

Interview with a Local: Amy Kortuem by Elizabeth Nelson



Q: Please state your full name, place of origin and horoscope sign.

A: Amy Kortuem (I'm not going to allow you to print my middle name). I was born right here in Mankato on December 19th, 19???. Mom and Dad brought me home in a Christmas stocking. I'm technically a Sagittarius (fiery seeker of truth), but I'm just a few days away from being a Capricorn (earthy and headstrong). Astrologers say it's being "on the cusp." Others say, "so THAT's why she's the way she is."

Q: What is your middle name...really?

A: I'm NOT telling. I don't even know if I could be bribed to tell. It would have to be a really good bribe. Really good.

Q: How long have you been in the Mankato area?

A: I've explored the world, but have always had Mankato as a home base. It just worked out that way: the best school situation was here, the best job offer was here...and my Mom is right, things do work out for the best. And now that I'm settled in a cozy little bungalow with an out-of-control garden I dug up myself with a shovel, it seems to be where I'll stay.

Q: What is your day job/dream job?

A: I'm living them both, really. My current job is advertising copywriter at BlueSheet Marketing in Mankato (see, you CAN get a job with an English major and concentration in writing). I'm also achieving my dream job as a harpist and touching people with my music. This situation means I'm often working every single day of the week, but what's a little exhaustion in exchange for living your passions, hmm?

Q: Playing the harp seems like it would be a pretty cool gig. Do you ever get stereotyped as the renaissance-lady-fair/angelic type?

A: Being a harpist has taken me to very exciting places. It's also created some interesting and pretty darned memorable experiences. I'm thinking of writing a book called "That Harp Lady, Confessions of a Small-Town Harpist" filled with strange-but-true harp stories (believe me, there have been some strange ones). And yes, the angel-harpist association is very strong. But when you get to know me, I'm pretty down-to-earth (with definite angelic qualities,

of course...). For a long time I've felt that it's been my mission to bring the harp's beautiful music to people on a personal level. Connecting with the audience and making a positive impact with my music and my spoken messages is what it's all about.

Q: Can you elaborate on a "strange-but-true-harp-story?"

A: One of the best was several years ago when I was playing at the fair. They had me set up really close to the chicken barn. It was so quiet in there, I thought my playing had lulled the chickens to sleep, but I later found out they'd sent all the animals home that day because it was so hot. And there I was, playing my heart out to an empty chicken barn. Glamorous, huh?

Q: You have to be pretty strong to haul your harp around. Do you feel like guys are intimidated by your pipes?

A: Very strong. I've thought of getting t-shirts made that say "I'm a harpist, I don't have to lift weights." I'm sure they'd go over great with other harpists. Really, guys seem to be impressed by my biceps. I have scared off a few pesky ring bearers at weddings with them, though.

Q: Have you been involved with any musical groups here in Mankato?

A: I've performed with the Mankato Symphony Orchestra and have also played for several of Gustavus Adolphus College's Christmas in Christ Chapel services, which are always beautiful experience. I've sung with and accompanied the Minnesota Valley Chorale. Currently, I sing with the chamber vocal group Musicorum and accompany our Christmas concerts. I've created ensembles for my recordings and concerts and have been very fortunate to have such highly talented people performing with me. And right now I'm putting together a group to perform Celtic music. We had our first rehearsal in my living room last weekend, to an audience consisting of my two cats. They loved it. Said we're gonna make it big.

Q: What are your cats' names?

A: Jingle Belle and Harry. Belle was my birthday present six years ago. As the vet says, "There's a lot of cat crammed into that compact body." Harry (a.k.a. The Many-Haired One) is a huge, white Turkish Angora. Very, very hairy. When I'm not practicing the harp, I'm vacuuming. And vacuuming.

Q: Your last two concerts were very impressive. Do you have a concert planned for this holiday season?

A: Yes, my second annual "To Drive The Cold Winter Away" holiday concert will be Saturday, November 27 at 7:30 at Good Counsel Chapel. This year I'll be donating a major portion of the concert proceeds to VINE Faith in Action. I'm a big believer in the "pay it forward" concept. Since one of the greatest gifts in my life has been the harp itself, I'm honored to be able to give back to the community using that gift.