



Junior Hoedownner

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Peg Willis

We asked Peg Willis to write a story about her and the kids up in northeast Oregon. Here is what she had to say:

I began learning to play the fiddle in 1989. I didn't have a clue what it was all about, but my son Casey was enjoying it, so I decided to give it a try. I began sneaking a few minutes of practice time on Casey's fiddle whenever he was out of the house. Eventually I got brave enough to play on stage - in front of a microphone (not to mention the audience) - and lived to tell about it.

I began teaching almost as soon as I learned to hold the instrument. The result has been a continuing run of kid fiddlers in the area. Several performing groups have come out of this activity.

First there was The Round-Up Fiddlers (Mary Wachter, Jodi Severe, Jamie Bealer, Matt Karchesky and Casey Willis). I played backup guitar along with Randy Severe and Frank Moore - who lived in Pendleton at the time. I didn't start this group. I just came along with Casey since they needed backup.

Then came The Young-Time Fiddlers - the first kids I actually taught to fiddle. They were from the Christian school where I taught several grades (4th on up) over the years I was there.

Next was The Pick 'n' Bow Company. They performed an average of 6 times a month for 3 years running. This group included fiddlers Jacie Penner (Sites) and Joe McCullough, backed up by Karie Smith and Sam McCullough on guitar and Joe Wehland on bass. In addition to their many local gigs this group performed for a number of events outside of the area - including an all expense paid gig in Washington DC at the awards banquet for the first international ThinkQuest competition.

The Pick 'n' Bow Company released two cassette tapes and a CD. The first recording was done by Dallas McKennon, who was the voice of Woody Woodpecker (and a number of other cartoon characters) and co-starred with Fess Parker in the 1960's TV production, The Daniel Boone Show. (Dallas played Cincinnatus the store keeper.)

Then came Shenanigans! The group originally included Brynna Rust, Eric Jepsen, Kara Clay, Alex Carlson, Kate Kendrick, Amanda Tullis, Lauren Ann and Hillary Harshman, Nick Berretta, Blaine Maley and Matt Holland. By the time the group disbanded only four of the original 11 were still involved and one of those was moving to California. Most of the kids were from Morrow and Umatilla Counties, but Blaine was from Gilliam County and Nick was from Walla Walla. Most of the kids began learning at age four or five. The group "Shenanigans!" formed during Summer Strings 2001.

Summer Strings was a week long "camp" we did each year in June. We had a number of teachers, and six class periods were offered daily in Old Time Fiddling, Irish Fiddling, Violin, Theory, Keyboard, Tin Whistle, French Canadian Spoons, Cello, Arts & Crafts, Folk Dancing, Square Dancing, Line Dancing, Ensemble, Beginning Note Reading, Parents' Survival ... classes at all levels for kids and parents.

In 2004 (I think that's right) I took Shenanigans! to Ireland. (Five kids in the group at this time.) We studied at the Joe Mooney School of Music in County Leitrim and also took time to visit many places in the country.

Shenanigans! presented a number of free concerts in several counties during their time together. The biggest productions they did were the show commemorating the Heppner Flood of 1903 (presented 4 times) and the show in Heppner following their return from Ireland. The kids played fiddle, bass, guitar, mandolin, whistle and keyboard.

Shenanigans! released two CD's during their years together.

The next group was Mulligan Stew. These kids were a bit older when they started playing fiddle (2nd - 4th grade) and are playing together still. They have performed for The Queen of the West (luxury cruise ship) and a number of other groups. Their performing schedule is pretty full and includes several northeast Oregon counties as well as Portland. The group (currently) includes Holly Warne, Kodria Haddock, Blaise Grant, Barry Grant (Blaise's dad)

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and me. The three kids play fiddle, piano, mandolin, whistle and hammered dulcimer. Barry is on bass and I play guitar.

In the summer of 2005 Mulligan Stew was asked to perform in Anchorage - which they did, and also attended a summer music school near there. In 2006 they attended The Rocky Mountain Fiddle Camp. At both of these music camps they had the opportunity to learn from outstanding musicians from all over the world.

Mulligan Stew's first CD, "The Mountain Road," will be out any day now.

Shenanigans! and Mulligan Stew have also had workshops with Phil and Vivian Williams, Casey Willis (of

Country Tonight -

voted the "Best Live Country Show in America" 3 years running), Daniel Slosberg (of Pierre Cruzatte fame), Nolan Murray (many time Canadian Instrumentalist of the Year) and Kevin Burke - renowned Irish fiddler. They've learned a lot from these musicians - not only about music but about the culture of music.

Two more groups are coming up - Smokin' Strings (6 boys, ages 9 - 13) and StringSong (kids are 7 - 13). I'm no longer taking new students - am just working with the ones I currently have. I also have a student teacher working with some of the kids - Blaise Grant of Mulligan Stew.

July's Fiddle Tune

The fiddle tune for this month is the familiar Arkansas Traveler. This tune dates back at least as far as the 1850's, when it appeared in a musical entertainment about the dialogue between a traveler and the occupant of a ramshackle cabin. The dialogue might go like this:

Q: Does this road go to Little Rock?

A: The road never went anywhere that I ever saw.

(fiddle break)

Q: How deep is that puddle in the road?

A: It's only knee deep on my ducks. (fiddler break) You get the idea.

Arkansas Traveler

[Composer]

Violin

The image shows a musical score for the fiddle tune 'Arkansas Traveler' in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It consists of four staves of music. Each staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation includes standard musical notes and rests, with a 'V' marking above the first measure of each staff. Below each staff is a line of fiddle-style tablature using letters D, G, and A to represent fret positions on the strings. The tablature for the first staff is: 0 2 1 0 2 - 2 2 1 - 1 1 0 - 0 0 1 - 1 1 2 - 2 2 1 2 1 0 2 - 1 - D D D D G G G G G G D D D D D D D D D D D D D D G G. The second staff is: 0 2 1 0 2 - 2 2 1 - 1 1 0 - 0 0 3 2 3 1 0 2 3 1 0 2 1 2 0 - 0 - D D D D G G G G G G D D D A A A A A A A A A A A D D D D D. The third staff is: 3 - 1 3 2 - 0 2 1 0 3 1 0 - 0 0 3 - 3 3 0 - 0 0 1 0 3 1 0 - 0 - E E E E E E E E A E E A A A A A E E E E E A E E A. The fourth staff is: 3 - 1 3 2 - 0 2 1 0 3 1 0 - 0 0 3 2 3 1 0 2 3 1 0 2 1 2 0 - 0 - E E E E E E E E A E E A A A A A A A A A A A D D D D D.