DICK KELLEY/staff photographer

The journey of Jan Poirier's harp, named Desiree Lynette, is chronicled in a scrapbook.

String along with Jan

Aficionado has a harping passion

By Elizabeth Roach
special writer

To say Jan Poirier wanted a harp is not quite accurate. To say she craved one with every fiber of her being comes a lot closer to the truth.

"It was this real desire, deep inside of me," says the 42-year-old substitute teacher at a Montessori school in Farmington. "Every time I would hear a harp, something in my fingers would just . . ., oooh, the desire I had.

"There was this gut feeling in me, a desire so deep that I would instantly have tears flowing down my cheeks whenever I would hear a harp on the radio or at a concert."

She took harp lessons in her teens but for the most part did not play one since. However, the desire persisted.

Eventually she made her decision. She would buy a harp of her own. Mrs. Poirier and her husband, Mark, a senior analysis engineer at the General Motors Tech Center in Warren, began saving their money.

Obtaining a harp, it turns out, is not as simple as, say, running out for a pack of cigarettes. The harp scrapbook Mrs. Poirier keeps is her record of the process.

'It came in a case as big as a closet. There she was. Of course I had to cry.'
— Jan Poirier

THE SCRAPBOOK, more than an inch thick, contains, among other things, correspondence between the Poiriers and Lyon and Healy Harps Inc. in Chicago, Ill., from whom they ordered a grand concert harp.

It also holds color pictures of their 1974 visit to Lyon and Healy, where they saw a harp being made.

They placed their order that summer, knowing it would take nine months to make a grand concert harp, Mrs. Poirier said.

However, babies are delivered more quickly than harps.

The factory makes one harp at a time. What with the backlog of orders and a shortage of trained harp makers, Mrs. Poirier didn't receive her harp until Dec. 1, 1978.

"Those last three months seemed to me like three years," Mrs. Poirier said. "The time just stretched out and stretched out."

Finally, the big day arrived.

"I didn't know if I could stand it," she said.

SHE GOT UP early that morning. "I didn't sleep all night. It felt like I was getting married. I said, 'Oh my God, what'll I wear?' I was so nervous, I was crazy.

"It came in a case as big as a closet," Mrs. Poirier said. "There she was. And, of course, I had to cry."

Just over six feet tall, the harp weighs 78 pounds and is made of hand-carved spruce and maple. Its fluted column is covered with gold leaf. By the date of delivery, the harp's price had increased from $5,995 to $9,045.

The Poiriers invited the delivery man in for champagne with their friends. "We never quit celebrating. I bet we had 200 people just stop by the house that weekend," Mrs. Poirier said.

Like ships, she said, harps are traditionally considered female. She named her harp Desiree ("desired or longed for") Lynette ("shapely and graceful").

"I feel it's very important to name your instruments so you can have a personal feeling for them," Mrs. Poirier said.

To celebrate the arrival of Desiree Lynette, the Poiriers held an open house on Mother's Day of 1979.

The invitation, a copy of which is in the scrapbook, read, *"Rejoice with me*
my dream's come true
I wish to share
My Harp with you."

They invited more than 1,000 people, and 250 came to see nine professional harpists play her harp, Mrs. Poirier said.

"It was definitely the happiest day of my whole life. A photographer friend of ours came and took pictures all day. I have about 600 pictures of the people who came."

NOW THAT she has her harp, she has resumed harp lessons and has be-

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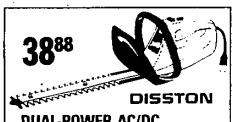
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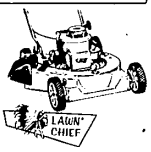
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