

## A Profile on Gwendoline Thornblade By Molly Ritvo

Gwendoline Thornblade radiates music. Her passion for playing and her dedication to teaching music is Thornblade's life. Thornblade founded the Suzuki School of Newton, based on the teachings of Dr. Suzuki, in 1986. Thornblade believes in the "triangle of musical development, involving the student, the teacher, and the parents". Thornblade says, "Any child, regardless of aptitude, can learn to play a musical instrument as easily and as naturally as learning to talk. The benefits of adding music to one's life are hugely rewarding," she continues in her lilting British accent, "and students become more self confident, more self aware, and have a greater understanding of how one's life is enhanced through music."

Thornblade is no stranger to the music world. She has formerly been a member of the Boston Philharmonic and the Heritage Players and currently plays with the Longwood Symphony. Thornblade has led clinical Suzuki workshops throughout the US, Canada, and Israel. She received her Suzuki training with major celebrities of the Suzuki world, including John Kendall, Bill Starr, and Carol Sykes. Thornblade has been a faculty member with the Newton Public Schools, the Longy School of Music, and The New England Conservatory. Thornblade now teaches privately in her home studio and to date has worked with over 1000 students.

Sachiko Isihara, the Executive Director of the Suzuki School of Newton, says that "Gwendoline is a remarkable woman who has shared her love of music with so many people. She is especially skilled at working with amateurs and developing their talent. She is a real woman of the Newton community who has given plenty, and has shared her gift with so many."

Thornblade has recently moved her talents to direct the Newton Senior Center Chamber Ensemble (NSCCE) at the Newton Senior Center. She created the Chamber Ensemble, a group for everyone, regardless of talent, who wants to play music. "It has just been delightful," Thornblade says. "This project is essentially building bridges in Newton." Thornblade began the group at Lasell Village retirement community, but faced challenges with finding space to rehearse. She then approached the Senior Center Ensemble and found them "very receptive to the idea. There is a lovely space for us to use, and it is a very welcoming community. We are incorporating new members every day," she says. NSCCE now has 16 members that rehearse every Wednesday from 9:00 to 10:30a.m. at the Senior Center in Newton, MA. They have played everything from Bach to Bartok and have concerts twice a year.

Thornblade is building community through music every day. She has brought some of her own students, all children, to work with the Chamber Ensemble and is thrilled with the "age bridging that has happened and the opportunity to create music for everyone," she says. "The Senior Center is a very special part of Newton and it is important for me to find ways to give back to my community by offering seniors a chance to play music, to have a social experience, and to simply relish the joy of music."

Spreading the joy of music is so indelibly a part of Thornblade that is impossible to separate her from her music. Besides forming NSCCE, Thornblade is hoping to work with a non-profit called Project STEP (String Training and Education Program) that prepares talented music students of color to enter the profession of classical music by providing an intensive musical education program. Thornblade says that this is another way for her to give back and to “offer her strengths to the community.”

Thornblade teaches the Suzuki method and says that it is successful because it creates “a nurturing environment.” Thornblade believes “every child has the potential to learn music. It just needs to be unlocked in the right environment. Music can change lives; it adds a new dimension for the child to experience life and discipline, it fosters self-esteem when a child believes that he/she can do it. Every child can do this.”

Thornblade has “always had the love of music,” but she only entered the field professionally thirty-nine years ago, as she was trained and tracked at an early age to enter the Dental profession for a “real career,” as her mother said. However, Thornblade fondly remembers her grandmother (who would have received a music degree in Budapest had women been allowed to receive them) singing opera to her at a young age. Thornblade first played the piano as a child, then moved on to the violin after leaving boarding school, and was later encouraged to play the viola, when, as she says she “finally found my voice and decided this was how I would like to live.” Many years later her mother acknowledged, after watching her teach, “that indeed this is the right career for you to do”

When Thornblade first moved to Boston in 1965, she continued to foster her passion for music, especially chamber music. “Chamber music has been a great part of my life, both socially and professionally,” she says. Thornblade met her late husband, an economist and amateur cellist, through one of the many groups she played with. “Music is part of me,” she explains. “I love all of it...coaching others, and especially performing and practicing in amateur settings.” After settling in Boston, Thornblade enrolled her daughters in a Suzuki violin program. About two years later, Thornblade was invited to train as a Suzuki teacher, worked in the program and the rest was history.

Creating NSCCE has been very “rewarding,” Thornblade says with her joyful smile. “Our Ensemble has grown immensely and we have created a fun space where it is OK to make a mistake. Our goal is to enjoy music, and we do.” And that is precisely what Gwendoline Thornblade does wherever she goes: offers the love of music to whoever will receive it. She has worked with special needs students and watched them excel. She has watched children become more outgoing and confident through their growth in music, and she has even made a guest appearance in Rhymes with Orange, a former student’s comic strip. The only thing Thornblade hasn’t done lately is fill a dental cavity.