



July 11, 2010

Soothing tones: Interfaith minister starts drum circle

By Dana Ailer
Contributor

In July 2008, a bolt of lightning started a fire that nearly destroyed a historic home on East Beverley Street. Although the house was still standing, so much water was required to put out the fire that "everything that wasn't burned was under 4 feet of sludge," said homeowner Lou Boden. Everything, that is, except Boden's collection of Native American flutes.

"The flutes I had at the time were untouched and unscathed," he said.

Boden, an ordained interfaith minister, said the experience showed him that the flutes were going to be an important part of his life.

"I said, okay, there's something going on here," he said.

Classically trained in percussion and flute, Boden hadn't played either instrument in 25 years before visiting a mesa outside Taos, N.M., where he was inspired to take up Native American fluting.

"The thing is," he said, "you don't have to know anything about music to make beautiful music with these instruments."

Boden used the soothing tones of the flutes to help him and his family recover from the trauma of the house fire. At first, Boden played his flutes for himself in his backyard. After hearing him, Doug Sheridan of Sunspots Studios asked him to play for the glass studio's Earth Day celebration. That concert paved the way for more public performances. Eventually so many audience members asked Boden to teach them to play the flute that he decided to start a Native American flute and drum circle. Last year, he was trained as a facilitator at the Flute Haven Native Flute School in Stony Point, N.Y., and in February he conducted the first meeting of Spiritheart Flute and Drum Circle of the Shenandoah Valley.

Boden sees his previous career as perfect training for Spiritheart, he said.

"I have literally thousands of hours of classroom experience teaching and training and development, so doing this is not really a big stretch, except this comes from the heart instead of a textbook. I'm doing this because of what these flutes have done for me and because I want to share it with everybody else," Boden said.

The fact that people with no musical training can come together and, as a group, create melodic, spontaneous music is often a surprise and an inspiration to first-time participants. Boden said one of his favorite things about Spiritheart is that the circle is inclusive. He said it's a safe place where everyone supports each other.

"The group dynamic is very powerful," he said.

Many of the 13 people who met June 28 on a shady terrace at Mary Baldwin College to participate in Spiritheart agree with Boden.

Joe Moore of Swoope said he enjoys being a part of music that's impulsively created by an

ever-changing group of participants. A member since the first meeting, Joe explained, "It's good to find a rhythm other than your own."

June 28 was local musician Chris Wray's first visit to Spiritheart, but not his first drum circle. Wray said he enjoys participating in circles because, "It's like meditation, but with a group energy."

The group created spontaneous music for more than an hour, sometimes exchanging instruments in the middle of a run. Soothing strains flowed as though they had been rehearsed, although most of the participants had never met before and many had no previous experience or musical training.

Mike Deaton, who attends Spiritheart and facilitates his own drum circle in Harrisonburg, says both circles give him a feeling of "energizing relaxation" because everyone brings his or her own spirit that contributes to the group energy.

"In a drum circle, all are talking, all are listening and all are being heard," he said.

Deaton also advocates the healing power of drumming. In May he facilitated drumSTRONG — Drumming to Beat Cancer in Charlotte, N.C. More than a thousand people participated in the event, which included 28 hours of nonstop drumming.

Students at Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center are getting the opportunity to experience the healing power of drumming first-hand. Last spring, a group of students from WWRC attended a Spiritheart meeting at Mary Baldwin and soon Boden began facilitating a monthly flute and drum circle at the center.

Christy Wagner, WWRC's Activities Director said she is enthusiastic about her students' participation in the circle.

"What's so great about Lou is that he can take kids at whatever level — even if they've never held a drum or flute before — and he can engage them in this music and keep them on a beat," she said. "You don't need to know anything about it to be successful at it."

When asked if he might begin to facilitate more therapeutic and healing circles, Boden was philosophical.

"This whole thing will unfold and grow the way it wants to unfold and grow," he said.

Additional Facts

If You Go

- Spiritheart Flute & Drum Circle of the Shenandoah Valley meets at Mary Baldwin College on the last Monday of the month at 7 p.m. In good weather, the group plays on Tyson Terrace, between the Student Activities Center and Pannill Student Center. More information can be found at www.louboden.com or at The Sacred Circle on East Beverley Street.
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