

My Rollercoaster Ride  
Mary Ellen Pense

“The National Conference will be coming to the Bay Area in November 2007, and we need your help!” I remember hearing similar words to these at one of our workshops about two years ago. I was very excited that the AOSA Conference would be so close to home, because even though I had been a member of our local chapter since 1989, I had never been to a National Orff Conference before. All of us were encouraged to join a committee and help out in hosting this big event.

Since I really enjoy needlework and making things, I decided to join the Boutique Committee. Even though it was difficult to get myself from the Peninsula to Heidi’s house in San Francisco on those Saturday workdays, looking back, I’m glad I did it. Heidi made knitting those dolls look so easy! Even though I’ve done a fair bit of knitting, I’m afraid I didn’t quite get the knack of knitting with four small needles at the same time. I did a little better with the lettering masters for the packets included at Janet Greene’s workshop, though. Besides the feeling of accomplishment in working together on a project, one of the most valuable outcomes of being on the Boutique Committee was that I got to know Heidi, Sue and Greacian a little bit better.

As the conference approached, I lost my job. At that point, I knew there was no way for me to afford to go to the conference. I assumed that I could still show up to work at the Boutique, but at the October workshop I learned that even volunteers needed to officially register. I was certain when I came home from that workshop that I would not be going at all, and sadly informed Greacian that I would need to withdraw my offer to help.

I quickly learned what a fabulously supportive community our organization is. So many people helped me to make it to the Conference, including Greacian, James, Karen Medley, and Merlyn. I felt so honored and privileged to have received a one-day scholarship and was so excited to be attending the closing day in San Jose.

I learned something from every workshop I attended. From Andrea Ostertag, not only did I enjoy learning some new folk dances, but I learned about “kissing the floor” with one’s foot instead of stomping. From April Racana and Narumi Shimosato, I learned how uncoordinated I am; talk about having to exercise your brain! The ball game they taught was difficult, to say the least, but trying to sing the accompanying song in Japanese was quite a bit for my brain to handle. From Peter and Mary Alice Amidon, I learned some new techniques for story telling and gleaned an informative list of good stories to tell. From Laura Koulish I learned a beautiful fan dance.

To top off all the learning I gained at the workshops, I experienced the unforgettable closing session. I was so impressed with the performance of the children, and especially with their poise as they mingled amongst all of the adults to teach us how to dance. And the puppet show! I turned to my friend

Kim and said, "Can you believe how entertained all of us are by these tissues on string?" I also had the pleasure of renewing connections with my friends from levels training at Mills, and my carpool friends from the Music School in San Mateo. This was a special day that I will never forget.

*Inspired by her first Orff workshop with Doug Goodkin in 1987, Peninsula native **Mary Ellen Pense** has been a classroom music teacher for 20 years. She has taught and led choruses in San Jose, Hillsborough, Menlo Park, and San Mateo, and most recently in the Redwood City School District through Music For Minors. She also loves ballet and enjoys needlework, water aerobics, and being outdoors.*