

Lost and Found Harp

Figure 7-1



<https://www.lyonhealy.com/harps/style-85-cg/>

My eleven-year-old daughter, Meg, who'd fallen in love with the harp at age six, had begun performing. She wasn't playing a classical pedal harp but a smaller, extremely valuable instrument built and carved by a master harp maker. After a Christmas concert, her harp was stolen from the theater where she was playing. For two months we went through every conceivable channel trying to locate it: the police, instrument dealers across the country, the American Harp Society newsletters—even a CBS TV news story. Nothing worked.

Finally, a wise and devoted friend told me, "If you really want that harp back, you should be willing to try anything. Try calling a dowser." The only thing I knew about dowzers were that they were that strange breed who locate underground water with forked sticks. But according to my friend, the "really good" dowzers can locate not just water but lost objects as well.

Finding lost objects with *forked sticks*? Well, nothing was happening on the police front, and my daughter, spoiled by several years of playing an extraordinary instrument, had found the series of commercial harps we'd rented simply unplayable. So, half-embarrassed but desperate, I decided to take my friend's dare. I asked her if she could locate a really good dowser—the best, I said. She promptly called the American Society of Dowzers and came back with the phone number of the society's current president: Harold McCoy, in Fayetteville, Arkansas.¹

I called him that day. Harold picked up the phone—friendly, cheerful, heavy Arkansas accent. I told him I'd heard he could dowse for lost objects and that I'd had a valuable harp stolen in Oakland, California. Could he help locate it?

"Give me a second," he said. "I'll tell you if it's still in Oakland." He paused, then: "Well, it's still there. Send me a street map of Oakland and I'll locate that harp for you." Skeptical—but what, after all, did I have to lose?—I promptly overnighted him a map. Two days later, he called back. "Well, I got that harp located," he said. "It's in the second house on the right on D—— Street, just off L—— Avenue."

I'd never heard of either street. But I did like the sound of the man's voice—whoever he was. And I don't like backing down on a dare. Why not drive to the house he'd identified? At least I'd get the address. I looked on an Oakland map and found the neighborhood. It was miles from anywhere I'd ever been. I got in my car, drove into Oakland, located the house, wrote down the number, called the police, and told them I'd gotten a tip that the harp might be at that house. Not good enough for a search warrant, they said. They were going to close the case—there was no way this unique, portable, and highly marketable item hadn't already been sold; it was gone forever.

But I found I couldn't quite let it go. Was it the dare? Was it my admiration for the friend who'd instigated the whole thing? Was it my devastated daughter? Or was it just that I had genuinely liked the sound of that voice on the other end of the line?

I decided to post flyers in a two-block area around the house, offering a reward for the harp's return. It was a crazy idea, but why not? I put up flyers in those two blocks, and only those two blocks. I was embarrassed enough about what I was doing to tell just a couple of close friends about it.

Three days later, my phone rang. A man's voice told me he'd seen a flyer outside his house describing a stolen harp. He said it was exactly the harp his next-door neighbor had recently obtained and showed him. He wouldn't give me his name or number, but offered to get the harp returned to me. And two weeks later, after a series of circuitous telephone calls, he told me to meet a teenage boy at 10:00 P.M., in the rear parking lot of an all-night Safeway. I arrived to find a young man loitering in the lot. He looked at me, and said, "The harp?" I nodded. Within minutes, the harp was in the back of my station wagon and I drove off.

Twenty-five minutes later, as I turned into my driveway, I had the thought, *This changes everything.*