

As originally published in *WestchesterWebsites*

The Piano Tuner

I may have been hasty and let emotions get the better of me, but it was an offer I couldn't refuse. I bought a 1949 George Steck baby grand piano. It was in excellent condition and the price was right. I knew it would look perfect in our front room. And it did.

My husband, Payne, however, had a different viewpoint. He was the one who actually played the piano. He was already perfectly satisfied with our Baldwin upright piano that we kept in the basement. The Baldwin, which had a cracked soundboard and a bad paint job, was like "a comfortable old pair of shoes," he said. The "new-old" baby grand was more of a piano than Payne actually wanted right now.

Well, I already made the purchase, rearranged the entire first floor of our home and had the piano moved here. It looks great, it sounds beautiful and I know that Payne will learn to love it. And he did.

The task at hand would be to find someone that knew about piano tuning, care and repair. I called a piano tuner named Stephen. The first thing that impressed me about him was that he told me I should really wait a couple of weeks before having the new piano tuned. He said to give it a chance to settle in and get used to its new environment. He agreed to tune the Baldwin in the basement for now, and said he'd look at the Steck to see what needed to be done. It made perfectly good sense to me.

Stephen, the piano tuner, arrived at our home in Bronxville with toolbox in hand. He appeared so young and that surprised me. But, ever since I turned 40, almost everyone seems to look younger than I am! Our investment broker looks like he's 23 at best. I guess if I can trust someone that young with our life savings I can surely trust that this young man before me is capable enough to tune our pianos. Besides, our dog instantly liked him and that is always a good sign in my book.

Stephen looked at our new, old baby grand with great admiration and respect which, of course, made my husband quite happy. I asked Stephen if he would play our piano a bit, so he could tell us what he thought about it, hoping to ease Payne's mind. Hoping he'll say we made a very wise choice, indeed. Well, Stephen proceeded to play the piano in the way that makes one's jaw drop. My husband I and just looked at each other in amazement. It was obvious that this young man was no stranger to the piano at all.

"Pianos need to be played and they need to be loved"

We listened to our new, old piano being expertly played. Beautiful music filled our home. We watched as the piano tuner's fingers seem to dance across the ivory keys. My husband was amazed by his talent and ability. Stephen was happy to show him a few pointers on playing and offered several exercises for Payne to practice.

We could have listened to him play for hours, but Stephen was here to work after all. He gave the baby grand a good going over. We were delighted to hear that it was in excellent shape and only needed a few minor repairs and a tuning. The piano tuner offered us a wealth of information on piano care, much more than we expected. My favorite thing that he said was "Pianos need to be played and they need to be loved". It was obvious that Stephen truly loved pianos.

Now it was time to move on to the Baldwin in the basement. Stephen carefully examined the piano and told us that it was probably best not to invest too much money in repairs. That was made clear to us at the start, when the piano was offered to us, for free. We all agreed that a tuning was in order, and the \$85 he would charge us to do so would be well worthwhile.

I didn't plan on watching the piano tuner tune the piano. I don't watch the mechanic fix our car or the oil burner man service our furnace. But this turned out to be somewhat of a spectacle from the moment Stephen opened up the piano's case exposing its brassy metal plate and network of steel strings. Thousands of parts -- pegs, pins, felt, screws and hammers. Stephen took great care tuning the instrument and was happy to answer any and all questions we had. At one point, he noticed a guitar pick on the shelf nearby, and he cleverly used it to pluck a string that he had isolated from the rest. This string must have been particularly difficult to tune the traditional way.

What could have been just another service call turned out to be an afternoon of enjoyment and education. We made plans for our piano tuner to return in two weeks once our new old 1949 George Steck baby grand has adjusted to its new home.

As Stephen left, he gave us his business card imprinted with, amongst other things, his website address www.looneytuner.com. I wanted to ask him why the name Looney Tuner, but decided to just look at his website instead. So I did, and it made perfectly good sense to me.

-Penny L. Webb of Bronxville