

Dear Barbara,

I remember when I met you in 1970 in The Young Musicians Program at UC Berkeley.

**I was so shy and withdrawn,
I felt a lack of mental strength and I think you
knew that I could crumble at the slightest
pressure.**

You were so gentle with me.

You had a maternal nature about you that I loved.

**When the Young Musician's Program gave me a
piano, you made arrangements to have it
delivered to my home while I was at school.
I ran home from school, threw open the front
door, and there it was; a beautiful upright piano.
You left a hand written note on the piano.
and it read:**

"Hello Donna, I am your piano.

Would you play me please?

Love, Piano."

My heart was filled with love for you.

**And I still, to this day, have that hand written note
that you left me.**

**I remember when you invited Yolanda and me to
spend a Saturday afternoon with you.
The three of us sat on your living room floor and
we played several games of Jacks while we
listened to KDIA on Yolanda's portable radio.**

Yolanda said to you,

“Donna’s not shy, Mrs. Shearer! She talks to me all the time! She’s not shy!”

You smiled, looked into my eyes and said,

“Donna doesn’t have to talk if she doesn’t want to”.

We continued playing Jacks and I felt relieved, having just been put on the spot.

My spirit was weighed down because I could not control the factors outside of myself at home.

One afternoon, while you were giving me a piano lesson, you talked to me about thinking smart during my practice time.

I said to you, in a sad and defeated tone,

“I’m stupid”,

You said to me,

“Stupid?! Who told you that?! You’re not stupid! If you were stupid, you wouldn’t be able to do this music! Oh, Donna! You’re not stupid!”

You put your arms around me and sighed with concern as water poured down my checks.

“Oh, Donna. You’re not stupid!”

You took me under your wing to try to protect me. You invited me to the Piano Club to see you perform.

As you played the grand piano in your performance, I felt each note in my chest.

**You were mentally keen, alert and clever in your interpretation of the music.
You gave a brilliant performance and I was proud to be your student.**

**When you invited me to spend the night at your home, you enveloped me with love.
You took me to a Mexican restaurant for lunch. It was the first time that I had ever been to a restaurant, and you made me feel so comfortable. You taught me how to knit, and we had a lot of fun with it.
We spent the whole afternoon knitting. I felt so safe with you,
That's when I started wishing that you were my mom.**

**My music was the only thing in my life that I had control over, and I was determined to get it right. At my piano lesson with you, I struggled through a passage in the Chopin prelude, feeling defeated. Paralysis overtook me and I sat there frozen, unable to move to the next note on the page. My heart started racing and pressure built inside my head.
All of a sudden, I gave out a shrill. You were so patient with me.
"It's okay, Donna! It's okay! Let's take a deep breath and we'll start from the beginning".
As I struggled to get air into my lungs, you put**

**your hand on my shoulder,
Your touch breathed life into me and it saved me
from drowning.**

**You made a pants suit for me to wear when I
performed in The Young Musician's Program final
concert.**

**You also made me a formal gown to wear when I
played me violin in The UC Berkeley Symphony
Orchestra performances.**

**You gave me books by Langston Hughes and
James Baldwin.**

**You sent me birthday cards with designs and
symbols that represented my African-American
heritage.**

**Thank you, Barbara, for recognizing and
acknowledging a very important part of who I am.**

You've given much to me.

You taught me about the importance of:

Focus

Challenge

Integrity

Responsibility

Confidence

Dedication

Determination

**I hope that through my hard work, I have repaid
your dedication and returned your devotion.**

**When I was in the hospital after the airplane crash that I was in, you reached out to me all the way from Italy through personal letters,
You gave me love and encouragement when I felt that my life was shattered.
Your love helped me to put back the pieces in my life.**

**You were so excited when I told you that I was writing a book about my life and what I've survived.
I so wanted you to read it because you played a major part in my life.
Of course, when I get it published, I am dedicating my book to you.**

**You once told me that music saved my life.
Well, I know that music and you, Barbara, saved my life.**

**Your constant warmth, love, and care for me has helped to breathe life into my soul.
And because of you, I am able to breathe on my own,**

Barbara, you were the best Mom that I have ever had and I will love you forever.

**Love,
Donna Allen**