

Carol Agler

Synopsis:

Our Tournament of Roses events in Pasadena were unbelievable--first at Bandfest, then at the float judging (where we learned that this was the 1st time a band had been allowed to play for a float being judged) and at the Rose Parade where we were cheered for 2 hours without pause! It was very moving. Many of us cried during and after the parade and during Bandfest where Pickerington Central Marching Band dedicated "Amazing Grace" to us, then turned and played it to us as we stood behind them after our performance. Their support and the support of the crowds at Bandfest and the Parade, and the support of all those that contributed to our trip--it all got overwhelming twice for me. Those tears were triggered by band members' tears.

We were so proud to finish strong in the 5.5 mile Rose Parade--ALL of us! It seemed to go so quickly--how could we have possibly marched 5 1/2 miles already??!! Our band sounded strong all 5 1/2 miles! I couldn't be more proud or pleased.

To recap:

December 28, 2009

The first morning we practiced our Bandfest show in the gym before breaking for lunch and then loading the buses. We left OSSB at 1:20 p.m., headed for Indianapolis to catch a non-stop flight to Los Angeles. The tour company arranged for a special check-in for us which made things go easier. For hours our flight sounded like an airborne cocktail party. Most of our students were too excited to take a nap. For at least two it was their first flight, so I did some reassigning of seats so that first-time flyers had an experienced adult next to them. Luckily the pilot had a very smooth take-off. There was a bit of turbulence over the Rockies, but not enough to shake us up. At LAX we were greeted by Ken Metz of the Radio Reading Service. He welcomed us and said the Braille/Large Print Rose Parade programs were ready. His service provided those programs for all students and staff. We loaded our bags onto 2 motor coaches and traveled to the Marriott Burbank Airport Hotel. After a snack of fruit and bottled water we settled into our rooms and staked out territory.

December 29, 2009

Tuesday morning Dan Kelley and I went to a working breakfast for band directors while the rest of the group went to an area high school to practice with instruments for Bandfest. We were able to collaborate with Jon Waters, Assistant Director of the Ohio State University Marching Band, and with Mike Sewell, Director of the Pickerington Central Marching Band as to the plans to rehearse "Beautiful Ohio" Wednesday morning. Dan and I joined our band at Diamond Bar High School where we met a blind flute player and her father. She would be attending Diamond Bar High School that fall and

had come to see the school. She assumed the band on the field was their band. It was a thrill for both of us that WE were the band on the field. She met Macy McClain, our talented flute/piccolo player and she stayed for our entire rehearsal which went longer than planned. The students didn't yet have their "chops" back and new media people arrived. Dan even did a remote interview with Diane Sawyer! After a water break we had the students run the show one more time, and we were satisfied with the results. It was important to do the interviews with the national media, as it provided more opportunities to represent people with disabilities.

We had to take everyone on the buses into Disneyland instead of going through the front gates. After a hasty lunch in the park we said goodbye to our non-band entourage and went to the back lot to change into uniform and immediately were on stage performing for a good-sized crowd. Among those in the crowd was Jonathan Waters, OSUMB Assistant Band Director. Our band played "Military Escort" march, "Superstition," "Isn't She Lovely," "Sir Duke," "Our Director" march, "Eye of the Tiger," "Beautiful Ohio" and finally "Le Regiment" followed by 2 choral numbers by 7 band students who are also in our high school choir. We were to stop at 4:00 which would have eliminated our vocal numbers but our Disney guide obtained permission for us to do the whole show so we continued with the vocal version of "Sir Duke" followed by the very touching song "With One Voice" written by a Kim Spencer, a resident of Central Ohio. The lyrics: "I sit alone singing my song, but with one voice, I'll sing out strong.... And to that one voice we'll add more, and with one voice we'll learn to soar, and with one voice we'll not give in, and with one voice we'll learn to win. Together we'll sing finally to be heard, and nothing can stop us 'till we've have the final word. We've got the music and now we have the power to face the world as we become one!" It clearly represented our desire to show the world the ABILITIES people with disabilities possessed. Many in the audience were moved to tears. The arrangement can be heard in part at <http://www.halleonard.com/product/viewproduct.do?itemid=8711275&keywords=one%20voice&searchcategory=03&>

We went immediately to a jazz workshop led by the incredible musician/composer Alex Iles. I have to confess, when I saw the music I thought he was attempting too much for one 2-hour session, and when he laid out his plan to the group I realized he meant to do this complicated jazz arrangement of "When You Wish Upon a Star" in ONE hour! Once we got started with a bit of verbal translating into Bb solfege of the parts by our experienced staff and volunteers and a just a few bits of advice things moved quickly. Alex was excited by how fast our student memorized by ear and how they mimic the style well. Twice they recorded us and played it back. The band really improved after hearing the playbacks. And, right on time, we had accomplished what Alex had hoped...they did the complicated chart in the hour's time. We switched drummers and he then taught "Chameleon" by Herbie Hancock (listen to Herbie Hancock play it at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JcjkA5ZAWQo>) by ear and had a blast with this great funky "jazz fusion" tune. When he asked for people to improvise, 4 hands shot up right away. My daughter Mandy commented that this was unique to our band--lots of volunteers for improvisation. With most bands it would be like pulling teeth. I heard Noah, one of the improvising students, say, "I wish we did this all the time!" When we

recorded it Alex planned for us to stop at a designated point, but the band kept playing so he followed Dan's suggestion to orchestrate a fade out. And so it was---just like real life-improvising as you go along!

After the jazz workshop we posed for a picture, then changed and waited to be released to get dinner and enjoy the park. There wasn't time for rides, and some didn't even get dinner, but we did see the fireworks a little before we managed to get all of us together to head for the buses. The park is beautiful at night with all the lights. Many of our students, in spite of low vision, are excellent photographers.

December 30, 2009

Wednesday: Bandfest was the next morning. Margie Coleman hurriedly sewed white pocket inserts into the assistants' jacket pockets, doing each one in less than a minute! We got there right on schedule for the 4-Ohio-bands rehearsal and were SO surprised that it DOES rain in California! The weather forecast called for a 10% chance of rain. Yet, here it was misting constantly. Our raincoats, of course, were back at the hotel just 1/2 hour away. The rain was very light and sometimes non-existent during our practice for "Beautiful Ohio." No other band was wearing raincoats, so neither did we. After the rehearsal the rain picked up so all bands were escorted to the adjacent parking garage to do warm-ups where it was dry and a bit warmer. Students and Dan Kelley were interviewed by many different TV and radio stations while we waited for our cue to go to the field. Jeff Schneider had everyone placed perfectly for our Script Braille Ohio, only our escort decided to take a different ramp to the field (just a few steps shorter route) which left us lined up in reverse. So we made a "U" turn and waited to take the field. It was cold—in the 50's—as Dan and I led the band into position. Dan said his fingers were so cold they were numb....which meant he couldn't READ! He is not only the band's director, but the announcer as well. I warmed his left fingertips with my hands and when Gary Hahn gave me the headset microphone to give to Dan, it was "Showtime!" Dan climbed the ladder, got his bearings, and there it was! Our band looked fantastic in red, white and blue uniforms, the marching assistants in red jackets with white pocket inserts with the OSSB emblem embroidered on them.

The Script Braille "Ohio" drill to "Le Regiment" looked and sounded AWESOME! Chris Harrington dotted the "i" while the crowds in the stands cheered and stomped. The step-off drill in "Superstition" was perfect! Hien Nguyen's saxophone solo in "Isn't She Lovely" carried in the air. Hien created a rich huge sound! The two circles rotated in opposite directions in "Sir Duke" looking fantastic! Macy McClain's, Sam Shepherd's and Noah Beckman's soli in the shout section were "right on!" They marched off the field to great applause. The band assembled for our "parade in review" while Dan and I posed for a picture with Mr. Hahn, Dr. Stacey Houser—head of the Music Committee of the TOR Parade—and Mr. Remo, of Remo Drums, himself. Then we joined the band as they passed in front of the stands playing "Military Escort."

We moved to the far side of the stadium around the 20-yard line, moving between the track and the stands as instructed. Brendan was crying. I asked him if he was hurting (he

carries a heavy snare drum) and he said, "I'm crying because of all the support of the crowd! Listen to them!" I heard a beautiful song being played by Pickerington Central Marching Band. Two media groups vied for interviews as we stood in the rain. Whitney Bryant tugged on my sleeve saying Pickerington Central just dedicated "Amazing Grace" to us! We were so touched!

We continued to stand and watch the other bands—Pickerington Central and Ohio University—as they did their shows and paraded in review. When Ohio state University's Marching Band took to the field we moved into the end zone ready to join them when cued. They played "Hang On Sloopy" and Terry danced very subtly luring the cameras to him. Our cue came, the cadence began, and Pickerington Central and us marched across the field into position. Ohio University came from the far side of the field and Dr. Woods directed "Beautiful Ohio." We were front and center, OSU to the right, OU to the left, and Pickerington Central right behind us. It looked fantastic and sounded HUGE! What a thrill!

We all exited the field and headed back to the bus to put away the instruments and get In-N-Out Burgers for lunch. Some of us ate in the parking garage (not a good idea when you're hoping to keep your uniforms clean) and others on the bus. The rain had stopped, thankfully, but we were pretty wet from our elbows upward. We went back to the hotel and changed for the dinner/dance at the Pasadena Convention Center. Our tour company combined the 4 bands for an evening of relaxation and fun. They had a green screen that you could pose in front of and they'd put your picture on the cover of a magazine. I chose to be "Woman of the Year" on Vogue Magazine. My husband Fred chose to be on the cover of Rolling Stone Magazine. It was free, and you could do as many as you wished. Kelsey Riley looked like a movie star on the cover of Hollywood Magazine! Students danced and ate and danced and ate. It was a great evening!

Thursday—December 31—New Year's Eve

Dan Kelley, myself, Interim Superintendent Cynthia Johnson, Retired Superintendent Louis Mazzoli, Music Assistant Martin Williams, and Drill Writer/Marching Assistant Mandy Agler went to the brunch at the Tournament of Roses House where Dan and I posed behind the Rose Parade trophy with Dr. Stacey Houser and others. We chatted with others as we enjoyed a small high school jazz ensemble, a nice brunch and that same high school's full jazz ensemble. They were VERY good! It was hard to imagine they were in high school! After the brunch each band director was recognized and given drumheads commemorating the 2010 Tournament of Roses Parade. When Dan Kelley was announced he stood and recognized me as well, and we were given drumheads. Everyone rose to their feet in a standing ovation. It was quite a moment!

Since our band was to perform at the Rose Palace for the Float Judging Dr. Houser, our liaison Carolyn Eberhard and we had to slip out. We joined the Mayor of Pasadena's motorcade complete with police escort and hurried to the palace. Our band was assembling next to the Lions Club float. They had spent the morning at the Grammy Museum which had opened just for us. An LA morning show sent a camera crew to the

museum to have a live interview with some of our students. The students told us how cool the museum was and that Terry had danced on a floor that lit up when you stepped on it. Once again, the cameras were on him! Cameras and reporters greeted us at the Rose Palace, too. The resulting article in the LA Times can be viewed at <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-blind-band1-2010jan01,0,5187673.story>

We visited with officials of the Accessibility Commission of Pasadena, the Mayor, and members of the white-cane drill team that would be walking in front of the Lions Club float in the parade. They, too, had sighted volunteers, only their guides would serve as spotters, walking behind their line as they walked elbow-to-elbow, each using a cane. Our students stood patiently waiting for over an hour before it came time to play during the judging of this particular float bedecked with beautiful roses. As time got close I began to shiver. Dan said he'd felt the same way before he climbed the ladder at Bandfest. Jeff Schneider's commands to the students on the field settled him down. Carolyn Eberhard said she'd been a TOR volunteer for 17 years and had never been allowed at a float judging event, and they'd NEVER permitted a band to play at one. No wonder I was shivering!

We were to play for 4 minutes 30 seconds and stop no matter where we were in the songs. We realized that if we played "Military Escort" and then the "Livin' in the City" intro to "Superstition" (which we leave out in parades) followed by "Superstition" it would work out perfectly. And so it did. The man in control gave us a big "Thumbs up."

We exited and got water for everyone. The Accessibilities Commission of Pasadena and the Mayor presented us with a framed certificate as well as smaller versions in print and Braille for our band members. The certificate recognized us for demonstrating the ABILITIES of those with Disabilities. They gave each of us a "20" button in honor of the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. And they provided us with lunch, which we ate in the front yard of a nearby elementary school. We changed on the buses—boys on one bus, girls on another—and headed for the Santa Monica Pier. OSUMB was hosting a Buckeye Bash there so we were greeted by a sea of red shirts. We saw OSSB retired teacher Rita Arthur and her husband Dick waving to us from the pier! Students, families and volunteers enjoyed the sights and sounds of the beach and the amusement park. I was with Terry Runkle and he was very talented at the shooting games. In no time he had 40 tickets to exchange for a toy at the arcade. We gathered in front of Bubba Gump's restaurant at 5:30. While the others enjoyed dinner three of us brought in the New Year at a nearby hospital. One of our volunteers had needed medical assistance. Dan Kelley had the band yell "Happy New Year" (Columbus time) in a voicemail to me which we enjoyed hearing on our way back to the hotel. All was well. We returned to the hotel to get organized and to sleep 3 hours before getting up for the big event!

January 1, 2010--Tournament of Roses Parade

This was it! I couldn't find the pins for my lapels...or I was too nervous to think of them. It was a challenge to find everyone's correct uniform parts. Bria had someone else's

pants in her garment bag. Noah had Bria's pants, and Robert had Noah's. Chris had Robert's! Some students couldn't their shoes or hats. Luckily we had a list of everyone's uniform pieces and shoe sizes and we got things straightened out easily. Students got their instruments out and put together, storing the cases under the bus. We had 7 minutes to get off the bus once we were in position to do so. Only the sousaphones and drums would get cases off from under the bus. We ate our boxed breakfasts on the buses while we waited in line to move into position to disembark. After probably ½ hour we moved to the base of the freeway ramp and unloaded. As soon as we were all ready we moved up the ramp and were given clear plastic garbage bags to wear so as to keep in our body heat. The weather was not terribly cold and some people declined the bags. Someone asked why we had to punch holes for our head and arms. The time flew by, everyone checking and double-checking that their shoes were double-knotted, instruments and reeds working, and making last-minute visits to the port-a-potties. We moved from the bridge to further up the street. Then we melded into the parade surrounded by stands of Ohio State fans. Our escort Gary told us to play a cadence until he cued us to switch to our songs. At his cue we began "Military Escort." The crowds were loud! I remember seeing the scaffolding where the photographers were standing in 3 or 4 levels and saw Ed Crockett of OSUMB there. Ed is the one who took our official band photo on our website and in the Rose Parade program. I saw our photographer Paula Shepherd, mother of trombonist Sam Shepherd and his 3 brothers who were marching assistants. We turned the famous 110-degree corner and saw that the Lions Club float was a good distance ahead. In the turn the front of the band has to march in half-steps until the whole band has rounded the corner. Of course that increases the distance between us and the float. Gary urged us to take lonnnnnngggg steps to catch up. We'd brought a wheelchair knowing one of our drummers could not march the entire parade. He could go at least a mile, so the wheelchair followed the band until he needed it. The long steps just weren't possible for him so he transferred to the wheelchair fairly early in the parade. Jake Shepherd, Sam's oldest brother, pushed him the whole rest of the parade, declining assistance even on the two hills. I worried that the long steps would take their toll on our sound but as soon as we resumed a regular stride our sound recovered as well. The crowds stood and cheered, people giving me a "thumbs up" gesture or saying "You're doing GREAT!" I looked to my left seeing Martin Williams waving at the crowds on that side. Dan and I discovered we HAD to march next to the drums so they could hear his commands. Once Gary told us we were past the cameras we had 3 other songs to add to our rotation of tunes. Dan cued "Go back to the top of the order, then add 'Our Director!'" but the only thing the drummers heard was "Our Director!" Dan cued a roll-off. The drummers played a roll-off. The front of the band began "Military Escort" while the percussion section played "Our Director." They are both marches, but one swings while the other has "straight" eighths. Dan began to sing the melody to "Military Escort" and I joined him. The drummers caught on right away and just like that we were all playing the same piece!

We kept marching along. I waved at the crowds and realized my face was beginning to hurt from smiling for so long---a wonderful thing! I simply couldn't stop smiling! The people don't wave politely—they interact, cheering, whooping, blowing horns, giving "thumbs up" signs, yelling hoorays and Happy New Year's, etc. I looked to my left at

Bria and there were tears on her cheeks. She carried a heavy snare drum. I asked her if she was hurting. She shook her head “No.” I asked if she needed someone to take her drum. She shook her head “No.” I thought, “What could it be?” Then I remembered Brendan’s tears at Bandfest and I said, “Are you moved?” Bria shook her head “Yes.” That’s when I found myself wiping my eyes between waves. It was very moving! I marched next to Bria for most of the parade and watched as she worked through fatigue and probably pain to play her part 100% of the time, never giving up her drum. Five and a half miles! Other bands can spell drummers, allowing them to fold their drums upward reducing the strain on the back while others carry on until their turn to have a break. We don’t have the depth to spell anyone. Our drummers play ALL the time and carry their drums in play position ALL the time. Marching assistants can take the drums for a stretch if necessary, but 3 of our drummers played the entire parade without resting—Bria Goshay, Whitney Hammond and Earnest Turner.

There were two slight hills in the parade and one left turn besides the right-turn at TV Corner. I knew we’d go under an overpass I thought toward the end of the parade. (We were not able to go on the parade route tour after the breakfast our first day, so I wasn’t entirely sure.) It was shortly after the left-turn. When we got there the sound reverberated against the concrete and our band played even louder. It was fun! Crowds cheered everywhere we were and continued to the end! And there they were—Dr. Stacey Houser, Gary, and Loren Klock—our liaison until Sept.-- standing right next to the port-a-potties at the end of the parade! Stacey hugged and hugged us, saying she’d been told that we’d dropped out way back at the beginning of the parade and had radioed others along to route to see if we were really out of the parade. To her relief, it had been a false report! She was trilled that we ALL made it to the end and in FINE form! Dan and I hugged. Who would have thought in 2005 when the band became a marching band that one day we’d be marching in the Rose Parade?! We were so very proud of our students—we’d never marched more than 4 miles—maybe 4 ½-- and that on a cushioned track. Dan told us if we could do 4 miles we could do 6 and he was RIGHT! Bria was crying. Dan hugged her. Bria handed me her phone and choked out, “Tell Mom.” She’d called her mother but was unable to speak. I explained about the parade and Bria’s success and how she was so moved by the experience. Mom was really happy! Sam appeared saying he was surprised he wasn’t tired—his “chops” were tired, but HE wasn’t. Others came up cheering their success, remarking on how fast it went.

We realized we needed to move away from that area because more bands were ending the parade. Our buses were at the front of the line of buses next to the street. We put the instruments away, got our lunch tickets and headed for the line for In-N-Out Burgers. The Ohio State University Marching Band was reaching the end of the parade so Dan and I were able to congratulate Jonathan Waters and thank him for the help he and his band have provided over the years in summer sessions, experiences at Skull Sessions, etc. Being able to work with their excellent band members made a huge difference in our members’ skills. They are such great inspirations.

After we ate it was time to scurry to the Rose Bowl (where IS everybody???) to find our seats. We stopped to pick up the friends and family group at the designated spot. A

media person called me twice wanting to interview our students but I was unable to connect with him once we got to the stadium. The crowds were huge—it was like a mosh-pit trying to get to our seats. We were sitting in the disability section, but there were only half as many chairs as we needed. I tried to get people in the seats they were assigned, but the numbers didn't make any sense, moving from 59 to 102 and such. Some OSU fans were incredibly ugly to us as we tried to find our seats. They did not ask, they yelled for us to sit down in the empty places--by the end of the 1st quarter the stadium people brought us folding chairs so we could at last sit in our places. I felt awful for our group as one man yelled, "You can't see anyway!" So, no matter what, we sat. And when others in our party came to me to communicate, even as they squatted this same man would yell at them.

I had a great time audio-describing the game to Dan Kelley and Boniface Womber. I could watch the video display behind me to my left and was pleased that my guesses at gains and losses were fairly accurate. We enjoyed the half-time shows by both bands. My husband Fred (Boniface's marching assistant) said that he and Boniface got lots of congratulations from people when they saw Boniface's "Best Blind Band in the Land" t-shirt. They felt like rock stars! I was waiting in line outside the ladies' room when the lady behind me began talking about our band. I told her and her friends I was the co-director of that band. She asked me if I knew Noah Beckman. Of course I did. She is a "lunch lady" at his home school in Dublin, Ohio! What are the ODDS?!?!

By the third quarter I was beginning to lose my voice (Dan lost his after the parade. This temporary laryngitis moved throughout the band over the next two days.) We had to exit before the end of the game so as to get to our buses safely. Our crew got to see the final touchdown, though. It took some phone coaching to get everyone to the buses. We managed to get to Medieval Times dinner theater right as the show was starting at 7:15. My husband Fred and daughter Mandy skipped the dinner and show. They went with the 2nd bus to the hotel where the Pickerington Central band members were staying so as to help GMT tour guide and bus driver pack up and drop off our instruments and uniforms at Pickerington's semi. The timing worked out perfectly. They returned with an empty bus right when we were ready to leave.

On the way back we announced that, at long last, people could sleep in. Our waking deadline was 10:00 when breakfast closed.

January 2, 2010

We slept in, packed up, loaded the buses and headed for Universal Studios. We broke into our "traveling" groups and enjoyed the park at our own paces. I went on the Studio Tour which was great—especially the earthquake and flood sections. It was neat seeing Wisteria Lane from "Desperate Housewives," too. Susan's house was previously Marian's home in "The Music Man." Our little group stopped for lunch. One girl cried when she tried swallowing so I took her to the First Aid station where she was able to get Tylenol and to sleep for a couple of hours. We stayed there resting and enjoying the calm and quiet all afternoon. The band met at Hard Rock Café—part of the park—for dinner

and brought us food to eat on the bus afterward. We then drove to the airport where the GMT guide had arranged for a private check-in. Northwest/Delta was very accommodating. The pilot was exceptional, too. We barely felt take-off or the landing! No nervous students on this leg of the trip—and no airborne cocktail party, either. Everyone slept! We reached Indianapolis, collected our luggage and headed for Columbus. Going from 70-degrees to zero was some shock! For the first time I fell asleep many times on this bus. I hoped that no one took my picture. Since I'd taken Martin's picture as he slept, I figured I wouldn't be so lucky.

We stopped for brunch at a pancake house sometime after crossing the Ohio border. When we got to OSSB a cameraman interviewed Dan Kelley and Whitney Bryant. We put the luggage on the stage so people could claim theirs. Slowly parents claimed children, some students went to the cottages to stay on, and the rest of us gathered our stuff and left as the opportunity arose. It was an incredible experience—this Rose Parade journey. We couldn't wait to tell our families all about it.