

A Workshop Odyssey

By Michele Collins

Having four children studying Suzuki we had reached a stage in 2001 where the eldest was considering whether or not to continue her music studies. She had been studying for ten years since starting school when she was four. Her three younger sisters followed in her footsteps with myself, the Suzuki mother, quite frankly in need of a large dose of motivation.

Another Suzuki cello mother had information about a summer workshop in England in a beautiful school in Dorset. It was English speaking; it offered plenty of activity, lots of facilities, and it was residential and most attractive to my teenage daughter as they offered separate teenage accommodation.

Arriving at Bryanston through the large impressive gates we were immediately struck by the sheer size and beautiful condition of the grounds. We registered at the main building and were given our packs containing timetables, accommodation, faculty listings, rules and map of the grounds. We just had time to literally drop our bags at our respective accommodation and then it was off on a tour of the main building, auditorium and tuition rooms. From then on it was absolutely non stop, each of the two older children had a minimum of four hours of music each day and the younger two had three hours. I was determined to try to get to as many lessons as I physically could: the more you put in the more you get out.

From Sunday to Saturday I ran from lesson to lesson trying to absorb as much as I could. I think that during the course I really began to appreciate what the Suzuki Method is all about. I saw the amount of work and time people devoted to their study and practice, and the level of standard and performance that is possible. It was not that I did not know the theory of Suzuki but I can honestly say that until I actually saw it that I did not appreciate the intricacies and simplicity of it all. Before I went to the workshop, for me the study of Suzuki had become a battle to churn out more and more advanced pieces. At the workshop I learned that the method was laid down in a series of building blocks. That the intricacies of Four and Twenty Blackbirds, and by intricacies I mean the look of, the sound of, the tone of a truly studied four and twenty blackbirds lead to the intricacies of Twinkle to Minuet 1 to Vivaldi etc`.

My eldest daughter learned that playing the violin was after all something cool. She turned to me some weeks after the course and said 'you know I am always saying I think that I will give up, well I am not now, I love it.' All of my children made wonderful friends at the workshop whom they continue to contact via text and e-mail.

Since going to my first workshop in Bryanston I have gone to many more workshops in Ireland and England. My children love going to catch up with their friends. My eldest daughter went with the family for two further years and has since has been twice to workshops in France with her musical friends. She is 18 now, still studying violin, still loving it and not talking about quitting.

I will be back in Bryanston in 2005 with my two younger children, one of whom will stay in the teenager accommodation. My second daughter, who studies violin and harp, will this year travel to a workshop in Ireland with her friends.

Other than the initial decision to take up Suzuki lessons I feel certain that the decision to attend the workshop was the single most important decision made in regard to our family's involvement in the Suzuki movement.