

WHAT'S SPECIAL ABOUT A WINTER WEEKEND?

What on earth do you do on a winter weekend? No performers? No classes? No concerts? No schedule? Our winter weekends are quite different from the spring and fall events; you might like to know just what went on at last year's.

The main event was so simple: our own music. It happened often and anywhere. There were other kinds of activities, but music was always being made somewhere by someone. Friday night it was a good-sized gathering in the main lounge (very comfortable--carpeted and upholstered) while a smaller group worked on a jigsaw nearby, often singing along. Saturday morning the groups were smaller--two or three swapping songs or instrument hints in several corners of the main building. I remember a pleasant few minutes with a friend, two autoharps, and "On Top of Old Smoky," of all things. It was Saturday morning that I picked up a dulcimer for the first time, which was instant passion--I bought my own a few months later. I think my favorite singing of the weekend was the group of 15 or 20 that began Saturday afternoon as a bored-looking bunch sitting around wondering what to do and suddenly blossomed into a lively session of unaccompanied chorus, gospel, rounds, and old favorites (harmony, harmony). Hated to see supertime come and break it up.

Rumor has it that there were other things to do. Some went skiing Saturday afternoon. Some whole Pinewoods families were with us, and those with children especially took advantage of the winter sports at hand. We could see through the picture window that tobogganing on the hill behind the lounge was popular. I heard that someone from the hotel led a long walk through the snowy woods that shouldn't have been missed.

The music-making Saturday night started right after supper, with everyone gathering in the lounge (except those who danced for a while with a hotel staff member who enjoys teaching East European folk dancing). Song-leading and instruments were passed around the room. Eventually, as always happens, a smaller group accumulated in the next room, and two different kinds of music carried on for many hours more. Looking back, I'd say it was more or less an informal division into singers with instruments in one room and unaccompanied singing in the other. Some people wandered back and forth from one room to the other. Both went on forever. Three of us lasted almost to 5:00 a.m.

All I remember after breakfast on Sunday morning is almost falling asleep on a nice soft couch listening to quite a large group swapping (haven't we sung everything yet?) and again watching the kids on toboggans. I remember hearing some original songs, some hymns, and some banjo/chorus songs. I soon gave up napping.

The food was good, too--fresh, ample, tasty, and intelligently prepared. We enjoyed ordering breakfast (this year I plan to try my first lox-and-bagel breakfast) and having some choices at other meals. Solway House is, after all, a hotel and we are guests at a resort--it adds a nice touch of luxury. Another luxury is the fact that we have Solway House all to ourselves on that weekend.

But what makes the winter weekend really special is time. There was time to sing every note, make new friends, tune an autoharp (now that's time, swap banjo tunings, learn (memorize) a whole new song to take home. . . .

And I don't remember a single tape recorder.