

This newsletter provides promotion and marketing ideas, shines a light on people in our dance community, provides history and general information about our much loved activity, and highlights provincial and national events. If you wish to contribute an article, or see an event, topic, person, or club featured, contact the editor.



SQUARING IN LINES - by Editor Claudia Littlefair

The winter months are cold and long, which prompted our club in Strathmore to offer “one couple line dancing using square dance calls”. We were inspired by callers Bob Simpson and Darby Love. Their square dance club, Wheel Arounds in Nanimo, BC have been dancing this way for the past 5 or 6 months. In between tips, Dorothy Simpson and Darby cue rounds.

To quote Bob, “We introduce new calls to the dancers and then practice the moves. We make sure it flows well and is not too jerky. A lot of memory work for the dancers, short term and long term. **This is an opportunity for us to exercise our bodies and our minds while enjoying our friends responsibly.** Normally square dancing involves 8 dancers. During the Covid-19 Pandemic of 2020 we developed this 2 person program.” View their videos at: <https://www.facebook.com/nanimosquaredancers/>.

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Our hall in Strathmore is over 4600 sq.ft., which allows for 12 couples to be well over 6’ apart, members wear masks (optional while dancing), keep physically distant, bring their own refreshments and water bottles, use plenty of hand sanitizer throughout the evening, and there is no changing partners. Anyone who is not well, whether Covid-related or not, stays at home and drop-ins are not allowed, as we need to know ahead of time how many people to expect. The floor is marked out with painter’s tape prior to the start of the evening. These precautions help to create a low risk environment, and provide an opportunity to dance and socialize on a weekly basis.

“SOCIAL SQUARE DANCING” - THE NEXT STEP?

Excerpt from ‘SSD Program, FAQ - We Urgently Need New Dancers’

Why do we need new dancers?

All activities and organizations need new people for growth. The number of square dancers has **dwindled** each year for decades. Here’s why: it’s far easier to **lose** a dancer than to bring in a replacement. Losing an experienced dancer is instantaneous. Training a replacement to comfortably dance at club level takes more than a year.

We desperately need a way to bring in new dancers **faster** than we lose existing dancers. We have needed that for decades.

In 2020, Covid-19 shut down square dancing completely. After months away from square dancing, many existing dancers will never return.



When we **restart** after Covid-19, our need for new dancers will be greater and more urgent than ever. If we can focus on making square dancing an ideal activity for **new** dancers, we can **grow** like never before. Let’s consider the Covid-19 shutdown, and the upcoming restart, as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for tremendous growth.

Why can’t we do what we’ve always done in the past?

The age-old methods bring in **few**, if any, new dancers. New dancers can begin square dancing just **once** per year when (and **if**) you start a beginner group. It takes **more than a year** for a new dancer to reach a comfortable club level. The combination of **limited** product availability, and a **huge** commitment to a **long** training period, makes it very **difficult** for you to build up a nice-size group of dancers.

Decades ago, when square dancing was booming, beginner lessons lasted just a few weeks. You could start **several** beginner groups each year. Beginners could reach club level in a **reasonable** timeframe.

Over the decades, square dancing's entry barrier **rose** higher and higher. Classes became **longer** and class starts grew **less frequent**. We can all plainly observe that the number of dancers has **dwindled**.

The age-old methods **do not work**. We need a different approach which is more **friendly** toward **new** dancers.

What is the Dance Program Escalator?

Today's square dance scene involves constant **teaching** so that dancers can continuously **move up** to the next level. Dancers are always in **Learn Mode** and **never** in **Dance Mode**. **Next** year's new dancers will never get to dance with **this** year's new dancers, because the two groups will always be on different steps of the Dance Program Escalator (i.e. B1-B2-M-P-A1-A2-C1-C2-etc.), the undesirable, counterproductive Escalator of Levels.



What is the difference between Learn Mode and Dance Mode?

In the old-style training model, new dancers start out in Learn Mode. Each call is **explained**. Then, a **walk-thru**. For several weeks, new dancers require a distinct **pause** before and after each call. Therefore, Learn Mode consists of "**stop-and-go**" dancing, which gets tedious. Stop-and-go makes dancing a lot **more work** and a lot **less fun**.

Eventually, dancers learn to do a particular call at full dance speed. Yet they are **still** in Learn Mode. As soon as they learn a call, they must immediately learn **other** new calls. Each new call is explained, walked, instructed, then executed stop-and-go. **Most** dancing in Learn Mode is stop-and-go.

The **few** dancers who survive until the end of Mainstream class are pressured to immediately take a Plus class. Then maybe a wild west version of DBD. Then A-1. And so forth. New dancers are **perpetually** in Learn Mode with **stop and go** dancing. It takes **years** to eventually get to true Dance Mode where you can flow through an entire fun dance at full speed, moving with the music. New dancers' original goal was to finally get to dance with their friends who brought them into square dancing. But those original friends are no longer at beginner level. They moved on, to dance in Learn Mode for a higher program.



SSD is vastly different. For starters, learning time is kept **short**. Dancers reach Dance Mode **faster**. Dancers are encouraged to stay in **Dance Mode**. **This** crop of new dancers can dance with the **last** crop of new dancers and **next** crop of new dancers. Instead of tedious stop-and-go, dancing is fun, flowing movement with "wind in your face". We gain back our historically tremendous recruitment tools of "Friends Bring Friends" and "Friends Dance with Friends".

For decades, square dance leaders wanted to **teach** people to dance.

But people just wanted to **dance**.

Let's give people what they **want**. Let them **dance**!

What kind of square dancing would be easier to sell?

Square dancing is a **leisure** activity. A long training period is a huge entry **barrier** which keeps new customers **out**. For greater entry and success, we need a program that today's busy people can enjoy after a few **weeks** (instead of a few **years**) of training.

A shorter training period gives **you** many immediate benefits. First, during a year's time, you can easily start **two, three or even four** beginner groups. Think about how many new dancers you normally get from old-style once-a-year classes. SSD features **multiple** starts per year, so you'll immediately **double, triple** or even **quadruple** your numbers, by simply offering

the product more often. Add in the amazing factors of “Friends Bring Friends” and “Friends Dance with Friends” and you gain a huge potential for **growth**.

**What kind of shorter program can be easily learned by new dancers
and also enjoyed by experienced dancers?**

A good destination program must be **small** enough to learn in 12 weeks. It must also be **large** enough to provide an exciting and varied dance experience. These two goals (**easy** to learn, **satisfying** to dance) have always been a balancing act. In the past, we focused **mostly** on making square dancing more “interesting”. That focus **cost** us big-time, by building a huge entry **barrier** to new dancers.

Today’s callers who use SSD report that it offers a great **balance** between **short** training time (which favors **new** dancers) and a robust program with substance and **variety** (which favors experienced dancers).



When you consider the Covid-19 shutdown and the upcoming restart, our **best bet** is to emphasize a form of dancing which makes the activity very **friendly** to **new** dancers. **SSD is that product**.

How can we maximize “Friends Bring Friends” recruitment?

SSD is a fun yet meaningful dance program. Beginners can learn it (Standard Application) in 18 to 22 hours. Dancers are encouraged to **dance** that program, and to **recruit** their friends, with **no** pressure to move up to higher programs.

Think back to when **you** were a **new** dancer. You were enthusiastic about the **joy**, **friendship** and **excitement** of square dancing. You **loved** dancing to lively music and being on the same **team** with other fun people. You would have **gladly** invited your non-dancing friends to try it. **Except**, you couldn’t. The beginner class you are in is already **closed** to new members. The next class starts a **year** later. After waiting a year, your enthusiasm **declined**, or you have already moved on to the next program.

What if a new class starts every 12 **weeks**, precisely when new dancers reach their **peak** of excitement? You’d have **far** more selling opportunities per year, and far more **enthusiastic** salespeople. We could once again enjoy a **key** selling feature which we lost over time: “Friends Bring Friends”.

Every survey of square dancers shows that the **vast** majority of us got started because a friend or acquaintance **invited** us. With a shorter and easier program, we can **maximize** the recruitment method which is by far the most effective: “Friends Bring Friends”.

While “Friends Bring Friends” will continue to bring you new dancers, a **strong marketing program** is always **desirable**. You can share marketing ideas, and find out what works for other leaders, in the **Social Square Dancing group on Facebook**.

And the people stayed home.
And read books, and listened, and
learned, and
rested, and exercised, and made art,
and played games,
and learned new ways of being, and
were still, and
listened more deeply. Some meditated,
some prayed,
some danced. Some met their shadows.
And the people began to think
differently.

And the people healed.
And in the absence of people living in
ignorant, dangerous, mindless
and heartless ways,
The earth began to heal.



And when the danger passed
and the people joined together again,
they grieved their losses, and made
new choices, and dreamed new
images, and created new ways to live
and heal the Earth fully,
because they had been healed.

- **Unknown author**
(source: Eastern Ontario
Square Time Newsletter)

INTRODUCTORY 'ZOOM' SESSIONS

Interested in trying out virtual square dancing but feel it's too hard? Try the **INTRODUCTORY SESSIONS** posted on the Calgary & District (C&D) website: <http://www.squaredancecalgary.com/virtual/virtual-intro/>. Lots of intro sessions to



choose from by caller Lorne Smith, including a 'how-to' session on using the Zoom program.

Something New! Introductory 'Zoom' WORKSHOPS every Tuesday, 7pm, where square dance calls will be taught. Hosted by caller Barrie McCombs. First night was held October 13 and featured the following calls: Courtesy Turn, Ladies Chain, Veer Left/Veer Right, Star Thru, Square Thru, and Partner Trade.

These Workshops will be posted on the C&D website and C&D Facebook pages.

CONFESSIONS OF A ZOOM DANCER

- by Dawn Gilchrist, Airdrie

Hi, my name is Dawn Gilchrist and I have a confession to make. I love Zoom dancing! Don't get me wrong, I totally love square dancing with real people, in a square, in a hall, with a live caller and all the personal visiting, laughing and skirt twirling that comes with it but with Covid-19 having put a halt to group activities this past March, virtual dancing is the next best thing, and in some ways even better!

I have been square and round dancing through Zoom since early April 2020 and currently attend at least six dances a week and often more if I have nothing planned on Saturday. I have even attended two different "convention" type events. The "Take a Peek" convention hosted by a group in the States that ran over three days and had callers from all over the States and our own Canadian Callers Festival that was hosted by Lorne Smith of Calgary and had 11 callers from east to west coast of Canada. Virtual dancing has opened the door to a whole new experience of dancing and has allowed me to continue to learn and grow as a dancer.

The concept of dancing with imaginary people, called Phantoms, took a little getting use to but once I was able to wrap my mind around the idea of a phantom couple across from me, I have enjoyed every minute.

The idea of dancing with a phantom couple is fairly simple. When you are in a Zoom dance you and your partner "square up" facing your computer/device screen and assume the position of couple #3. You are facing the caller and a "phantom couple" who are couple #1. Most of the patten and dances are called using moves that involve only two couples, so you really only have to think about where you and the phantom couple are.

For a moment, picture in your mind being in a square and you're looking at couple #1 across from you. Now imagine doing a do-si-do with that couple, you walk forward, take a step to the right and walk backward to your original spot. Simple! Now imagine doing a right and left through, you walk forward extending your right hand you grab the phantom's hand and pull by, you then extend your left hand and finish with a courtesy turn. Easy. Now while some of the calls may require a little more imagination, you'd be surprised at how muscle memory takes over and how easy it really can be. The trick is to not over think it. Just listen to the caller and do your part. Once in a while the caller might do a "full square" call or even a tip with one real couple and three phantom couples, and it's a whole new level of learning but to tell the truth, sometimes it's almost easier than with just one phantom couple. **Confession #2, sometimes I'd rather (and often) dance by myself with three or seven phantoms than with a real partner!**



Zoom screen. Writer Dawn Gilchrist encircled.

I have heard many reasons why people don't want to dance virtually.

- "I don't have the Zoom program" (it's a free download)
- "I don't have enough room" (you need less room than you think and moving a couch or table is pretty easy)

- “I don’t want people to see me dancing” (you can turn off the video feed on your device)
- “It’s too hard to dance with phantoms” (yes it’s hard at first but like most things, once you give it a real chance you just might like it and the more you do it the easier it is!). And if you want you can even “pin” another couple to be on your screen and you can use them as a guide to follow so you know if you’re in the right position.

Zoom dancing offers other perks that I would never have the opportunity to do. I get to dance to callers from England, Europe, Australia and from all over the United States. I also get to “dance” with people from these far away places as well. I have learned to understand the accents of callers and enjoy hearing them “sing” in other languages. English is the international language of square dancing so all calls are in English even though the caller is doing the singing part in their native tongue and I get to hear music that I don’t hear in Calgary and area.

Another perk of virtual dancing is when we get back to dancing in person and if we are one couple or a few people short of a full square, we will still be able to dance because we know how to dance with missing people. Or a snowstorm cancels your dance, the caller can send out a Zoom link to the club and presto you’re all dancing the evening away, as per normal, almost. And if you miss the socializing aspect of square dancing, between tips you can still visit with your friends, have private “chats” and often after the dance is over, we sit and talk with each other for as long as we like, or until the host of the meeting has to leave

I have made many new friends with my new Zoom dancing community and hopefully someday I can meet and dance with them in person. I even have a Covid Zoom Dancer badge with a Zoom Bomb dangle for easy recognition! Gotta like that.

Confession #3, that I hope that Zoom dancing continues well after we can resume dancing in person.

A GLIMPSE OF THE PAST

NOTE: For this issue only, the following article takes the place of the regular column featuring excerpts from the book “As I See Saw It –Bob Osgood”. The article was written by the wife of the infamous “Pappy” Shaw, known as the ‘Father of Square Dancing’. This eloquently written article appeared in the January, 1960 issue of Bob Osgood’s “Sets in Order” square dance magazine.

The Saga of the Square Dance Stamp

At about this same time [1956] the push to get a square dance commemorative stamp was started. ...After watching everything under the sun being honored by our postal department, including chickens and truck drivers and actors, we couldn’t see square dancing being left out of it. So, a number of organizations – dancer associations, etc. – started getting the word out to get petitions into the Postmaster General and the postal department or the committee in charge of selecting subjects for postage stamps or commemorative stamps.

The stamp idea went into hibernation for a while, but then in June, 1964, Elmer Alford in The Dalles, Oregon, picked up the square dance stamp idea and had written the Post Office Department on the proposition of a square dance commemorative stamp. Hearing back from the post office people, he was told that his letter was on file and that it would be brought to the attention of those responsible for the 1965 commemorative stamp program. A large article in the local (The Dalles) newspaper ran an illustration and a story on the proposal.

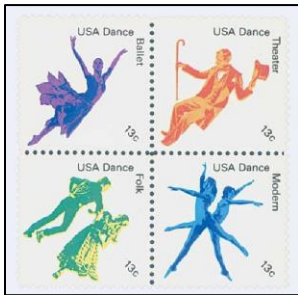
Later, in October, 1964, the post office department took a positive step in releasing a new commemorative honoring “American Music.” A second commemorative came out dedicated to “Modern American Art”. If we can guess correctly, we might just assume that the next in the series would be the “American Dance.”



One element that concerned us, however, was the way that our activity may be pictured on a stamp. Getting the stamp was one thing. It would certainly draw attention to American contemporary square dancing and would let the world know that the Americans do enjoy a great dance activity. ... It was highly possible that the Post Office Department artists might see American Square Dancing as it was fifty, a hundred or a hundred and fifty years ago, so we wouldn’t be surprised if such a stamp came out with an old time fiddler, a group of people in bib overalls, and a Virginia reel in progress.

A change of time and place: July, 1978. New York City, my birth place which has always held a rather magical, mythical spot in my memory.

I had returned to the big city at the invitation of the U.S. Postal Service, to take part in the first-day ceremonies for the American Dance stamps being issued at the Lincoln Center. Thousands who shared in the pride of square dancing had waited for more than a dozen years for a U.S. stamp to commemorate the American folk dance. At last the dream was to become a reality.



For those of you who are not stamp collectors, we should fill you in. **When the Post Office brings out a new postage stamp, its first day of issue is usually limited to one specific location which is associated with the new stamp.** A ceremony is held, with representatives of the Post Office and guests connected with the subject of the stamp in attendance. Lincoln Center, with its Library for the Performing Arts, might very well be the hub of American Dance, insofar as theater, ballet, and modern forms of the art are concerned. And so it was chosen as the site of the first day celebration. A special branch post office was set up to sell the new quartet of stamps and to hand cancel them with first-day of issue.

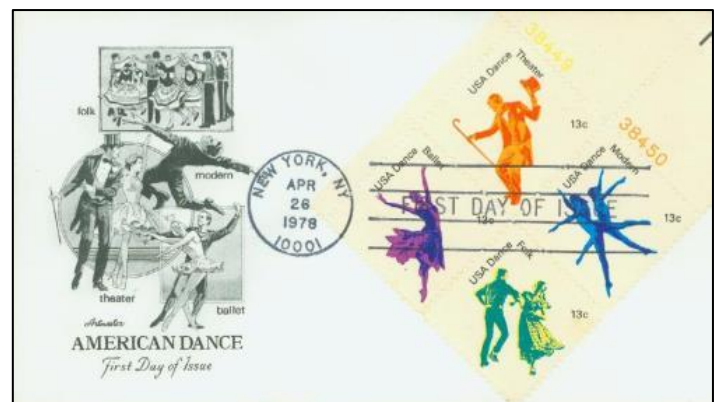
In attendance were leaders of outstanding ballet companies, choreographers of Broadway's musicals and personalities such as Nancy Hanks, who heads up the government's cultural program, Walter Terry, dance editor of Saturday Review, the daughter of Ruth St. Denis, and others. While there was a noticeable rapport among these artists, it was apparent that no one was quite certain what to do with those of us called upon to represent the square dance. Perhaps they had expected bib overalls and hob-nailed boots, but it was clear that those present knew little of the current status of American Square Dancing.

This became even more apparent when they began taking credit for the issuance of the new stamps (which one speaker said they had worked on for the past five years). **Had no one told them of the tens of thousands of signatures of square dancers on petitions that were on file with the Postmaster General, and the campaign for the stamp that has lasted more than twelve years?** Perhaps it didn't really matter, for now we had our stamp and the waiting was a thing of the past.

There were the usual speeches and each of us representing the four different aspects of American Dance, as portrayed on the stamps, received special albums commemorating the event and containing a sheet of new stamps.

We enjoyed ourselves immensely during our brief stay and we did all the things expected of a tourist. But the great feeling of pride upon receiving the album on behalf of square dancers everywhere, and the realization that square dancers can accomplish so much by working together, overshadowed everything else...Still, we had our stamp and this was a giant step toward bringing square dancing, the American folk dance, to the attention of the world.

The irony of the stamp story is that we spent a decade to get the stamp, but within a few months the US Postal Service changed the rates and so our 13 cent stamp was retired.



One day a little girl was sitting and watching her mother do the dishes at the kitchen sink. She suddenly noticed that her mother had several strands of white hair sticking out in contrast on her brunette head. She looked at her mother and inquisitively asked, "Why are some of your hairs white, Mom?" Her mother replied, "Well, every time that you do something wrong and make me cry or unhappy, one of my hairs turns white." The little girl thought about this revelation for a while and then said, "Momma, how come ALL of grandma's hairs are white?"

THE LIGHTER SIDE OF DARKNESS - by Dee Jackins



Dee is an avid square and round dancer and enjoys writing. She shares the lighter side of some of her experiences, challenges and near disasters as a sight impaired person. See issue #2015-6 for her complete story under "Chatter Close-up".

Dee and her husband square danced from 1969 to 1971. In 1975, she lost sight in her left eye, and by 1989 her vision was completely gone. While trying to cope with her blindness, Dee's husband was diagnosed with cancer. He died 10 months later in October, 1991. A friend suggested that she try square dancing again, and in 1995 she joined Calgary's singles club. Dee has been dancing ever since. She dances by visualizing the calls and positions, and with the gentle guidance of dancers' hands for no-hand calls such as weave the ring.

Here are a few of my spirited sport skills from the past, some were quite entertaining.

When I still had a limited amount of sight, we always went to camp sites where there were horseshoe pits. At the time my peripheral vision had pretty well disappeared but for horseshoes you normally go in a forward motion at all times anyway. So in my case I would 'hope for the best' and when my turn rolled around someone would tie a white flag on top of the peg for my benefit, then for some reason everyone retreated as far back as possible. (Wonder why...). That white flag sure helped in my aim towards the peg and better yet when I would hear that 'clang' metal on metal at the other end, to my surprise that resulted in some pretty lucky but neat ringers. Where there's a will there's a way.

When I was contemplating about a new activity to tackle, golfing was my next choice. One very brave soul approached me and was willing to volunteer as my guide. It was mid-summer; an outdoor game was quite appealing therefore I decided to accept this challenge. There was no need to obtain new clubs; the guide had an abundance of older clubs just waiting to jump into action. What a break, must be my lucky day! This should be a blast... My Golf Pro commented that I was progressing very well; so I continued taking instructions for a couple more months. He eventually informed me that anyone who accompanies me golfing would not be allowed to play along with me, since I would be needing assistance in setting up and most important, heading in the right direction. Well that was the end of my golfing career; I wouldn't expect anyone to suffer through this ordeal. The amount of time required to complete all these regulations would certainly cause a back log of enraged and frustrated golfers ready to charge, with their clubs gesturing above their heads, waiting for some quick action. Maybe there's some truth about booking a tee time for the blind golfers - book them after dark! It shouldn't interfere with their game whatsoever...Right?

My next venture took me to the beautiful green, grassy lanes of outside Lawn Bowling. Now, this seemed quite fascinating, I've done five pin and ten pin bowling which is an indoor activity but this lawn bowling really got my attention and is a real challenge. These balls or bowls as they are called are biased and are not perfectly round and have more weight to one side. When the player rolls the bowl, it rolls in a path which is curved in nature. After a summer of lessons and actually joining in bowling tournaments around Alberta, my bowling techniques were progressing along quite nicely- (I thought).

The game was a close one and it was my chance to execute a perfect shot. After I released the bowl, it felt good when it left my hand, it really felt right...so I anxiously stood by waiting to hear the results. "Awesome! Fantastic! What a marvelous Shot!" It sure made my day for a few seconds, until I heard the rest of the story - "But you're bowl is on the wrong lane." Talk about bursting one's bubble! Oh well, so much for that career! Maybe there's something more interesting around the corner.

In the meantime I really enjoy this contact sport called Square Dancing (in my case anyway, my apologies to all whom I have body tackled in the past)- it's more fun and much more my style. Let's think positive - see you across the square.

A little girl was talking to her teacher about whales. The teacher said it was physically impossible for a whale to swallow a human because even though it was a very large mammal its throat was very small. The little girl stated that Jonah was swallowed by a whale. Irritated, the teacher reiterated that a whale could not swallow a human; it was physically impossible. The little girl said, "When I get to heaven I will ask Jonah". The teacher asked, "What if Jonah went to hell?" The little girl replied, "Then you ask him".

DECISION AND CHOICES

- by Austin Hayward, Thames Valley Dance Club, Woodstock, Ontario)



While playing golf the other day, I stepped up to the tee block and began to wonder. Wow! 416 yards with sand bunkers at 210 yards, a water hazard at 312 yards and a green that slopes front to back. Do I use my driver and go for it? Do I try to land my ball between the sand traps and the water hazard? Which iron do I need to accomplish this? Which way is the wind blowing?

Questions, decisions and choices. But is life any different?

In times like these when Covid-19 has driven us to stay at home, put our normal activities on hold and forced us into isolation, we have a tendency to watch the news and try to keep in touch with how our world is turning. We understand that the media wants us to intently listen to everything, but are you realizing that over 90% of the news you are watching is negative news?

Again, and again we are expected to make decisions, make choices and hope that those choices are positive and beneficial to you, your family and the world around us. If all we hear from media is negative news, society tends to react negatively which has huge consequences. Many people are growing up scared, suicidal and angry. It does not take much imagination to where to attribute these negative tendencies. Riots, hurricanes, forest fires, crime, murders, political corruption, deaths and on and on are broadcast daily on our news channels.

But do you realize that you have a choice? **Being pessimistic or optimistic is a choice.** Being optimistic gives more energy and allows us to discover more constructive ways to look at the world, thus expanding our thinking and amplifying the good.

Just as examples, do you realize that in the last 25 to 30 years, over 100,000 people come out of extreme poverty every day? Did you know that child mortality (infant deaths) in the world has halved since 1990? Did you know that life expectancy in the world has increased from 52.6 years in 1960 to 72 years today? Health globally has improved tremendously. Does it not make you feel good to hear these things? Does it not give you hope, vision and encouragement to move forward in a positive way?

I am continually awed at quotes by Sir Winston Churchill and their parallel to today's circumstance.

- *"Remember, A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty"*
- *"Life can either be accepted or changed, if it is not accepted, it must be changed. If it cannot be changed, it must be accepted"*
- *"You will never reach your destination if you stop and throw stones at every dog that barks"*

And finally, **"Fear is a reaction; courage is a decision"**

Tell your children positive things. Tell them how smart they are, how great they look or how well they are doing facing the peer pressures that exists today and they will grow up with a positive outlook on life.

Tell them how stupid they are, how bad they are acting or how poorly they are doing in school and they will exhibit the negative attributes in life that you have inadvertently exposed them to. It's a choice, a decision you need to make.

Come on people! **Let us expose to others the positive attitude, the fun we generate and the energies we radiate in our dancing to our everyday lives.**

Our friends, our children, our grandchildren will thank us for the positive, optimistic and wonderful world we are trying to set up for them despite all the negativity that surrounds us these days.

Attitude is a choice. Happiness is a choice. Optimism is a choice. Kindness is a choice. Giving is a choice. Respect is a choice.

Whatever choice you make, makes you. Choose wisely. (For those of you that are interested, I parred the hole.)

KELLY'S KORNER - by Kelly Thompson

Kelly started square dancing in 2016 after being coerced by his sister. He admits that he would have never walked into the club on his own. He has since found a whole new way of looking at life, a community of new friends and personal confidence that didn't exist before.

LET'S RECYCLE

I have often said we square dance for four reasons:

1. To get out of the house.
2. To find the snack table.
3. To be with people.
4. And if necessary, to learn to square dance.



It is my observation, though, the real reason is those potlucks. The whole thing is aimed at delaying our personal appointment with that final recycler. I have recently learned the existence of Social Square dancing which looks to me like a shortened program designed to teach square dance in a standardised format, and I think to qualify new dancers at an introductory level. Being that it is a short program it is theoretically possible new dancers could be included in social dances fairly early in the dance season, meaning they could enjoy a lot of pot-lucks sooner provided the gathering is at their level.

In many ways, I think to some degree this is being done, therefore the only thing missing is that special level name tag. It is interesting the last move taught with the Social Square Dance program is recycle. As I was learning to square dance I visited another club before I had graduated to mainstream. They did ask my experience and did include me in the activities for the evening but I was somewhat overwhelmed with some of what was being done. One move the other dancers had to guide me through was "recycle" as I had never heard that call before. It was the next week at our club that recycle was taught but I still didn't understand the move. It wasn't until the summer dances and re-teaching by the caller that I finally "got it". To that point I had learned about the snack table but the real thing was that even before I graduated, I went to another club out of province and out of my comfort zone.

Through my brief experience taking "plus" lessons, I was, again, out of my comfort level. It seems to me that as square dancers become more proficient at their given level it is then they expand their comfort zone. My personal journey has taken me from almost not entering the building the first time, to dancing on stage in front of live audiences and a movie career that would challenge John Wayne if I am ever discovered. I think as experienced dancers, we all need to be aware that new dancers may have a very small comfort zone.

I think most square dance clubs do try to include as many as possible so I think on any given night most new dancers could visit and be included. It seems, though, that our special or open dances are not quite as inclusive. In theory, at a mainstream dance, the dancers are expected to be graduated and have a certain level of experience. The beginner summer dances where the callers do some re-teaching is where new dancers learn to dance. It is my understanding the Social Square Dance program aims to get new dancers into the special dances as soon as possible at a level within their proficiency and comfort.

There is no doubt the next potluck will be the best one as long as it doesn't include recycled material, only recycling dancers, but that is what square dancing is about. Good friends, good dancing, good food, or in one word - FUN!. I think "Let's Recycle" misses the point here and instead should read "Let's Rejuvenate". - See You Across the Square.

A REALLY, REALLY FUNNY TRUE STORY

Editor's Note: Not often I justify using space for a non-dance matter, much less a joke. This is the exception to my rule. Enjoy!

It was about five years ago. I was trying to lose a few pounds so I was staying away from carbs. That's when I met my husband, Rob. On our first date, he booked the next two. He liked me. I liked him. Things were looking real good. He picked me up in a Cobra Mustang and his pathetic attempt to win me over with a car totally worked. I'm not shallow, but since I spent most of my twenties picking men up because I didn't want my hair to frizz in their non-air conditioned jalopies on 3 wheels and a 15 year old spare, I welcomed his fancy sports car with open arms.

We arrived at the restaurant and Rob was ordering food I hadn't allowed myself to eat in years. I didn't want to be "that girl" so I ate, drank, and oh, was I merry. Later we shopped a bit. Rob surprised me by buying an expensive pair of shoes that he caught me eyeing. Was this love?

That's when it happened. Gas strikes in two different ways - uncontrollable toots or sharp, shooting pains that feel a lot like dying. I thought I was dying. Not to make a scene, I told Rob I suddenly wasn't feeling well and probably needed to head home.

On the way home in his Cobra, he tried to hold my hand and ask me lots of questions, but I wasn't having any of it. The pain was so bad it felt like I was being stabbed with a bunch of tiny forks. Then I realized ... My God, help me. I have a horrendous fart on deck. I'm in trouble. Big trouble.

The more I held it in, the more pain would shoot through my stomach and down my legs. I was even having to raise myself off the seat, gripping on to my door and the dashboard.

"Seriously, you need to hurry - I'm in a lot of pain." I managed to say through gritted teeth.

"Wow, it's that bad? What's wrong? Do I need to take you to a hospital?"

How do you tell a man you just started dating that the reason you're writhing in pain is because you have to fart? Well, you can either tell him, or like me, let the fart speak for itself.

People, hear me. There was nothing I could do. As impressive as I am with sphincter control, this was out of my hands. Slowly, it eeked out. The more I tried to stop it, the more it forced its way through the door. However, to my pleasant surprise, there was no sound. I sat silently, sweat accumulating above my upper lip. Ok, maybe I got away with it. Maybe I'm home free. Then it hit me. Not an idea, a cloud. A horrific, fart cloud. Not in a, "Am I smelling something?" sort of way. More like a "Is someone dead and rotting in your trunk and am I in hell?" sort of way.

Suddenly, I panicked. "Roll down the windows!" I screamed (yes, I literally screamed it like I was in a horror movie).

"What? Why?" Rob asked, starting to freak out because I was freaking out.

"I can't roll down the windows, unlock it! UNLOCK IT!"

"What's going on?" Rob yells back to me, "Why are you ..." then it hit him. I could see it in his eyes. Was it surprise? Horror? Water started to accumulate at the base of his eyelids, "Oh my God, I CAN TASTE IT!" he screamed.

"Roll down the windows!" As I screamed, the toots started to flood out uncontrollably. I scratched and clawed at the window like I was being kidnapped. Rob, unable to see either by fart cloud or panic, kept turning on the windshield wipers instead of unlocking the window.

It was chaos. We were acting like we were under siege by gun fire. We were under siege alright, just not by gun fire.

Finally he was able to hit the right control and he rolled down our windows. We both gulped in fresh air. I was horrified, yet happy to be alive, then remembered I just farted on the man of my dreams, then sorta wished I was dead.

We sat silently for the rest of the way home. Although the shooting pains had subsided, I now desperately needed to use the bathroom, in an urgent, explosive kind of way.

He pulled up to my apartment and before he could come to a stop I had already jumped out, "Ok, thanks for dinner, sorry about the fart, love the shoes!" and ran in to my apartment like I was running from the cops.

I burst through my door and ran straight for the bathroom, where I was finally able to unleash and make noises that no one should ever, EVER, hear coming from another person.

Then I heard it. Rob's voice. Right. Outside. My. Bathroom. Door. "Anna? You left your shoes in my car and your front door was open. Where do you want me to put them?"

"Get away from the door!" I screamed like Reagan from The Exorcist. "Ok, I'm sorry. Are you okay?"

toot *toot* *splatter* *ungodly noise* "I'm fine, Rob - just leave the shoes there. I'll call you later okay?"

"Okay, are you sure you're ..." "I'm fine! Get away from the door!" This man! I mean, I love him, but take a freakin' hint!

Finally, I heard the front door shut, and the Cobra engine zoom away. I thought that was the last I'd hear from him. I didn't think it was possible to ever see a man again after he screams he can taste your fart after only knowing you for 48 hours.

But, to my surprise, I did. A couple days later, actually. Now we're married and he's lying on the couch while I type this ... "It was your rack that saved you," he just lovingly reminded me. Well, thank you boobs. You saved us. You saved our destiny.

- This story was brought to by Anna Lind Thomas.