

It is Friday evening of my first week ever at Scandia Camp Mendocino. As I write, in the background I hear Anders Wedlund playing music and hear the gentle footsteps of dancers on the floor. In the wee hours tomorrow morning I will head back to Seattle, taking with me memories of tunes, teachers, friends, dances and an incredibly rich experience.

When I decided to come to Scandia Camp Mendocino this year it was because I knew Kjell-Erik Eriksson would be teaching, and I had studied with him before. I had a growing interest in Finnskogs Pols, and I looked forward to kicking my knowledge up a notch. This was an opportunity, for just one week, to walk away from the business of my life, and just do what I love – play the fiddle.

In preparation for camp I asked Seattlites who had been to the Woodlands many times all sorts of questions. I learned it was beautiful – and that was no lie. I learned that the drive was long, and that I can confirm. I brought all the items people suggested and felt well prepared...except for understanding the quality of the community and learning that I would find. That is something hard to describe to someone who has not been here. I think that if it were mine to tell, I would say to someone in my shoes to be prepared for quality connections, meaningful conversations, and of course, deepening knowledge of the music and dance that this community shares.

There were, however, some surprises along the road. While I had been told about the creatures that share our cabins, it did not really register until I came in to nap mid-week and found a skittering creature dashing for the safety of a crack leading out of the cabin. I also did not realize that flashlights really ARE essential, even for reading inside before an afternoon nap! And, that afternoon snooze is not to be taken lightly – it is the secret to success if you want to stay up until the wee hours fiddling, which I happily did.

But, the greatest surprise was the total blending of teachers and students. I have not experienced a learning setting that was quite like this. Instructors were incredibly accessible at meals and between class times, having real life conversations, not just about the craft of music or dance, but about all manner of other subjects. I take away with me new tunes, but those are easy to get. What is more valuable is the newfound understanding of why my teachers do what they do, how they view teaching, what is important to them about playing music, how they structure their lives to be able to do it. I learned tricks to make me a better teacher, tools to make my music more danceable, new ways to understand rhythm and shaping of tunes and explored new ways of learning. I watched every instructor attend other teachers' classes, dance, play and take part in the life of camp, leading by example not by discussion. This is something that I think makes Scandia Camp Mendocino special – a small cosmos where people do what they love together, regardless of skill level or length of time involved in the community.

I hear Josefina's Dopvals coming from the nyckelharpas, and while I want to contribute to the community by writing this article, I want to dance more. It's time. Would I come back? Yes, yes, yes! I am exhausted, but very happy and very grateful to have been here. I am thinking about Kjell-Erik Eriksson and his expression of unity and joy in sharing Scandinavian music. So, raise a hand, touch your ring finger to your thumb, leave the other fingers up, and shout out "Folk On!"