

A trip back in time

By Roberta L. Wilkes

When the last issue came out I was packing for a trip to Parsons, TN to see the Rivertime Players. In a real tent. I was excited, but hoping I wouldn't be disappointed. After all, none of the troupe was born into the business as I was – so would they be able to pull it off? Would I feel the nostalgia? Would it seem the same?

My friend, Marilyn and I made the journey across part of Oklahoma, all of Arkansas, and on into Tennessee. We got to the lot mid-afternoon. I saw Mickey Lacey's car and just beyond a rolled-up side curtain, Mickey. And then our friend, Mark Tubbs. My heart started to flutter a bit and I jumped out of the car. Well, okay, I don't really jump much anymore. I walked toward the tent.

The tent is vinyl, so it's shiny. That threw me a bit. It doesn't have the canvas smell. But the color is right, the poles are there, the stage looks right and – I can't believe it – I tripped over a stake. The ropes aren't tied; there is some sort of belts with ratchets. And instead of the top being laced together, it's Velcro.

But, believe me, none of that made any difference when the audience got there and the show started. Because as the evening wore on, Marilyn and I laughed and laughed until we thought our sides would burst. And I could smell the popcorn and watch the kids sitting in the front row – yes, behaving themselves. (After all, their parents were sitting somewhere behind them.)

Well, then, it all came back. The reason it was so great trouping under canvas. It was great because everyone was having a good time. And, yes, the audience obviously felt Toby and the rest of the troupe were family. And, in this case maybe they were *really* family, but I remembered how it felt to be treated like family anyway. And, by the way, all of us old-timers who were there were treated not just like family – but like royalty. We were introduced; Mickey and Toby, played by Shane Bridges, did some bits. I did a version of the old "Wages" routine – the one where Toby tries to get paid, but ends up owing the boss money. We put a spin on it by having two come up to ask for money, instead of just one. Mickey and Mark Tubbs stepped in to be the two – without any rehearsal at all.

They didn't need our bits, though. Or us, really. They were obviously comfortable on stage. The characters were good. They had thought up new bits. Bits that were timely. The play was changed a little, too – to accommodate the players they have in their troupe. That's what we would have done, I realized. Sang new songs and made new acts – depending on what we had to work with.

I'm going to go again next year if it's at all possible. I may try to come down from the north, so I won't have to make the pull across Arkansas. But I'm going. Maybe I'll see you there!



Roberta L. Wilkes, Mickey Lacey and Mark Tubbs on stage with the Rivertime Players.