



[Home](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Submit News](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [About TKC](#)

July 1, 2011

Musical Chairs: Center Stage Strings students return to Three Rivers

by SARAH ELLIOTT

There was no music in our house this past week. The spare bedroom is empty. They've moved out; they're gone.

Company's coming

For two weeks, from Sunday, June 12, through Sunday, June 26, we were honored to open our home to two of the Center Stage Strings Music Camp students.

We were assigned 17-year-old Samantha and 16-year-old Anna.

They are two of the nicest teens you could ever hope to meet. They are polite, kind, beautiful, responsible, intensely dedicated, and oh so talented.

In they came with a couple of 60-pound-plus suitcases, several musical instruments, music stands, formal performance-wear, and more. This was Sam's first year at camp; Anna's second.

Daily prelude

For two weeks, our house guests were out of bed by 6 a.m., preparing for another action-packed day at camp by practicing on their violins (and Sam has a viola too) for an hour or so. They would each take a bedroom, close the door, and start to play.

Because of the time of year, the windows of the house are all wide open and the sound could be heard no matter if I was in the kitchen, out tending the vegetable garden, or walking up the driveway after an early-morning run. As soon as the music reached me, I would stop, look up the canyon at the snow-covered peaks, and could almost see the musical notes wafting through the air in complete harmony with my surroundings.

The violin music blended seamlessly with the nature that abounds in Three Rivers. The hawks would circle closer just to hear, our horse neighbor was hanging out along the backyard fence line more often, the blue jays stopped their constant chatter and perched on the deck railing tilting their heads, and the sounds of the river at its peak flow for the season was the beautiful accompaniment.



PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT: The beautiful sounds of violin music was heard each morning for two weeks coming from the Elliot home. Left-to-Right, Sam and Anna.

Creature in the night

But not all things attracted to the music were welcome additions. A late-night episode with a scorpion still makes me cringe as I knew before the campers ever arrived that this was one Three Rivers adventure I did not want them to experience.

Anna was in bed when she felt a crawling sensation on her arm. An innocent flick of her finger to remove the critter resulted in a sting.

Not wanting to wake John and me, she quietly but urgently asked Sam to hit the lights. When there was some light shed on the subject, they saw the scorpion on the floor near Sam's music and gear bags.

While Sam jumped onto the bed to save herself, Anna realized this creature must die for its sins. She grabbed a shoe and began pounding away like it was a hammer and the scorpion was the nail. When she was done, the scorpion was in several pieces.

For the rest of the camp, one of Sam's bags was the crime scene, with the smashed evidence of the scorpion's demise and Anna's vengeance ingrained into the cloth in several places.

Where were John and I during this midnight emergency? Responsible host parents that we are, we slept through the entire traumatic event, only to be told about it in the morning.

When Anna left for camp the next morning, I couldn't help thinking that maybe she would be applying for a transfer to a more bug-free environment. But when I told her how I thought I might never see her again, she shrugged and said, "What are the odds that I would be stung twice?" I really, really hoped she was right; what a trooper.

Amusement park (like)

Our driveway is now part of the legend and lore of the Center Stage Strings Music Camp. We are on North Fork Drive, just a quarter-mile from Sierra Drive so, in theory, it's a convenient locale from which to retrieve and return the young musicians each morning and night via the camp shuttle.

In actuality, we are so close to town, yet so far. Once off North Fork Drive, the driveway turns to dirt and is an obstacle course of ruts left over from the abundant winter rains. It winds past a mature eucalyptus tree that was planted by my great grandmother more than a hundred years ago in what used to be her front yard (the house was destroyed by fire in the 1950s).

Then the road takes a sharp right and passes my grandpa's old work shed, skeletons of ranch equipment, and his old chicken house and hay barn. After a 90-degree left turn and a long straightaway bordered by horse pasture on one side and trees laden with summer fruit on the other, the dirt finally turns to pavement, only to begin about a 12 percent grade that stair-steps its way up the hillside to our home.



Most days, shuttle driver Ryan (camp director/founder Danielle Belen's husband) would pick up and bring home our two houseguests. To give Ryan a break in the mornings, we would all walk down to meet him... that lasted about three days. To be fair, the girls had a lot of accoutrements that needed to be hauled to camp each day, from instruments to formalwear.

Before long, we learned that the driveway had a nickname: the Indiana Jones driveway. It became a curiosity, so other campers were asking to be dropped off last in order to experience the Disneyland-like ride. Danielle, herself, showed up one night to check out the driveway and we hear tell that her sporty little car made it much more of a thrilling ride than the camp van could ever do.

Family ties

Imagine sending your children off to camp where they leave the inclusiveness and safe confines of the camp center each day to live with a family they don't know 300 miles or more away from home. This is perhaps more nerve-wracking for the parents than the students. So with the campers came their families.

One or both of Sam's parents overnighted in Three Rivers for three consecutive weekends. We enjoyed getting to know the entire family.

They love the outdoors, physical challenges, and they couldn't get enough of Sequoia. We recommended hikes for them; they wanted strenuous, but I kept them reined in at easy to moderate because I didn't want to recommend hikes that would entail navigating through snow or unpredictable water-crossings.

In fact, the first weekend I warned Sam's mom, Carla, so many times to stay away from the river that she was kind enough to call me when she got back into town to let me know that she had, in fact, heeded my warnings and not drowned.

Dad Chris and Carla have now been to the top of Moro Rock via various trails leaving from the Giant Forest Museum area; to Tokopah Falls with the added benefit of a close-up view of a mama bear and two young cubs; and Little Baldy.

Sam and her family are set to return in September at which time we will hike together to Alta Peak.

It wasn't all practice, practice, practice at camp, although they had a lot of that; close to eight hours most days. They spent an afternoon at Lake Kaweah on a houseboat, a day in Sequoia National Park, had a movie night, barbecue night, a rubber-ducky race in the flume, and recreation time daily that consisted of some competitive table tennis matches.

Our campers left for camp before 8 a.m. each day and didn't return most nights till after 9. We were, however, responsible for three breakfasts, which helps the host families better get to know their camper(s). For us, we also got to know various parents during these mealtimes.



The three bears: On a hike to Tokopah Falls in Sequoia National Park, Sam's parents and sister received the rare treat of watching a mama bear and her two young cubs. —Submitted photo

Out of the nine public concerts and master classes during the two weeks, I made it to seven. It was a busy time, but worth it. When I did get to hear my two students play their solos, I was as nervous as if they were my own children on that stage.

Host families received many thanks, from the CSS camp and from the campers' families. We also received complimentary tickets to the four professional concerts in the series and an eight-by-10 "family portrait," which was taken by Geoff Glass in a studio setting and provided to the host families at no charge.

The Center Stage Strings camp is set to increase in campership each year, so keep in mind the possibility of assisting the camp as so many Three Rivers residents are doing. There are volunteer opportunities from hosting a student to meal prep and numerous necessary tasks.