

A Letter from Jane Cory (Manitoba) 2009

My name is Jane Cory. For the past three years in a row, my parents and I have been traveling for a day and a half every July to come to my favourite camp in the world, the Calvin Vollrath Fiddle Camp. When I first heard about the camp in 2006, I was very excited to hear that the organizer of the camp was one of my favourite fiddlers, Calvin Vollrath. I also heard that another fiddler who truly inspires me, Mark Sullivan, would be there. For the last two years, we've had the honour of having another one of my favourite fiddlers teaching us, Manitoba's own Patti Lamoureux. There are also several other amazing fiddle instructors from across the country who come there to teach us about music.

I thought the camp sounded very fun, so off we went to a small town called St. Edouard, located a few miles outside of St. Paul, which is not too far from Edmonton, Alberta. Once I got to the idyllic Renewal Centre where the camp is held, met some new friends and instructors, and ate some great food made by the staff, I was instantly in love with the camp. Campers can bring their tents, trailers or RVs and park right on the beautiful grounds of the centre or stay in the cozy dorm rooms. After the welcome barbecue, each camper auditions for which class he or she will be in: beginner, intermediate, advanced, piano or guitar. The days always end with a jam session, and all players are welcome to join in. In the second year, they created a slow or fast jam, depending on how you prefer to play.

The basic activities for camp during the day are groups, where you learn new tunes from your instructor, then workshops, where you can choose from a wide variety of topics, whether it's learning French Canadian tunes, Manitoba tunes, Métis, Cajun styles, or learning about theory, vibrato or how to create a nice dance feel. You can also learn how to stepdance from Calvin's wife, Rhea, who helps run the camp, and is an awesome stepdancer. Gordon Stobbe, probably the busiest fiddle instructor in Canada, is a regular at Calvin's Camp and even takes the time to teach square dancing alongside Rhea to anyone who wants to learn. One very exciting activity that the whole camp can participate in is a friendly talent show called "Fiddler's Idol", where one of the instructors, Randy Foster, emcees a program for whoever wants to showcase their talents, whether music, magic, jokes, skits or anything you want to perform that is entertaining.

The evenings are probably the most delightful part of the camp, because you get the chance to hear concerts by some of the best fiddlers in North America, the instructors. Each of the instructors has unique personalities and styles, but they are all humble people with kind and generous souls, not to mention being very talented. I am lucky enough to know these people, make many new friends, learn a lot of new (and old!) tunes and spend five days having the time of my life. There are many amazing camps across Canada, but this one is unique because it is small and personal and friendly, so all the instructors and students have such a close bond, and are always there for each other to jam with, talk to and learn from. I highly recommend that anyone who plays the fiddle, piano or guitar to attend this camp. It is an opportunity not to be missed. I look forward to attending Calvin's camp every year. It is the highlight of my summer, and one of the highlights of my life.

Jane Cory