

# What I Did Last Summer: A 24-Year Old's First Time at Sleep-Away Camp!

by Alexandra Deis-Lauby

This summer I went to my first summer camp EVER! It happened to be a CDSS family and adult week at Timber Ridge Camp. My experience was wonderful.

I have been contra dancing (on and off) for five years. Then, a year-and-a-half-ago, I jumped in headfirst and started going to dances all the time, including dance weekends in the Midwest. I was living in Chicago then and Dennis Wise, also a Chicagoan, would say "I'm driving to Indy, Cincy, or Kentucky next month. Want to come?" At those weekends I learned to lead waltz from Gaye Fifer and to lead flourishes and dips from Lauren Peckman. Dennis taught dance communication through contact improv, and Bob Greene and Martha Edwards of St. Louis introduced me to spritely English. Lisa Greenleaf called an amazing quintuple progression dance called "Penguin Pam" to the rollicking music of the Latter Day Lizards in Lexington, Kentucky. Seth Tepfer hash-called\* at 9 am at Summer Soirée, and Janine Smith wrote (and called) a singing square to "All About that Bass."

Dancers in Chicago, Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio, North Carolina, Missouri, Virginia, and Maryland opened up their homes (and their cars) to my friends and me. The small but growing dance communities in these cities are warm, welcoming and vibrant.

The camp experience is yet another level of community. CDSS Family and Adult Week hosts families taking their annual vacations together. Over recent years, today's teenagers have grown up at camp and, now, as "crew," take care of the younger kids. Young adults love it so much they continue to return without their parents. This year, Timber Ridge had a grandmother with two grandchildren who came just to be near "folkies."

The structure of family camp is ingenious. I've been telling everyone about it (dancers and yet-to-be dancers alike). It works like this: everyone of all ages, 2 to 99, has classes for their age groups in the morning. Lunch and unstructured time in the afternoon lets families spend time together.

During the evening dance, crew members, as roving babysitters, check on the sleeping kids while the adults dance.

The camp environment, shaped greatly by the twice-daily campwide gatherings, is founded on sharing and inclusivity. At "gathering," one can share via performing, teaching, storytelling, or even proposing! This year, a marriage proposal between two integral community members was the highlight of the week. Throughout the week, the callers, folk artists, and musicians bestow their knowledge and lend their talent to campers.

At Timber Ridge, I contra danced with a man whose wife and children have been contra dancers for many years, but for him, this was his first time. I got to English dance with 10-year olds who loved it and danced both roles. I learned singing rounds about Thai food, and neat fingerplays for kids. Andy Davis told stories from all over the world and the campers and staff assembled two nights of musical performances.

It is amazing to be a part of a community that constantly surprises and reveals new pockets of the folk tradition. I'm so happy that I dove into the contra dance world headfirst.

*Alexandra Deis-Lauby is a New York native who discovered the joys of contra dancing while at school in Chicago. She currently teaches pre-school where her favorite part of the day is singing folk songs with the kids.*

*\* For those unfamiliar with the term, hash calling is a spontaneously-called, unchoreographed dance, a hash (or mix) of moves thrown together on the spot by the caller. (The editor's thanks to Seth Tepfer for verifying this). We hope to have an article about hash calling in an upcoming issue.*

*Thanks too to Alexandra who shared with us the wonderful photo by Ryan Carollo which is this issue's cover.*



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