

## **STATE AND NATIONAL NEWS**

SAI is looking for someone to populate their website. Not sure what that means (I didn't)? We need someone to post things on the website. Please contact Jillian Chrisman if you have a desire or could make some recommendations.  
J2chrisman@comcast.net

The Suzuki Violin Program at the University of Evansville will be hosting its workshop from March 4-5. See the attached brochure.

The Northeastern Suzuki Guild will be holding their workshop in Fort Wayne on February 26 and 27. See the attached brochure

### **Parents as Partners**

SAA is encouraging teachers and parents to participate in Parents as Partners. Sixty talks focusing on the Suzuki philosophy, practicing, listening, and other matters will be presented. These videos will be available to watch until June 30. Registration can be done via the SAA website's homepage, with early bird pricing in effect through January 31.

The next SAI meeting will take place on July 9 in Northern Indiana.

## **STUDIO/TEACHER SPOTLIGHT**

Written by Liz Efroymsen-Brooks

Linda Kummernuss is a Suzuki violin teacher who lives in Auburn Indiana and teaches at 3 different locations!

She is on staff at the Fort Wayne Suzuki Talent Education Program, which is run by Janet and Bill Klickman. At the FWTEP there is a staff of 5 who teach a student population of around 150 violins, violas and cellos. Linda teaches private students, as well as groups and chamber ensembles.

Then Linda also has a private studio of about 13 Suzuki students at Manchester University in North Manchester, Indiana, through a community outreach program. She is also on the faculty of Manchester University, teaching strings technique classes and college violin students.

Her third teaching location is in Auburn, where she teaches in her home about 23 students. Due to the challenges of running a single private studio, her approach is more modified Suzuki.

Linda first became introduced to the Suzuki method through a fall weekend workshop at a State Park in Ohio. Loraine Sink who brought her Suzuki students to the workshop.

Fast forward to 10 years later. Linda is living in Miami Florida with a 2 year old son. She wants to start him on violin in a Suzuki program but no one has an opening.

Word got out that she was looking for a teacher and she got a call Bill Banks, who was starting the Miami School of Musical Arts. He needed a Suzuki violin teacher. So he offered to send her to training at the first summer Suzuki Institute at the University of Miami. He then offered her a job teaching and she never looked back! She still could not find a teacher for her son, so he became her guinea pig. Eventually he switched to Suzuki piano and Linda was able to barter violin lessons for the piano teacher's child for violin lessons for her son. Linda's daughter plays Suzuki flute and they have attended institutes together.

Eventually Linda moved to Auburn because her husband, a Lutheran pastor, was assigned there. He retired and they settled in northern Indiana. She also loves playing in a violin/guitar duo that develops and performs the original music written by the guitarist.

Linda has her training up through Book 6 and has done a Book 8 overview. Her training has been all over - Florida, Ohio, D.C. and Chicago.

### **Quarterly Topic: FINDING TIME TO PRACTICE**

**NEXT NEWSLETTER TOPIC: Suzuki Institutes and music camps: How do you encourage your students and parents to attend? Do you have students with positive stories they can share?** Send your thoughts to Rachel Gries at [BRQVLA@aol.com](mailto:BRQVLA@aol.com)

#### **Finding time to Practice: One story followed by a few practicing suggestions by Jillian Chrisman**

Having taught violin for over 30 years, I do know that families are busier now more than ever. The reality of fitting music practice into the hectic daily schedule is increasingly challenging. Over the years I've seen students' lives taken over by increasing demands of sports, homework, and the lure of video games. There is definitely less down time too. Balancing it all is trickier than ever. Here is one story of a former student and her success into adulthood and time management.

Years ago, a wonderful little student, about 12 years old, came in to her lesson completely exhausted. She was a walking zombie – and this was not the first time. While on the way to her lesson she ate her fast food dinner and changed out of her sports attire back into street clothes. My patience ran out on seeing this brilliant mind overrun with activities. I asked her, "How many activities are you involved in?" She

began listing them. If I recall correctly there were around six or seven. This was worse than I thought! I cared for her deeply and realized this was a moment in which I needed to express my concern for her. I quietly told her and the home teacher that she needed to get her activities down to 4 or less by the next lesson or that I would “help” them eliminate an activity myself (violin). At that point, I would have preferred her life to be improved with fewer activities – even if that meant no violin. I realized this child and family needed help (it takes a village) in reducing her hectic life that she had come to know as normal. She needed the opportunity to develop time management skills - choosing appropriate workloads and balancing time demands. She came back the next week and told me what she chose to eliminate. I was so happy for her. She played violin very nicely through high school and went off to college and became a doctor. We have stayed in touch and about a couple of years ago I asked her, “Do you remember when I asked you to cut back on activities?” She did not remember. But after a moment of thought she said, “I remember getting to drop some activities I didn’t really like that much and I was really relieved and happy about it.”

Here are a few basic practicing suggestions.

**Practicing Suggestion #1 – Just do it (like Nike says).** Commit to the amount of practicing that is realistic for your family schedule and for your child’s progress. Ask your teacher and have a conversation with him/her regarding this. Even grabbing 10-15 min. on an insane day will help. Daily practice creates muscle memory and fluid, relaxed playing.

**Practice Suggestion #2 – Find a way to consistently listen to the Suzuki repertoire or any repertoire your child is learning.** Listening creates amazing musicianship, facilitates progress and eliminates errors.

**Practicing Suggestion #3 – Follow your teacher’s instructions with the utmost care.** They are personalized for your child! Write notes during the lesson, video the lesson in whole or parts, refer to your teacher’s notes and practice sheet throughout the week.

**Practicing Suggestion #4 – Music is Art.** It gives the homework side of the brain a chance to breathe. Let practice time be a kind of down time for you and your child – away from the busy ‘must produce’ or ‘get it done’ mentality. Make it a moment in which you can relax and hear your child’s music. I realize this concept may seem unrealistic or a bit too dreamy – but it IS possible! Balance your corrections/suggestions with sitting back and just enjoying (mistakes and all). Try to find a peaceful space in the house (even if it’s a corner of a room) that will help translate the practice mentality into a time enjoyed and not rushed. Make a cup of tea, sit back and relax with this miracle in front of you.

Happy Practicing,  
Jillian Chrisman

## Practice Suggestions from Teachers and Families

Every-other-year I do a 30 day challenge, following the winter break. I have a practice chart the students need to use, which is a check list of each thing they should be practicing: tonalization, scales, review pieces, new song, reading assignment, etc. I have a picture of an ice cream cone posted on a board. One picture for each student, and the student's name is on his/her ice cream cone. The practice chart needs to be returned to me each week, and a small sticker is placed on the ice cream cone picture, one for each day the student practiced. The stickers look like sprinkles on top of the ice cream. A \$5.00 gift certificate to an ice cream store is the reward for any student who successfully completes the challenge. Parents love this! (Linda Kummernuss)

The best thing I ever learned about getting students to practice I heard at a lecture in Stevens Point. The teacher said to give a number of repetitions per day and write that on a practice sheet. That way they know they are finished when they complete the assigned number. She gave each of us a copy of the practice sheet that I continue to use to this day. It separates practice into technique, reading, study piece and review. Under each category I explain the assignment and list the number of repetitions needed. I've carried this a step further. Since I know some of my students (especially the high school kids) don't practice every day, I give the number of repetitions for the week and draw a box for them to mark each repetition. That way, when they skip a practice - as they ALL do - they can make it up by completing the total number before their next lesson. They also don't skip repetitions if they skip a day - it eliminates the confusion of - whether or not the missed repetitions can be made up the next day. Just get the total done. There are boxes at the bottom of the sheet for students to mark days they listen and days they practice. (Ann Sloan)

Thanks to a 100 day practice challenge a few years ago, we got into a great routine of practicing. My kids now know that practicing is not an optional activity, and that they are expected to get it done before they can have any electronic time (Kindles, TV, or computer). Over time there has been generally less complaining over practicing. Sometimes practicing needs to be done in the kitchen while I am making dinner – not my favorite way to do it, but some nights it's how it works. On days that are packed, sometimes the kids just do their daily review. We try to have the philosophy that doing something is better than nothing. (Rachel Gries)

I like to make use of video taping during practice so they can hear/see what needs to be fixed and then work to improve it.

I find that there is a certain point in the mastery of a piece where requiring Abigail to play at unusual tempos is really helpful. It makes her re-engage the ear instead of going forward purely on muscle memory. This moment happens usually before she has it memorized. If we miss that point, some poor habits have become ingrained with the

piece itself and it's very difficult to iron them out. Best if we can make a game of it - flip a coin to see if it goes faster or slower, etc.

WE put the review list on our IPad (in playlists) by day. He plays along with a speaker and knows exactly what songs to do each day. Mom does have to check in on bowings, accuracy, but there is less disputing "not another song".

OUR practice typically occurs after a long day of public school. Restless and hungry make for a frustrated cellist and mom. Mom always allows some running around/rough housing (physical energy to be let out) and food before we try any cello. If it's nice outside the best way to increase his focus is to let him run around in the fresh air for 15 minutes - this is a 7 year old boy!

I'VE read and tried about a million practice gimmicks and ideas. These are not bad, but if I'm honest with myself, the best practices happen when I'm sitting right with my child, 100% focused on him, with no distractions and no rush to do anything else. That is the basic truth about practice!

Fine time to do even a little every day- something is better than nothing. Your child could even play review songs while you wash dishes, cook, fold laundry, etc.

REMIND them to do their best, offer an incentive for "best" work - perhaps an M and M for each song done is their "best".

Make sure that they have a snack and water before they start; they play better if hydrated and have some protein!

We pick out small toys or markers one for each song she has decided to practice. So, if she's doing 6 songs, we'll have 6 small toys and she'll get to put one in a bowl or other special place for each song practiced. The visual countdown helps a lot.

WE practice at the end of the day (after dinner) ... tired child /mom. We start the practice with a "beginning of the practice" hug - this helps to focus. Prior to playing a song/group of notes, we decide what things to pay attention to - usually one easy (ie flat feet) and one more challenging (left hand position).

Lilah (6) says she finds time to practice during the day with mommy after she's finished with her schoolwork. "I like to practice where there are quiet times and spaces."

Maclean (13) has practiced almost every day doing the things listed

With my 8 year old son, I have found that we are much more likely to practice if we do it in the morning before school. He's not tired and hungry from being in school all day. If I drive him to school, rather than have him take the bus, we have an extra half hour of our morning together, just the two of us. It's the perfect time to focus on our violin playing!

Henry (14) usually practices after he does his homework.  
Henry said it's good to have someone who will bug you about practicing.  
Have a place to practice, like special space in the house that is just for music.

We schedule it like homework. Attached (below) is what our board looks like for today.  
The board usually defaults to homework, violin, chore as well as what's for dinner!

