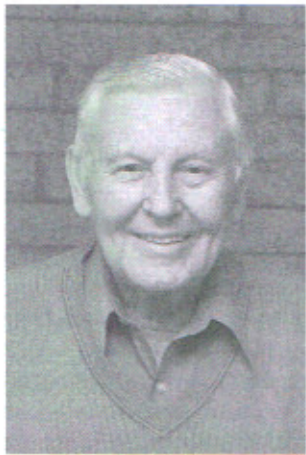


# Tribute to a Fellow Mandolinist

by Susan McLaughlin



*Ray Pacholek*

In August of this year, the Regina Mandolin Orchestra lost one of its long-standing members, Ray Pacholek. As Ray was also a passionate believer in C.M.S.A., I thought I would pen a few words about our convention experiences.

In the late 1990s, Ray, Ernie Nicholls and myself were searching for a mandolin 'experience' that offered greater opportunities. We knew of the existence of CMSA, but none of us had had the courage to go to one of

their conventions. In 2001, the CMSA convention came to Bozeman, Montana . . . as close as it had ever been to Saskatchewan. It was an opportunity we couldn't pass up. We had no idea what we were getting into, but we went ahead and registered as delegates. Ray and Ernie left Regina on a Monday and drove to Swift Current, two and a half hours away, where I live. Since we had received our music via post only a couple days prior, we practised furiously in my basement that night. The next day we departed for the 8 hour drive to Bozeman.

For the next four days, as we went from workshop, to en masse rehearsal, to late night jam session, I'm sure all three of us had that "deer in the headlights" look in our eyes. Here were people just like us! People who shared a common love for the unique sound of the mandolin family of instruments. People who understood our passion for playing great music together on the mandolin!

The En Masse Orchestra experience left us breathless. For us, the sheer size of the orchestra was overwhelming. The thought of sitting down to play next to complete strangers left us with sweaty palms.....however those strangers became friends within minutes, and the anxiety evaporated! Our new friends welcomed us, and showed great patience whenever we asked questions. The music selections were glorious, and the sound of hundreds of strings being plucked or tremoloed together was divine. We were struck by the calibre of conducting, and the attention to detail.

The evening concerts were a special treat for us. One of the featured performers in Bozeman was Evan Marshall. That evening, we sat as close to the front of the hall as possible, about 4-5 rows from the front. I'm sure we must have sat open-mouthed through the entire performance! In truth, each one of the guest artists and workshop leaders impressed us with their knowledge, and left us with new

and exciting ideas churning around in our heads.

I will always remember the drive home that Sunday, as we conversed endlessly about our convention experience. Talk about 'kids in a candy shop'! We compared notes on what each of us had seen and heard. We were excited about the new ideas we had been introduced to: new styles of music, new playing techniques, etc. We relived every moment, sharing our thoughts and opinions on every aspect of the convention. Each of us experienced a renewed interest in the mandolin and its music. We were hooked, and couldn't wait for the next convention experience to come around.

Through the ensuing years, I have watched Ray Pacholek become one of CMSA's most passionate supporters. Every convention brought something new and interesting to his attention, something that he always 'talked up' when he returned home. Ray made a point of trying to learn each and every delegate's name and how they came to play the mandolin. He also made a point of introducing himself to the guest artists, and relished the fact that he could be on a first-name basis with them. He was never shy about asking them questions about technique or repertoire. And Ray couldn't say enough good things about Jim Bates and his handling of the En Masse orchestra conducting duties. Here was a Music Director that treated everyone with respect and kindness, yet drew exciting performances from the orchestra!

The Toronto Convention was a real highlight for Ray, who was very proud of his Ukrainian heritage. Growing up as part of the Ukrainian community in both Saskatoon and later, Regina, Ray made the acquaintance of many talented people who later moved to Ontario and became associated with the Toronto Mandolin Orchestra. He relished that convention for the opportunity it gave him to renew old acquaintances from his youth. He also savored the 'Ukrainian' flavored repertoire played by the En Masse orchestra. During rehearsals, he was thrilled to find himself seated next to a professional-caliber mandolinist trained in the Ukraine.

Back home in Regina, Ray never missed an opportunity to promote the CMSA and its objectives. Whether teaching a mandolin student or participating as a Board member for any one of the organizations he belonged to, Ray often referenced the CMSA and its activities. Within the Regina Mandolin Orchestra, Ray was continually advocating to bring the CMSA Convention to Regina. He was thrilled when we put in a bid to host in 2013, more so when our bid was accepted, and even this summer, shortly before his passing, was offering his encouragement to the host committee. We will miss Ray's presence in the Regina Mandolin Orchestra.