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Pack Creek Ranch, San Juan County, Utah

Mid-September in 2012.

Back in the mountains south of Moab for the fall.

The aspen and oak trees are turning yellow and orange and red.

The air is slightly blue from smoke drifting down from forest fires up north.

The sky is clear, the days cool, and the stars come out in full glory just as the crescent moon is setting.

The crickets and coyotes are the music of the night.

Driving down from Seattle I got off the interstate as much as possible and drove through the agricultural areas of the Yakima Valley and Columbia River basin. The harvest was on for pears, hops, onions, corn, melons, and alfalfa hay. The apple trees hung heavy with red fruit just before picking. And the pumpkins were ripening in the fields.

I stopped often and wandered out into the fields and trees just for the smell of the fecund ripeness of the Earth. Lovely . . .

And now I'm here, thinking about . . .

DOING THE HORSE-PUCKEY POLKA IN PENDLETON

The Beat Goes On Marching Band continues to indulge my fantasy and include me in their parade events as their cymbal player.

You can see proof if you go to YouTube and punch up the video *Parade Highlights – Pendleton Roundup – 2012*. You'll see me about midway through, right in the middle, clanging away. (*There are other good postings about the rodeo there, and the one about the Indian Princesses is special.*)

My original fantasy in joining the band was strictly John Phillip Sousa. Flashy uniforms, tight formations, military discipline, classic marches, etc. When I went to my first rehearsal, the band members were, as expected, in informal mode and dress. But they rehearsed with concentrated discipline. And I assumed that in a parade, the spirit of John Phillip Sousa would prevail. The band members would be transformed at performance time. They all seemed so sane and normal . . . at the time . . .

As I wrote in a previous posting, my first parade – the Seattle Seafair - was at night. A near-terror trip for me. I was too busy trying not to make a fool of myself to really notice everything that was going on. Mostly all that went through my mind was *DON'T SCREW UP! DON'T SCREW UP.*

Flash forward – a snapshot of a moment in the Pendleton, Oregon, Roundup Rodeo Westward Ho parade on Friday, the 14th of September.

Imagine a white-haired, bearded man scuffling along with what seems like a collection of renegades from an assisted living center. He's carrying shiny, heavy-duty, brass cymbals. He and they are dressed in baseball caps, khaki shorts, purple T shirts, white shoes – looking like golfers on the way to a tournament who decided to invade a parade.

The band at this moment has just been dancing, singing, and merging into the spectators, while somehow playing music together. It's not John Phillip Sousa, it's Hey Baby – part of which is sung to the crowd, "Hey, baby, do you want to be my girl?" And the crowd applauds and sings back.

The cymbal man has actually shifted from oblivious anxiety into consciousness of the big picture – staying in line forward and sideward, being there with a big clash at the drum roll-off, singing, dancing, doing some kick-step stuff, staying in left-right-left-right mode, and all the while dodging horse apples deposited by about 1,000 horses ahead of our band.

Some tricky footwork is required – but doing the horse-puckey polka in Pendleton is just one more challenge the band takes in stride.

The snapshot is taken at the moment just as the cymbal man looks up and sees everything reflected in the huge glass windows of the Hamley Saddlery Company, purveyors to cowboys since 1905.

He sees the spectators, and the band, and himself.

Everybody is smiling – even him.

The man is very happy.

Yes!

The beat goes on.

There's an order-in-chaos to the loosey-goosey style of the band.

If you want a backstage view of the foundation upon which the fun rests, go to the band website: www.thebeatgoesonmb.org/ and select the "Member

Info" section at the right hand side, then select the "Rehearsal Music choice, scroll down, and take a look at how much thought and care and planning that goes into each and every piece of music the band plays and performs.

That's what it takes to appear a little wild and crazy when marching.
John Phillip Sousa would roll over in his grave to see our band in action.
But nobody ever danced and sang and laughed when his band played.
Or had nearly as much fun.
Eat your heart out, John Phillip Sousa.

As for the Pendleton Roundup Parade:
It's biggest non-motorized parade in the country.
No floats, no fire engines, no convertibles full of dignitaries.
No recorded music, electric lights, or princesses in ball gowns.
Mostly horses – about a thousand of them.
Even a couple of horse-mounted cowboy bands.
And oxen, mules, and donkeys.
Plus covered wagons, stage-coaches, buggies, and carts.
And hundreds of cowboys and Indians in full regalia.
Rodeo queens, and real Indian princesses as well, but they, too, ride horses.
And, of course, marching bands.

The parade goes a couple of miles down one main street of Pendleton and back up another, all the way out to the rodeo grounds, where the West is still Wild, and will get wilder at rodeo time. The rodeo princesses open the show by riding full tilt into the arena, jumping a fence, and rearing up short.
(Try that, Miss America.)
And then it's bucking and racing and roping and bull riding time.
There's nothing quite like the Pendleton Roundup – go sometime.

Alas, in all good things there is a downside.

I'm going to need new shoes and socks, for one thing.
After marching through town and wandering around the chutes and pens and barns behind the rodeo arena, I ended up with my white shoes camouflaged in slimy brown and green – covered with horse shit and cow shit, and soaked in animal pee – both outside and inside.
I threw away my shoes and socks before I got into my car to drive on.

I ended up with purple-and-yellow stripes of bruising on my arms and belly from getting pinched by some over-flashy moves with the cymbals.

I ended up knowing how much I still have to learn about playing cymbals well in a marching band.

And I ended up once more exhausted – flat on my back on some grass - mostly from the anxious tension of wanting to do my best for the band.

But I also ended up with great memories.

There's that lasting snapshot from the Hamley's window.
Me - in the crowd, in the band, in the music, in the moment.

I ended up with a sense of engagement, knowing that I *can* do this band thing – and sooner or later I'll find my band groove.

All this from a day doing the horse-puckey-polka in Pendleton.

All this - and not a single regret.

The Beat Goes On.