



REFLECTIONS FROM THE

2010

MARVIN E. REECHER MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT, MEREDITH ANN GAINES

My birthday present this year was better than yours. So there.

I woke up that morning to an email informing me that I had been selected to receive the Marvin E. Reeher Memorial Scholarship to attend the 2010 Area IX Festival in Arlington, TX. In my excitement, I immediately forwarded the email to all my friends and family that I had forced to read the essay I submitted with my application. Needless to say, they were all pleased that their suffering through my essay had not been in vain.

In that essay titled "For Whom the Church Alarm Tolls: Inadvertent Bell Reference Intentional", I jokingly shared my frustrations as a handbell director with my church's alarm system. I also seriously shared how much I looked forward to the Area IX festival and what I hoped to "bring home".

"I look forward to the opportunity to network with fellow handbell directors, composers, and ringers. I look forward to the teachable moments and the laughter created by a dissonant chord that was not quite intentional. I look forward to the various optional classes where I can learn new things to take back to my choir."

What is amazing is that I can honestly say that all the things I was looking forward to, happened. I was able to network with some outstanding handbell directors, composers, and ringers. Over many conversations, I was able to ask questions, share my own thoughts, and gain invaluable information. I had also chosen to participate in the Festival Choir under the direction of Michael Joy. I think any of the ringers in that group would tell you that there were quite a few teachable moments and we contributed our share of laughter at unintentional dissonant chords! I also attended several different classes and reading sessions where I not only learned some new things, but also heard some choices of music for future ringing events.

Even in all that excitement that I was expecting, there was more to enjoy in what I did not know to expect. In every moment, there was an opportunity to learn. The classes were highly varied and taught by leaders in the handbell world. The reading sessions gave the opportunity to not only ring new selections, but the ability to discuss with fellow directors and ringers the various types of skills that could be focused on with each piece.

And the concerts...oh the concerts!

Concert Bells of Fort Worth, under the direction of Stephanie Rhoades, gave a concert that was nothing short of brilliant. With their concert titled "Young at Heart", they wowed the audience with their musical precision and mastery. The selections they shared were a perfect combination of toe-tapping, young-at-heart music with occasional unexpected antics blended with pieces displaying the depth of soul the entire group has for music and for handbells.

Handbell Solo Artist, Sueda Luttrell, shared a phenomenal lunchtime concert with all the attendees of the festival. I was mesmerized by her artistry and found myself lost in her music and motion. She ended her concert with *Symphonia on Hyfrydol* arranged by Kevin McChesney. To say that it left the audience excited and wowed would be an understatement. With the last note, I found myself leaping from the seat with applause and thinking, "I wanna see and hear it again! Play it again!"

Overall the festival was simply amazing. All of the attendees had an outstanding experience with the clinicians, Anna Laura Page and Michael Joy. The Sunday morning service was quite brilliant and gave many the opportunity to see how handbells could be incorporated into an entire worship service instead of just the prelude. The Area IX Festival will return in 2012 and I encourage everyone to start making plans today for their choirs to attend. You will NOT want to miss it!!

See, my birthday present WAS better than yours. But if my husband asks, please don't tell him I said so!

