only factor to consider. Gail and Jim Gough had a family to support with very little financial overlap beyond necessity. A week’s trip to Rome, participation in numerous ceremonial events requiring elegant clothing and special costuming, not to mention all peripheral expenses - well, to say the budget was stressed should be obvious. What she did to tip the balance and fund her trip will give you a clue to the other sides of Gail . . . she liquidated Jim’s two outgrown wedding bands and his stash of gold tooth fillings!

Gigi, as she has been known since the birth of her first grandchild, is fun. She is also independent, determined, resourceful and fearless. Her life experiences, although centered around music, have been diverse and speak to ample struggle laced with little luxury. Yet she smiles, and the lines in her face confirm that happens a lot. This could be her mantra - “Do whatever you must to survive, but whatever you do make it fun.”

Thinking back over her years of employment, it is the time spent teaching at a Music Magnet School in Houston that was the most fun of all, and it began with her job interview. Gigi remembers the principal asking her one essential qualifying question - "Are you flexible and a little bit crazy?" She had found her ideal position.

Her classes ranged from 2nd grade thru 5th. What surprised Gigi most was that these young children were each supplied with bona fide instruments, mostly donated from the community. This assured that even from the earliest stages, while they were learning to read music, to understand and to feel music, patterns of physical movements required to play an instrument would already begin mapping patterns in their brains. This was a rare and prized opportunity for the children, yet it presented some difficulties as well. These instruments were scaled to adult proportions. The children were small.

She began by assessing their physical attributes in hopes of matching each to a compatible instrument. A trombone, for example, required arms long enough to work the slide. In most cases, children accepted her guidance, but where she met resistance imaginative accommodations were necessary.

One of her 2nd graders was determined to play the clarinet. His hands were small and weak, his fingers could barely reach the keys, the thumb guard continuously caused him pain, and his arms were too weak to lift it for long. Gigi padded the thumb guard with electrical tape and made a strap to hold it up. He required considerable special attention yet held tenaciously to his dream. Privately, Gigi feared the child had little hope of succeeding.

The two years spent here, in this school, were the most rewarding of her many faceted career. The faculty, staff and student body were as diverse as could be, yet supremely simpatico. Thru hard work and laughter they performed concerts, staged comic skits, and formed a "Baby Jazz Band" which was often televised in Houston. Gigi would have stayed happily for many years, but a virus struck her down.

The years following her forced retirement were, frankly, the royal pits! The virus damaged her heart inflicting her with cardiomyopathy, a condition so serious she was placed on Michael DeBakey's heart transplant list. Her level of risk was near the top, nevertheless, a donor heart could take years to surface. While awaiting her new heart, life was far from uneventful. She suffered pneumonia, was dangerously ill, but recovered. Later on - she died.

She died in the ground floor reception area of Houston's Scurlock Towers while waiting for Jim to retrieve their car. The receptionist, whose back was facing Gigi, inexplicably turned around to find her slumped in her seat. Emergency room physicians were summoned at once, but with all they could do she did not respond. Jim returned to find his wife deceased. Imagine the stupendous blow.

Suddenly, one doctor spoke. "I feel a slight pulse!" The crew sprang into action again, immediately placing her on a gurney and wheeling her at top speed through the arial crosswalk to Houston's Methodist Hospital, fortuitously right across the street. In that particular hospital, where patients came from around the world, with the best and newest heart saving techniques, they succeeded in bringing her back.

That evening her physician offered an option. She and Jim listened to the proposal. It was radical. Given that it was her heart condition that killed her, and given that a donor heart could still be months away, she might consider the possibility of a new device which was still in experimental stages - an implanted defibrillator which could not only regulate her heartbeat but could actually restart it when it stopped.

She and Jim were left alone to discuss the proposal. She was to give her answer in the morning. Jim was unsure. His drive home that evening was a black and dismal journey weighted down with worry.

Not so with our Gigi. She knew immediately what she would do. As soon as Jim cleared the threshold on his way home, she picked up the phone and made one call. It was to the principal of her Magnet School. She asked that the principal, staff and student body pray for her. They did. Against all political directives prohibiting prayer in school, together they said a silent prayer for Gigi's successful surgery and recovery. It worked.

Eight years passed. Gigi was Guest of Honor for a special concert at her school. Students, now in their High School years, gathered in the auditorium and swarmed her when she entered the room. It was a joyful, clamorous reunion. Finally, when time came for the students to be seated for their performance - do you remember the little boy who struggled so much with his instrument? That little boy, now a young man, sat proudly as First Clarinet!

Gigi claims that day shifted her philosophy and proved how tremendously important it is to never, ever sell a kid short!

Gigi's Curriculum Vitae is packed with proof of musical prowess. Born with perfect or relative pitch, with an innate understanding of the language of music, Gigi is at ease with all things musical. She learned to play piano as a small child and piano remains her instrument of choice, but she plays the pipe organ as well. One summer, her brother (a noted band director) taught Gigi how to play every band instrument. She has performed in churches, night clubs, theaters, private homes, and on-the-air.

As a young woman, she regularly performed on Cactus Pryor's televised program in Austin. It was during this period when a young guitarist by the name of Jim Gough spotted her and announced emphatically to his mother, "I'm going to marry that woman!" If you ask, she may share with you the details of how that transpired.

Dorothy Newcomb

Would you like to experience Gail's Hallelujah Chorus @ St Paul's Basilica?

[YouTube](#)

(search for)

[The Hallelujah Chorus.wmv](#)

Sir David Willcocks conductor - White jacket, shirt, hair. Black tie, slacks - 6:55 min

Gail is one of the sopranos to screen left, near the Timpani (Kettle Drums)

ENJOY!

ADDENDUM

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You may wish to pause a moment to consider this sequence of events:

1. Gigi has a severely damaged heart which may stop at any time.
2. One afternoon, she casually leafs through the March 1993 edition of Texas Highways magazine filled with fascinating articles.
3. One article catches her attention. The article features the Chez Eddy Restaurant located on the top floor of Houston's Scurlock Towers. Chez Eddy's features elegant cuisine developed to be easy on the heart.
4. She and Jim decide to dine there and choose an evening to go.
5. Following dinner, while waiting in the ground floor reception area of Scurlock Towers for Jim to retrieve their car, her heart stops. She dies.
6. The receptionist, whose back is to the seating area, *just happens* to turn around. She sees Gigi slumped in her chair and immediately calls for Emergency Room physicians - code blue - (look it up)

(*Did you wonder where the ER physicians came from?*)
7. Emergency room physicians immediately appear from Houston's Methodist Hospital, a world class hospital *which just happens to be* immediately across the street from Scurlock Towers and is connected with aerial passageways.
8. Here they have all the newest and finest equipment, medical knowledge, superior staff and techniques.
9. They return her to the world of the living.
10. She is offered the possibility of an implanted device so new it is still in the early experimental stages. One of the first ever made. She accepts.

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Her heart stopped on that one evening, in that one spot.
What an amazing coincidence!
Or . . . was it?