



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.



RECONNECT - DISCOVER DANCE!

- by Editor Claudia Littlefair

When will we ever dance again? It could be as soon as this fall, or maybe not until early 2022. Whenever it is, **now** is an opportune time to plan your advertising strategies. Play around with ideas, discuss them with club members, do some online research. In short, make a plan because “failing to plan is planning to fail”.

Recently, I viewed a few youtube presentations from the January 24th BC Square & Round Dance Federation meeting which explored issues regarding the restart of our dance activity. Brian Elmer, chairperson of the marketing committee, SQUAREUPB.C., recommended a proposed universal slogan with adaptations: “*Reconnect: Discover Social Square Dancing*”; or “*Socially Reconnect: Discover* (fill in dance form) eg. Square Dancing, Choreographed Ballroom Dancing, Clog Dancing, Line Dancing, or Contra Dancing.

Reconnect. It’s a powerful word. To socially reconnect is something many people will seek out when this pandemic is over. As members of our dance community, we know that **one of the greatest benefits we offer is social connections.** This is a selling point! Be wise, plan to use this slogan as part of your advertising.

TOOLS FOR IMPROVING HAPPINESS THROUGH SOCIAL CONNECTION

- by Laurie Santos, LifeSpan Research Foundation, May, 2020

Social distancing is challenging all of our relationships, our health and our happiness in ways we haven’t even been able to fully comprehend yet. How can we be better at knowing how to invest in our wellbeing and relationships in this time of COVID?

Laurie Santos – a professor of psychology at Yale University and the host of the popular “Happiness Lab” podcast – sat down in a kitchen-table Zoom conversation to discuss what science teaches us about happiness. Her online class “Psychology and the Good Life” has grown by almost 2 million in the last couple of weeks on Coursera, because so many people are anxious and want evidence-based tools to support their mental health.

It turns out that humans are bad at knowing what makes us happy. Our minds tell us that the path to happiness is based on circumstances – money, jobs, relationship status. This is not new. Young Zen monks in eighth-century China had to be cautioned not to look to someone or something outside themselves to make them happy. Thousands of years later we’re still there, our minds conditioning us to think some quick fix is out there.

Research data, however, tell us that many of us spend our energy working toward the wrong things. **Happiness comes from having rich social connections.** What’s ironic is that in our quest for the perfect life circumstances (job, income, house) we often sacrifice our social relationships.

This experience dealing with COVID-19 has shown us that even weak ties – the people you connect with casually like the mailman – have always been a potential source of happiness and are now more important than ever. **Social distancing is teaching us that people crave social connection more than we realized, and that we need to put more effort into making and maintaining relationships.**

“I really hope that this whole crisis causes us to realize how much stuff we were taking for granted,” Santos said. “I hope when we get on the other side we have incredible gratitude for stuff we were taking for granted before.”

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Santos' classes include behavior "re-wirements," that is, requirements that students perform actions they don't normally do, like talking to a stranger on the bus or buying someone coffee. Students discover that these actions bring them joy. But like those New Year's resolutions that we soon give up, it's hard to sustain new behaviors that lead to happiness. Santos notes two keys to keeping those behaviors going:

- (1) finding a way to turn a behavior into a habit, and/or
- (2) get friends to support you in making behavior changes stick. For example, friends can form a running group and in this way encourage each other to exercise regularly.

PROMOTING SQUARE DANCING - ZOOM SESSIONS

Need some marketing inspiration and advice? Tune into the USDA (United Square Dancers Association) zoom workshop this **Saturday, February 13th, 12:00pm MST**, called "*Promoting Square Dancing During the Most Challenging of Times*". This session is hosted by national square dance caller and marketing executive for iHeart Media, Mike Hogan. Mike was instrumental in putting together CALLERLAB's "*Square Dance Marketing Manual*". Find the zoom link to this workshop on the USDA website at:

<http://www.usda.org/WEbinar/02-13-21.php>.

The March 13th workshop is also on marketing: "*Do You Hear What I Hear? Using Newsletters and Other Forms of Social Media to Get The Word Out*".

A FEW THOUGHTS ABOUT JERRY STORY

- by Noah Siegmann, Vice-Chair, Social Square Dancing Committee

Editor's comments: *Well known and well loved caller, Jerry Story passed away on December 19, 2020. He had been a full-time caller for over 40 years calling in all 50 states, Canada and numerous foreign countries. Jerry did the Alberta Tour (calling in Edmonton, Red Deer and Calgary) in 2015. At that time he was promoting the 50-Call Program, the forerunner to the Social Square Dancing (SSD) program. At the time of his passing, Jerry was the president of the SSD Committee. To help with medical and household debt, a gofundme account has been set up by Tony Oxendine. For more information go to: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/jerry-and-kristy-story>*

A few thoughts about the leader of this great Social Square Dance movement. We will carry on the work he began!

Yesterday in a small secluded family burial plot in southeast Iowa, a great man was laid to rest. As I said my tear-filled final goodbye and paid my last respects at the gravesite, it began to really sink in just how deeply Jerry Story touched my life. I have put together some of what he meant to me and why in this tribute, and welcome you to read on if you'd like to know who this man was to me and how our relationship evolved through the years.

Our relationship began in 1999 when I met him via a cassette tape recording of a live dance he had performed a few years earlier. I was captivated and enthralled immediately, and soon wore out the entire 2.5 hour tape and memorized it all in short order. **I aspired to be like that caller from that day forward, and my 12 year old mind dreamed of the day I would get to experience & meet him in person.** When I finally did get to meet him, he was larger than life and so nice! And what

a showman! He became my instant hero in the Square Dance calling world. Growing up on the farm didn't give us much chance to travel overnight to festivals or long-distance events, so seeing him once a year in Milwaukee on Memorial Day weekend when he made a stop during his tour was the most highly anticipated event for me.



When I was 17, I jumped on the chance to attend a Callers College in North Carolina and take my skills to the next level. Jerry was one of four top caller-instructors present that helped me grow and polish my presentations, and it was crazy to get one-on-one coaching time with him that week. From that point on, I was unstoppable in my desire to be a pro and show him my progress. I began calling dances quite a bit, and was booked usually multiple nights per week in Wisconsin and Illinois. I spent some years growing and developing my occupation, and still dreamed about one day being worthy to share a stage with him. Still only seeing him once or twice a year, I continued striving to improve and decided to start increasing my travel radius. Our relationship had developed into a student/coach/acquaintance by this time and he had told me a few times that whenever I was ready, he would help me accelerate so in December of 2011 I emailed him stating I was ready to kick it up to the next level with my calling career and any contacts or opportunities would be greatly appreciated. I received this answer from him: "Hello Noah, We should talk after the Holidays. Call me. I will help you all I can. Merry Christmas". I was floored! Shortly after that I started receiving calls and emails from clubs across America, stating Jerry had recommended they get in touch and book me. It was exciting. I put a tour together slated for the following fall/winter through Iowa, Missouri, Oklahoma and Texas. Felt like I was rolling!

Then, I received a call from Jerry August of 2012. He had a surgery scheduled and would be out of commission for several weeks, and would I be interested in stepping in and calling a huge dance in Houston and a weekend festival in Arkansas for him beginning of September. Talk about surreal! I accepted, and then received the following email from him a few days later: "Can you come down to Nashville on Tues. Sept 18th. We will record tracks at 2 PM and do Vocals that evening and Wed. morning. If you can't make it we can pull something out and send it to you to put a vocal on. It would be best if your vocal was done in Nashville. Let me know." (He was part owner of Royal Records). **In short, he offered to add me to the official calling staff of the label, and to come down to cut a record with him on the tail end of my TX/AR tour.** Think THAT was exciting?

In 2013 he told me I should start my own big weekend festival in the Wisconsin area. I told him I had no idea where to even start planning something like that, how I could hire the talent necessary to pull it off, or if we could get enough dancers to make it. He told me he believed Anna & I could do it, that he would help me brainstorm, be part of the calling staff, and would even take a pay cut if it was a flop. Wow. I gladly took his help and WI*PAC Weekend was born. A huge success, and a bright spot for hundreds of people every Labor Day weekend.

I have seen him give time and attention to people that were branded somewhat as second class or rejects, and lift them up regardless of what the cool clique thought about it. And it was always the right thing to do.

He was the best in his field world-wide, knew it, but was humble about it and never took on a pompous or prideful attitude. He cared little for accolades or recognition, but instead continued his process to improve his choreography and presentation for the enjoyment of the dancers. He was a terrific delegator, and because of his vote of confidence many people rose to greater heights and accomplished more than they would have attempted otherwise. I speak from experience on this.

He was open about his mistakes and less than elegant choices from the past, and even though he certainly wouldn't back down from a righteous fight, began to settle down and mellow out in the last decade or so. Took inventory on what was most important, and made decisions based on those things. **After over 40 years of full-time travel in the entertainment world at the top of his game, he began giving up bookings to other callers, moved permanently back to his home town of Fairfield and began building his life around his dear wife Kristy, their children, grandchildren and local businesses.** I was proud of him for doing that. It was the right move, and he enjoyed living close to family and catching up on all the time he had spent away from everyone during his whirlwind career. He really loved his family, and seeing them all more brought him so much joy. I think he knew that was where they belonged, and after lots of work and development on their property he and Kristy hosted hundreds of Square Dancing friends for a multi-day celebration after the National Convention in June of 2015. That was special.

He was a seemingly never-ending source of energy and vitality. Always gave his all onstage, even when he was exhausted or it was a small crowd. Such an entertainer and great singer. Truly the greatest Showman of the Square Dancing World.

He was always thinking of ways to improve & grow the activity, regardless of whether they were popular or not. He fought for years to repair problems the activity had been experiencing, and in 2015 he asked me to co-chair the SSD committee within the CALLERLAB organization. Together for 5+ years we spent hundreds of hours planning, writing emails, drafting resolutions and having discussions/debates with the critics of what we were trying to get accomplished. It was an uphill battle, and several times during private conversations we discussed giving up altogether. But we didn't, and thanks to his spunk and strong resolve we began to gather momentum to make the necessary changes. I will cherish the memories of our mid-morning talks which would also cover topics such as politics, our faith in God, our families, plans for the future and how to grow Square Dancing for generations to come. Sometimes I think he just needed to let off some steam, especially when it came to Mainstream Media and politics (not just in government 😊). Our relationship turned into a friendship somewhere along the way, and we became equals and partners in many things. I got my wish and was privileged to have spent countless hours sharing stages with him across the nation, singing and calling together for people everywhere. A treasure trove of memories.

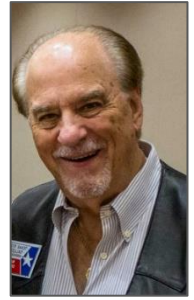
He was a larger than life type of person, and was loved everywhere he went and every stage he stood on. A huge ready smile, hearty handshake and go-getter personality were his trademarks in all circles he lived in. A real spark plug for many peoples' lives. A fair player always. Loved making people smile! A little rough around the edges. He was a pillar in MY life, and it is going to take some time to figure out how to move forward carrying the torch he never set down for a moment. As is the case with leaders in life and causes, he many times found himself alone championing certain things he thought were important. Always looking for helpers, but times when nobody showed up he would shoulder the responsibility without complaint and move ahead regardless. I admired him for his resiliency and grit. He also would not hesitate to strongly call things the way he saw them, which as you can imagine occasionally got him into trouble... 😊

When I received the news of his death, I didn't really have an instant reaction. However, as it sank in and I pondered who Jerry was to me, the tears began to flow. And they flowed NOT because of what a great caller he was, or because of the hours we spent working in committee, or the dances we conducted together, or the records we produced or the accolades we received, but because he was my friend. All of the other things fade away in hindsight, but that piece remains. And my uncontrollable response showed me just how much of a loyal, true friend he was who would do anything I needed, encourage me, challenge me, and trust me. And I trusted him in return. And here I am crying as I write this... He was part of a small circle of people I call close friends, and I am honored to have been in his.

As difficult as the goodbyes have been, I am grateful that Jerry knew the Way to Heaven and believed the good news of Christ's death, burial and resurrection. So I know he is in Glory, and we will see him again, guaranteed. The graveside service was beautiful. My heart is with Kristy, Josh, Jacob and their families as they mourn this gaping hole in their lives right now.

Some of my fondest memories are standing with him onstage at WI*PAC on an early Sunday afternoon, as the festival would be winding down for another year. We would have 2 hours programmed together, just him and me, and everybody (including us) would be footsore and tired after an extensive few days of solid dancing. So we would begin the unwinding process, and spend the time performing some of the most pleasant, easy-going beautiful and fun songs he had in his collection and I would harmonize with him. Classics, new and old. There were so many moments where we would just get lost in the music, singing our hearts out together... the people out on the dance floor feeling it as well. We had a groove together, an understanding of phrasing and music that transcended any experience I've ever had with any other caller. These memories I will cherish as long as I live. I will miss him. I can still hear him saying goodbye on our last phone call a few weeks ago: "See ya Pal, I appreciate your friendship." Those words I have tucked away in my memory, never to forget. **Jerry Story. SD Calling icon, businessman, husband, father. And to me, friend. I loved him very much. So in the words of a song: "I was proud, to walk with you every mile... So long my friend, Goodbye for a while...**

IN MY NOT SO HUMBLE OPINION - Thoughts I have as I navigate what is left of my life. - Blog by Wade Driver



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2020

In 1957, when I learned to both dance and call, the choreography was simple, and the calling was fun and exciting. To dance required a desire for fun and laughter. To call required an ability to entertain...period.

As new callers developed, their work ethic diminished as did their ability to entertain. I have discovered that when an aspiring caller first begins, he is now relying on his or her ability to solve a puzzle rather than entertain the dancer. It has become more and more about the caller. Problem is, the more that mentality insinuated itself into our activity, the more fractured it became. Dance levels became social castes and created the misguided assumption of ability, therefore intelligence, levels. Ergo: if I dance C1 and you dance Plus, I must be smarter therefore better than you. As ridiculous as that sounds, the existence of that belief is an absolute fact.

Through all of this, I have concluded (right or wrong does not matter because it is my opinion) that callers with no entertainment skills (no talent) rely on difficult choreography to make them look good. Choreography has become the crutch of untalented callers.

Now, is it really a lack of talent or a lack of work ethic? I choose the latter! I have known many extraordinarily successful callers over the past 63 years who could not sing. and had the personality of a stump. Yet, somehow, through practice, hard work, and planning were able to successfully entertain at both small and large venues.

Now we are having the battle of the acceptance of SSD (Social Square Dancing) vs the level system we have used for the past 40+ years. First, the current system has deteriorated into an unworkable process. For many, many cultural reasons, the current system just WILL NOT work.

It appears to me that it is not the dancer who is vehemently fighting the installation of SSD as a process to learning square dancing, but it is the callers. The question is...WHY???

My opinion: In order to properly utilize SSD as a progression to club dancing, be it SSD, Mainstream, or Plus, all callers must learn how to call a square dance and not just memorize some complicated piece of choreography. **And, have no doubt, SSD or a similar process by some other name is the future of MWSO or there will be no future at all.**

Callers must learn how to present singing calls! Callers must learn how to smile and be pleasant to dancers. In other words, they must learn how to do the same thing over and over and over while entertaining the dancer enough to make them want to come back.

It is amazingly easy to call HARD. It is extremely hard to call EASY!

If you are a caller today and wish to keep your job, you had better learn how to call and not just how to solve puzzles. It is time to go to work and earn your paycheck.

About the Wade Driver: In 1957, Wade Driver learned to Square Dance from his father. Doc Driver in Atlanta, Georgia, where he was born. It was then that he performed his first singing call and has been calling ever since. In 1975, after moving to Houston, Texas, Wade quit his regular job to pursue Square Dance calling as a full time profession. In December of 1975, he produced the first records on the "Rhythm" label. Since 1975, Wade has made Rhythm Records one of the top Square Dance labels in the world.

Wade and his wife, Helene, live in Spring, Texas. In addition to calling at home, he travels all over the world. He has called in almost every state in the union as well as Japan, China, Australia, New Zealand, England, Germany, Sweden, Austria and Canada.

Wade has been a member of CALLERLAB since 1975 and is a past member of the Board of Governors and the Executive Committee. He is a recipient of the CALLERLAB Milestone Award.

He believes *"Those of us who have made our living as Square Dance Callers owe it to the activity to put back into the activity as least as much as we have taken out. Square Dancing is a fun recreation. Callers should make sure that it always stays that way"*.

POSITIVE THINKING

- by Austin Hayward, Thames Valley Dance Club, Woodstock, ON

One year. One year of isolation, keeping to ourselves and trying to do the right thing. Trying to cope with and understand the new “normal”.

If things are not bad enough, winter is here with it's blowing snow and cold temperatures. The so-called “second wave” of Covid-19 is upon us. Dancing is at a stand still. I am wondering how my dancing friends are doing. Are they running the gauntlet of this brutal attack on what was our routine, our life before Covid-19? Will we ever dance again? Will we remember how?

Mental health issues related to our lockdown and this miserable pandemic effect us all in some way. Some people are more susceptible than others, not only affecting themselves, but also those around them. Those that suffer from depression, anxiety, PTSD and other psychiatric disorders can become suicidal, angry and frustrated.

These people need help. And that help is available if they reach out. (24-hour CMHA help line 1-833 456-4566)

But here is some food for thought. It saddens me to see people miserable, complaining, blaming and criticizing others for the way they themselves feel. It baffles me to why some people allow themselves to be mind manipulated and let others dictate their own state of mind. Why do we let other people's negativity affect us? Why do we let them bring us down and into their world?

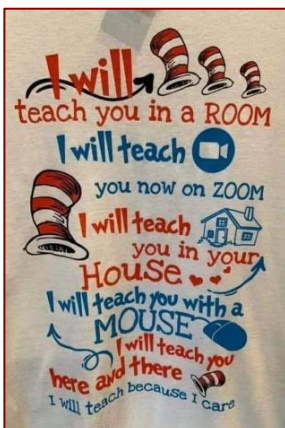
News Flash! ! ! Only you can change this and manage where your mind goes. Only you can edit out the negative and keep the positive. The choice is, do we want to be happy? Do we want to enjoy life? Or do we want to be miserable and sad? Easy choice. right?

This is not “rocket science”. **We have the ability to control what we think.** We have the power and the mental capacity to make ourselves happy so why do we allow other perceptions of uncontrollable circumstances to affect us?

How do we make ourselves happy? **Happiness is a choice. You are not “stuck” where your mind is.** Your mind can take you wherever you want. It is a wonderful thing that allows you freedom and can put you in wonderful places.

Dancing is one of my “happy” places. A place to forget about all the negativity that surrounds. A place to dwell into the positive. I feel the friendships around me, the closeness of my dance partner. I feel the desire to listen to and move to music. I feel the satisfaction that I can dance, that I have learned steps that have been taught me. I feel good about myself. I am meeting new people and expanding my friendship circle. A sense of accomplishment envelops me. I have involved myself in a healthy lifestyle that pleases me, and I know I can accomplish all the above every time I dance.

Until this pandemic is over, Avril and I will involve ourselves in virtual dances and dance wherever we can find room because this is what makes us happy. How good is that? Be happy. Dance.



Virtual dancing eliminates restrictions caused by distance allowing people from across the globe to dance with each other. An unexpected benefit of “zoom” dancing is that those who attend regularly have formed an unofficial Global Club where a feeling of connectedness and community flourishes.

For example, an older, single dancer from outside of Chicago who lives in an apartment says he has nothing to do but watch TV. He attends between 110 to 140 “zoom” dances a month! And in addition to those, 15 to 20 chat or technical zoom sessions. It is what is keeping him sane.

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".

Whenever dancers gather for an evening of fun, if there's an opportunity to pull a prank, it probably will happen. One night I was sitting out a tip and before the music started, one of the dancers informed me that there was a camera on the chair next to me. I had no idea who it belonged to, so I was not about to take any pictures. This dancer suggested I pick it up when the music starts, hold it up and pretend to be a photographer. These little mischievous jokes would stop the caller so we could claim a badge. The music had begun but I thought I'd let the caller get right into the heart of the song. I carefully reached for the camera, making sure it was facing the right way and stood up slowly, brought the camera up to my eye and aimed at the stage to make it look like I knew what I was doing. It didn't take too long before the dancers noticed the caller had taken a look to the side of the hall and did a double take, no more calling, no more music, The dancing came to a halt. When the laughing subsided and the dust had settled and the caller continued, I quietly sat back down on my chair. "Oh goodness, did I cause all that commotion?" The devil made me do it!

In Round dancing, which is cued ballroom, there's only your partner involved but I still like to know who is in the area. My partner usually tells me whose ahead of us and who is behind us. It just helps tremendously to see it in my mind. One evening, it was quite funny when my partner and I were waiting for the Cued to start the Round Dance, something had gone awry with his equipment so we had a bit of time to visit. While waiting I casually started to gaze around, moving slowly to my left, angling a bit more to face the unsuspecting couple directly behind us - paused for a second and said "Hi (name of person)". My partner was giving me the play by play. He told me I was looking at him straight in the eye and apparently he just stared back with mouth agape, then he picked up his jaw off the floor and shook himself to reality. We all had a good laugh and carried on with the dancing. It's interesting to watch what reaction transpires when something unexpected takes place.

When circumstances are correct, some couples will attempt to form a square with either all the men or all the women having identical first names. It can happen accidentally but most likely it was previously planned. The first time I noticed this there were three of the men called Tom and the fourth man was Ted, close enough. That qualifies, no problem here, it was certainly the Tom Tom Square. There has been the true Larry Square, where all four "Larry's" were present. Then there was the Bob Square which had three originals. As everyone was introduced it was quite obvious we were short of one Bob in this square. My partner piped up and assured everyone "We're not short at all." As he pointed in my direction and said, "Meet Bob!" With no hesitation I joined forces and introduced myself, "Just call me B.O.B., you know - Blind Ol' Bat." No truer statement ever spoken - "Where there's a will, there's a way!"

We do have fun and look forward to dancing again. Overheard on the morning news - 'I don't like stairs, they're always up to something!'

A couple in their 90's are both having problems remembering things. During a check-up the doctor tells them that they're physically okay, but they might want to start writing things down to help them remember. Later that night, while watching TV, the old man gets up from his chair. "Want anything while I'm in the kitchen?" he asks. "Will you get me a bowl of ice cream?" she asks. "Sure." "Don't you think you should write it down so you can remember it?" she asks. "No, I can remember it." "Well, I'd like some strawberries on top, too. Maybe you should write it down so as not to forget." He says, "I can remember that. You want a bowl of ice cream with strawberries." "I'd also like whipped cream. I'm certain you'll forget that, so maybe write it down." she says. Irritated, he says, "I don't need to write it down. I can remember it! Ice cream with strawberries and whipped cream. I got it, for goodness sake!" Then he toddles into the kitchen. After about 20 minutes the old man returns from the kitchen and hands his wife a plate of bacon and eggs. She stares at the plate for a moment. "Where's my toast?"

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.

FIGHTING THE FIRE

Remember the saying "to fight fire with fire?" I think it stems from the idea of fighting a forest fire with what is called a back fire. It burns in a controlled way ahead of a fire front in order to stop a wild fire. Recently, I saw a documentary about chorophobia - the fear of dancing. I had never heard of chorophobia before, but certainly I think I suffered from the disease for several years. I don't think my condition was as bad as others have but it does seem to be debilitating none the less. It's cure reminded me of 'fighting fire with fire'.



The documentary basically showed that the very young will begin to move in repetitive movements when rhythmic music is played. **It seems there is a natural desire to dance.** If we are born to dance, where did that love go to? Was it in high school with the idea that others will be judging? Was it society's expectations? Was it a bad experience? I'm sure there are a lot of different reasons. Although the documentary stated dancing does not have sexual connotations certainly there is a stigma associated with that, too. It all adds up to the establishment of a small comfort zone.

A few things pointed out in the documentary are, I think, quite important to know about. **Although most people have a natural desire to dance, many have a fear of dancing.** They are supposedly expected to find joy in dancing but would actually rather do their taxes. The expectation that it should be pleasurable doesn't seem to be there for them, even though humans are the only species that dances for pure pleasure.

Dancing has its rewards that aids in meeting some very basic needs of the human species. Humans need love and joy which we should be getting on a regular basis. Dancing is an expression of self, interaction with our environment but so many are left in isolation simply because they don't participate. Dancing should allow us to shed our inhibitions and for at least a short while to allow us to lose our mind and with that our problems.

Chorophobia is a form of anxiety and dancing is the ultimate treatment for anxiety. One person interviewed said "*If I had the gift of dancing, I would be a lot happier.*" Is dancing a gift? Is dancing a gift we can give? Is dancing a gift of happiness that we can give? Can we treat each other's chorophobia and, who knows, treat social anxiety disorder in the process?

The intention of chorophobia treatment is to overcome the fear we have acquired. Chorophobia treatment aims to push through the threshold, and if successful, open new doors to a different way of living. I think it's important to ease into treatment. I don't think to overcome a fear of heights is done by free fall parachuting, therefore I don't think sudden immersion into dancing works either. We likely need to step into the program one foot at a time, like stepping into a hot bath tub.

Where can we seek treatment for chorophobia? We can look to ads in newspapers, radio, television, word of mouth, Google; we can find a treatment center. We can look to salsa lessons, tango or ballroom dancing, but those can be a BIG first step.

I think our local square dance club has the fire power to nail chorophobia to the wall!

We gather in group settings where everyone is learning, where fancy footwork isn't important and where we are accepted even if we make a mistake. We can give the love, the joy, the inclusion and the comfort that is the sense of belonging. We can give that true gift that keeps on giving. "*If I had the gift of dancing; I would be a lot happier.*" Square dancing is the easy first step to a whole new world free of that phobia, and the move to a better way of life. **Square dancing rocks!**

We can fight that fire with fire, but first we need to strike the match.

CHOROPHOBIA, THE FEAR OF DANCING, IS A REAL THING

SOURCE: <https://www.cbc.ca/documentarychannel/features/chorophobia-the-fear-of-dancing-is-a-real-thing>.

Director Michael Allcock has a problem he'd like to share with the world. At a Christmas party, he was asked to dance by an attractive coworker. "I knew right then and there that, if I was going to go anywhere with this woman, I needed to get on that dance floor — pronto," he remembers. "But I couldn't do it. I stood there, utterly frozen in my tracks. I was simply paralyzed with fear and anxiety."



Allcock has chorophobia — in Greek, chorós means dance — which is defined as a fear of dancing. He has rarely danced in public since he was a child. "Dancing is supposed to be fun," he says. "Dancing is supposed to be liberating. Don't I want to have fun? Don't I want to feel free? Why can't I dance? But then I found out I wasn't alone."

He decided to turn the camera on himself and go on a global quest to understand why he is so terrified by the simple act of dancing — a story told in the documentary Channel film *Fear of Dancing*.

Chorophobia is more common than you think

Allcock estimates that there are hundreds of thousands of chorophobes. Among them is British actor and author Stephen Fry. "I really, really, really hate dancing and have not the slightest milligram of envy for those who can do it," he says.



Another chorophobe Allcock encounters is American singer-songwriter Be Steadwell. She's even written a song about it. "The expectation for Black folks and Black women is to be a particular kind of dancer and to be good in a certain way," Steadwell says in the documentary. "And I'm just not the person that, you know, someone's gonna see in a club and say, 'Wow, you're a good dancer.'"

Humans have been dancing for a very, very long time

We may be the only species to dance for pure pleasure. Nobody is exactly sure when we first started, but in *Fear of Dancing* Allcock takes us to one of the ancient places on earth where it may have started, Africa, a continent with cultures steeped in dancing.

It also appears the impulse to dance is an instinctual part of being human. Marcel Zentner, a professor at the University of Innsbruck in Austria, found that babies may be born with a predisposition to move rhythmically in response to music.



"[Five- to 24-month-old infants] were ... played this music and then spontaneously, they would start to move," he says.

Infants listened to a variety of sounds including classical music, rhythmic beats and speech. Their movements were recorded by video and 3D motion-capture technology and analyzed. The study found the better the children were able to synchronize their movements with the music, the more they smiled.

Fear of dancing develops as we grow older

So why do some people grow up to be afraid of it? "If you had 50 people who all had a fear of dancing, they'd probably have 50 different reasons for why they have a fear of dancing," says Peter Lovatt, a dance psychologist at the University of Hertfordshire in the U.K. The problem often starts during the teenage years when, "suddenly, dancing becomes about mate selection or about competency issues — moving your body in a way that your social group may find acceptable or unacceptable," he says.



Allcock remembers that by the time he reached Grade 11, his lifestyle changed. He stopped going to class to front a band called Barbaric Fantasy. "It was all about partying," he says. "I became a stereotype: the dropout metal-head stoner that's just too cool to dance."

For a single guy back on the dating scene, the pressure to dance can be intense, and — like a fear of heights — chorophobia is real. "The only difference is no one would ever think of helping a person with that fear by dragging them to the edge of a building," Allcock says.

Ways to help chorophobes learn to embrace dancing

Champion ballroom dancer and instructor Olé Burlay thinks Allcock could overcome his fear if he just had the right teacher. "I think that the fact that people are afraid of dance is just because they're not capable of doing it," Burlay says. "So, if you get the right instructor that introduces it right away [in a] gentle form, that can be overcome."

Jorge Ortiz, once a reluctant dancer, and his business partner, Rebekah Diaz, have developed a virtual studio to teach partner dance steps. "Hopefully, you get the experience of being in a flesh-and-blood dance studio without having the anxiety to actually have to walk through the doors," says Ortiz.



Chorophobes in Toronto have found a novel way to bust a move. They meet once a week to dance together in a dimly lit room. "Darkness is such an equalizer," says Eric Allin, one of the organizers of the party. "With the lights off, it's no longer a visual event. It takes on ... a more abstract meaning. You're unable to perceive others, and you're not being perceived."

There is, Allcock says, a lack of understanding about people who have a fear of dancing, and he hopes his film creates more awareness about the problem. "I kind of resent the fact that society expects me to dance," he says. "It's almost like this is an act of rebellion for me not to dance."

Watch [Fear of Dancing](#) on documentary Channel. Available on CBC Gem

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