

Stummin' with Kids In Memphis!

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I'm president of a new non-profit corporation, The Memphis Dulcimer Gathering, Inc. My friend, Lee Cagle, and I started the corporation to promote the dulcimer in the Memphis area. We just completed our first (experimental) Mountain Dulcimer Youth Camp. The week-long, 9 a.m.-12 p.m., camp was designed for up to 15 kids ages 9-18. Campers built mountain dulcimers from cardboard kits, learned to play a few songs, listened to traditional stories and music, and began arranging music by the end of the week. They performed at a concert for their families and friends, too!

The kids and their families were very impressed with how much they learned during the week. One of the campers and her family are members of my church, and today I was able to get some feedback about the camp. The camper I'm referring to is 15 years old, and has never tried to learn to play a musical instrument before. She has experience with chorus at school, but she was really excited about learning to play the mountain dulcimer. She is a friend of my daughter, and the reason she signed up for the camp was because I made my daughter sign up, and I asked her to get a friend involved. Well, both of the girls did a great job playing their dulcimers.

They also made really unique looking instruments by decorating the cardboard kits with their original designs. My daughter has listened to me and watched me play for years, but has never shown an interest in learning, even though she is a talented musician. She came away from the camp loving the instrument, because she said it was better when you build your own; and she thought it was more fun to play than it was to listen to the music.



Photo by Lee Cagle

My daughter really did NOT want to participate in the camp, but I insisted; because this was an experiment, and we needed campers of all ages. My daughter is 15-- and I'd say that is the perfect age for building the kits and really appreciating the dulcimer music.

One thing we did during the camp that I think is different than what someone else might be doing with their camp is have the campers journal the experience on a blog. I am a teacher, and I always try to get reading and writing in every activity kids do. I set up my laptop computer with an airport connection in the meeting room where we conducted all of the camp activities.

The campers wrote about the building and playing process with paper and pencil (because that was quick for them), and then I posted their comments on a blog. (The younger kids also read their papers to each other to share their experiences.) After that, the campers could use the internet to share their writing with each other and with their families when they were at home. I put pictures of the camp activities on the blog, as well. By looking at the pictures, one can really get a feeling for the enthusiasm of the campers, and the success of the camp. I highly recommend combining the technology that the kids use today with the traditions we want them to remember and appreciate. That way the kids get the best of both worlds, and the dulcimer becomes more relevant to them.

Our local newspaper came out to take pictures and to write about our Mountain Dulcimer Youth Camp. They asked me what I liked best about the week, and I told them that I liked the fact that there were nine more players and nine more dulcimers in the world! I really am excited about that.

If you would like to see the pictures I took and read about our camp, look at this website:

<http://www.MemphisDulcimer.com>

I think you'll really get an idea of how the camp went.