

## **Susan Thornton: Introduction to “Blood Alley”**

My earliest memory of Santa Rosa was 1988.

My first band, the Colorado St. Andrew Society Pipes and Drums, was very small, and in 1987 we decided to merge with another small band, the Colorado Isle of Mull Pipes and Drums. We took their name and began madly learning their competition music.

That summer we had a week-long workshop sponsored by the St. Andrew Society of Colorado. One of the instructors was Alan Walters, then with Triumph Street. We learned a lot, and working with Alan was fun, as he had a great sense of humor.

Just a few months later, the Colorado Isle of Mull traveled to compete in Santa Rosa. We were overwhelmed and impressed by everything. There were so many bands, including high-level bands – great athletes – top Highland dancers – singers, fiddlers and musicians, and much more. The festival site was larger than anything we had ever experienced.

We were very nervous about competing. And I was terrified of the stories I’d heard of “Blood Alley,” the space we had to march down to compete.

Sure enough, our time came and we marched toward the competition area, then made a sharp right turn. Ahead of us lay “Blood Alley,” surrounded by the largest crowds we had ever seen at a piping competition. The audience was huge and very attentive and knowledgeable, and the march down the “Alley” to the circle seemed endless.

I was in the front row of the band, shaking like a leaf – until I looked up and saw to my surprise that Alan Walters was standing there waiting to judge us.

Seeing my panic, he gave me a big smile, and I immediately relaxed and gave him a wink.

When our competition results came back, at the top of his judging sheet, Alan had written, “No winking at the judges, Thornton!” It’s a memory I’ll never forget.

Oh, and lest I forget to mention it, a miracle happened that day, and the new Colorado Isle of Mull took first place over 18 other bands in grade four! My feet didn’t touch the floor for week.

## **Jim Fitzrandolph: A Bathtub Fulls of Beer and a Congo Line**

Jim Fitzrandolph was also a member of the Colorado Isle of Mull when the band went to Santa Rosa for the first time. He remembers:

- The El Rancho leaving the doors to all the un-rented rooms unlocked so that the party-goers could crash for the night.

- The "congo line" he watched at the El Rancho featuring two pipers per chanter strolling up and down the hallways. There was a piper who walked behind the lead piper. playing the lower hand. while the piper in the lead played the upper hand.
- His mother's amazement when looking at a bathtub full of beer in one room (in the evening), that was empty the next morning.
- The image of Bob Mason playing *Flowers of the Forest* over a certain very drunken and passed-out pipe major in the airport before boarding the airline to return to Colorado.
- The story of Highland dancers from the City of Denver Pipe Band dancing in the aisles while flying – until the pilot sent flight attendants back to see what was going on!