Music has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. I grew up in a home filled with music and began playing the piano at a very young age. I first played in church at age four. I also regularly sang with my Dad, and one of our favorites was Bill and Gloria Gaither’s, “You’re Something Special”. This song is very important and a center point for all of my work with children. Each and every child is special, and each one of them deserves to know it.

 It wasn’t long before I began sharing music with friends at the nursing home. One thing led to another, and before long I was working with younger children at church. I played by ear until I met Jo Vaughn. She taught me many things, including how to read music.

My mother worked for the Baptist Children’s Village so we moved a lot, but I must say I gained a great deal while moving across the state. I had the opportunity to meet many people, write music programs, and work with various church groups, which all taught me valuable lessons. I had to learn how to get to know people quickly, and music opened many doors.

I went to junior high in Clinton, MS where I was introduced to “The Little White House”, a program for children with special needs. It was a wonderful learning experience where my love for music and those with special needs grew. I will never forget a young man with Downs Syndrome who was non-verbal, but after some time in music and because of his love for it, the young man began to sing. His dad was brought to tears when he heard his son sing a solo, "Elvira" during the end of year program. There was a lot of joy that night.

Through high school I participated in many choirs, bell choirs, and show choirs. I was a member Attache in Clinton, MS. I loved choir in Brookhaven, MS with Mrs. Russell where she and Eclipse were loved by all. Then there was Southern Style and Mrs. Beason. I learned so much about hard work, teamwork, drive and determination. However, special needs students have taught me more about drive and determination than all of my choir experience combined. It was at an early age that I realized what a powerful tool music could be, especially for those with special needs.

I married right after high school and worked with our church youth group as well as special needs children and youth. It didn’t take long for us to start a family, first came my daughter Pam who has never met a stranger and I doubt she ever will. Then came my very reserved son, Earl. Both of my children are tremendous blessings, and God has used both, Pam and Earl, to teach me many lessons. Pam was always so busy and got into everything before you could know what was happening. Life was very exciting! It was time for Earl to be talking, exploring, playing with friends, but he never really saw the need. He was smart, but different. It took a long time for us to understand Earl. He had trouble communicating. His doctors kept telling me I was comparing him to Pam and how boys develop differently from girls, but that wasn’t it. Finally, he was diagnosed with Aspergers which is an ASD at age 11. Day to day life was a challenge. He was so smart, but yet he had so much trouble with us so called ‘neuro-typical’ folks. There were so many situations that really got to him; he was on overload. Music was one of Earl’s greatest escapes and quite often it was our only common ground. We could both understand things through music and coped much easier with it than when trying to have “regular conversation” through the years. My daughter is married with five precious children. My 26 year old son still lives at home, and is working toward being on his own.

I served as the pianist, children's and youth choir director, as well as the youth and adult handbell choir director at First Baptist Church, Coffeeville MS. While at FBC I directed many musicals and special programs. I also taught piano, and was the pianist for The Sharecroppers as well as The Gospel Messengers.

 I attended the University of Mississippi, where I studied History and Music. I was a member of the jazz band and chorus. My Bachelor of Arts degree was completed in 1996. I later went back and studied special education. I taught special education in Water Valley, MS , West Point, MS, and Spencer, WV.

I currently teach classroom music in many area schools including Kyle Academy for Autism located in Pasadena. Mosaic Church in Pearland has given me the opportunity to work with teens and young adults with special needs. We have a handbell group, sing, and do private piano lessons. I also teach small group piano lessons, private piano lessons, Music & Me which is a music program for preschool students, and Music Makers which is a group program for students with special needs. I do many private sessions for special needs students who benefit from music by working on specific skills such as hand and eye coordination, gross motor skills,and/or fine motor skills. We work on these tasks while having a good time exploring music.Each summer I lead and/or work with music camps. All of my students have the opportunity to use various instruments and learning styles to find what best suits the individual student. My goal through music is to help students realize how special they are, experience the joy of music, provide a means of expression, focus and work on skills needed, look at new possibilities, have the opportunity to be creative, and help students gain a sense of accomplishment. Music has served as a mighty tool to help students with special needs and many others have a greater means of expression and creativity.

 It has been a special journey in every aspect of life with my son. We have faced many mountains and valleys, but through it all we have both grown. Earl has made significant strides in Houston; the gains are attributed to coming to a larger city with the benefits of higher quality programs and wonderful counselors/therapists. This journey with Earl has taught me many skills and provided me a deeper understanding of various thought processes which have been so helpful in reaching others with special needs.

My best days are when, through the power of music, the shell that encircles someone is cracked, and you begin to see the student soar. It is beautiful when a student realizes new potential, and has the opportunity to be a star and shine. I love hearing a student say, “I did good!” Their joy is contagious! I have multiple students ages 2 to 56 years with various needs, and each one has special and unique abilities. Music has served in many capacities. It has been a coping mechanism for some, while it has been a creative outlet for others, and it has given a voice to many of my non-verbal students. The group lessons, as well as camps, also encourage social interaction, and skills such as taking turns and sharing. Music in and of itself is a powerful language that has a direct bond with the soul, through music I strive to make life noteworthy for all. It is such a privilege to help someone learn music and gain other skills through it. I love encouraging and helping each student create his/her own masterpiece. Always remember, every masterpiece is just like it’s creator; it is special and unique.

Please note; personal references are available upon request.

-Candace Hunt