

Moving the Grand

I worked part time for North American Van Lines to earn extra money while in college. Several jobs were memorable and could justify writing an entire story on them, but my favorite incident was moving a piano.

The dispatcher from the van company called me and asked if I was available to help move a concert grand piano from a local teacher's studio into storage. I replied that I had never moved such a large piano but was willing to assist. When I arrived at the warehouse I was told to accompany Jake who was an experienced mover and would teach me how it was done. I was becoming concerned because I was expecting to assist three or four hefty movers. Jake was in his late fifties and was only five feet tall!

When we arrived at the address of the piano teacher, Jake pulled a simple piano dollie, a rubber mallet, and a large cargo belt from the back of the van and headed toward the house. A piano dollie is made of four 2" x 3" pieces of hardwood fastened together in a rectangle about 16" by 24" with 3" rubber wheels at each corner and partially covered with carpeting.

Were only the two of us going to move a concert grand piano that could weigh as much as a thousand pounds on a dollie that weighed less than ten pounds? And, one of us probably weighed less than 100 pounds! This was getting scary.

We approached the house and it appeared we would be moving the piano out the front door and down about a dozen concrete steps to the sidewalk before we loaded it on the van. How could that possibly be done by the two of us?

Jake marched cheerily up the steps and rang the doorbell. An elderly lady opened the door and ushered us into a large living room where the largest grand piano I have ever seen was positioned in the center of the room. She explained she was having the entire living room painted and the floors refinished while she was on a trip to Europe and didn't want to risk her prize possession being damaged.

Jake said, "Don't worry, lady. We'll have it out of here and in storage for you in no time at all."

I was thinking, "I hope he knows what he's doing because I'd hate to see this lady's piano slide down the steps, fall off the dollie and end up on the ground in a pile of splinters, or, worse yet, crush one of us in the process." I was also thinking, "How are we going to get this thing out the door? It's too big to go through without tipping it up some way."

Jake carried the dollie to the left side of the piano and placed it on the floor between the two legs. He then took the mallet and gently rapped the top of the support for the foot pedals beneath the keyboard and removed them. Next, he asked me to lift the left side of the piano just enough to allow the wheels to clear the ground. He then tapped both legs with his mallet and removed them. Before I began to tire from the weight he helped me lower the left side of the piano onto the dollie.

Next, Jake asked me to lift the right side of the piano gently as he steadied the dollie and the piano, so the piano was now resting vertically on its side on the dollie. He then had me steady the piano while he cinched the belts around the piano and dollie securing them to make the piano and dollie one.

Jake called a five-minute break before we wheeled the piano out the door. While we rested he explained the next stage of the operation to me. Jake would walk backwards down the steps holding his shoulder against the piano and guiding it down one step at a time. My job was to follow the piano from above keeping it vertical. "Keep it steady and make sure it's that way at all times," he said.

"Are you sure you don't want me to go first," I said. "It seems to me you'd want the bigger guy below to hold back the weight."

Jake said, "No, I need to be on the bottom because I've got the experience how to work the wheels on the dollie down the steps a little at a time. Besides when you do it right the weight is mostly on the steps. All you've got to do is keep the wheels moving slowly down the steps one at a time."

"OK," I said, but it sure seems dangerous to me. "

"It's only dangerous if I let it go down the steps too fast or you let the piano lean over too much. Are you ready? "

"Yep, let's do it," I replied.

We rolled the piano out the door, to the edge of the top step, and let the front wheels roll down the face of the first step as the piano tilted forward. It continued to tilt until the board of the dollie reached the edge of the step. Then the piano remained tilted slightly until the board on the dollie slide enough to allow the front wheels to roll again on the top of the second step. The piano tilted slightly upward until the wheels reached the edge of the second step and plunged downward again as the front wheels rolled down the face of the second step. At no time did the piano and dollie try to run away. As Jake said, most of the weight was on the steps. Only a small force pushed on Jake and he could easily hold the piano back.

So, we inched our way down the steps with very little effort or wild motions. I couldn't believe how easy the job was if you knew what you were doing. The hardest part to the operation was lifting the left side of the piano waiting for Jake to remove the two legs.

We easily moved the piano onto the truck and into the warehouse. Who knew a concert grand piano could be moved so easily?