

*'Twas battered and scarred,
And the auctioneer thought it
Scarcely worth his while
To waste his time on the old violin,
But he held it up with a smile.
"What am I bid, good people", he cried,
"Who'll start the bidding for me?"
"One dollar, one dollar, do I hear two?"
"Two dollars, who'll make it three?"
"Three dollars once, three dollars twice, going for three",
But, No,
From the back of the room a gray-haired man
Came forward and picked up the bow.
Then wiping the dust from that old violin
And rosening up the strings,
He played a melody, pure and sweet,
As a carolling angel sings.
Then the music ceased and the auctioneer
With a voice that was quiet and low,
Said "What now am I bid for this old violin?"
As he held it aloft with its bow.
"One thousand, one thousand, Do I hear two?"
"Two thousand, Who'll make it three?"
"Three thousand once, three thousand twice,
Going and gone", said he.
The audience cheered,
And some of them cried,
"We just don't quite understand."*

"What changed its worth?"
Swift came the reply.
"The Touch of a Masters Hand."
And many a man with life out of tune,
All battered with bourbon and gin,
Is auctioned cheap to a thoughtless crowd
Much like that old violin.
A mess of pottage, a glass of wine,
A game and he travels on.
He is going once, he is going twice,
He is going and almost gone.
But the Master comes,
And the foolish crowd never can quite understand,
The worth of a soul and the change that is wrought
By the Touch of the Master's Hand."

"The Touch of the Master's Hand" was written by Myra Brooks Welch. She was called "The poet with the singing soul." Hers was a very musical family.

As a young woman, Myra's special love was playing the organ.

In 1921, at a student convention she listened to a speaker address her group of students. She said she became filled with light, and "The Touch of the Master's Hand wrote itself in 30 minutes!" She sent it anonymously to her church news bulletin. She felt it was a gift from God, and didn't need her name on it. Its popularity spread like wildfire. Finally, several years later, the poem was read at a religious international convention --- "author unknown." At the end of the rendition, a young man stood up and

proclaimed: "I know the author, and it's time the world did too. It was written by my mother, Myra Welch."

Then her name, as well her other beautiful works of poetry became known worldwide. All of her poetry told of the rejoicing she had in God's love. What the world did not see, was the woman who created these masterpieces: Myra in her wheelchair, battered and scarred from severe arthritis, which had taken away her ability to make music. Instead, her musical soul spoke through her poetry.

She would take one pencil in each of her badly deformed hands. Using the eraser end, she would slowly type the words, the joy of them outweighing the pain of her efforts. Her words, a joyous expression of the wonders of life, as seen by a singing soul that was touched by The Master's Hand.

One day as a friend who had been commiserating with Myra for her difficulties turned to leave her home, Myra patted the arm of her wheelchair and said, "And I thank God for this!" Imagine being grateful for a wheelchair! But her talent lay undiscovered prior to her wheelchair days. Rather than becoming bitter, she chose to let her handicap make her better, and a wonderful new door opened for her.

This poem has very special meaning for so many people.

My family grew up in a very musical home, where the center piece of furniture in the parlor was an old upright 1800's piano.

Sadly, like many children today, our interest in practice and playing was diminished by sports, friends and the growing restlessness of youth.

When we were young children, there were also several old violins laying around the house, damaged and unusable. One day my father took them

away (to be trashed as we thought). One night several weeks later he returned home with the violins in full working order.

As we were all gathered in the parlor doing the mandatory three hours of homework and the equally compulsory one hour's piano practice , he took one of the repaired violins and began to tune it. Years of non-playing and the hard daily work of being an electrician, had left his fingers and joints stiff and somewhat malformed.

Yet, when he placed the violin under his chin and began to play Gounod's "Ave Maria", we children sat enraptured, perhaps not realizing we were seeing the vestiges of some former glory, but unconsciously recognizing the master violinist at work before us.

Quietly from the corner, I remember my mother moved to the piano and joined him in playing, and together these two quiet, unassuming people, gave us a performance that could not have been bettered even by the famous virtuosos of that day, for the music was not in the instruments but rather in their hearts and souls.

That was the night we all discovered "music" . Remarkably --- all four boys in the family took to the piano; all five girls took to the violin.

One of my brothers is a classical pianist and virtuoso in his own right, and has played for packed concert halls throughout Europe.

Two of my sisters became classical violinists.

And the rest of us???

While never following a musical "career", each of us still enjoys the relaxation of our own musical skills --- perhaps remembering a night when we were moved to love music by the touch of our very own "Master's" hand.

May you feel that spiritual and emotional touch as you read this beautiful poem.