

International Association  
of Gay Square Dance Clubs

# TEN YEARS IAGSDC

**A Collection of Pages  
From Our Memory Book**

Compiled and Edited  
by Luis Torres

Design and Layout  
by Roger Coffin

**Digital Edition**

Version 1.0

April 3, 2009



# Introduction to the Digital Edition

Allan Hurst - 4/3/2009

Bear with me for a moment before turning the page, please. It's been a long three years.

The book you're about to read is truly a labor of love twice over.

The first labor of love was compiling and editing the book, and that credit goes entirely to Luis Torres, along with Roger Coffin, who did the book design and layout.

The second labor of love was creating the digital edition. Here's where I come into the story.

My first square dance class was 1995, and my first IAGSDC Convention was San Francisco in 1996.

Andy Shore, who was the club caller for El Camino Reelers at the time, kindly lent me his copy of *TEN YEARS IAGSDC: A Collection of Pages From Our Memory Book*.

I think I read it three times. I was amazed, scandalized, and unexpectedly passionate over the contents of those 227 pages.

When I discovered that the book was permanently out of print, I was upset, because future dancers would never learn the history of our community.

In mid-2006, I took on the job of Editor in Chief of the *GCA Call Sheet*, which I published as a PDF. This led me to think about republishing the *Ten Years* book in electronic format. Now, recreating a book digitally isn't something to be undertaken lightly, but I didn't know that at the time.

First I went to the Iggy (IAGSDC) Board and received both their unofficial blessing and their opinion that this book was Not An Official Project. (Although it became an official IAGSDC project in July 2008.)

Next, I located Luis Torres, and asked to recreate the book electronically, to ensure that it would never be lost. Although Lu didn't dance any more, he was pleased with the idea, and gave me permission (and one of the last "new" copies of the book), subject to a few conditions:

1. The book must be reproduced *exactly* as published.
2. Typos in the book must *not* be corrected.
3. No text may be added, deleted, or otherwise changed, including factual information.
4. The resulting e-book must be distributed without charge.
5. While I was allowed to add an introduction and a colophon and/or any other supplementary material, none of it could be placed between the front and back covers of the book.

So here we are. There are minor "white space" and line spacing variations, but *all* text, graphics, and formatting are reproduced faithfully, *including typos*. Three of which gave my proofreaders absolute fits not being able to correct. Oddly, nobody but me admitted spotting the typo in a top-of-page article heading.

If you print out this book on a printer capable of duplexing (printing both sides), you'll have a facsimile which is paginated identically to the original printed text, sandwiched between this and the colophon.

As I write this, it's 2009. I'm no longer a newcomer to the LGBT square dance scene. You're reading this, so my idea has come to fruition...and just before the 26th IAGSDC Convention in Washington, DC.

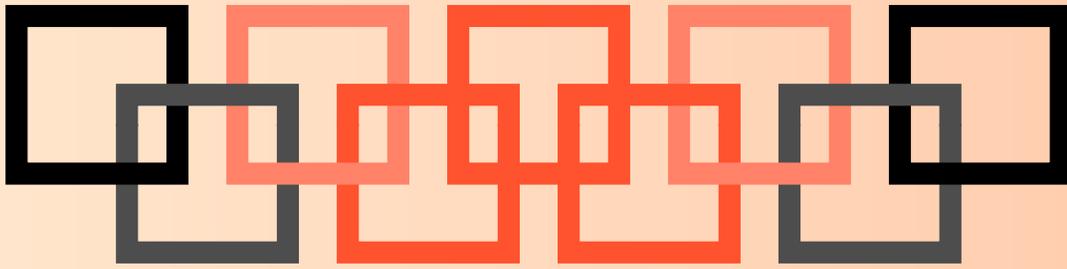
So folks, this is our history, never recorded anywhere else - not like this - and possibly never again.

A number of the people described in these pages have passed on. For many, this book is the *only* record of their square dance existence.

Please join me in the joy of remembering - or, in many cases, discovering for the first time - all of them. The dancers. The callers. The clubs. The HTQs. (Even Sybil.)

So turn the page, already. Read. *Enjoy!*





International Association  
of Gay Square Dance Clubs

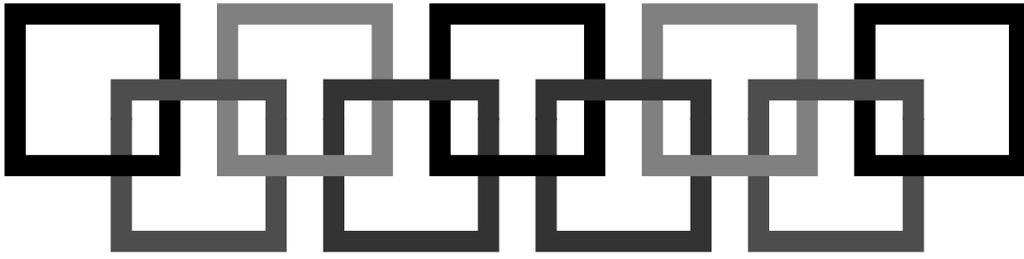
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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the “worker bees” who make our activity possible: to the ones who fill club and national offices, the ones who teach classes, who contact and contract callers, who plan dances, fly-ins, and conventions, who carry, set up, and remove equipment, provide goodies, publish Travel Guides, provide material to new clubs, and do a million other things that need to be done, without needing to have someone ask them to do it. The fun we have dancing would not be possible without their effort. It is also dedicated to my dancing- and life-partner, D.A.S., who has supported my efforts in putting this publication together.

Luis Torres, San Antonio, Texas

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San Antonio, TX 78230

**NOTE: Mention of an individual in this publication is not meant to make any statement as to that individual’s sexual orientation.**



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A publication like this one would not be possible without the contribution of many people, and, if I forget someone who should be thanked, I hope they will forgive me. A few individuals must be singled out, however. First and foremost, I want to thank my friend Roger Coffin from the Wilde Bunch in Albuquerque, who handled all the technical aspects of design, layout, and production. If he had not said yes when I asked him to take over this task, I would have never undertaken it. Special thanks go to Denver's Karl Jaeckel and San Francisco's Freeman Stamper. Being as passionate as they are in their involvement in and support of gay square dancing, they are inexhaustible sources of information to whom I came time and time again with questions. Karl also transcribed two interviews for me.

I am also grateful to all the individual dancers and callers who agreed to be interviewed for this publication—I appreciated their time and their candor—and to the individuals who contributed articles or who allowed reprinting of previously published material. My thanks also to Harland Jylha in San Antonio, who transcribed two of the interviews for me, and to Skip Rognlien and the IAGSDC executive board, who supported the project.

One of the things I wanted to include in this publication was a section of historical sketches of all the IAGSDC clubs. In September 1992, I sent out a mailing to all the clubs requesting the information I needed, and giving January 1, 1993 as a deadline. By that date, only eight of 43 clubs had responded. Eventually, another six replied, but rather than include such a truncated representation, I opted for dropping that section. Nonetheless, I want to thank the clubs that replied. They were: Alamo City Wranglers, San Antonio, Texas; Chi-Town Squares, Chicago; Chinook City Dance Club, Calgary; Cotton Pickin' Squares, Memphis; Desert Valley Squares, Phoenix; Finest City Squares, San Diego; Golden State Squares, San Clemente, California; Grand River Squares, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Midnight Squares, San Francisco; Prime 8's, Sacramento; South Florida Mustangs, Hollywood, Florida; The Wilde Bunch, Albuquerque; Tinseltown Squares, Los Angeles; and Triangle Squares, Toronto.—LT



# FOREWORD

For those of us involved in gay square dancing, the IAGSDC's tenth anniversary convention is a momentous occasion. Looking forward to it a few years ago, I thought it would be appropriate to celebrate the event by doing something to preserve the history of the gay square dance movement. As a trained historian, writer, and editor, I offered to oversee the task, which I initially envisioned as a great cooperative effort of all the IAGSDC. Little did I suspect that the project would become basically a one-(or two) person job.

What I am presenting in this publication is basically oral history. **[NO, VIRGINIA! It's *not* oral history as opposed to anal history. It's oral history as historical information gleaned through the spoken word, in interviews, rather than through documents and archival research.]** Oral history is an accepted method of gathering information about people, events, social movements, etc. But, based as it is on the recollections of individuals—simply edited for publication, rather than definitely confirmed, corrected, or denied—it may suffer from the failings that are common to human memory.

This volume is not presented to our organization as the definitive history of the IAGSDC, but as an attempt to preserve information and experiences that are as ephemeral as we human beings are. Since the project depended on the work of one individual, working with no budget, I have only included material that I became aware of or found within my reach, and people I was able to interview without having to undertake special travel.

There are people I would have loved to interview, like Seattle's Doug McPherson, but many of them are no longer among us. There are others, like Scott Carey, Keith Snowdon, Harlan Kerr, Dean Hoftmann, Chris Phillips, and some of the early members of the South Florida Mustangs, who could have added immeasurably to filling out the story, but who I simply could not arrange to interview.

Perhaps this work will have served its purpose, if, aside from preserving the material it contains, it encourages other individuals and the IAGSDC member clubs to become more conscious of the value of our past experience and the need to preserve it. It is my hope that this collection will find many interested readers within our large—and expanding—gay square dance family.—LT



# SPECIAL THANKS

Last April, when Roger and I first began facing the actual cost of this publication—which appeared to be two-and-a-half times the amount the IAGSDC had set aside for the purpose—the collapse of the project seemed imminent. The fact that we were able to publish should be credited to a number of real “angels:”

- Ron Bass and George Robbins from Chesapeake Squares and Sandi Baxter and Carole Hammer from the South Florida Mustangs. They were the first “outsiders” to read the completed manuscript, and, when they heard of the financial difficulties, they originated the idea of appealing for assistance across the organization. Their enthusiasm for the manuscript was encouraging to me, and their “good reviews,” given to anyone who would listen, encouraged others to contribute.

- My partner, D.A.S., who footed the enormous long-distance phone bill I generated while trying to contact individuals throughout the IAGSDC.

- Tammy Coddington from Sacramento’s Capital City Squares, who appeared seemingly out of nowhere, and joined Roger and me in helping to produce the publication. She is a printer by profession, and her good will and her contacts made the reproduction possible.

- Dean Hofmann from Finest City Squares in San Diego, who despite the fact that he was in the hospital facing life-threatening medical problems, made the effort to send one of the two largest contributions we received. In his note, he said: “I feel very strongly about the worth of this project, so I willingly send a check to help out.”

- Finally, the clubs and individuals listed below, who sent in contributions, large and small. This publication is **your** publication!

Chesapeake Squares, Baltimore, MD  
Desert Valley Squares, Phoenix, AZ  
Midnight Squares, San Francisco, CA  
Rosetown Ramblers, Portland, OR  
Squares Across the Border, Vancouver, BC  
Sun Coast Wranglers, Tampa, FL  
Times Squares, New York, NY  
Tinseltown Squares, Los Angeles, CA  
Tucson T-Squares, Tucson, AZ

**Capital City Squares, Sacramento, CA**

Jim Ozanich

**Chesapeake Squares, Baltimore, MD**

Ron Bass and George Robbins  
Marilyn Hage and Deborah Greener  
Ett McAtee  
Dave McMaster and Steven Lawrence  
Chris Thomas and Richard Rohrbaugh  
Mike Tinley

**D.C. Lambda Squares, Washington, DC**

Nancy Crowell  
Tom Halloran and Bob Dye  
Tom Harris and Lu Rossignol  
Merry Susan Hancks  
Nick Mattera

**Finest City Squares, San Diego, CA**

Dean Hofmann

**Grand River Squares, Grand Rapids, MI**

Chuck Novak

**Independence Squares, Philadelphia, PA**

Will

**Midnight Squares, San Francisco, CA**

Alan Hall

**Sun Coast Wranglers, Tampa, FL**

Stephen Studnicka and Edwin Jaufmann

**South Florida Mustangs, Hollywood, FL**

Sandi Baxter and Carole Hammer

**Times Squares, New York, NY**

Ken Braid

**Tinseltown Squares, Los Angeles, CA**

Bob Becking  
Van Horrocks  
Kim Nagele  
Jay Schmidt

**Tucson T-Squares, Tucson, AZ**

Maxine Smitherman

**Western Star, San Francisco, CA**

Freeman Stamper

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# PARLEZ-VOUS SQUARE DANCE?

by Ett McAtee  
Chesapeake Squares, Baltimore

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This charming short piece by Ett McAtee looking upon square dancing as a "second language" gives us a different, but very accurate, slant on our activity. —LT*

Do you consider yourself bilingual? I mean, do you speak "square dance?" When you talk to people, do words or phrases that **could** be simple everyday expressions bring to mind movements executed by couples in a square? What do **you** think of, for example, when you hear: "Veer to the left!" "Press ahead!" "Make a U-turn back!" or "Zoom!?"

How many other times in our everyday life do we think in "square dance," even when the situation at hand has nothing to do with our beloved activity? As *American Squaredance Magazine* once pointed out, we know we are in it deep when our boss tells us "Keep busy!", and we walk away reciting the definition to ourselves! Think about it next time you find yourself thinking in "square dance" in your everyday affairs.

Seriously, I have been wrestling with the question of what makes square dancing so attractive to me. While some folks have trouble committing to a once-a-week class or club night, I have difficulty making time to do much else. I have realized over the years that as I learned more and more, both about new calls and about the mechanics of calling a dance, I am really learning to speak another language. One of my lifelong interests has always been the science of language, or the syntax, grammar, and structure

of a language, how it is put together and understood.

As square dancers, we interpret what a caller says: we take the command, process it through the gray matter of our brains, come up with an interpretation of the call, and execute it in our square. In effect, we "speak square dance," but instead of using verbal feedback we communicate to the caller and to the other dancers that we understand the call by performing it in our square. As a caller, I am now learning how to communicate the language to my dancers every time I call a dance, and how to be sure it is understood by them. "Square dance" is a language spoken and understood only by other square dancers. If you don't believe me, try asking anyone off the street if they "box the gnat!"

Square dance is also an international language. We can go anywhere in the world, walk into the local fire hall or school cafeteria, and feel right at home as soon as the needle goes down on the record. Dancers from all over the world speak the same language, thanks to the ongoing efforts of Callerlab. At the 1990 National Advanced and Challenge Convention in Virginia Beach, I found myself in a square with six Swedish dancers, who spoke very little English, but who spoke excellent "square dance." Several dancers from Japan and Germany were

also at the convention, and although we might have had some difficulty communicating with each other off the dance floor, within the square we understood each other perfectly!

Square dancing has added a lot to my life. It's an activity that satisfies my interest in another language, yet also allows a physical interpretation of that language. Best of all, I now have international friends from abroad who share my love of square dancing, and with whom I can "speak" in our common "language." I was privileged to accompany Anne Uebelacker on a

trip to Sweden in April 1991, during which I square danced with some of the best dancers in the world. I now have friends named Lotta, Leif, Björn, Birgit, Arne, Svend-Olaf, and Maxie. I've also become friends with Chuck and Tomiko from Japan, Stefan from Germany, and a whole bunch of Canadians. Every year, I look forward to meeting more and more dancers from around the world to share the common language of "square dance" and to seal our common bond with a great big YELLOWROCKS!

# SQUARE YOUR SETS! A REPORT FROM THE NATIONAL GAY SQUARE DANCERS' CONVENTION IN NEW YORK CITY

by Luis Torres

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The following article was written after "Peel the Apple," the IAGSDC convention of 1989 in New York City. It was submitted to a major national gay publication from California, which turned it down because they did not see much of interest in the gay square dance movement.*

*This was my first convention, and the article reflects the excitement that I felt after that experience. The excitement has not diminished, and each succeeding convention has been a memorable event.*

*The article is included here, not only because many people who have read it have reacted positively to it as an accurate portrayal of the spirit of gay square dancing, but also because it gives some background about the fledgling square dance movement in 1982 and the founding of Washington, D. C. 's Lambda Squares.—LT*

I first encountered gay square dancing when I attended the 1982 National Gay Reno Rodeo, where a demonstration by San Francisco's Foggy City Squares was part of the program. I had been involved in folk dancing for years, but this was the first time I had seen "my people" doing the kind of dancing that I enjoyed. After the rodeo, I extended my vacation to include a visit to San Francisco and joined the Foggy City Squares for one of their weekly meetings, which at that time were held at one of the large gay discos south of Market Street.

When I returned to Washington, D.C., I was determined to duplicate that experience, so I xeroxed a bunch of flyers, spread them around the city's bars, book stores, and other establishments where I knew gay people were likely to see them. Eventually, the group that became the D. C. Lambda Squares began meeting in the gym of a suburban school. Since my background was in traditional U.S. and British squares and contras, that was what we danced.

Soon it became clear, however, that the fledgling gay square dance groups that were popping up around the country were dancing Western squares, which require a specific course of instruction. I suggested that Lambda Squares do the same, since it would open the opportunity for contact with the other gay groups. Although I withdrew, the group carried on. Doug B., one of our original members, worked to perfect the calling he had started doing while still in college, so he could call for the group. D.C. Lambda Squares is still dancing strong today.

Earlier this year, I responded to a note I saw in one of the local gay papers telling about a similar group in Baltimore, the Chesapeake Squares (founded with the help of the D.C. group). I got in touch with the group, and picked up on my gay square dancing again by joining their "Mainstream" class. Mainstream square dancing, which represents about a year's worth of lessons and dancing experience, is the common ground for Western squares throughout the U.S. and other parts of the world

That's how I happened to be in New York over the 4th of July weekend participating in this year's convention of the International Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs. How things had changed in the gay square dance world since my last contact with it! The convention was being held at the Sheraton Center, one of the large hotels in the center of Manhattan, and although the big "Welcome International Square Dancers" sign in front of the hotel omitted the key adjective, the very fact that the convention was taking place here was impressive enough for someone who had been away for almost six years.

The four days that followed were, without doubt, the most pleasurable and exciting block of time I've spent in my half a century of life. Here were some 650 gay men and women representing 30 square dance clubs, 27 states, 3 Canadian provinces, and one other foreign country (an American living in Mexico City was in attendance!), gathered together to do what they love best: to have fun, dance until exhaustion sets in, and revel in each other's company. The atmosphere was positively charged from beginning to end. The host group, the NYC Times Squares, had spent a year-and-a half and countless hours of individual labor preparing for the event, and we were determined to honor their effort by having a ball!

The program contained almost continuous dancing from 8 or 9 a.m. until around midnight, with the promise that beyond midnight, as long as there were dancers on the floor ready to dance, there would be callers to call for them. Mornings and afternoons offered workshops for the various levels of square dance proficiency from Basic to Challenge, introductions to the next higher level

for those who felt ready to tackle something more complex, and workshops in other types of dancing: Western two-stepping, bootscoot (Western line dancing), clogging, and round dancing. And, of course, there were many hours of "at level" dancing with some of the best callers from the straight square dance world and many of the gay callers who have been developing their talents over the last decade.

The polymorphously perverse tastes of our community were catered to alongside. For the drag set, there was the tasteful tastelessness of the "1989 Honky Tonk Queen Contest," hosted by San Francisco's Sybil and Miss Wella Balsam from Vancouver. Sybil, appearing in a Bette Midler-style mermaid dress whose fishtail required her to walk with tiny side-to-side steps, kept the audience in stitches with her bitchy wit. For the leather-and-chains set there was an "Ad-Hoc Leather Tip" (a "tip" is a set of 2 dances), which got the boys so worked up that they ran from one ballroom to the other "invading" the dancing going on in each. Finally for those of us with more sedate tastes, there were special performances by demonstration teams from various clubs, led-off by a crackerjack performance by the Foggy City Dancers in sharp black-and-red outfits.

The morning of the convention's third day there was a "fun-badge tour:" four bus loads of gay square dancers set off to explore New York. At prominent points along the way, the buses emptied out, a huge sound system was set up, everybody squared up, and we danced a tip. Even in seen-it-all New York the crowds stopped to look, and although Lincoln Center Plaza, St. John's Cathedral, City Hall, Battery Park (with

the Statue of Liberty in the background), and the main hall at Grand Central Station have seen their share of strange sights, I'm sure that our gay square dancers were still something a bit out of the ordinary. And, so what if the comments in the background were not always positive? We had our fun!

Fun is a great part of the gay square dance world, but it's the people in it that make it special. In an effort to discover what awakens such enthusiasm in our dancers, I talked to many of them about their experiences. There's an old saying that "square dancing is friendship set to music," and, although the saying is a bit corny, gay square dancers generally agree that their clubs provide an arena where gay men and women can meet without the sexual tension, the alcohol, and the cigarette smoke that fills the bars. People come together initially to dance, but eventually discover that their ideal sexual types are not so all-important, and they can love, care for, and appreciate all sorts of age levels, of body- and personality-types they had never allowed themselves to get close to before.

Furthermore, after a while, the people you meet at square dancing start to become the friends you go to the movies or theater with, the ones you invite over for dinner or for a party, the ones you visit when they are ill, or try to cheer up when they are blue. And you do this spontaneously and gladly, because it all comes back your way with interest.

Stan B. and Bill S., from Sacramento, are 67 and 73 respectively, and have been together for 39 years. They started square dancing with straight groups in Texas 8 years ago. When they moved to Sacramento, they discovered gay

square dancing and finally had the chance to be each other's partner. They say the basic difference between gay and straight groups is that the gay groups seem to have 1,000 percent more enthusiasm. Stan and Bill dance at least 3 times a week, which they credit with helping to keep them physically active and mentally sharp. When asked how long they intend to keep this up, they say: "For as long as we can walk! And after that, we intend to do wheelchair squares...gay ones, if possible!"

Hal K. from the New York group has been dancing for four years. He was introduced to square dancing by his lover, who had learned while in college in New Mexico. Hal feels that the warmth and lack of pretense of the people he meets while dancing are what keep him interested, and sees it as an activity that welcomes couples while including the single. He and his lover are in the process of adopting a baby. "When that baby comes," says Hal, "all the members of the Times Squares will be considered its aunts and uncles." In the New York group, he reports, contact between younger members and older ones who are members of SAGE (Seniors Active in a Gay Environment) has prompted the younger ones to become SAGE volunteers.

When Bill S. had a heart attack in his early 40s followed by a quadruple bypass operation, his doctor, a straight woman, told him that after recuperation he would have to start getting regular exercise. Bill replied that that would not be easy, since he did not think he had the discipline to stick to a workout regimen. She knew he was gay and enjoyed dancing, so she told him to look into gay square dancing, which was then developing a following in Seattle. Bill,

a Liverpudlian by birth, had come to this country at 23, and had no familiarity with square dancing. He followed his doctor's orders, however, became active in the Seattle group, and carried his enthusiasm with him to San Francisco three years later when he was transferred there. He is now an active dancer and a member of the demo team there. "My experience is," says Bill, who has been to every convention since the first one in Seattle in 1984, "that in gay square dancing you may see people only once a year at conventions, but though you are separated by 2,000 miles for the rest of the year, you develop a close and warm relation, and you know that if you travel those 2,000 miles, there is someone at the other end to welcome you and make you feel at home."

Winston S. and Jerry C. are both black, both at least 6'3", and both very thin, with not an extra ounce of fat on either of them. These three characteristics make them stand out on any floor, since the presence of black gays among our square dancers is, unfortunately, still a rarity. Winston was talked into trying square dancing reluctantly. "Frankly," he says, "I'd seen some of it on TV, and I thought it looked boring." Both he and Jerry, however, probably came to square dancing through a love for dancing in general as a form of expression. Winston studied tap dancing for five years; Jerry had been a member of both modern and ethnic dance companies.

Jerry first encountered square dancing the summer of '88 when he saw a demonstration by the Times Squares at the piers located at the foot of Christopher Street. He accepted the invitation to the group's two summer "open house"

evenings, and joined the Basic class in the fall. Jerry admits he got the bug early, and arranged his work schedule so that every night the class was held he could arrive a half hour earlier, "to get that extra bit." "For a while there," he says, "I didn't want to eat, I didn't want to drink; all I wanted to do was just square dance!"

Both of them find square dancing a wonderful social outlet, and are looking forward to more travel to fly-ins and conventions. The lack of a black presence in gay square dancing, they speculate, is perhaps the result of square dancing being more a part of the white American experience than of the black one. Lack of familiarity with the activity makes it even harder to draw black people close enough so that they can become interested. Winston has been working on his brother, though. And the last evening of the convention there was what is perhaps a good sign for the future: a full square of gay black men and women set up on the ballroom floor: a historical first for gay square dancing.

The situation for gay women is similar to that of black gays in square dancing. Ett M. from Chesapeake Squares says that square dancing has been the occasion for her to go from not having much to do with gay men three years ago, to having dozens of new gay male friends. Cheryl D. from Portland agrees, and adds that her experience is a change from always going out with other women, to going out more often in mixed company, "with square dancing as the common language between us." Why is the majority of gay square dancers overwhelmingly male? To that question both Ett and Cheryl have a ready answer: traditionally, the gay male community has been an individualistic one. You

go out and cruise the bars alone with the hope of scoring. Gay women, on the contrary, have been more inclined to build networks: you meet people through friends, you go to discussion groups, a women's bookstore, a coffeehouse. For the men, square dancing becomes a network; the women can choose, and many decide to remain within their old established lines of communication, hesitant to join a new, sexually-integrated activity.

There are some very important straight people, both men and women, involved in gay square dancing, namely the callers who call for local groups, for fly-ins, and for conventions. Mike DeSisto from Seattle and John Preston from southern California were without a doubt two of the most popular callers at the New York convention. Their backgrounds are quite different: Mike is from a blue-collar background, a crane operator by trade. When he is not calling, he goes back to the crane or does body and paint work on trucks. John studied theater arts in high school and college; although he calls full-time, he occasionally does commercials, and admits he is "open to being discovered." Mike has worked with gay square dancers in Seattle over 5 years, while John has been involved in conventions and fly-ins for only the last two.

Straight callers like these two, aside from overcoming whatever prejudices they may have had originally against gays, put their business on the line when they become involved. Straight groups have been known to tell their callers "if you call for them, you can't call for us." Significantly, however, gay square dancers have been able to attract some of the best callers in the business. These callers' popularity has allowed

them to reply: "Sorry you feel that way, but if you don't reconsider, you've just lost me as a caller."

Mike and John agree that gay square dancing separates the average caller from the superior one. For one thing there are a few "technical" differences. Think of this: the straight square dance world is rather conservative. Standards of dress are strictly maintained: long-sleeve shirts for the men, square dance dresses for the women. Couples tend to color-coordinate: the man's shirt and the woman's dress are often made of the same material, so a caller standing above the dance floor needs few visual clues to tell who is dancing with whom. In gay square dancing, most visual clues fly out the window. Sex differences are not a big help: your square may be all male, and where there are women in it, they may be dancing the man's part. With a wonder of understatement, John says: "Among gay square dancers the dress code is more relaxed!" What he means is that, although at regular evenings during the year the dress is pretty conventional, at a convention the dressed-up lady in the square can be a man in drag who is dancing the man's part anyway.

Why do they get involved? John Preston says, "The unbelievable amount of energy, and the unbelievable amount of warmth that I get back from it, makes me feel so good that I am at the point where I'll juggle my schedule if they want me to do something for them." To this Mike adds that he came to gay square dancing at a low point in his life, right after a divorce. "I was a real bastard," he says. "I didn't like anybody very much. But again, the warmth, love, and energy I got from my gay squares made me a better person than I ever was. I'll cancel

any engagement to call for a gay group, and I'll book for them as far in advance as they want it. Not only that, but I'm working on a plan so that when I die, I can send taped calls back from the other side, so I can stay involved!"

"Where does this "energy " come from in the gay groups?," I asked. Mike thinks that it is youth. His observation is that gay square dancers tend to be in their 30s and 40s for the most part, and the youthful atmosphere pulls the older dancers along. Besides, gays seem anxious to learn. "You teach them something, and the reaction is always: 'more, more!'" "

John Preston, who is half black himself, has a different theory. "I think it is a product of repression. When a group of people has been repressed and they finally find something that gives them a release, the release has to be explosive." He compares his experience with gay groups to calling for straight black square dancers in Detroit. He found a similar energy and enthusiasm there.

Nice things happen to gay people when they start square dancing. Take the case of "The Abduction of B.B. Fisher." On a regular dance night a couple of weeks before the convention, the president of Baltimore's Chesapeake Squares opened the room the group uses at the local community center, as she usually does, and brought in the group's Fisher boom box. She left the room for a few minutes, and while she was gone, someone walked through and out the alley, stealing the boom box. The incident was reported to the group, and she told us that she would replace it. Two thirds into the evening, I pulled one of the club officers aside and told him we

should find a way to replace the machine without having her pay for it. Much to my surprise he reported that without an open announcement, people had already given him \$150. By the end of the evening we had \$175, and later donations brought the amount to \$200.

It's fun, it's enjoyable. And when you see Winston (remember Winston: black, thin, and 6'3"+?) dancing the girl's part and being partnered by Jessie L., who stands 4'11" when she stretches, you can believe that everything good is possible in gay square dancing.

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*EDITOR'S NOTE: Since the above article was written in 1989, it seemed worthwhile to do an update on the people mentioned in it. Below is what can be reported about them as of August 1992.—LT*

## ADDENDUM

**Stan B. and Bill S. from Sacramento** had the 40th anniversary of their partnership recognized at the Vancouver convention's banquet in 1990. Bill turned 70 in January '92; Stan celebrated his 76th birthday in August '91. They both attended the Miami convention in 1991, where they were observed dancing up a storm, as usual. At the Albuquerque convention in 1992, they became the first two people to register for "Remake the Circle," the 10th anniversary convention in Seattle. They still dance actively year-round in their area, and continue to credit square dancing for keeping them both fit and alert.

**Hal K. and his partner, Mitch M., from the New York Times Squares**, who were reported in the process of adopting a baby, finally got a call from the agency just about two years to the day of when they first made their application. They were offered a black male preemie weighing only six and a half pounds. Hal and Mitch, both of whom are white, did not hesitate. They picked the baby up the day after Father's Day 1990, and marched with him in the following Sunday's New York Gay Pride Parade.

Michael Joseph, is 2 1/2 years old as of this writing, and is a happy, healthy baby. He has already been to half a dozen or more fly-ins and one IAGSDC convention (Miami) with his parents, and has been a hit with all his square dancing uncles and aunts at these events. At the Miami convention, Michael Joseph made history by being the first baby square dancer to participate in the convention's Grand March. We can report that he looked extremely handsome in his miniature Times Squares' club shirt.

In the September 1992 issue of the Times Squares' club newsletter, Hal and Mitch announced that Michael Joseph's adoption had become final as of September 8, 1992. They say they have a file full of complimentary reports from all the officials involved in their case. Their lives have changed drastically since Michael Joseph came into their home, but a once-a-week baby-sitter allows them at least one night out on their own. In the same newsletter, Hal, Mitch, and Michael Joseph also announced that they were moving to Orlando, Florida, where they expected to organize another gay square dance club.

**Bill S. from San Francisco's Foggy City Squares** was transferred by his company to Memphis, Tennessee. In a new relationship with Joe S., formerly from the Rosetown Ramblers in Portland, the two have set up housekeeping in the South and have become founding members of their new hometown's Cotton Pickin' Squares.

**Winston S. from the Times Squares** has been dancing Advanced at last report. He broke ground by becoming the first black reigning Honky Tonk Queen at the Miami convention. **Dominique de Fontainebleau** was truly a vision of loveliness, captivating the audience with her charm and poise. She reigned over the longest-ever Honky Tonk Queen Pageant to date at the Albuquerque convention.

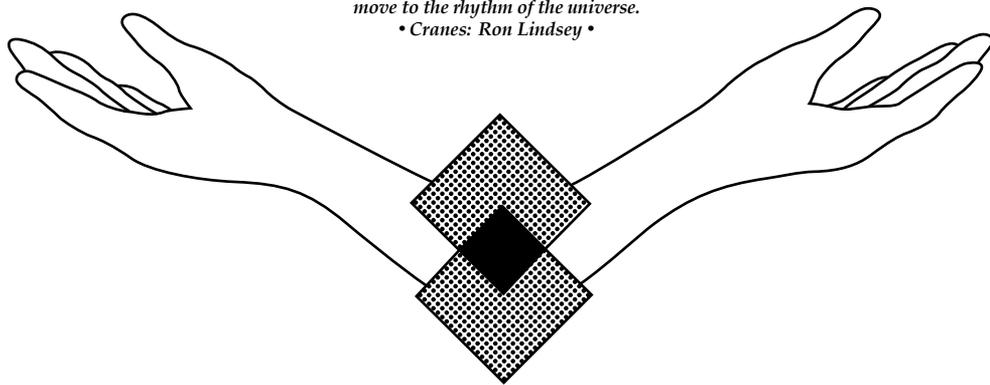
**Jerry C., also from Times Squares**, has also been dancing Advanced. We hear he is kept quite busy trying to keep his "evil sister" under control.

**Ett M. from Baltimore's Chesapeake Squares**, has been rapidly developing as an outstanding caller and square dance teacher. She ran the club's Plus class in 1990 and 1991, and earned accolades from her students, many of whom showed their newly acquired skills at the Miami convention. She is reported ready to start the club's first Advanced class in 1992. When not playing with her square dance checkers, Ett can be found racing through the Challenge program and attending any function called by Mike Jacobs.

**Portland's Cheryl D.** has also been working on becoming a caller and teacher. She has called at club functions and has taught Plus and Advanced classes.



*The  
Japanese  
Crane, Tancho.  
Red Crowned Crane,  
Bird of Happiness, symbol  
of love, happiness, longevity and  
marital fidelity. The birds can live for  
more than half a century and usually mate for  
life. While male or female may initiate the dance of  
mated couples, such antics can be contagious. If one crane  
in a flock begins to dance, the action frequently spreads through-  
out the entire group. At anytime and of of sheer exuberance, cranes  
move to the rhythm of the universe.  
• Cranes: Ron Lindsey •*



April 6, 7, 8, 1984 • The Madison Hotel • Seattle Washington • Hosted by Puddletown Squares  
Featuring National Callers Elmer Sheffield and Paul Marcum  
First International Gay Square Dance Convention

# ALL JOIN HANDS

**FROM THE ARCHIVES OF THE IAGSDC #1:  
ARTICLES OF ORGANIZATION  
FOR THE SOUTH FLORIDA MUSTANGS**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The club we know today as the South Florida Mustangs was the first gay square dance club to come into existence. The club was organized in 1980, three years before the sequence of events that led to the creation of the IAGSDC, and was then known as the "Miami Mustangs." Their 1980 Articles of Formation are included here as a document of historical interest, revealing as it does some of the thinking behind the coming into being of gay square dancing. The copy reproduced here came from the personal archives of Art Smith in Seattle.—LT*

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**ARTICLES OF FORMATION  
-FOR-  
MIAMI MUSTANGS  
AN ARKY\* SQUARE DANCING CLUB**

(This club was formally established on **February 3, 1980**, by a concerned party, which through revisions, elections, and amendments approved this document. The document was re-drafted on 2/5/80. cdp)

**ARTICLE I: PURPOSE**

The purpose of this organization is to reinstitute and perpetuate the unique art form of Arky\* (of the same sex) Square Dancing.

**THE CONCEPT IS NOT NEW**

This manner of all-male folk dance, which had its beginnings as an early American pastime, is believed to be the forerunner of "modern-day" square dancing.

The preservation of all-male square dancing is the intent of this organization.

**ARTICLE II: MEMBERSHIP**

Membership in this organization shall be divided into two categories: Level I and Level II. This [structure] is designed to allow all persons the ability to maintain membership status, regardless of their commitment limitations.

Level I: This level shall be recognized as the GENERAL level, a category open to anyone. Requirements for membership in this level are as follows:

- a. Applicants must attend at least two scheduled meetings or practices.
- b. Interested applicants must register for membership by completing a Level I membership form.

- c. All members must be male.
- d. Members must attend at least two practices per month during their initial probation period. This period shall not exceed six months, and is designed to determine dancing skills and commitment. This [probation period] shall be strictly dedicated to teaching of the Basic 50 calls, according to the Sets in Order-American Squaredance Society. (Members with prior knowledge and experience in square dancing may choose to elect [*Editor: meaning not clear: to by-pass?.*] this period.)

Upon successful completion of the probation period, members shall be recognized as Level I dancers.

- e. All Level I dancers must attend scheduled practices affiliated with the Extended-Basic program of square dancing (Sets in Order, calls 50 through 75). Upon completion of the Extended Training, Level I dancers may elect to remain in this level, or apply for membership in Level II.

In essence, the purpose of Level I is to provide a means for square dancing to those unable to dedicate large portions of time [to the activity], or [to allow an opportunity for] square dancing for fun.

Level II: This level shall be recognized as the Advanced Level, a limited category. The requirements for membership are as follows:

- a. The ability to perform up to and including the Extended-Basic Program of square dancing, [that is] all calls, 1 through 75, according to Sets in Order-America Squaredance Society.
- b. The ability to attend all practices affiliated with Level II for the instruction of Mainstream, including Plus 1 and 2, and any experimental movements in accordance with Callerlab and Sets in Order.
- c. Membership in the American Squaredance Society.
- d. All members must be male.
- e. No individual or particular set shall be sponsored by any outside commercial or non-commercial organization.

The purpose of Level II is to provide an opportunity for serious dancers to excel in learning and executing further advanced steps. NOTE: This level is not intended to be segregated from the Basic level. Participation in the over all scope of the club is a priority of the Advanced level.

### **ARTICLE III: NAME**

The name of this organization shall be **THE MIAMI MUSTANGS.**

## **ARTICLE IV: OFFICERS**

In recognition of the complex nature of square dancing, a governing structure must be created to ensure organization. This shall be [carried out] through the election of officers. [Additional] responsibilities shall be delegated to these positions. The positions are:

Chairman  
Co-chairman  
Secretary  
Treasurer

Terms for these offices shall be limited to one year.

## **ARTICLE V: DUES**

Dues shall be determined by the officers. The amount will be collected quarterly to cover operating expenses of the organization. A membership fee shall also be required, as according to Article II. All payments and transactions shall be handled through the club treasurer only.

## **ARTICLE VI: DRESS AND CONDUCT**

Certain standards shall be required in appearance. These standards apply only for two situations:

### **PRACTICE AND PERFORMANCE**

#### **a. Practice requirements:**

1. Different color shirts to distinguish the partner roles.

#### **b. Performance requirements:**

1. Different color shirts to distinguish the partner roles.
2. Levis blue jeans.
3. Western hats, boots, and taps (suggested/optional).

#### **c. Performance restrictions:**

1. No tennis shoes or sandals.
2. No shorts or cut-offs.

### **CONDUCT:**

No particular restrictions are placed on any members, unless excessive use of alcohol or stimulants directly affect their ability to perform. This applies to practices as well as performances. Any one member has a responsibility to 7 other dancers.

2nd INTERNATIONAL GAY SQUARE DANCE CONVENTION



**Promenade**

MAY 25-26-27, 1985  
DENVER, COLORADO

**Along**

**The**

**Rockies**

**FROM THE ARCHIVES OF THE IAGSDC #2:  
THE FIRST GAY SQUARE DANCERS' FLY-INS  
DENVER IN 1982,  
AND SOUTH FLORIDA IN 1983.**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The first attempt at hosting a gay square dancers' fly-in has to be credited to Denver, where the Mile High Squares (and its parent organization, the Colorado Gay Rodeo Association [CGRA]) issued an invitation for the weekend of November 12-14, 1982. Unfortunately, only five out-of-town dancers, all from San Francisco, attended that event.*

*Credit for the first successful fly-in, with large involvement from other clubs, belongs to the South Florida Mustangs. Their event, beginning with the weekend of February 12-13, 1983, included not only a weekend of dancing, but also an additional week of touring the nearby tourist attractions.*

*Of the four items included here, two came from the personal archives of Karl Jaeckel in Denver and two from Art Smith in Seattle. See additional references to the events described here in the interviews with Alan Hall, Karl Jaeckel, and Art Smith.—LT*

**DOCUMENT #1: ARTICLE FROM THE COLORADO GAY RODEO ASSOCIATION'S NEWSLETTER ANNOUNCING THE NOVEMBER 1982 EVENT**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Karl Jaeckel states: "We scheduled this event soon after meeting "Happy" New Year at the Reno Rodeo in the summer of 1982. Five San Francisco dancers attended, but none came from other cities. The San Francisco dancers were Alan Hall, Paul Zimmerman, Jack Kendrick, Russ King, and Scott Carey."—LT*

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**FIRST NATIONAL GAY SQUARE DANCE EXHIBITION**

Charlie's (Country and Western Bar) is sponsoring a weekend of gay square dancing Nov. 12-14 (1982). Seven gay square dance groups throughout the country have been invited to participate, and, to date, four clubs have responded and will be sending members. Square dancing will start at 7:00 PM Friday, and workshops and work on new calls will be held on Saturday and Sunday afternoon. Dancing will include all levels - Basic, Mainstream, Plus 1, and Plus 2. Dave "Happy" New Year, a southern California gay square dance caller, will be caller and instructor for the weekend.

Square dancers will be arriving in Denver on Friday, and we are asking for volunteers to pick them up at the airport and to have them stay in local homes. For more information, contact John King at Charlie's, or Mike Hart, who is coordinating the event for Charlie's.

## DOCUMENT #2: SCHEDULE FOR THE DENVER WEEKEND

### CHARLIE'S WEEKEND OF GAY SQUARE DANCING & INSTRUCTION DAVE "HAPPY" NEW YEAR FROM LOS ANGELES, CALIF. WILL BE OUR LIVE CALLER

#### AGENDA

Friday, Nov. 12<sup>th</sup>

7 to 9 PM	Charlie's	Get-Acquainted Square Dancing
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Saturday, Nov. 13<sup>th</sup>

1 to 5 PM	Charlie's	Square Dance Workshop
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Break for Dinner

10:15 to 10:30	Charlie's	Exhibition Square Dancing
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10:30 to 10:40	Charlie's	Exhibition Clogging
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Sunday, Nov. 14<sup>th</sup>

11 to 1PM	BJ's	Brunch
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2 to 6 PM	Charlie's	Square Dance Workshop
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7:30 to 8:30 PM	Charlie's	Country and Western Dance Lessons
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9 to 9:30 PM	Charlie's	Country and Western Musical Review (MS Benefit)
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10 to 10:15	Charlie's	Exhibition Square Dancing
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## DOCUMENT #3: A SHORT ARTICLE FROM A PORTLAND, OREGON NEWSPAPER REPORTING THE MIAMI FLY-IN

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The following article about the fly-in is from The Cascade Voice, a Portland publication that described itself as "Oregon's Premier Bi-Weekly Newsmagazine of Alternative Lifestyle." The article appeared on March 25, 1983 (Vol. 2, No.6).—LT*

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### GAY SQUARE DANCE FLY-IN

Square dancing to some may seem extremely old fashioned, but the rise in [the activity's] popularity is apparent from the turnout of groups attending the First National Gay Square Dance Fly-in. Hosted by the South Florida Mustangs, the fly-in was attended by members of Denver's Mile High Squares, Seattle's Puddletown Squares, and San Francisco's Western Star Dancers. The event encompassed nine days of itinerary, including dance exhibitions, parties, and sun.

The Western Star Dancers danced in the ocean to earn their Dolphin Badges.

The National Association of Lesbian/Gay Square Dance Clubs was formed at the fly-in, with representatives from each of the groups meeting to hash out the details of the organization.

The Association set up guidelines for the membership requirements for future groups who may wish to join. The groups must be inclusive, non-profit, and not competitive.

Upcoming square dance events in Seattle:

**Spring Hoedown**, Saturday, April 9.

**Graduation Dance**, Sunday, May 1st, 2 p.m.-5 p.m. The dance is a celebration of the graduation of Seattle's first class and will take place on a ferry boat cruising Puget Sound. Cost is \$5. Portland's own Rose City Ramblers plan to attend.

## DOCUMENT #4: PRESS RELEASE FROM THE SOUTH FLORIDA MUSTANGS ABOUT THEIR FLY-IN, AND A LIST OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE EVENT

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The following press release was sent out by the Mustangs to individuals and publications in Boston, Denver, Seattle, Miami, Atlanta, Houston, San Francisco, and Fort Lauderdale. The Mustangs also compiled a list of the participants, including addresses and phones. Only the individuals' name and club affiliation are reproduced below. —LT*

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February 27th, 1983.

Miami/Hollywood, Florida

On the weekend of February 12th/13th, the South Florida Mustangs hosted the First Annual Gay Square Dance Fly-in. The guest clubs were the Mile High Squares, Denver, Colorado; the Western Star Square Dancers from San Francisco, California; and the Puddletown Squares, Seattle, Washington.

This event was held at the CROSSFIRE, a new Country and Western bar and dance hall in Hollywood, Florida.

After brunch on Sunday, each club put on their costumes and danced several exhibition dances.

On Monday evening, while the beginning groups were practicing, representatives of each club group met and organized the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LESBIAN/GAY SQUARE DANCE CLUBS. One of the goals of this organizations is to encourage new non-profit gay square dance clubs across the country.

The groups spent the following week in central Florida touring the Kennedy Space Center, Epcot, and Disney's Magic Kingdom. More square dancing took place at the Parliament House in Orlando, Florida.

The following is a list of those attending the event.

*[EDITOR'S NOTE: The L or F preceding the name indicates whether the person danced Lead or Follow. It is clear that the gay square dancers' tradition of "bi-dansuality" was already evident at this early stage in the activity's history!—LTJ*

### SOUTH FLORIDA MUSTANGS

F Bruce Upson  
L Howard Janowitz  
L Jim Rosevear  
F Jim Carlton  
L Dean Hofmann  
L Robert Creighton  
L/F Jim McMahon  
L Myron Shalm  
L Winston Hall  
F Peter Amodio  
L/F Doug Thompson  
F Ken DiGenova  
F Bob Montrose  
L/F Chris Phillips

PUDDLETOWN SQUARES  
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

F Art Smith  
L Jim Goeres  
F Tom Dickson

WESTERN STAR  
SQUARE DANCERS  
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

L Hank Rickard  
F Russ King  
L/F Thom Lesniak  
L/F Paul Zimmermann  
L/F Mark Nilson  
L/F Brian Porcher  
L/F Larry Brown  
L Ron Douglas  
F Scott Carey  
F Roger Perry  
L Dennis Ficken

MILE HIGH SQUARES  
DENVER, COLORADO

F Craig McCarthy  
F Dave Robertson  
L Bob Southerland  
L/F Karl Jaeckel  
F Betty Weiland  
L Wayne Jakino  
L Douglas B. Jarrett  
L Mike Hart

LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK

Richard Jannotti, guest Islip, N.Y.

PROSPECT, CONN.

Rob Lutkus, guest



**Third Annual Convention  
of the  
International Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs**

**August 22-25, 1986**

**FROM THE ARCHIVES OF THE IAGSDC #3:  
SELECTED DOCUMENTS FROM  
THE ORGANIZATION'S FIRST YEAR**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The selected documents included here were circulated among the existing clubs and interested people in 1983/84, as efforts to organize a national gay square dancers' organization took place. The particular copies used for this publication came from my personal files, and were sent to the D. C. Lambda Squares in my care, at a time when the club was just beginning to form. They came from Harlan Kerr, then president of the NAGSDC (National Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs), in Seattle, Washington, where he resided at the time.*

*The documents are included here in their original form, with only occasional editorial changes. They cover a variety of topics that were of interest at that time to the member clubs and their leadership, and to prospective member clubs. The documents are not in strict chronological order; their order was assigned to them by the editor so that the story they tell would have a certain logical order for the reader.—LT*

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**DOCUMENT #1: LETTER FROM THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATION'S CHAIRPERSON, HARLAN KERR, AFTER THE RENO RODEO SUGGESTING A TIMETABLE FOR THE FOLLOWING FEW MONTHS AND ULTIMATELY LEADING TO THE FIRST CONVENTION.**

NATIONAL GAY/LESBIAN SQUARE DANCE ASSOCIATION  
P.O. BOX 20604  
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON 98102

**August 16, 1983.**

Dear Association Members,

I have just written a letter from the association to Phil Ragsdale regarding next year's rodeo [*EDITOR'S NOTE: See document #2*]. A copy is enclosed for your information and review. I decided to be low key in the letter to Phil, since I felt we would probably want to open up discussion on next year at Reno before hitting him with a comprehensive criticism of the dance festival and suggestions for change. I plan on maintaining a continuing correspondence with Phil as the year progresses, making stronger suggestions as the planning time for the rodeo draws near.

Here is a suggested timeline for the next two months:

Sept. 1—Representatives from member groups should have their initial news and information input in to me.

Sept. 10—First news/information exchange between member groups. Invitations to other groups to join the association sent out.

Oct. 1—News/Information for the second exchange should be sent to me.

Oct. 10—Second news/information exchange mailed out.

Oct. 20—Convention bids from clubs wishing to hold the first convention should be in. (This is tentative pending approval by member clubs.)

Oct. 23—Convention bids will be sent to club representatives for consideration.

Nov. 1—Along with your news/information exchange, include your feelings about which convention bid to select.

Nov. 10—Along with the monthly news/information exchange, the selection of the convention location will be announced.

I have been giving much thought to the convention since we first discussed it in Reno. Here are some ideas. Please review them and send me your comments along with your news and information for September.

I propose that we have a three-day convention, and that it be held in the late spring. Perhaps the schedule for the convention could be organized along the following lines:

Friday	3-9 p.m.	Registration
	5-7 p.m.	Meet-and-greet happy hour
	7-8 p.m.	Opening activities and welcome
	8 p.m.-midnight	Get-acquainted Dance
Saturday	9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.	Workshops, etc.
	1-4 p.m.	Board meeting
	6-7 p.m.	Dinner
	7:30 p.m.-midnight	Big dance with Grand Promenade, exhibitions, etc.
Sunday	10-11:30 a.m.	Brunch
	Noon-2 p.m.	General Meeting of the Association
	2-5 p.m.	Diehards' Tea Dance
	5-5:30 p.m.	Closing and adjournment

I feel that we can use this schedule like the suggested by-laws, and work with it until we have something that we all are satisfied with. So, discuss it with your local groups and send me their feelings on it. It seems important that the association develop a schedule to provide the host city with, so they can use it in their planning. Other things that we need to consider are the dates for the convention, how it will be financed, and which responsibilities fall on the host city and which on the association as a whole.

I hope that all of you will be able to survey your clubs and get the information back to me.

Sincerely,

Harlan Kerr  
National Chairperson

**DOCUMENT #2: LETTER TO THE ORGANIZERS OF THE RENO GAY RODEO THANKING THEM FOR HOSTING THE COUNTRY DANCE FESTIVAL AT WHICH SOME OF THE EARLY CONTACTS AMONG GAY SQUARE DANCE GROUPS WERE MADE.**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The letter below was addressed to Phil Ragsdale, founder and president of the National Reno Gay Rodeo, where square dancers from different groups around the country first came together. Note that at this point, August 1983, the name of the organization was still not firmly established, and the words Gay/Lesbian still were part of it.—LT*

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NATIONAL GAY/LESBIAN SQUARE DANCE ASSOCIATION  
P.O. BOX 20604  
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON 98102

**August 12, 1983.**

Dear Phil,

On behalf of the National Gay/Lesbian Square Dance Association, I would like to express our appreciation for the inclusion of the Country Dance Festival in the rodeo format this year. All of the association members who attended were pleased to be able to dance with each other and to meet a variety of other country and Western dancers while there. With several new clubs forming, and with our current member clubs offering classes, the association should represent well over 1000 dancers by next summer, and we expect a large percentage of them to be attending the Reno Rodeo.

As you begin planning for next year's rodeo, please feel free to contact me. Any assistance that the National Gay/Lesbian Square Dance Association can provide in planning will be gladly given. In particular, you might want to contact us regarding how many members will be attending, the number of clubs which plan on being represented, and the needs that square dancers might have with regards to performance areas, sound systems, and scheduling.

Again, I want to thank you for all you and Ron Brewer did to make the Country Dance Festival a success and a good time for all of us.

I hope to meet you next summer in Reno, if not before.

Sincerely,

Harlan Kerr  
Interim National Chairperson  
National Gay/Lesbian Square Dance Association

cc: Puddletown Squares, Western Star Dancers, South Florida Mustangs, Mile High Squares [Denver], Rosetown Ramblers, New Year's Resolutions, Wilde Bunch

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The dancers who had participated in the Reno Rodeo of 1982 had been somewhat frustrated that dancing had not received more appropriate space and attention. An effort was launched to lobby the rodeo's organizer, Phil Ragsdale, and convince him to change this situation. The following letter was circulated among the existing gay square dance clubs. The effort was successful, and the various Western dance forms received their own separate full schedule of activities at the 1983 rodeo. (See the preceding two documents; see also references to the 1983 Reno Rodeo in Karl Jaeckel's interview and elsewhere.) This document was provided by Karl Jaeckel. —LT*

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**CAPITAL CITY SQUARES  
Sacramento, California**

**October 9, 1982.**

Dear Dancers,

We are attempting to put together a format to present to Mr. Phil Ragsdale of the Reno Gay Rodeo in an effort to have square dancing and clogging become a more involved part of the Gay Rodeo in Reno this next year, 1983. We are suggesting a dance convention in conjunction with the Rodeo, with the Capital City Squares as the co-hosts and organizers.

We would like each club to be a real part of an event of this caliber, so we are asking for your support and suggestions. In the suggestion department, we would like to get an idea of what you would like to see, do, and be a part of in an event of this kind. Also, please give us your thoughts concerning the possibility of having the convention before or after the Reno Rodeo, either in Reno, or in another city.

As we receive your input and start putting together all our ideas, we will keep everyone posted as to how things are developing. The sooner we can get your ideas and suggestions, the sooner you'll hear back from us. We hope to be hearing from you soon and often.

Sincerely,

Ed Chancy  
Roseville, California  
For the Capital City Squares  
of Sacramento, California

### DOCUMENT #3: AN INVITATION TO JOIN THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GAY SQUARE DANCE CLUBS

BOX 20604

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON 98102

*[No date, but the postmark on the envelope containing all the documents in this section is **November 28, 1983.**]*

The National Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs is continually seeking to broaden its membership, and we would like to extend an invitation to your local group to apply for association membership. The association is based on four principles that unite our members. These are:

1) Association member groups are Gay oriented. That is, that they consist mainly (although not necessarily exclusively) to provide square dancing activities for the Gay community.

2) Association member groups use Callerlab format in their approach to teaching and performing Modern Western Square Dancing. The main way in which they vary from Callerlab format is in the use of same sex couples.

3) Groups belonging to the association are non-profit making in structure and intent. That is that the member groups exist mainly for social, educational and recreational purposes, and are not primarily performing groups or groups that exist for profit-making purposes.

4) Association member groups and activities are non-competitive in nature. That is, that member groups do not engage in competitive dancing with other member groups.

The primary purpose for having a national association is to provide a basis for communication between Gay square dance groups, to help promote square dancing within our community, and to plan regional and national events for us to come together at. In addition, it is a basic goal of the association to provide assistance to new groups that are forming.

If your group would like to become a part of the association, please send us a letter that explains how your group meets the criteria outlined in the four basic principles of the association listed above. Be sure to include information on how your group is structured, how many members you have, how old you are, how often you meet, and any other information that you feel is pertinent. The association requests a \$10 application fee to cover the cost of reproducing your application, having members around the country review it, and to cover the cost of initial information that will be sent to you. Please allow three weeks from the time you submit your application to receive notification.

If there is any area related to square dancing that you feel the association can help you with, please feel free to contact us. Also, if you are forming a new club and need assistance, please let us know.

Sincerely,

Harlan Kerr

National Chairperson, National Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs

**DOCUMENT #4: THE FIRST OF THE MONTHLY COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIRPERSON TO THE MEMBER CLUBS IN AN EFFORT TO MAINTAIN LINES OPEN AMONG THE MEMBERS**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This document is of particular importance, since it describes in detail the results of the organizing meetings of the future IAGSDC held at the Reno Rodeo in August of 1983, and the guiding principles of the organization as they were delineated at that time.—LT*

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NATIONAL GAY/LESBIAN SQUARE DANCE ASSOCIATION  
P.O. BOX 20604  
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON 98102

**September 10, 1983.**

Dear Association Members,

As I have mentioned before, the upcoming year should be both exciting and a great deal of work, as we move to make the association a functional, growing, and viable organization. This mailing is the first of monthly news and information exchanges that will serve both to provide communication between the various clubs in the association, and to conduct association business. Earlier, I sent out two letters. These letters asked the members of the four founding clubs to comment on a number of issues. Herein, I am including both those letters and the replies that I have received. In addition, I am sending letters of invitation to join the association to all existing clubs I know of. I would appreciate it if those clubs could include their responses to the issues listed in my two earlier letters along with their applications for membership. The following is a summary of the initial letter that I sent out following the meetings that were held on the final day of the Reno Rodeo:

Dear Association Members,

As most of you know, there were two meetings held on the last day of the rodeo. The first of these was open to all square dance groups, while the second was a meeting of the four founding groups of the association. During the first meeting, the underlying goals of the association were outlined, along with the concepts that unify the member clubs. In addition, initial discussion was given to the concept of holding a national convention in 1984. As outlined by Scott Carey of Western Star Dancers, the association is open to any Modern Western Square Dance club or group that meets the following criteria:

- 1) Member clubs must be Gay/Lesbian oriented. This means that the main intent of the club must be to provide members of the Gay and Lesbian communities with a place to engage in square dancing and related activities. It does not mean that member clubs have to be exclusively Gay.

2) Member clubs and groups must use the Callerlab format. The intent here is to insure a uniform approach to the teaching and performance of square dancing. The main way in which member clubs vary from Callerlab format is in the use of same-sex partners.

3) Clubs and groups belonging to the association are non-profit making in structure and intent. For the most part, member clubs provide social, recreational, and educational opportunities for Modern Western Square Dancing, and are not performing groups that have been formed with the intent of performing for profit as a goal. It was discussed in Reno that we may want to offer an “associate member” category for groups that are essentially profit-making in nature.

4) The association adheres to a non-competitive relationship between its members, and does not support or sponsor competitive activities for square dancing. The association encourages, and should provide as many opportunities as possible, for members to come together on a local, regional, and national level, however, none of these is done with the intent of having competition between member groups.

In addition to the four unifying principles of the association, four initial goals were also discussed. These were:

1) To promote communication between member groups.

2) To help build the association through the promotion of Gay square dancing, and by encouraging the development of new clubs.

3) To encourage and develop regional and national events where member groups can gather and share dancing, ideas, and friendship. One of the main thoughts in this area is the holding of a national convention on an annual basis.

4) To provide support and encouragement to all association members and forming clubs.

At the second meeting in Reno, the four founding member clubs discussed formalizing the association’s structure and setting up a framework for communication between members, and a process for bringing new groups into the association. One of the main things decided was to have a national chairperson who would coordinate communication between member clubs, in order to provide a forum discussing association business and concerns.

In addition, it was proposed that each member group select a person to be that club’s representative to the association. This person would receive information from the association, and report back to the association his/her club’s feelings about various issues. Each group’s concerns, ideas, and responses to issues would be copied by the chairperson and sent out on a monthly basis.

It was further decided that we would ask member clubs to submit bids for holding the first annual convention in 1984. Bids should include information on why the group wants to host the convention, their ideas on how the convention could best be handled in their community, and suggested dates. Since the convention should take a long time to plan, interested groups should submit their bids as soon as possible. Also, member clubs should send in the name and address of their representative to the association.

One of the main things discussed in Reno was the process for bringing new clubs into the association. We decided to send a letter of invitation to all clubs and groups we are aware of, and ask them to complete an application for membership. In addition, we decided to ask each group to address how it meets the four unifying principles of the association that were listed above. We are asking the clubs to pay a \$10.00 processing fee along with their application. Later, when dues are set, all groups will be asked to pay them. Should the current members decide that a club does not meet the criteria that we have set up, they will be given an opportunity to provide further information before being turned down.

The remainder of this letter will be devoted to three subjects:

- 1) The need for association by-laws
- 2) Some ideas on the national convention
- 3) Initial ideas that the chairperson would like member clubs to discuss and respond to.

## BY-LAWS

I found that while working on the by-laws for Puddletown Squares, the easiest way to initiate discussion was to provide a set of initial by-laws for members to work [over] critically, and modify and change until they suited our purposes. Therefore, I am asking you to consider the following by-laws that we can discuss and alter until they suit the association:

### PROPOSED BY-LAWS FOR THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GAY/LESBIAN SQUARE DANCE CLUBS

#### ARTICLE I: NAME

The name of this association shall be the National Association shall be the National Association of Lesbian/Gay Square Dance Clubs.

(NOTE: At Reno there was a lot of discussion about deleting the word Lesbian. All four member groups have discussed this and agree as of this mailing [that] the word Lesbian should be dropped. Their reasons are included in their club news response below.)

#### ARTICLE II: PURPOSE

It shall be the collective purpose of the members to encourage and provide social, educational, and recreational opportunities for Modern Western Square Dancing. (NOTE: I propose we add “on a local, regional, and national level” after “Dancing.”) All member clubs are expected to operate under four principles that unify the association. These principles are:

- 1) Member groups are Gay/Lesbian oriented. That is that they mainly (though not necessarily exclusively) consist of Gay and Lesbian members. (NOTE: I propose that we add “and exist with the intent of providing members of the Gay community with opportunities to engage in Modern Western Square Dancing.”)

- 2) Member clubs use Callerlab format for the teaching and performance of square dancing. The main variation that member clubs have from Callerlab format is the inclusion of same sex couples.
- 3) Clubs belonging to the association (with the exception of associate members) are non-profit making in structure and intent. That is, that member groups exist mainly for social, recreational, and educational purposes, and are not primarily performing groups, or groups that make appearances for profit.
- 4) Association member groups are non-competitive in concept. Member groups do not engage in competitive dancing with other member groups.

### ARTICLE III: MEMBERSHIP

Section 1. Membership is open to any group that meets the criteria included in the four principles outlined in ARTICLE II.

Section 2. Groups wishing to become members of the association will be asked to apply formally. The board of the association will examine the application, and, if the group applying meets the four unifying principles for membership, they will be granted member status upon payment of dues.

Section 3. Dues are payable annually, and are set by the executive board of the association.

Section 4. Membership categories.

1) Full membership

Full membership is granted to any group that meets the four principles outlined in ARTICLE II, and is approved by the executive board. Full membership is contingent upon payment of dues. Groups that are granted full member status will select, by their own processes, a representative to the executive board.

2) Individual membership

Individual membership is granted to each member of a full member group. The executive board may set an appropriate fee for each individual within a full member group. Individual members are granted member status at all association functions, and may participate as voting members in all general meetings of the association. They have the right of voicing their ideas and opinions to the executive board for consideration.

3) Associate membership

Associate membership may be granted to groups that do not meet the four principles outlined in ARTICLE II. These groups may have non-voting representation to the executive board, and their members may attend general meetings of the association in a non-voting status.

## ARTICLE IV: EXECUTIVE BOARD

### Section 1. Executive Board Membership

Each group that is granted full Membership status in the association shall select, by its own processes, a representative to the executive board. Each Associate Member group shall select a non-voting representative to the executive board. At the annual convention, the executive board shall elect a National Chairperson, who will serve until the next convention.

### Section 2. Duties of the Executive Board Members

#### a) Representatives from Member Groups

The representatives from Full Member groups shall serve as voting members of the executive board, and shall serve as their group's voice in discussing board business. They shall submit a monthly summary of their group's ideas and concerns on association business, and relay the concerns and ideas of other member groups to their home group. They shall vote on the National Chairperson at national conventions. In addition, they shall perform all duties incidental to the office. Associate member representatives shall perform the same duties in a non-voting capacity.

#### b) National Chairperson

The National Chairperson shall serve to coordinate the exchange of information between members of the executive board and member groups. He/She shall prepare a monthly bulletin that will be sent to each member group. This shall include issues of concern to the association, as well as input from individual groups regarding these concerns. The National Chairperson shall chair national meetings of the executive board and general membership. In addition, she/he shall perform all duties incidental to the office.

### Section 3. Removal of Executive Board Members.

#### a) National Chairperson

The National Chairperson may be removed from office by a 2/3 majority voting of the members of the executive board.

#### b) [Group representatives]

Individual member groups may remove their representatives by their own processes.

## ARTICLE V: MEETINGS AND QUORUMS

### Section 1. Executive board meetings

a) An executive board meeting shall be held at least annually, at the national convention. At this meeting, the board members shall conduct the business of the executive board and elect the National Chairperson from among its members. Additional meetings may be called as needed.

b) A quorum for the conduct of executive board business shall consist of a majority of the representatives of full member groups.

c) Only representatives of full member groups may vote on board business.

- d) Robert's Rules of Order shall serve as governing authority in instances of dispute.
- e) In lieu of board meetings, executive board business may be carried on via correspondence managed by the National Chairperson. Correspondence on association business shall take place on a monthly basis.

#### Section 2. Annual Convention and General Meetings

- a) An annual convention of the association shall be held between April 1 and May 31 of each year. The purpose of the convention is to bring the membership together for educational, recreational, and social dancing activities related to Modern Western Square Dancing, and to conduct the business of the association.
- b) A general meeting of the membership shall be held during the convention. At the general meeting, the National Chairperson and Executive Board shall present a State of the Association report. All individual members of the association who are members of Full Member groups shall be allowed to speak and vote on business and issues at the general meeting.
- c) Robert's Rules of Order shall be the governing authority in instances of dispute.

#### ARTICLE VI: AMENDMENT TO THE BY-LAWS

These by-laws may be amended by a 2/3 majority of the members present and voting at a general meeting of the association held during the National Convention.

Please examine these by-laws and send me any changes that your group feels are necessary. Other items that I would like your input on:

- How should the national convention be set up? How should we select the member group to host it?
- What activities is your group planning in the upcoming year that you would like to invite other members to?
- How is your local group organized? How big is it? Do you offer classes?
- What things does your group feel the association should be doing during the next year?

This is an initial letter to get the flow of information going. Your help in this process, by responding to the issues addressed above, would be greatly appreciated. I'm very excited about the association and the possibilities that lie ahead of us. There is a lot of work to do, but the results will be well worth it. I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Harlan Kerr

National Chairperson, National Association of Gay/Lesbian Square Dance Clubs

**DOCUMENT #5: LETTER FROM WESTERN STAR DANCERS DESCRIBING THE CONDITION OF THE CLUB IN AUGUST 1983, BEFORE THE FIRST CONVENTION IN SEATTLE.**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This document and the following one contain descriptions of local clubs and are part of the efforts of the chairperson of the NAGSDC, Harlan Kerr, to maintain communication among the fledgling clubs of the organizations. The purpose was to make the clubs aware of each other's activities and operating procedures, thus making everyone aware of what had been tried, what worked, and what did not.—LT*

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**August 31, 1983.**

Hello Harlan:

Foster [no last name given in the document], here; hoping to provide some of the information you requested. I will attempt to put the info in appropriate categories.

Organization of W.S.D.:

I have enclosed a copy of the description of our club which we hand out to possible new members. It is complete, and I could not be more so. The only addition is that we presently provide an evening of Plus instruction for those who qualify. It is on Thursday evening at the home of one of our members. Club members are teaching this level. Records are the primary mode of instruction. Guest callers are being considered.

Upcoming events:

As regards upcoming events, we will be sending you a copy of our newsletter each month. In connection to this, we send copies to each of the gay square dance clubs.

You may want to take notice of the following: 9/19 through 9-26, 1983 is National Square Dance Week. Also on 9/21 it is suggested that all square dancers telegraph their respective representatives advising them to vote yes on H.R. #706, which will make square dancing the official American folk dance. Pass it on.

Notes on Reno:

Per your fine correspondence to us in August, we are of the opinion that you have that matter very well covered. Should you have specific questions, do not hesitate to ask us.

Comments on the 1984 Convention:

I believe that a convention for 1984 is a good idea, that it should last for three days (and no longer), provide time for dancing, socializing, and birthing the National Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs.

I suggest that clubs which achieve national membership by this December 31,1983 should have direct input for the designing of the '84 convention. Those clubs achieving membership subsequent to that should be asked for input for the 1985 [convention].

I presently support your tentative schedule for the '84 convention and will make suggestions in this regard when I have them.

[ATTACHMENT]

WESTERN STAR DANCERS  
223 SANCHEZ  
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94114  
(415) 864-6134

HISTORY AND PURPOSE. Since March 1982, Western Star Dancers has grown from its five founding members to both a club and class of about 100 square dancers. We are a Lesbian/gay non-competitive club which seeks to (1) promote square dancing as a national activity, (2) provide an identity for Mainstream dancers, and (3) provide and promote opportunities for Mainstream calling and instruction.

Although WSD is for dancing, it is our constant objective to achieve a harmonious balance between satisfactory dance experiences and the general social needs of its members. Our stated policies are to: (1) promote fellowship within the group by square dance and other activities, (2) pursue a spirit of cooperation, support, and positive encouragement, (3) enhance the lifestyle of our members and their friends, and (4) encourage the sharing of responsibilities and duties by all members.

WHY JOIN WSD. We teach the 68 Mainstream calls as currently defined by Callerlab, the organization which defines and guides square dancing in the U. S. Our graduates are at the Mainstream level, the first level of square dancing and the level at which the majority of square dancing in America is done. Knowing the Mainstream calls enables us to comfortably dance not only at our own club, but also at other clubs and square dance gatherings across the United States.

MEMBERSHIP. WSD is open to anyone regardless of race, religion, ethnic background, age, gender, or sexual orientation and is available to those who have successfully completed a course of Mainstream instruction. Potential members can receive instruction in classes sponsored by WSD. As an urban square dance club, WSD's membership has an extremely broad range of personalities, career skills, and non-square-dancing interests. Although blending all these talents together is not always easy, the mix provides the club with almost limitless ideas and challenges.

ACTIVITIES. Weekly activities include club night on Wednesday and class night on Thursday—both at the Golden Gate YMCA in San Francisco. Class is conducted entirely with a caller; club night is a mix of a caller and a few recorded singing calls.

While Western Star Dancers is committed to providing a supportive atmosphere for Mainstream dancers, during club night Plus-level calls are taught on a gradual basis. Occasionally workshops are conducted at members' homes in Basic, Mainstream, and Plus levels. Additionally, some members are experimenting with the dance form in innovative ways.

The monthly newsletter, THE WESTERN STAR, is an integral part of WSD's communication with its members. In addition to articles of general interest, it announces special activities such as monthly dances featuring tips through the Plus level, a luncheon group formed to provide a social activity for those who work in the Financial District in San Francisco, and theater parties just for fun.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, please give us a call or drop us a note. The address and phone number are at the top.

Western Star Dancers is a founding member of the  
National Association of Lesbian/Gay Square Dance Clubs

**DOCUMENT #6: LETTER FROM EMERALD CITY SQUARES, SEATTLE, TO THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE NAGSDC DESCRIBING THE CLUB AS OF OCTOBER 1983.**

EMERALD CITY SQUARES  
2584 9TH AVENUE W.  
SEATTLE, WA 98119

October 9, 1983

Harlan Kerr, National Chairperson  
National Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs

Dear Harlan and Association Members,

As members of Emerald City Squares, we are delighted to respond to your invitation to apply for membership in the National Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs. The information that you sent about the association has been reviewed, and Emerald City Squares is in full accord with the four unifying principles as defined. Please accept this letter as a formal request for membership in the association.

Emerald City Squares is a DBD Plus club and was founded on September 11, 1983. The club was started by a group of Puddletown Squares members who had been dancing 3 + nights a week, and who wished to dance the Plus program of Modern Western square dancing. We credit Puddletown Squares, not quite a year old, for making the formation of a Plus club possible at this early date. The high quality program of Mainstream instruction offered by Puddletown Squares enabled us to develop the proficiency level necessary to move into the Plus program much sooner than would ordinarily be expected. We are a non-profit, member-run club with no formal by-laws or structure. Club business is conducted at open meetings and committees are appointed as needed to accomplish specific tasks. We have no caller and rely on member instructors, tapes, and Callerlab-approved manuals to conduct our classes. The club meets on Sunday afternoons, and we expect to complete the Plus program of instruction by the end of January 1984. Our current membership is about 20 dancers.

Emerald City Squares meets the criteria outlined in the four basic principles of the association as follows:

1. Emerald City Squares is a gay-oriented club whose purpose is to provide to the gay community instruction and activities relating to the Plus program of Modern Western square dancing. Membership is open to anyone who is in accord with the stated purpose of the club and meets the following requirements:
  - A. Successful completion of a Callerlab-approved Mainstream program of instruction.
  - B. Membership and active participation in a Mainstream Club.

C. Demonstration of a proficient Mainstream dance level. For the purpose of this requirement, proficient is defined as knowing the 68 Mainstream basics by definition, being able to dance them by reflex in any logical order, and being able to dance in a relaxed, considerate, and comfortable manner.

2. Emerald City Squares adheres to the exact definitions as approved by Callerlab in teaching and in dancing. We take exception with Callerlab on two points only:
  - A. Couples may be the same or opposite sex.
  - B. Courtesy turn, California twirl, curlique, box the gnat, star thru, and slide thru are not sex-oriented calls when dancing by definition.
3. Emerald City Squares is a nonprofit club in structure and intent. The club exists for social, educational, and recreational purposes, with primary emphasis on excellence in dancing.
4. Emerald City Squares is not a competitive club by nature or by activity. ECS will neither engage in nor suggest competitive dancing with association member clubs.

If accepted into the association, Emerald City Squares will abide by the association by-laws as drafted, and be an active and enthusiastic participant in association activities. We are looking forward to a favorable response from the association and thank you for the invitation.

Happy dancing!

Emerald City Squares

**DOCUMENT #7: UNDATED REPORT FROM PUDDLETOWN SQUARES TO THE ASSOCIATION.**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The following document is an eloquent witness to the initial success of gay square dancing in Seattle.—LT*

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Dear Association Members,

Puddletown Squares is almost one year old. We currently have about 120 active members, and have graduated over 180 Mainstream dancers in the past year. Beginning Sept. 20th, we will offer our third class for beginners, and have over 100 people planning on attending. Right now a great deal of energy is being put into putting together a bid to hold the first annual convention of the association, and members should be receiving this soon.

We support the National Association by-laws as written, and feel that we should use them to operate for the time being, [pending] an official adoption at the convention. Perhaps we could make initial modifications that all member groups agree on, and set a date of Nov.1st for changes and modifications to be made. A survey of the women in our group indicated that they felt that the word Lesbian should be dropped from the name. The men in our group support this decision.

We feel right now it is important to get as many of the existing groups as possible into the association. The sooner this can be done, the sooner the association can truly be representative of Gay square dancers on a national basis.

Although we continue to plan on attending the Reno rodeo, we also feel that it is important that we attend and support other regional and national events, too. The main annual event that we feel we should focus on is our own (the NAGSDC) convention, but we hope to have a number of members attend the Colorado rodeo, the South Florida Mustangs' Fly-in, and Reno. We feel that a critical analysis of Reno and how it is set up and managed is necessary.

Our next newsletter should be out in a week or so, and a copy will be sent to all association members.

Sincerely,

Harlan

**DOCUMENT #8: A LETTER TO MEMBER CLUBS REGARDING ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS AND LISTING PRESENT AND PROSPECTIVE MEMBER CLUBS**

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GAY SQUARE DANCE CLUBS  
P.O. BOX 20604  
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON 98102

[No date - 1983.]

Fellow dancers,

It's been a while [since you've heard from me], and I am sure that many of you might be wondering what is going on. Enclosed is a current update.

Puddletown Squares has submitted the enclosed bid to host the first NAGSDC convention. Please respond with your feelings on this as soon as possible.

The South Florida Mustangs are planning on hosting another Square Dance Fly-In in February [ED: 1984], during the week of the 11th through the 18th. They would like a tentative head count as soon as possible. Write or call Ken DiGenova at 13100 N.W. 17th Avenue, Miami, Florida 33167, phone 305/687-1117. If you cannot make it for the week, try the weekend. It would be nice to see as many people as possible there.

As long as you are getting head counts, perhaps we can get a tentative count of those who will be attending the convention, the Colorado Regional Rodeo, and the Reno Rodeo.

In order to facilitate getting things going in a more structured fashion, I am asking approval of setting up a local advisory and work committee here in Seattle. The purpose of this committee would be to write press releases, help get out news and information, and generally assist me in writing and publishing a newsletter on a regular basis. If approved, this committee would consist of two members of Puddletown Squares and two members of Emerald City Squares (pending final approval of Emerald City's membership in the association). The people I would like to be on this committee are Agnes Smith from Emerald City, Bob Jones from Emerald City, Doug McPherson from Puddletown, and John Paul Olafson from Puddletown. This committee would meet on the first and third Sundays to coordinate National Association communications. This added structure should help improve the quality and frequency of communication. Please let me know what you think of this.

BY-LAWS: I would like to propose that we adopt the proposed by-laws on a tentative basis as written, and that we operate under them beginning December 15 and submit them for revision and final approval by the general membership at the convention. That will do three things:

- 1) give us a set of by-laws to operate under,
- 2) give us a longer time to consider and discuss them among the members of each club,
- 3) give the total membership a chance to participate in the final revision and adoption in a situation where we can discuss the by-laws among ourselves.

Please let me know what you think of this proposal.

I am asking the association to approve the following:

- Accept the bid by Puddletown Squares to host the first convention (see enclosure),
- Endorse and encourage participation and support of the South Florida Mustangs Flyln,
- Accept Emerald City Squares' application for membership,
- Extend tentative membership to the following clubs pending their submitting a letter of application, \$10 fee, and official approval by the board:

Wilde Bunch—Albuquerque

Capital City Squares—Sacramento

Midnight Squares—San Francisco

Sundancers (New Years' Resolutions)—Palm Springs

Lambda Squares—Washington, D.C.

Rosetown Ramblers—Portland, Oregon

New Year's Resolutions [—Palm Springs]

John Barley Square Dancers—Vancouver, British  
Columbia, Canada

- Ask the following clubs to become associate members:

Foggy City Squares—San Francisco

Fistful of Crinolines—Seattle

Happy dancing,

Harlan Kerr

**DOCUMENT #9: LETTER FROM WAYNE JAKINO, PRESIDENT OF THE COLORADO GAY RODEO ASSOCIATION REPORTING ON DENVER'S MILE HIGH SQUARES AND PROPOSING A "NATIONAL GAY DANCE ASSOCIATION"**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Clogging and Country/Western dancing have been associated with the gay square dance movement from its earliest days. There have been a number of large and highly-trained clogging groups that have developed within the gay community concurrently with square dancing. The next three documents, beginning with the letter below from Wayne Jakino, president of the Colorado Gay Rodeo Association, show an attempt to bring all these forms of dance together under an umbrella organization similar to the square dancers' IAGSDC.*

*This and similar attempts failed to produce results, primarily because the orientation of the various dance forms was simply too different: clogging groups have been traditionally geared towards public performance, while square dance clubs have been most concerned with recreation and with providing a social outlet for their members. In the intervening years, although clogging workshops and Country/Western dancing have always been a part of IAGSDC gatherings, their role has always been subordinated to that of square dancing for all participants.*

*The documents are also interesting for the background they provide on the development of gay square dancing in Denver, initially under the umbrella of the C.G.R.A., and eventually as an independent activity, and for the insights they give on the discussions about whether to include the term "Lesbian" in the name of the new national square dancers' organization, a debate which as we approach our 10th year, seems ready to surface again.—LT*

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COLORADO GAY RODEO ASSOCIATION  
7900 E. COLFAX  
DENVER, CO 80220

**August 26, 1983.**

Dear Harlan,

The Colorado Gay Rodeo Association is very pleased to have someone serving as chairperson and coordinator during the formative part of a national dance organization. It is with great pride and respect that, in encouraging the growth of any group, we here in Denver point to the success of the Puddletown Squares. Congratulations!! Enclosed please find the initial check from C.G.R.A. for our own "Mile High Squares." This letter represents the views of the nine-member Board of Directors of C.G.R.A.

We are a large organization made up of 320 members, with 159 holding current "dues paid" status. We are a non-profit organization under the State of Colorado and Federal guidelines. Our interests are quite diverse, including not only the Mile High Squares, but also the Denver Country Cloggers, the C.G.R.A. Round Dancers, the Mounted Drill Team, and members participating in the

various rodeo events and horse riding areas. Many members are involved in more than one area of interest, which can become very time consuming. All the individuals belong because we encourage individual growth, self-respect, and total community support without separatism.

You will be receiving a separate letter of viewpoint from Karl Jaeckel, one of our leading square dance instructors, with opinions garnered from the currently active square dancers. Presently holding board positions on our nine-member board are four square dancers and two cloggers. I point this out because all six have been instrumental in forming our dance groups and continue to work for the broadest growth possible.

1. Name for [the] National Organization?

We prefer that the word Lesbian be dropped from the name and that in the by-laws and letter of invitation, wherever the wording **Gay /Lesbian** or word **Gay** appears, that it be changed to read **Gay men and women**. In soliciting opinions in this area, we found the word Lesbian to be a separatist term, and that those few who prefer it would not generally belong to mixed groups of both men and women. Since the term refers to women, we [referred] to women as our primary [source] for an opinion.

2. To Include What Groups?

We would like to encourage that the organization also examine the possibility that all dance groups be included and the name become the **NATIONAL GAY DANCE ASSOCIATION**, encompassing as many groups as possible. It is a shame to further divide our community by duplication of purpose, i.e. National Gay Cloggers, etc. The majority of Colorado dancers enjoyed the format used on Thursday and Friday in Reno as opposed to the Saturday night split. [The] C.G.R.A. board suggests the use of a facility with adjoining rooms, the largest for all groups, and smaller rooms for each workshop area.

The by-laws you have submitted are great, and we felt they and the other information sent displayed present plans for a National Association to be a means of communication between groups. The National Board would be for the purpose of coordinating a National Convention and other opportunities for dance festivals around the country. A division to sub-boards for each specific dance area handles the problems and needs of those separate areas. The member representatives from each team would serve on the sub-board and national board. On a separate sheet, we have prepared a flow-chart to explain our thinking. **[See attachment.]**

We sincerely hope that consideration will be given to this idea. With current pressures of AIDS in our community, we are pleased that all the various styles of “country” dancing interest in our community provide some positive and healthy alternatives within our lifestyle. Never more than now have we needed to encourage unity and support of each other, and C.G.R. A. points with pride to the tremendous success of square dancing in Seattle, Portland, Miami, San Francisco, and other cities. These groups have the opportunity, through their own positive attitudes, to encourage all forms of dance groups to collectively unite in support of each other.

### 3. First National Convention Site?

Denver would love to have that privilege. In reasoning, we could point out our central location and that all could travel equal distances to get here. But, in looking at all sides for the direction that meets the needs of the majority, rather than just a few, we have agreed that the Seattle or Portland area would be the best site. These cities, along with San Francisco, have the largest concentration of dancers, and it would be much easier for the groups with relatively smaller teams to travel the greater distance. We hope you will make a bid to be the host city!

### 4. Groups Planning to Travel?

The Mile High Squares will be traveling to our closest square dancing neighbors in Albuquerque New Mexico on October 8th and 9th to dance with the all-new “Wild Crowd [sic].” Anyone who is interested is welcome to join us for a relaxed and fun weekend.

### 5. Rocky Mountain Regional Rodeo?

The Second Annual Rocky Mountain Regional Rodeo, sponsored by the Colorado Gay Rodeo Association, is scheduled for June 1,2, and 3, 1984. It would give us great pleasure if the new National Gay Dance Association would plan and host a dance festival in Denver to coincide with our rodeo weekend. Please consider this your formal invitation to coordinate a festival. We would like about half as much time as in Reno, and without scheduling dancing during the hours of the rodeo. Your member representatives from Denver will do the leg work to find proper accommodations. At present writing, most of the Reno rodeo contestants are stating that they do not plan to participate in Reno next year, which could effectively reduce the size of that rodeo. It is our hope that Mr. Ragsdale will respond to the inquiries regarding the prize money and the point system in such a way that these people will feel it is worthwhile returning to Reno in 1984! Regardless of what happens with Reno, we are expecting a large turnout for our R.M.R.R. in June.

### 6. Current Publications

Our monthly newsletter, “ROUND-UP,” is at press at this moment, and we expect the mail this weekend. Anyone wishing to receive this newsletter for yourself, your organization, or bar should send a request to:

C.G.R.A., 7900 E. Colfax, Denver, CO 80220

### 7. To Harlan, the Puddletown Squares, and All Fellow Dancers:

We are extremely grateful for all the energy and time you all are putting forward to get the new association off the ground. We all know how difficult it is to get even a local group together, and the problems are only compounded by going for a national scope. Feel free to contact the Colorado Gay Rodeo Association if you need help that can be rendered from this end.

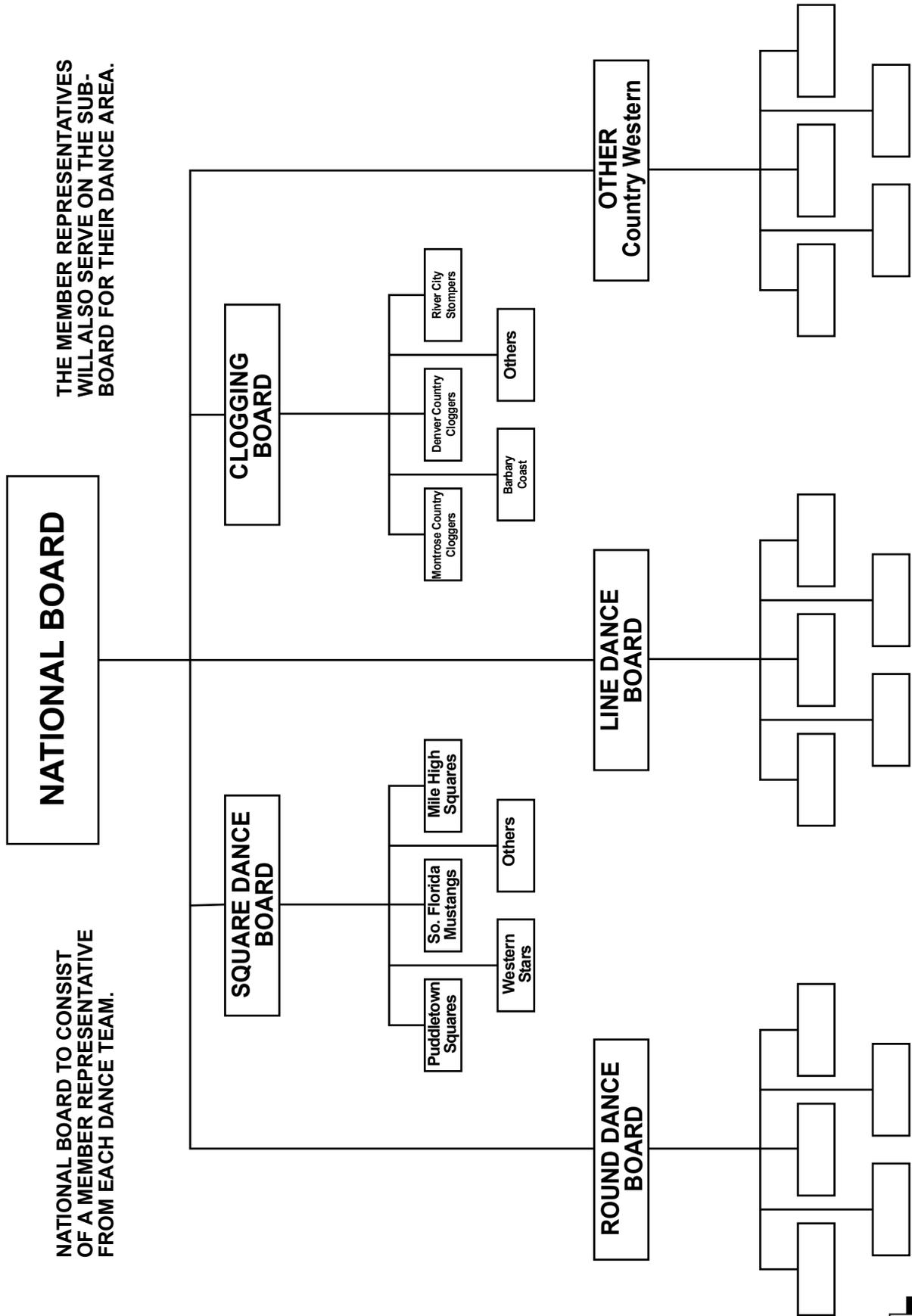
Thank you again!

Wayne Jakino

President

C.G.R.A.

[ATTACHMENT - FLOW CHART OF THE PROPOSED NATIONAL GAY DANCE ASSOCIATION]



## **DOCUMENT #10: LETTER FROM MILE HIGH SQUARES, DENVER, TO THE ASSOCIATION DESCRIBING THE CLUB AND DISCUSSING SOME OF THE CLUB'S CONCERNS AS THE ASSOCIATION TAKES SHAPE**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The document below is the companion letter by Karl Jaeckel mentioned in the preceding document from Wayne Jakino. In his letter, Karl also touches on the use of the term "Lesbian," and the initial attempt to make square dance calls non-sexual, an attempt that was not successful. As opposed to Wayne Jakino, Karl did not favor the creation of a national gay dance association, seeing clearly that square dancers had specific interests and approaches which differed radically from the other dance forms. (See the interview with Karl Jaekel for further details of developments in Denver.)—LT*

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**[MILE HIGH SQUARES  
C/O CHARLIE'S]  
7900 E. COLFAX  
DENVER, CO 802202**

**September 1, 1983.**

Dear Harlan and association members:

This letter will be brief, as I received your letter just three days ago, and I see you would like a response today. The main reason we Mile High Squares are sending two letters is that we are divided over the issue of the scope of the national association. I will address the instructor's feelings on that issue and will make responses to the other topics.

### **DESCRIPTION OF THE CLUB**

We are currently a group of about fifteen active dancers. After taking a break from dancing in August, we are now meeting each Monday evening from 7 til 9 PM at Charlie's Western Bar. Most of our dancers know Plus material; some are learning Advanced. Our immediate goals are:

1. to find a caller who will teach a beginning class this Fall. Three callers we have been in touch with, all of whom knew we are gay, said they do not have time to work with our group. A fourth caller, Tom Smith, is interested in working with us. Bob Southerland and I met with Tom tonight and have set the week of Sept. 12 as the first time Tom will call for us. We told Tom a little about the history of our club, our goals for the coming months, and about the development of the national association. We're now hoping that Tom will share our excitement about the growth potential of the club. Our arrangement with him is that we'll pay him \$40 per night, plus a percentage if we get over four squares. We'll see how that works.

2. to make arrangements for a centrally-located, non-bar dance space. One good reason for moving our dancing from Charlie's is location; Charlie's is approximately sixty blocks east of the heaviest gay area in Denver. By moving our dancing to the central 'Capital Hill' area, we will increase the accessibility of the club. Also, by establishing a separate location for the club, we should strengthen the club's identity, resulting in stronger attraction power.

## BY-LAWS, IN PARTICULAR THE SCOPE OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION

We (Mile High Squares instructors) are in concurrence with the by-laws as they are written. We feel that it is not appropriate to include in the association forms of dancing other than square dancing. The concerns, the problems, and the educational processes involved in square dancing are unique to square dancing. It should be expected that square dancers will want to unite around their common interest, but it should not be expected that dancers of other forms of dancing will want to unite with us, and vice-versa. We are not saying that we want to be segregated from other dancers; we simply mean that our primary interest and the focus of our attention will be square dancing.

We do suggest that you drop the term 'Lesbian' throughout the by-laws. I support Scott Carey's (Western Stars) wish, stated in Reno, that we set an example of unity within the gay community. Why is there a need for a division in terminology, if our goals are the same?

## [SQUARE DANCE] TERMINOLOGY

We prefer continued use of the term 'ladies' to designate original right-side dancers; there is simply no escaping that term for that dance position. Clubs dancing to records will not be able to conform to another term, and dancers who frequent straight dances must recognize "ladies" anyway. However, we offer a suggestion if the decision is made to use an alternate term: Why not coin a new 'word' and give it our meaning? The new "word" would carry no connotations, it would not conflict with existing Callerlab terminology, and, if chosen carefully, it would minimize the difficulty in crossing over to straight dancing. (Consider beginning the word with 'L' like 'ladies' for initial sound recognition.)

## THE FIRST ANNUAL SQUARE DANCE CONVENTION

We are glad to go along with the suggestion made in Reno to hold the first convention in Seattle. Puddletown Squares, one of the larger clubs, can spread responsibility further to accomplish more. Many of our dancers have not been to Seattle, and are anxious for an opportunity to visit. A date of late April would fit mid-way on the calendar between Florida's fly-in and our June rodeo.

One suggestion about the proposed itinerary for the convention: limit Friday night dancing to 11PM, and in that way encourage participation in the Saturday morning workshops. (Besides, 8 to 11PM is a comfortable dance length.)

## UPCOMING EVENT

About a square of us are planning a weekend jaunt to Albuquerque either the first or second weekend in October. Besides meeting our new neighbors to the south, we'll be able to partake in the hot-air balloon festivities going on that weekend. Wilde Bunch, here we come!

## THOUGHTS ABOUT RENO, 1984

Our group is again divided about the role exhibitions should play in Reno. Some of the group would like to see exhibitions continued, but condensed into one evening. That would give the dance groups an equal audience, and it would give the audience a "free" evening or two to plan other activities, if they desire. Others would like to limit square dancing in Reno to workshops and a couple of evenings of casual dancing, all levels available. That group would like to establish our annual convention, our own special event, as the place for our flashy exhibitions. Both groups would like more time in Reno to be scheduled as "free" time.

As we begin to develop plans for the square dancing portion of our Rocky Mountain Regional Rodeo, 1984, we will pass them along in the newsletter. If anyone is not receiving the newsletter of the Colorado Gay Rodeo Association, with which we dancers are affiliated, let us know, and we'll see that you are added to our mailing list. Our primary contact will remain Wayne Jakino, c/o Charlie's, 7900 E. Colfax, Denver, CO 80220

Until October 1 and the next newsletter, we wish you happy dancing. Wish us a prosperous venture with caller Tom Smith.

Cordially,

Karl Jaeckel  
Instructor, Mile High Squares

**DOCUMENT #11: REPLY FROM THE NAGSDC TO A PROPOSAL FOR THE FORMATION OF A NATIONAL GAY DANCE ASSOCIATION TO BRING TOGETHER ALL RELATED FORMS OF WESTERN DANCE.**

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GAY SQUARE DANCE CLUBS  
P.O. BOX 20604  
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON 98102

[No date - 1983.]

Dear Wayne,

Apologies for the delay in this letter, but things have been rather hectic this past month. There are a number of things that I wish to ask you about, aside from responding to your proposal for forming a National Gay Dance Association.

First, could you send me the name and address of a contact person for the Texas Gay Rodeo Association? Do they plan on having a rodeo this year? I have mentioned their formation to a number of people, and everyone seems excited about the prospect of having another rodeo to attend.

With regard to your last letter, I agree that it is important to keep from dividing our community further at a time when we all need to come closer together. However, at this time it does not seem appropriate to form a National Dance Association, since there has been relatively little contact between the various types of dance groups. What I would like to propose is that we take advantage of an event where several square dance, clogging, and other dance groups will be in attendance, and provide a time when they can get together and discuss everyone's feelings about forming a national association or coalition. I would further suggest that such a meeting be held during the Colorado Regional Rodeo. Although I currently find little support for such a group among the [square] dancers that I have talked to, I think the fact that with dance festivals being held as part of the growing number of rodeos within our community, there will be more and more reason to have some basis of working together as time goes by.

I have talked to many people who are tentatively planning on attending the Colorado Rodeo and participating in the accompanying dance events. We would like to give you all the assistance we can

in planning the dance portion of the rodeo. Please let me know who your local people working on the dance events are, and what specific things you would like us to start doing. Everyone is hopeful that the Colorado Rodeo dance events will be more fun, organized, and conducive to good will and fellowship than others that have been held.

In closing, I would just like to say that I am impressed with what I've seen in your newsletters, and that your organization is a fine example for all of us. I am looking forward to visiting Denver and supporting the Colorado Regional Rodeo.

Sincerely,

Harlan Kerr

**DOCUMENT #12: LETTER FROM PUDDLETOWN SQUARES, SEATTLE, WITH A PROPOSAL FOR THE FIRST CONVENTION OF THE NAGSDC, INCLUDING THE PROPOSED PROGRAM FOR THE CONVENTION.**

PUDDLETOWN SQUARES  
P.O. BOX 20671  
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON 98102

**November 16, 1983.**

National Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs  
Harlan Kerr, Chair  
P.O. Box 20604  
Seattle, Washington

Dear Harlan and Association Members,

Enclosed is the proposal of the Puddletown Squares to host the 1st Annual National Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs Convention here in Seattle, April 6th through April 8th, 1984.

The reception by the various hotels and organizations to this convention has been overwhelmingly positive. The hotel selected did solicit the convention, has been most cooperative, and looks as if they would be very agreeable to work with in the future.

On behalf of the Executive Board and membership of Puddletown Squares, we hope you will find this proposal acceptable.

Very truly yours,

Gary J. Way, Secretary  
Chairman, Convention Committee

[ATTACHMENT]

MEMORANDUM

**DATE: 16 November 1983**

TO: National Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs

Harlan Kerr, Chair

FROM: Puddletown Squares

Gary J. Way, Secretary & Chair, Convention Committee

SUBJECT: Proposal for 1st Convention of NAGSDC

On behalf of the Executive Board and the membership of Puddletown Squares, I present for your consideration the following proposal for hosting the 1st Convention of the National Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs.

DATES:       Friday, April 6th, 1984  
                  Saturday, April 7th,  
                  1984 Sunday, April 8th, 1984

PLACE;       Park Hilton Hotel  
                  6th and Seneca  
                  Seattle, Washington

PROPOSED SCHEDULE:

Friday 4/6/84:

2:00PM	Check-in and registration, Carlsbad Room, Park Hilton Hotel. A block of guest rooms for our comfort has been set aside and the hotel will provide a non-smoking floor.
6:00PM	Check-in and registration continues with refreshments served.
8:00PM	Square and Western dancing will be added to the above.
Later:	Bar tour as requested and hosted by Puddletown members.

Saturday 5/6/84:

- 9:30AM Workshops begin
- 10:30AM Break
- 10:45AM Workshops continue
- 11:30AM NAGSDC Board Meeting
- 12:00PM Noon Break
- 2:00PM Dance Workshops
- 3:30PM Afternoon break to see Seattle or continue with another workshop.
- 6:30PM Reception in the Carlsbad Room or Flag Plaza, depending on weather.
- 7:30PM Banquet in the Evergreen Ballroom
- 8:30PM Entertainment in the Carlsbad Room or Flag Plaza while the ballroom is being prepared for dancing.
- 9:30PM Dancing and entertainment in the Evergreen Ballroom, no-host bar provided.

Sunday 4/8/84:

- 10:00AM Champagne buffet brunch in the Evergreen Ballroom followed by the General Meeting of the NAGSDC.
- 1:00PM Official check-out time from hotel.

WORKSHOPS:

The following topics have been suggested for workshops:

- 1) Dance Styling
- 2) Callers' Clinic
- 3) Maintaining Membership
- 4) Starting New Clubs

Any further suggestions and/or comments are welcomed.

MEALS:

The Saturday banquet and the Sunday Buffet Brunch and some of the drinks will be included in the cost.

ROOMS:

The Park Hilton has offered us a special price of \$58.00 per room per night: not per person, but per room. Hospitality suites will be available. Also, non-smoking guest rooms are available upon request.

## COST:

All of the above plus more can be purchased for the low sum of \$95.00 if paid before February, 1984. A \$50.00 deposit will hold a space and guest room for you. Roommates may be requested or will be assigned by the convention housing person. If a single room is requested, there is a \$60 surcharge. A late fee of \$20.00 will be requested after March 1, 1984. The total fee covers guest room at double occupancy rate for 2 nights, Saturday night banquet & entertainment, Sunday morning champagne buffet brunch, equipment rentals, meeting spaces, callers and workshop leaders as needed.

Members of Puddletown Squares will gladly meet arriving guests and act as hosts. City sightseeing tours will be available at a nominal fee. City night life tours will be available with Puddletown members. The Park Hilton has reserved a block of rooms on the same floors and has designated one floor as a non-smoking area. Special group airfare prices may be available through a Puddletown member who is a travel agent. Your weekend in Seattle may be extended at the hotel at a special rate, or with a member of Puddletown Squares, so please consider coming early or staying an extra day or two to see the beautiful Emerald City of the Northwest.

(A NOTE FROM HARLAN: I FEEL THAT EACH CLUB SHOULD HAVE LOCAL FUND RAISING PROJECTS TO USE TO BRING THE CONVENTION COST DOWN FOR THEIR MEMBERS AND HELP TO MAXIMIZE THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO ATTEND. **IN ORDER FOR PUDDLETOWN TO OFFER THIS PROPOSAL, WE NEED TO HAVE ENOUGH PEOPLE PARTICIPATING TO OCCUPY 130 ROOMS.**) *[Emphasis added by editor! The first convention needed 260 participants to make the arrangements possible. At the Albuquerque convention, we had 1,100 in attendance!]*

**AN INTERVIEW WITH ALAN HALL,  
WESTERN STAR/MIDNIGHT SQUARES,  
SAN FRANCISCO**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The following interview with Alan Hall took place May 27, 1991, at the Fontainebleau Hotel during the Miami convention. Alan has some very interesting information about the background of the San Francisco clubs, which were among the earlier gay square dance clubs in the country, about the initial coming together of gay square dancers at fly-ins and conventions, and about the experiences of the first gay dancers to move into the straight square dance community, particularly at the Advanced and Challenge levels.—LT*

**LT** = Luis Torres

**AH** = Alan Hall

**LT** OK Alan, first of all tell me something about yourself. Where are you from?

**AH** I'm originally from England, and I emigrated to the United States in 1968. Eventually, I ended up in California after meeting someone on an airplane who offered me a 50 % increase in salary and an all-expense-paid move to California.

That's how it actually happened. A lot of strange things have happened to me that way, by accident. That happened even with square dancing, because I got involved in that by accident also.

**LT** How did you end up doing square dancing? Had you ever done any folk dancing or traditional dancing in England?

**AH** No. I just heard one evening from a friend of mine (I think it was my ex-lover who told me about it) that this person was doing this square

dancing stuff at the Trocadero Transfer, and that it was sort of fun. He asked if I would like to go, because they were just about to start a new class.

And I decided I would, thinking it would be something different, and not realizing what I was letting myself in for at the time. I thought it would keep me out of mischief. And when I actually experienced it, I found that the energy level was terrific. I think it was because of that energy level that it kept my interest. So, originally, I was sort of roped into the old Foggy City Dancers, a group that at that time was called by a guy by the name of Skip Barrett in San Francisco.

I suppose you could call it aerobic square dancing. This guy had tremendously high energy and gave out that energy to the people who were dancing, but we only danced singing calls. Literally, you never really learned square dancing calls. You learned the pattern to a particular singing call, and if it had a "star thru" and a "slide thru," you learned that.

**LT** So what you learned was a specific dance pattern to a specific record or tune?

**AH** He would call it, but if you really didn't know the pattern, you couldn't do the dance. Everything was based on singing calls. And we're not talking about small stuff: I mean, he had sixteen, eighteen, twenty squares at the Trocadero Transfer in San Francisco. He had people hootin' and hollering, and if you weren't hootin' and hollering he'd stop the record and say: "I can't hear you hoot and holler!" or "I can't hear the whoops." He liked to have a **lot** of activity and a **lot** of noise!

The other thing that happened at Foggy City Dancers was that you always danced with the same people in the same square. We were told we should never change. If you were a head, you were always a head, and if you were a side, you were always a side.

**LT** This Trocadero Transfer, wasn't that the big disco somewhere south of Market Street? I remember square dancing there twice with Barret's group in the early '80s.

**AH** Yes, but unfortunately the guy had an inferiority complex. There were a lot of people who wanted to not only dance there, but also to be able to dance in other places, which they couldn't do, since they were not learning the calls by Callerlab definition.

They also used to have a Foggy City Dancers exhibition group, which was sort of an elite. But eventually Skip Barrett's dictatorial attitude ticked

a few people off, and some dancers decided that they were going to break off and form their own club. Among these people who broke off, the main instigators actually were Scott Carey and his lover at the time, Ron Douglas. They spun off and started an organization they called "Western Star Dancers."

The new group started meeting in one of the little rooms at the ACT Theater, and about the second week I found out about it. I thought, "Well, I don't exactly want to give up Foggy City Dancers, but I would like to learn dancing by Callerlab definition." So, unlike most of the other people who had gone over to Western Star Dancers, I was the first one to join them and still maintain my relationship with Foggy City Dancers.

This went on for about four weeks. Initially, we had no caller or teacher. The way we learned was by putting on a record, and dancing until we came onto something we didn't know. Then, we'd stop the record, we'd look in the book to see what, say, a "scoot back" was, and then put the record back on again and continue dancing. We thought hash calling was laying different calls to singing calls; at the time we had no concept of what patter calling was. We weren't that sophisticated. I mean, we were struggling to keep one square together in a little room about the size of this hotel room.

**LT** So there was actually no one who had any calling experience or any teaching experience?

**AH** None whatsoever. Then one night after going to Foggy City Dancers, I was horny, so I went out to the Eagle, the San Francisco leather bar. They were having their first anniversary party, and while I was there, I met somebody and dragged him home.

The next morning, we were talking, and I said I square danced and I was going to go that evening to this Western Star group. He said: “Oh, I square dance, too. I used to do a lot of dancing back in Chicago. Do you think I could come?” So I said “Sure. Why don’t you come along?”

The guy’s name was Bill Klein. So, he came along, and, as we were struggling along trying to figure out something, Bill Klein said: “Please don’t think I’m interfering, but it goes like this.” And, after he said this about four or five times, we said: “Wait a minute. How well **do** you dance?” He said: “I dance pretty well” And so we said “What level did you dance at?” He says “C-4.” He had been one of the big C-4 dancers in the groups back East!

So, to cut a long story short, we said “Bill, we need you.” And Bill was the one that you might read about in the history of Western Star Dancers, who took us like a sergeant major through learning Mainstream in 10 weeks. Now, Bill honestly acknowledged he was not a caller, so even at that time we were still doing basically singing calls, but we could now put a record on and dance all the way through it without having to stop and look in the book, because Bill had already taught us all the 68 calls in the Mainstream

list within 10 weeks, and everything by definition right away.

The first thing he actually remembers doing was to have everybody roll away. Then, he said: “OK, heads right and left thru.” “But you can’t do that!,” we said. And he said: “Yes, you can. The girl can turn the boy.” So, he literally drummed into us, military style, every rule that you could possibly think of, and very quickly corrected all the wrong impressions we had developed in our ignorance. Bill eventually taught two classes.

**LT** How many people are we talking about?

**AH** At this particular point we had grown to two squares at Western Star as other people from Foggy City Dancers heard that there was this other group. For example, my partner at Foggy City Dancers said he’d like to come, too. His name was Paul Zimmerman. Paul and I went a long way together through square dancing.

And eventually we got a caller, also by accident. I had a tattoo done in ’81, and the fellow who did it, Phil Payton, became a friend. One day, a group of us were out for the evening, and Phil Payton was there. Somehow the conversation got around to the problem we were having, because we still didn’t have a caller. And suddenly, Phil says: “Oh, I used to call in New Hampshire!”

Of course, we immediately grabbed him, and he became one of us. We called him “the tattoo lady.” And, as the third class started, he

became our caller. He was not the most exciting caller, but he was a caller, nonetheless. So he became the first Western Star caller and did several classes. He really helped put Western Star on solid ground.

**LT** So where did things go from there?

**AH** At about the same time there was a big revolt going on at Foggy City Dancers, and what essentially happened was that some of the club members literally bought Skip Barrett out and they changed the name from Foggy City Dancers to Foggy City Squares. By then, Western Star was going so strong that I—for no reason in particular—didn't find time to dance with Foggy City Dancers much, and from then on I concentrated on Western Star Dancers.

After a while, there was a group of us who were really trying to get on and learn Plus. We had this 12" record of Plus patter calls called by Jack Lasry that we would play; we called it "the stinker." We kept trying to see if we could get through it, but we ran around and ran around, and had to keep stopping it and starting it. We knew the calls, but everything came so fast that we couldn't keep up. Then one day we actually got through it, and there was a lot of cheering and hollering.

This little group was very dedicated. We moved our way through Plus, and then we decided to start learning A-1. On Saturday nights we'd meet at this little church hall, and we'd dance from around 8 o'clock at night until 2 o'clock in the morning sometimes. Talk about

dedication!! Other times we'd meet in the middle of the week. This group included both Western Star people and Foggy City people.

Eventually as we got to the point where we had a couple of squares, we thought we should give ourselves a name. We kept running through names, but nothing seemed to be suitable. Other clubs had some of the names suggested, or at least something similar. Then, one night, when we'd been at it for a long time, John Lorenzini looked at his watch and said: "Jesus Christ, it's midnight already! If we're stupid enough to dance at midnight, why don't we just call ourselves the 'Midnight Squares!'" And everybody just laughed and said: "That'll do!" That's how Midnight Squares got its name.

**LT** So this was an "extracurricular" group with the idea of learning plus?

**AH** Yes, it started at Plus, and eventually became Advanced. And that arrangement worked out pretty well. At that point we had people coming in and learning Mainstream both at Foggy City and at Western Star. Western Star decided that it would do Mainstream and Plus, and refer those people who wanted to go into Advance and beyond to Midnight Squares. So Midnight Squares developed as an Advance and Challenge group, not to compete against Western Star and Foggy City, but rather to supplement those groups.

**LT** And what was happening on the larger scene beyond San Francisco?

**AH** Well, this goes back to the time of Bill Klein's original class. You see, we all went to the Gay Rodeo in Reno and this was the first time we had done any kind of advanced stuff in public. Actually, Steve Browning, one of the original Midnight Squares, choreographed this 12-couple exhibition that we performed at the Reno Rodeo.

**LT** What year was that?

**AH** It was 1982. And a couple of things were happening at the same time there at that Reno Rodeo. Art Smith from Seattle was there, and some of the Mustangs were there from Florida, and they also were dancing some A-level stuff. Phil Payton was doing his best to call Advanced. Skip Barrett was there also, getting all bent out of shape because people were not dancing his stuff. So for the first time there was this interaction among gay square dancers.

Art Smith was enthralled with what he saw at Reno, and determined he was going to try to develop something in Seattle. We had a very active woman in San Francisco, Agnes Smith, who decided soon thereafter that she would move to Seattle. Art and Agnes got together in Seattle, and the next thing we knew there was a club in Seattle working away. Agnes created a lot of enthusiasm, gave Art a lot of support, and she also ran into a guy by the name of Doug McPherson, who was very interested in pulling things together. So Agnes and Doug McPherson got working on the theory that if this gathering had worked in Reno, it may work somewhere else as well.

In the meantime, a couple of other things were happening that helped move things along and created one big spark down the road. In late '82 we had what you could say was the very first fly-in. Karl Jaeckel had moved to Denver, and in what seemed a very short while, there was a gay square dance club in Denver. They issued an invitation, and five of us from San Francisco flew to Denver. They had also invited a guy by the name of Dave "Happy" New Year, and Dave called for us. Among the five of us there were Paul Zimmerman, myself, Scott Carey, and Ron Douglas.

We had a marvelous time in Denver, and this combined with what had happened at Reno, and what was happening in Seattle to give the whole thing a tremendous impetus. Then the Florida Mustangs issued an invitation for the spring of '83. As luck would have it, the airlines were advertising a \$99 fare to Florida around that time, so off we went to Florida. It was as though a gunpowder keg had been prepared, someone lit the match, and BOOM!

**LT** At this first fly-in in Denver, we're talking now about the Mile High Squares as the host group, aren't we?

**AH** Yes, Mile High Squares in November 1982. Miami was also a big success. And when reports of it got back to Seattle, Doug McPherson had the idea of bringing everybody together. And, as I said, Doug and Agnes were instrumental in arranging for the first convention in Seattle in March of '84. Harlan Kerr was also involved in there somewhere.

**LT** Let's go back to something you said previously. Your first visit to the rodeo in Reno, you said, was '82. What exactly happened there? You said you had a 12 couple group?

**AH** The Mustangs came to the rodeo and they did an exhibition. We did this first 12 couple thing that nobody had ever seen the likes of before.

**LT** And by "we" you mean the Midnight Squares?

**AH** We weren't called Midnight Squares yet, but it was the people who eventually became Midnight Squares, that is primarily people from Western Star and Foggy City. We even bought shirts for the first time, you know: the leads wore a blue one and the follows wore a white one, so that we could make things easy.

Chris Phillips was starting to call, and Phil was calling. But I think the most exciting thing was just the fact that here we were, dancing with people from other parts of the country for the first time.

**LT** And all this was purely happenstance? It was nothing that was planned ahead of time?

**AH** The only thing the Gay Rodeo Association provided was a place in the program for a little bit of square dancing exhibitions.

**LT** Was there any other kind of Country/Western dancing, or clogging, or whatever?

**AH** They had regular clogging exhibitions, and then they had the regular two-stepping that most people would have otherwise done. But a lot of us just wanted to square dance and not two-step. So we kind of found a little space to ourselves in some barn area [of the Nevada State Fairground, where the event was taking place], set up the equipment, and off we went having ourselves a good time.

**LT** Did you return to the Reno rodeo in '83? Was there square dancing then?

**AH** Yes, but by then things had already moved on in the regular square dance movement. We'd already been to Florida.

**LT** The reason that I am interested in this is that I was at the Reno rodeo in 1982, and that was the first time I'd ever seen gay square dancing. And from Reno I went to San Francisco and I danced with Skip Barrett's Foggy City two evenings while I was there. When I went back home, I started putting out flyers in Washington and got together a group of dancers, or, at least, of interested people.

I taught them New England and English contras and traditional squares, because that's what I knew. Eventually that group took the name "D.C. Lambda Squares," but I dropped out because at that time, I just couldn't make the switch.

By then I had been contacted by Art Smith from Seattle, and I had heard about the Florida

Mustangs, so I knew that Western squares was the direction everybody else was going. I didn't feel that I personally wanted to go into Western square dancing, so I told the group: "I don't want to do it myself, but I think that if you want to keep the group going, you should go in the direction of Western squares, because that's where the fun is going to be." Little did I imagine how correct my estimation actually was!

**AH** I think you'll probably find that most everything came out of the '82 Reno rodeo.

**LT** Wasn't a group called the Rosemont Cloggers from Houston there also? I remember a huge clogging group with very fancy outfits.

**AH** There were a whole bunch of cloggers with fancy outfits, among them the Barbary Coast Cloggers, and some others. We, as square dancers, were still sort of floating around, wondering what was happening to us at the time, and unable to realize the significance of what actually **was** happening, or the significance of related events.

Out of Bill Klein's second class at Western Star, for example, there was a guy whose name escapes me right now, but he eventually moved to Albuquerque and helped start the Wilde Bunch. So there have been people who came out of the original Western Star group, and who have helped start other gay square dance clubs elsewhere.

**LT** Were you at the first convention in Seattle?

**AH** I've been to all the conventions.

**LT** Can you tell me what you remember about the first convention?

**AH** Putting down the flooring!

**LT** Well, that seems to be part of the game! We seem to put down flooring or take up flooring at every convention. What else?

**AH** I remember that they got Paul Marcum and Elmer Sheffield, two nationally known callers, to call for us, and I also remember talking with Paul and his wife. There was some apprehension on both sides, since it was the first time we were coming in contact with national callers.

But after about the first day, Paul said: "God, I've never seen anything like this! The energy that you people are putting out makes things fun for us. We've never had people hoot and holler, and laugh, and carry on like this!" And I remember we were dancing to Paul Marcum at 4 a.m. in the morning; we were so charged up, we were dancing until we dropped.

Finally, Paul said: "I'm losing my voice, and if you want me to call for the rest of the weekend, you'd better let me stop now." And the next thing you know, we found mops in the hallway and we took the head off the mop and stuck it on his head and shoved him in a dress, and his wife was laughing until the tears trickled down her cheeks!

The callers had such a good time that they went back with a positive attitude and started creating very good publicity within Callerlab for gay square dancers. And I think also the hotels were initially worried that a bunch a rednecks were going to come in and tear up the place, but found that we were “the most well-behaved group” that had ever stayed there. And, since Seattle is one of the more progressive cities, the mayor himself came and opened the ceremonies.

We had the grand march right at the beginning, which I thought was very good; nothing started before the grand march. And I very well remember the feeling of knowing there were some 300 of us there, and the general euphoria of it all.

At that time most of it was Mainstream dancing. Some Plus, perhaps. And I think we managed to get together a couple of A-level squares. So, as you can see, the growth patterns with other clubs, with more dance levels, etc. have been phenomenal since that time.

**LT** Do you remember what clubs were represented?

**AH** I can tell you where people came from. There was a whole group of us there from San Francisco. There was also a group from Portland, because someone from Seattle had gone down to Portland and started up a small group there, which was sort of getting on its feet. Mile High Squares from Denver were there. The Miami Mustangs were there. There were a few groups

of different people just generally around. I’m not quite sure where they were from.

**LT** So odds and ends from various places?

**AH** Odds and ends which I think led to starts being made elsewhere, including some people from Canada, which eventually led, with the help of Art Smith, to Squares Across the Border. That’s what I remember. You know, we’re looking back at ’84; that’s 7 years ago, and I did not think at the time that I’d have to remember what happened in March of 1984.

The thing is that I do remember lots of these little things, the initial things, and I look back and say, “Gee, what would have happened if I hadn’t met Bill Klein that night? Or what would have happened if Agnes hadn’t moved to Seattle? Or what if Karl hadn’t come and joined us at Western Star that night? “ That’s why I think it’s important to try and piece these little bits together.

**LT** Earlier in our conversation you said that you and someone else were the first gay couple in the area to go out into the straight square dance community.

**AH** That happened back when we were trying to learn the Advanced level. We were learning it to tapes, and we decided that we really wanted to go and dance to a live caller, so we picked up a square dance directory and started looking through it. And we found this group called the Biorhythms, who were dancing down in Palo Alto. We also went across to Oakland, to the East Bay.

Ron Haggerty was the caller in the East Bay whose club we went to. They had A-1/A-2 dancing. And also Dave Stevens was calling A-level dances down in Palo Alto. So we decided that we were going to go down and check out if it was OK if we came down and danced.

Initially the people in Oakland didn't have too much of a problem, but we had a little bit more difficulty when we went to Palo Alto. There was a little bit of negative reaction there.

And then right at the same time it was the first large straight festival, the Golden State Roundup, that we went to in a large group—not only just the Advanced people, but Western Star people, and others....

**LT** Was that the state convention?

**AH** Yes, the state convention. It was in San Jose. I can't remember whether it was '82 or '83. Maybe it was '83, because we followed square dance etiquette. We'd go as solo dancers, and ask all the single women who were sitting out all the time. You know how it is at straight festivals: there's always these extra women wearing "solo" badges. Well, we absorbed them all. With us there, there weren't any women left to sit out!

But after a while, our extra dancers decided they weren't going to sit out the dancing, so we'd square up with what was available, and you'd see these straight people look puzzled when they realized there were 5 men in this square and three women! But those who **did** dance with us,

realized that, of course, the square wasn't breaking down.

All of a sudden, I recognized **why** the squares weren't breaking down: The reason was that we knew everything from both parts, and when the caller had everybody half-sashayed, or called something from an unusual position, we didn't know it was unusual!! We just did it from that point. And it turned out that we were pulling all the squares through that we danced in.

By the end of the convention, the straight dancers were asking us to dance with them, and they loved it when we did. And so with that experience in the background, my friend and I—who had learned C-1 by doing a tape group—started going to dance with the Biorhythms and with other groups. Paul and I went together, raising a few eyebrows in some groups.

**LT** What is his last name?

**AH** Paul Zimmerman. Unfortunately he's not with us anymore, but Paul and I learned to Allemande left together. Paul was a very quiet person with a very technical mind. He was in computers and all that sort of thing, and could analyze things very well. He actually taught one of the Advanced classes of Midnight Squares using tapes, and he was very helpful to me when I didn't understand something. He could always explain things from another point that would make it clear.

Anyway, when Dave Stevens started offering a C-2 class, we went to his C-2 class. And before

we knew it, we were breaking into what is known as the Pacific Association of Challenge Enthusiasts, PACE.

Last year at the convention in Vancouver, I met a woman who had been one of the big leaders in PACE at that time, and she told me: “You don’t know what a stir you caused when you and Paul started dancing in the C-level groups around San Francisco!”

To a certain extent, I can understand it, because Paul was about 6’2” and wore a big beard! When we started dancing together, we agreed that in order not to confuse people, I would always dance the male part, and he would always dance the follow part. That way, they didn’t have to figure out who was the belle, and if they saw this big person with the beard coming at them, they knew it was alright.

I had no idea that we’d created that much consternation. We found that people wanted to dance with us because neither of us would get mad if the square broke down. We’d shrug our shoulders laugh and say: “OK, let’s go on with it,” because we both had long fuses. People would then not get uptight if they were weaker dancers. In fact, they’d relax, and because they relaxed, they learned easier, and then were able to do it. But, anyway, we did the C-2 class, and then we helped other people learning C-1, and eventually, we earned a great deal of respect.

There were some people who still had a lot of trouble with gay people going to the straight clubs. I can think of one person in particular,

who was rather anti-gay, until he got very sick and had a heart attack. And, who were the people who sent the cards and the wishes that he get well? Well, when I started in Harlan Kerr’s C-3 class, I was waiting for the class to start when, who walks in, but this guy and his wife. And here he was, this guy who used to be so anti-gay, now walking into a gay club to take a class!! I almost passed out.

So I think we’ve also done a great deal to help change attitudes, people like Paul and James Ozanich, who eventually became the PACE president for a year. We showed there’s no reason to fear, that we were out to dance, and that we could dance just as well as anybody else, and eventually we bridged the gap.

A significant change involved the caller, Dave Stevens. Dave wasn’t exactly pro-gay to start with. I remember an epithet coming out of Dave Steven’s mouth at the beginning. But eventually we changed his attitude. I think there were some preconceived notions about what things were about and we shot them all to pieces. And now we have the best callers coming and calling for us.

Another icebreaker was when we got Dave Lightly as the first of the PACE callers to come and call for Midnight Squares.

**LT** Do you mean the heavy-set guy from Iowa? He’s one tough caller!

**AH** The state convention went from Friday night to Sunday afternoon, I think. Anyway, he

had down time on Sunday night, so we asked him to come and call for Midnight Squares on Sunday night, and he agreed. And after he had agreed, then others like Mike Jacobs, Anne Redden (Uebelacker, before she got married), and a few others followed suit. So after a while, it was not difficult at all to get some of these top callers to call for the gay square dance conventions. Now you've got a number of great straight callers who really love to come and call for us 'cause they have a good time when they come.

**LT** You said that when you initially went out with Paul to dance among straight square dancers, some clubs were accepting and others were not. Could you elaborate on that?

**AH** Well, we didn't realize what was going on. We were a little oblivious. We didn't realize what a scene we'd caused. We encountered some people who were great, and other people who didn't want to dance with us. But we just plodded away. We realized there might be people who weren't going to be accepting, and we chose to ignore it, which apparently is the best thing we could have done.

**LT** So it was sort of: "If you don't want to dance with us, it's your loss?"

**AH** We could dance better than they could anyway! I think the key factor was that we gained respect. I think that word is probably the best word to use. We gained respect and, with that, things went rather steadily forward. Even now there are two gay people on the PACE board of directors, and one of the gay clubs in San Francisco is one of the few places that really

offers Challenge classes in the area, now that Dave Stevens has moved out of the area and up to Seattle.

**LT** So you now have straight people coming to learn Challenge with you guys?

**AH** Quite a few, particularly at the higher Challenge levels. I think that will happen more and more.

**LT** Now that you have been at this for along time, what do you get out of it?

**AH** I like the social interaction. I like the energy level. It's also, for me, good exercise. There's a whole sort of spiritual thing behind all this, I guess. Now it's part of me, and I don't know what I'd do without it anymore. Maybe it's a drug.

**LT** "Square Dance Methadone?"

**AH** Here I can really sort of blow and let out steam; just let everything go. My work involves a lot of mental concentration in the area of financial planning, and I can push all that aside and out of my system. I think that's what I really get out of it, and the fact that I have met some incredibly wonderful people over the years through square dancing, many of whom I still have a good friendship with. As an example, I met Keith Snowdon at the convention in Denver, and Keith and I have been very, very good friends ever since. There are a lot of different people who have become good friends over a period of time. I think that's important; a part of your social well-being.

**LT** There seems to be a way that the common interest breaks the barriers that otherwise would be there.

**AH** Such an eclectic group! I mean, we have everything from high twink to hard leather, and all points in between. When you can get a high twink here and a big leather number there pairing up as dancing partners in the same square, I don't know where else you'll find that in the gay community.

**LT** You get beyond the "no fats, no fems" syndrome.

**AH** That's true. It just doesn't matter. Neither does the gender. We dance with a lot of women.

Sometimes I wish there were more women doing square dancing, but I don't know if that's anything that will improve or not.

**LT** Have you got any idea why it is that we don't get more women?

**AH** The only thing I can think of is that a lot of women, when they meet and decide to form a relationship, tend to sort of move off quietly and set up their little white picket fence, so they don't get involved in outside social activities as much. I think gay men are more promiscuous than gay women so they will go out and do other things on the chance of meeting other people. Plus there's probably more gay men than there are gay women. But it would be nice to see more women.

**IN DENVER: FROM MILE HIGH SQUARES TO ROCKY MOUNTAIN RAINBEAUS.  
AN INTERVIEW WITH KARL JAECKEL.**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The Japanese have a special designation they give to uniquely gifted artisans, to great bearers of their traditions, or to individuals of unique wisdom and talent. They call such people "living treasures of Japan," and give them appropriate respect and recognition.*

*If anyone could or should be designated a "living treasure" of gay square dancing, one of the first to be chosen would certainly have to be Karl Jaeckel. Since he first became involved in square dancing, Karl has been indefatigable in his support of the activity and in his efforts to further it; no sacrifice—financial, of time, or of labor—has been too large to prevent his involvement.*

*A person with a uniquely organized mind and a methodical approach to things, Karl has become the, until recently, unofficial archivist of the IAGSDC, the person to whom anyone wanting information could turn for either an answer, or a reference to someone else who would have it. He received well-deserved recognition with the organization's "Golden Boot Award" at the Vancouver convention in 1990.*

*No volume of celebration on our organization's 10th anniversary could be complete without a word from him. This interview took place at the Albuquerque convention, "Diamonds in the Desert," on July 5, 1992.—LT*

**LT** = Luis Torres

**KJ** = Karl Jaeckel

**LT** Give me a little background about yourself, Karl. Where are you from originally? Where did you grow up?

**KJ** I was born in Iowa. My dad worked for a meat packing plant, and during the course of my childhood we moved two or three times, first to Kansas and then to Texas. I went to high school in El Paso, Texas, and spent four years at the University of Texas at Austin. My first job out of college was in St. Louis, where I worked for two and a half years.

I wanted to get involved in a gay social activity in St. Louis and wasn't finding the

opportunities. I didn't know what direction I was headed, but St. Louis was too conservative for my taste at the time. I had a friend in Denver who encouraged me to move there, and so I ended up in Denver in 1980. I've been there now twelve years.

**LT** What is your profession?

**KJ** I am a systems analyst and computer programmer for Martin Marietta, doing mostly government and defense work. I'm working on the Titan Missile Program.

**LT** Will it be a problem if we publish this interview in the tenth anniversary publication?

**KJ** No, I can't see why it would be a problem.

**LT** Had you ever square danced before coming to Denver?

**KJ** No, I never even dreamed of it. In fact if you had asked me in 1980 if I would be interested in square dancing, I would have flat out told you “no”. At that time my interest was genealogy, and I was as devoted to my family history as I am to square dancing now, so times **have** changed!

**LT** What was your introduction to square dancing?

**KJ** I had a good friend, Robin Brunswick, in the summer of 1981, who was a square dancer. She had danced with her family for several years, and she thought, knowing me and knowing my makeup, that it might be something I might enjoy. So she encouraged me to consider taking beginning lessons with a Denver singles’ club known as the Fiddlesteppers.

**LT** So this was a straight woman and a straight club?

**KJ** A straight woman. She was a friend of mine at work. At the time I **did** have evenings free, so I thought maybe it would be an activity that I **might** enjoy. She was a good enough friend that, for her sake, I was willing to try it out.

As it happened, our class was an exceptionally fun group of people. We had fun the first night, and so I went back the second time, and before you knew it I was into the routine of lessons, and potlucks, and the little parties that we planned alongside the lessons.

So, through August, September, and October of 1981, I was learning Basic and moving on into Mainstream.

Around that time, I was also involved with Country/Western dancing out at Charlie’s, a gay Western bar in Denver. Wayne Jakino, a very influential man at Charlie’s, was trying to start a rodeo association. He had just returned from the National Gay Rodeo in Reno, and one of the segments of the new rodeo association was going to be square dancing, so he was trying to interest some of the regulars at Charlie’s in starting lessons.

In the meantime, I was becoming a good dancer and dancing to good callers at the singles club. I could see Wayne’s difficulties, because he was trying to get this group of gay dancers going kind of in a vacuum, since no one involved knew how to square dance. There was no expertise available to them, and they were learning their square dancing from the flimsy paper instructional books that you can buy for fifty cents.

I kept a distance from it for a little while. They were preparing for some exhibitions, because that was their real strong focus, rather than learning for the sake of acquiring a skill and enjoying the activity for what it is. The organizers wanted to use square dancing to promote the rodeo association, which, I guess, was OK. At that point, I was still an observer.

I went to a performance that they did over Thanksgiving of 1981, and I decided it was time

to get involved, so I practiced with them in December for a Christmas show they were planning to do. I was just a dancer then, I wasn't in any way a leader at that tune, but I could see that I knew more than any one of them when it came to the square dance expertise of how to execute the calls.

It wasn't very long before they also realized that and recognized me as a good dancer. In January, my class at the straight club graduated, and I became a full Mainstream dancer. Later that month—and I don't remember exactly how it came about—I started teaching lessons at Charlie's for the gay group. We did not have a name for ourselves at the time, we were just dancing as part of the Rodeo Association.

I didn't particularly **want** to teach, but I was filling a need. What I did want to share with the gay group was the enjoyment to be had from dancing to a caller, but I didn't know how to go about getting a caller to come to a bar, and a gay bar at that. In those days there was strict separation between gay and straight dancers.

One of my friends at Fiddlesteppers, Bill Heiny, was learning to call, and I talked him into coming out to Charlie's one tune. I know he had a lot of hesitation about it, but he did make one appearance. Unfortunately, that particular night the group of dancers at Charlie's was not well-behaved. They clowned around and gave our group a bad name, and that's the last time Bill came to call for us, so I was still left with the responsibility of trying to teach.

In February we were lucky that Craig McCarthy from the South Florida Mustangs in the Miami area, where there already was a strong program, moved to Denver. I don't really know what brought him to Denver, but I was glad to see him because he already knew how to square dance. As it turned out, over the next couple of years he and I took turns teaching lessons, along with another guy named Bob Southerland.

I guess I taught classes through the spring of 1982. We were anticipating going to Reno that summer of 1982. As yet, there were no organized gay square dance activities: fly-ins, or conventions, or any of that. Our opportunity to be together was primarily at the gay rodeos and at the Western dance festivals associated with the rodeos.

In April we chose a name for ourselves. (I still have the ballot with the tick marks by each name!) The name we chose was "Mile High Squares." We also had club shirts going to Reno that summer. Actually, they were the white and blue Colorado Gay Rodeo Association shirts, polo shirts with a Western cut.

During that time, I was still involved with Fiddlesteppers, but, in addition to that, I started going to another straight club, the Gateway Singles, called by Jim Mustain, where I could learn Plus. I moved right from Mainstream into Plus because I could see that the only way the gay group could learn Plus was if I learned it first. I finished Plus lessons in the spring of 1982, and started teaching Plus to the Mile High Squares somewhere around the first part of the

summer of 1982. By the time we went to Reno, they knew enough Plus that they could do an exhibition number.

The real focus of Reno that summer wasn't so much to be able to dance with the other groups as it was to be able to do a show numbers. We polished up a Plus hash number (I think it was one of the Jack Lasry records) to dance it in front of the other groups at the rodeo. That was how our involvement with square dancing began at the rodeo. If there was some dancing with the other groups, there wasn't a lot of it. Mainly we went to do a show; each group came with a demo.

**LT** Let me interrupt here and go back to that first visit of your friend who was learning to call to the club. You say they misbehaved; they clowned-around. Was it your experience before that you had trouble keeping enough discipline to teach the class, or was this just their reaction to a stranger coming in?

**KJ** I think they just didn't realize how significant an event it was to have a caller coming in. Generally they were better behaved than they were that night, but it was one of those nights when everyone was acting crazy. I lost control of the group. I couldn't get them to calm down and listen to him. I don't think they really wanted to give this straight guy who was.. .well, there was an air about him that was uninteresting. His interest was in his square dancing. It just didn't work, and as far as I know he's never looked in our direction again.

**LT** When you talk about clubs preparing to go to Reno, what clubs are you talking about?

**KJ** That's a good question. There weren't very many.

**LT** You mentioned the Mustangs.

**KJ** At that time the Mustangs were far and away the best organized club. They knew the calls better. They knew more about the Callerlab format of square dancing than the rest of us. We were on the way, but they were further developed. I'm sure San Francisco was represented.

**LT** Wasn't that Skip Barren's group?

**KJ** Yes, that's right. Skip Barren was definitely there. Seattle? Yes, I guess Seattle was there, but I imagine it was just a few individuals rather than a whole square, although you'll have to verify anything I say with everybody else.

**LT** So basically you're talking about just three clubs: San Francisco, Denver and the Florida Mustangs?

**KJ** Capital City Squares of Sacramento was also represented at Reno in 1982. That's all I can remember, but other people might know better than that. It was in 1983, if we can jump ahead briefly, that there were more clubs, or I should say more cities represented. It was at the Reno Rodeo of 1983 also that we recognized the need for the first convention.

Well, there were a lot of events between 1982 and 1983. I guess it was at Reno 1982 that the Mustangs talked about hosting a fly-in, although I don't think we used that term yet. The Mustangs offered to host an event mid-year between the two Denver and Reno rodeos, where the dancers could get together for their own enjoyment, apart from the rodeo. I don't know at what point that really became a serious proposal and people started planning for it, but I know we were all interested in it. We enjoyed the rodeo—that was the main event of the weekend—but we recognized we would have a great time just getting together for dancing during a whole weekend.

I'm sure we received communications from the Mustangs that fall, and probably in January. In February of 1983, (I think it was like the 12th thru the 20th), they scheduled a full week of activities kicked off by dancing. I still have the scrapbook of pictures of what we did every day during that week. We made a trip down to Key West and we danced in the Atlantic Ocean. Later in the week we drove up to Orlando and we spent a day at Disney World and a day at the newly-opened Epcot Center.

Well, anyway, that was February 1983. The delegates of four clubs, Denver, Miami, San Francisco and Seattle, met on the back patio (I think this has been told one hundred times) at the Crossfire Bar and discussed the need for some kind of formal organization to gay square dancing. The groundwork was laid.

I can't remember at what point we started hearing about the first convention. I think the idea was discussed that we needed an annual get-together, and I do think that Seattle was brought up, but then there was a long period when nothing seemed to happen. I don't think we heard about a Seattle Convention throughout the rest of the entire calendar year of 1983, and all of us began to worry that a good idea was slipping through the cracks. At the beginning of 1984, right after the holidays, Harlan Kerr, Agnes Smith, and Doug McPherson in Seattle, took the bull by the horns and started seriously planning for that first convention. From January on they were actively working to pull it off.

**LT** Let me tell you something, because you're interested in this kind of thing. I was in the audience at the Reno Rodeo in 1982. After the rodeo, I went from Reno to San Francisco, and I danced with Skip Barrett's group when they met in that big disco south of Market Street.

**KJ** Yes, the Trocadero Transfer.

**LT** It was the first time I had seen gays involved in Western dancing, or in square dancing, or anything of the sort. I was tremendously enthused by the whole experience, both the dancing at the rodeo and the experience of dancing with the Foggy City Squares in San Francisco. So, when I went back to Washington, D.C., where I was at the time, I started the D.C. Lambda Squares, which I began teaching as a traditional club, because that's what I knew, and I was the person who was running it.

**KJ** Traditional in what sense?

**LT** Traditional square dances, instead of Western square dancing; traditional New England square dances and contras.

**KJ** Oh, contras.

**LT** We functioned that way for the first year and a half, until the club had its name—D.C. Lambda Squares—and the basic logo had been designed and adopted. By that time, I had communications from Art Smith in Seattle about what was happening there, and an invitation for us to participate from Harlan Kerr. I got the group together, and I told them: “This is what is happening out there. Everybody else is going to Western square dancing, but I’m not interested in Western square dancing.”

**KJ** You weren’t personally interested?

**LT** No, I was not. My background was in Scandinavian folk dancing, international folk dancing, traditional New England contras and squares, and English and Scottish country dancing. I did not think I could get into the Western square dancing thing: the long calls, one call describing all sorts of different movements, etc. I just didn’t think that it would be fun, much to my chagrin now, I must say. Anyway, I told the group: “This is where things are happening in the gay community. That’s the direction I think you should go also, but I can’t do it. You have to find somebody else.”

Doug Barnett was among the first people who joined D.C. Lambda Squares. Doug had a bit of calling experience, and I had used him to help me with the teaching, because in traditional squares you don’t need to have long periods of lessons. When we had new people coming in, I asked them to come in a half an hour ahead, and I had Doug go through right and left thru, circle right and left, dosido, etc. with them.

**KJ** Was he already calling?

**LT** He had called in college, I think, and he had an idea of wanting to call, but he hadn’t done very much of it.

**KJ** When was this?

**LT** This was following the 1982 rodeo. Sometime after August of ’82 and on to 1983 and part of 1984.

**KJ** I remember Doug Barnett the first tune in 1985, and my memory of him then was that he wasn’t calling, but he was interested in calling. He may have been dabbling with it at the Denver convention.

**LT** I haven’t checked on exactly what happened after I left, but I know that Doug was instrumental in keeping the teaching and the dancing going. I guess the club had its ups and downs, but eventually survived and prospered.

**KJ** In the meantime you....

**LT** In the meantime I faded away. I went back to Scandinavian folk dancing, and that's what I did until I heard Chesapeake Squares had been formed in Baltimore and was dancing. When I arrived, they were in the middle of their Mainstream lessons. I talked to Ett McAtee, who was club president at the time, and I said: "I know you don't normally do this, but I have a lot of background in dancing. Would you mind if I started now? If we find that I can't catch up, I'll quit." The class had started in August, and this was after the Christmas holidays, February, I think. So I joined the class in the middle, finished with them, and then went to my first convention in New York.

**KJ** That would have been 1988/1989.

**LT** Right, so in those four or five years in between, I wasn't involved at all.

**KJ** It's interesting to me that you were at the Trocadero and experienced Skip Barren's brand of square dancing, because.. I'd like to back up just a bit to 1982, about the time Mile High Squares adopted a name and was preparing for that 1982 Reno Rodeo. Four of us from Denver decided we wanted to make a spur-of-the-moment trip out to California. I think Monday or Tuesday we decided, "Let's go **this** weekend." I must say that I don't normally do things like that; I didn't, and I still don't.

Anyway, I called in sick on Thursday and Friday, and, as arranged, I met these guys at a certain place in Denver on Wednesday as soon as I got off work. We drove all night long from

Denver to San Francisco, taking turns driving and sleeping. I don't know how I got through it, but we arrived Thursday in San Francisco, just in tune for their dancing. That's why we pushed like that, because Foggy City Squares was going to dance Thursday night at the Trocadero Transfer.

Skip Barrett was more than eager to welcome us into his group. I think he was kind of honored, too, that some dancers from Denver were visiting. In fact they had a cake for us, I remember, and we were really given the royal treatment that night. However, we found out we couldn't dance with them, because they were doing "Dip for the Oyster, Dive for the Clam," and I forget what else. They had memorized routines that they could do to certain records, and I don't think they recognized that, although we were square dancers, we were viewing square dancing from the Callerlab format, which was different. All of his dancers, although they looked sharp, they only looked sharp doing memorized routines, and couldn't dance to anyone else. We were frustrated, but we had a good tune with everybody.

I did talk with Skip Barrett over that weekend and suggested that he hire or bring in some—I still remember using this word, and I still remember his reaction—**professional** callers, and what I meant to say was "callers who recognized and had adopted the Callerlab format." I know he took it wrong. We had some pretty strong words back and forth, because, as far as he was concerned, he **was** a professional, and he was making his living, making big bucks, at it. I know he was bringing in a lot of money with the dance lessons that he was giving.

So we had our experience out there. It was a huge group, just huge. That was in April 1982, and it was that summer at Reno when he brought maybe two busloads or three, I don't remember exactly, **busloads** of dancers from San Francisco over to Reno. He got up on stage, and he was the caller, and his dancers could dance wonderfully, and they could have a good time, but they had their blinders on as far as what the rest of us were doing in Denver and Miami.

I don't know how far along Seattle was that summer, but there was a group of us who recognized that there were definitely different paths going on here, Skip's path and then the Callerlab path. It was that summer in Reno when somebody came up and told me very excitedly: "**There is a caller here! There is a caller here!**" We didn't know who he was, but we were bound and determined to find him. Well, lo and behold, Dave "Happy" New Year had heard about what was going on in gay square dancing, and he had arrived at the 1982 Reno Rodeo in his big RV. And, here he was, an honest-to-goodness square dance caller, and one we had already heard about. Boy, was I excited to find out about his existence!

We followed him to his RV, and he had all the Hilton equipment there. He wanted to get an unplanned activity going; wanted to get some square dancing going, off somewhere, wherever we could set it up. A bunch of us were behind him one hundred percent. Phil Ragsdale was in charge of the total rodeo operation in those days, but, of course, our interest hadn't been planned for.

The rodeo was held at the local fair grounds. Happy went out back behind the main dance barn, where there was a chain link fence that separated the dance barn and the rodeo arena. We saw a plug on the rodeo side of that fence, so we found a way to get back behind the fence and connect his equipment. We helped him set up, and, before you knew it, we had a couple of squares dancing. Before long people in the dance barn found out what we were doing. Some of them were interested, and some of them weren't, but over the course of that evening we generated a lot of interest. Happy did a little bit of instruction to help people through his material.

I know we had some converts from Skip's group, people who really enjoyed what we were doing, but when Skip got wind of it, he fumed. He wouldn't have anything to do with it: Happy New Year was stealing his show! He called the whole thing off early. We were just getting going, having a great tune out there behind the fence, when Skip insisted that all of his dancers get back on the buses and go home. He brought the buses back to where we were dancing, and insisted that all of his dancers get on the buses, and they left and went back to San Francisco!

We were so disappointed! Skip continued calling for the Foggy City Squares, at that tune. He remained in control I guess through that fall. He didn't come to the February 1983 fly-in in Miami. I think he was probably still around, but he didn't last too much longer from that point on. Scott Carey, together with others, were among the first to insist on forming a Callerlab group in the San Francisco area, and I think Western Star

came about as a result of the frustration with Skip Barrett. Foggy City Squares probably lived as long as Skip was involved, and then I think the club died. For a period there was no Foggy City at all, and then some of the original Foggy City Squares members decided they wanted to continue the club anyway. There were four of them—I think Bill Whitefield was one—who created Foggy City Dancers fairly early on, but I don't remember just exactly how that happened.

**LT** For me, what Skip was doing was more similar to the traditional squares I was used to than what the Western square dancers did. In traditional squares you usually have a pattern danced to a certain tune. You dance strictly to the music, which Skip was doing. Skip's pattern fit whatever record he was using. To me, that was more familiar, and I was able to dance with them when I visited them. But then I realized what was going on elsewhere, in Seattle, for example, and I advised the D.C. group accordingly.

**KJ** I remember at Reno 1982, when Skip had the floor in the dance barn, he invited Happy to call one tip. Happy was calling very simple Basic, nothing hard, but one of the calls he used was flutterwheel, and the whole floor broke down because they didn't know how to do a flutterwheel. Skip had never taught them. That's when we started following Happy around to the back.

Other names come to mind: Andrea Barton was involved pretty heavily in the San Francisco

area, and Agnes Smith. She hadn't moved to Seattle yet.

**LT** Now these people were with whom? With Skip's group?

**KJ** I think with Skip's group originally, but they were among the ones who were interested in the Callerlab format. I've got a copy of the first Western Star graduation picture, and I know Agnes Smith is in it, but I'd rather not speak too much of San Francisco's history.

**LT** Let's get back to the period after that first fly-in, or first gathering, with the Florida Mustangs. Did you all meet again in Reno? Was that the sequence?

**KJ** Yes, it was Reno in 1982, then it was Miami in February 1983, and then it was Reno again in August, I think, 1983. This time the dance festival portion of that rodeo was a little better organized; there were more dancers who could dance together. They all knew the same calls: they knew Basic, and they knew Mainstream. We still did exhibitions. I think each club came prepared to do some kind of a show, but I think there was more of an emphasis on dancing together.

There were quite a few clubs present at the '83 Reno Rodeo. Among them were:

- Capital City Squares from Fair Oaks (Sacramento), California,
- Skip Barrett's Foggy City Squares from San Francisco,

- Midnight Squares from San Francisco,
- Mile High Squares from Denver
- New Year's Resolutions, "Happy" New Year's club from Buena Park, California,
- Puddletown Squares from Seattle,
- Rose City Ramblers from Portland Oregon,
- South Florida Mustangs from Hollywood, Florida,
- Sundancers, a short-lived club from Palm Springs, California, also called by "Happy" New Year,
- Western Star Dancers from San Francisco, and
- The Wilde Bunch from Albuquerque, New Mexico.

**LT** To what kind of calling? Were you using records or was there any kind of live calling?

**KJ** Right at this moment, I can't remember. I know that in those days we were a lot more willing to dance to records. I assume Happy was there again in 1983. I wonder if Chris Phillips was calling yet. Maybe he was calling, because I remember he was already doing some calling at the Miami fly-in; chances are he was calling at the rodeo also. *(EDITOR'S NOTE: The program for that rodeo's dance festival lists the following people as calling various segments: Karl Murray, Bill Hanzel, Phil Payton, Dave "Happy" New Year, Dave Dennison, and Skip Barrett.—LT)*

I remember being more satisfied and getting more enjoyment out of that meet than any previous meet, and I think there were enough of

us there that summer. That's when we started talking more about Seattle. Art Smith was there, and I don't know who else was there from Seattle. We recognized the need for our own convention. The association had been formed and now it was time for the association to offer a meeting, a national gathering. I think that's when we first heard about the Seattle convention. Earlier I stated that we talked about it in Miami, but I think it was in Reno that summer when we started talking about Seattle.

**LT** OK, now let's go back to your local situation between the Reno Rodeo of 1983 and the Seattle convention.

**KJ** During 1982 and 1983, there were three of us dancers who took turns teaching classes in Denver. I took the first one, Bob Southerland took the second, and then I remember we asked Craig McCarthy, who was formerly from Florida, if he would be interested in teaching a class. He did, and did a good job. We kept rotating: I took one, Bob Southerland would take one, and Craig would take one.

**LT** None of you had any kind of caller training?

**KJ** No, none of us were calling. If the opportunities to get caller training had been there for me, or for any of us, I suppose, we might have been interested, but the opportunities weren't there, so it wasn't an issue. What I was doing during that time was spending a bundle on records and organizing them in a fashion that I thought made sense for teaching, color-coding them, so they were easy to locate.

I divided Basic into the first half and the second half, and then there was Mainstream. I just kept adding to the collection, and it became more comprehensive all the time. I tried to fill the gaps with records that featured calls that I didn't have, so that I could start a class from ground zero and have material ready to use all the way up through Mainstream, and eventually through Plus. I wrote out all the calls used on all the hash records that I could get my hands on. Eventually that collection of music became so well developed that other clubs were interested in it, and that's a story unto itself. I tried to make it available. Five or six different clubs ended up with copies of that collection of music, and I still get requests for copies.

**LT** This is something you developed on your own, or was it a club project?

**KJ** On my own. It wasn't a club project, but it was material that I knew was needed in order to get our group going. I needed that set of music in order to do my job as an instructor. I knew that I had to have it organized. I couldn't just come down and do a good job of teaching a class by picking out records at random.

Anyway, I want to get back to your question about what was going on in Denver during the fall of 1983. We had an exceptionally good class that began in October 1983. I don't remember now if it was because of advertising, if it just coincidentally came together, or what the reasons were, but we had three squares in the class that fall. It was Craig's turn to teach the class, and

that was pretty much set without question, but I was going to class anyway as an angel. The class moved along smoothly. I collected the money, served some functions around the edge; I was the class treasurer, too.

Soon after the first of the year Craig had to go on a trip, so I filled in for him. I can't remember the exact sequence of events, but there was still much emphasis on preparing for shows, and a lot of people were against having to give up class time to prepare for exhibitions. Still, since at that time our square dance group was a part of the Colorado Gay Rodeo Association, whatever the powers that be wanted us as dancers to do, we did. They constantly were doing promotions at bars; that was the primary thing, and they wanted to do exhibitions at bars for the next Saturday night.

There were other causes of frustration with the situation among the dancers. The Rodeo Association was not always accepting of women. We had women in that class, and most of us encouraged them, but there were some people who didn't want women involved. There was also a decision made that the members of that particular class would not be granted membership in Mile High Squares unless they were "accepted." There was a strong force for keeping the Mile High Squares a show team.

On the other side, the side that I represented, there was a strong interest in allowing dancing to exist for its own sake, for the purpose of encouraging people to just come and dance as a

social outlet, and not worry so much about the exhibitions. The situation got more and more heated, especially during January and February of 1984, and in February things finally came to a head. One of the class angels was a good friend of mine from Fiddlesteppers, and she was one hundred percent behind me in wanting to fight for a social club that followed the Callerlab format. She said, “Karl, the class is behind you totally; you have their support!”

We held a meeting—and I have all the details of this in the scrapbooks at home—in February 1984 with probably eight or ten dancers from that class. They wanted me to be their instructor, and they wanted to pull away from the Rodeo Association. So it was through those circumstances that the Rocky Mountain Rainbeaus was formed. The class that had started under the sponsorship of the Mile High Squares and the Rodeo Association followed me in the creation of the Rocky Mountain Rainbeaus. We started lessons, and we found bar space (at a place called Oscar Wilde’s) where we could dance. It was a bar that wasn’t particularly a dance bar, and they let us do our own thing in the back room, so we totally had our own control.

We started dancing on Tuesdays in February. Essentially, that was the demise of the Mile High Squares’ class. I remember there were four dancers who danced with both the Rocky Mountain Rainbeaus’ class and the continuing Mile High Squares’ class, but the size of that Mile High Squares class was so diminished that in time it just fizzled out over the next couple of months. In the meantime, at the national level,

Seattle was sending out all kinds of promotional material for the convention, and I was talking up this first IAGSDC convention coming up in six weeks in Seattle.

I was successful in generating interest in this new Rainbeaus class, and they could hardly wait to get through Mainstream, so that they could go to the Seattle Convention. It was something they were interested in. We danced twice a week, two regular lessons a week through the rest of February and all of March, and, boy, did we ever have club fever during that tune! We also came up with club shirts, a sleeveless light blue T-shirt.

So, the Rocky Mountain Rainbeaus were well represented in Seattle. Nine of us went, and to me that was a tremendous success, because a few months earlier these people had no idea what square dancing was all about, and here they were going to a national gathering. Some of them couldn’t afford to fly, but they drove. Eddie Schellhous, who now is one of the leaders of the Cleveland City Country Dancers, was one of the Rocky Mountain Rainbeaus who drove up there. I think there are only three or four of that group of Rainbeaus who are still involved: my partner Dennis Cossey, and Eddie Schellhous, and I. We had a wonderful tune in Seattle, and came back to Denver more excited than ever and with more interest than ever in starting our first class under the sponsorship of our own club.

**LT** Let me ask you something: What did the Colorado Gay Rodeo Association provide to the Mile High Squares that it had any hold over the club?

**KJ** The rodeo association had strong leadership. It was well organized during that period of time; they had been the original organizers, and we felt subordinate to them. I certainly didn't have any authority. In a way, it was a hierarchy of leadership, and they were the ones who made the decisions. We had a Dance and Entertainment Committee that was part of the rodeo association; the leadership of that committee changed periodically from person to person.

We did have meetings, but everything funnelled to the rodeo association. Tim Cannon was a very strong leader of the dance portion of the rodeo association at one time, and Ted Cordova was another leader at another time, but we really weren't given the freedom to develop square dancing as a separate activity. It wasn't even thinkable that we would want to break away from the rodeo association. We were all working within the framework of the rodeo association until February 1984.

**LT** At the same time you were dancing in a bar. Was that paid for by the rodeo association or was it volunteered by the bar?

**KJ** It was free dance space.

**LT** All right, so **you** were providing the music and the teaching, but, in essence, you were just an adjunct, although they weren't really giving you any benefits, except...

**KJ** The dance space, which was arranged through the rodeo association. I don't think anyone even questioned the arrangement early

on. It was only as a result of these various frustrations that some of us began realizing that there were other ways that the dancing could be organized.

I was talking treason. People looked at me as a traitor, I know, for awhile. Fortunately, over time that kind of reaction diminished, but a lot of people had hard feelings towards me because I had the resolve to take a stand and say that we could do things differently. I wanted to bring in more people to the activity, and if Mile High Squares was going to focus on exhibitions, and have a selected membership, and have barriers against including women, then the restrictions overcame the benefits of continuing to be associated with the organization.

**LT** So the Mile High Squares didn't survive for very long after the creation of the Rocky Mountain Rainbeaus?

**KJ** Actually, Mile High Squares survived for quite a while. As it turned out, one of the dancers in that class that broke away and formed the Rainbeaus—Bud Rhyne, who was an exceptional dancer, very sharp—also danced with Mile High Squares. In time, he took over the leadership of Mile High Squares and continued offering classes.

The arrangement with the records that I had bought was that Mile High Squares, or the rodeo association, paid 50 percent and I paid 50 percent. Well, I got to the point where I could see a split coming, and so for all the records that I bought from that point on, I didn't accept the 50 percent from the Rodeo Association, so they

were mine. When Rainbeaus was created, I knew I could take with me all of those records that I had paid for without any compensation from the rodeo association. The records that had been partially paid for by the rodeo association I left at Charlie's for use by Mile High Squares, but I recorded them, so I had use of them on tape. Those were the records that Bud Rhyne could use in teaching lessons for Mile High Squares classes.

Mile High Squares continued to exist and continued to be a part of the rodeo association through 1984, and I think maybe 1985. In time, even the leadership of the association recognized that Mile High Squares needed to stand as an independent organization on its own two feet. Mile High Squares wrote its own bylaws and became a completely independent organization, apart from the rodeo association. It's just that the Rainbeaus recognized that need earlier.

Mile High Squares continued to exist as an independent club until the 1987/1988 time frame. I don't think any Mile High Squares members went to New York in 1989. By that time Denver was a one-club town. We have Rainbeaus now who were involved with Mile High Squares during that later phase: Dvorah Wernick, for example, and Marty Jermann. That's the rest of the story.

**LT** Going back to the formation of the IAGSDC, were you involved in the exchanges that led to the establishment of the organization?

**KJ** I was involved in square dancing during that time, but I was not one of the Mile High Squares

delegates to the meeting that created the association. The two Denver delegates were Bob Southerland and Craig McCarthy. They were the other two instructors. Actually, I was interested in attending the meeting, but the decision had been made that there would be two representatives from each club, and I wasn't one of them.

**LT** That meeting was where?

**KJ** That was in Miami in 1983.

**LT** Concurrent with that first gathering, or first fly-in?

**KJ** Yes, that's when the idea of the association was born. Scott Carey was the one who organized the meeting, who recognized the need for it and set up the parameters for the meeting. We knew going to Miami that one of the purposes of that gathering was to form a national association, and at that time it was **national**, it wasn't **international**.

There were four clubs represented, although there was interest in a fifth city. There were three dancers in Miami from Seattle. They were Art Smith, Jim Goeres, and Tom Dickson. There were ten dancers from Western Star, and, although I can't remember all of their names, I have a picture, because we took club pictures in Miami. There were eight from Denver, exactly a square from Denver.

Again, that was still during the tune when we were the Mile High Squares, and a lot of our dancers were very involved with the rodeo

association: Wayne Jakino, Betty Weiland, Dave Robertson, Mike Hart, I was there, Doug Jarrett was there, plus Bob Southerland and Craig McCarthy.

Of course, there were a lot of Mustangs. I know Washington wasn't there, but I think we knew from Art that there was interest in D.C. Also, we knew that Happy New Year had a group called "New Year's Resolutions" in the Los Angeles area. That was the group from the "fifth city" I mentioned before, but they were not represented at the Miami meeting.

**LT** Tell me about the first convention in Seattle.

**KJ** I guess the first and most impressive aspect of the convention for me and for a lot of us was the fact that the hotel was new—I don't know just how new, but at least it **looked** new and it was beautiful. It was a first class luxury hotel, and it was the first time a lot of us ever had an opportunity to stay in such a beautiful facility for pleasure, for vacation. Square dancing was giving us an opportunity to see a part of the country that we had never seen before. Seattle was a beautiful city. For the first time the convention really brought home the excitement of dancing, along with traveling, seeing new places, and being together in a recreational environment.

Another exciting thing was having two national callers, **big name** national callers. Doug McPherson, Agnes Smith, and Harlan Kerr from Seattle, the three of them together, had sent out a letter of inquiry to all the callers on the

Callerlab list. I don't know exactly what list they used, but they sent a letter of inquiry out to callers all over the country, telling them that we were going to have this square dance festival in Seattle, and asking if any of them would be interested in calling for us. They got positive responses from Paul Marcum and Elmer Sheffield. I know Paul and Elmer were probably being coached by their peers to turn us down, but they decided to take a chance, and so there they were.

And, boy, could they ever build the excitement level on the dance floor! We just went crazy. For the first time we knew how to dance, we were getting to be good dancers. I'm sure a lot of us were dancing Plus. I don't think there was any Advanced; I think it was all Mainstream and Plus. The "Fistful of Crinolines," a comic drag square dance team from Seattle, put on an incredible show. That was the forerunner to the Honky Tonk Queen contest. These guys had funny, funny names, and funny dresses.

We stayed at the hotel during the convention, but then afterwards we spent a night with one of the Seattle dancers, Dale Albertson. He took some of us from Denver up to Anacortes, and we took the ferry over to Orcas Island. That was part of the weekend for us. I don't know what else I can tell you. The convention was just a real highlight of that period of time.

At the general meeting at the Seattle convention, Denver agreed to host next year's convention. That proposal, or that bid, was made by the leaders of the rodeo association, and

a lot of the dancers at that meeting hesitated to accept Denver's bid, because the bid was made not by a dance group, but by a rodeo association. Eddie Schellhaus, Mary Ann Hartnett and I pulled Harlan aside, or maybe DougMcPherson—I know we pulled a couple of the leading figures aside—and expressed our concern that this next year's convention was being bid by a rodeo association.

The question caused heated discussion at the meeting, and so what ended up happening was that the rodeo association proposed that, instead of their bidding for the convention, they would allow the Mile High Squares, who were a sub-part of the association, to make the formal bid. With that technical change, everybody said "OK, we'll go with it." So the Mile High Squares bid the convention, but the real strength and organizing came from the people who were involved with the rodeo association.

At that time, the Rocky Mountain Rainbeaus had already split away, and so the Rainbeaus officially weren't among the sponsors of the convention. The convention was put on by the Mile High Squares (backed by the rodeo association). As a consequence, I personally had very little to do with the organization of that convention. The organization -was handled by Wayne Jakino, who had been president of the rodeo association and was still a power behind it, and Mike VanMeter.

Harlan Kerr had been the chair of that meeting in Seattle, and we left Seattle without a chair for the IAGSDC for the next year. However,

in April 1984, Denver hosted a rodeo, and during that rodeo a lot of dancers came together, and in our discussions, we recognized that there needed to be an IAGSDC chair to oversee the development of the Denver square dance convention. I nominated Bud Rhyne, because he was from Denver, and he was accepted. So Bud Rhyne then became the second chairperson of the association.

That was May 1984, and Bud acted as chairperson through the Denver convention, which was held Memorial Day weekend, 1985. Bud ran a lot of the meetings and made the announcements and was the speaker at the banquet at the Denver convention. Dean Hofmann, from the Florida Mustangs, was elected IAGSDC chairperson in Denver, to preside through the 1986 convention in San Francisco, and Scott Carey, from San Francisco's Western Star, was elected to the post in San Francisco, to hold office 1986-87.

**LT** Now, with all these developments, you still hadn't contacted a caller in the Denver area for your club? You were still doing it all yourselves?

**KJ** With added experience, I became more and more confident in my own ability to teach. During 1984 I wanted to learn to call, and the Denver Caller's Association sponsored a class, and so I joined it. But it wasn't a good experience: This was the spring of 1984 when everything else was happening. The Rainbeaus had just been formed, we were preparing to go to Seattle, the politics among the two gay clubs was intense, and at the same time I took a ten-week class on Sunday afternoons to learn to call.

The gay dancers were already developing a high-energy style, and we had a lot of fun together. We kicked up our heels, and we developed our own styling, and here I was on the side going to this straight caller's class that was being run by the older callers of the Denver area, people who had been around for years and years and were the established authority locally. I was willing to accept the difference between our gay dancing and the straight dancing, but their criticism was very strong. Eventually, I came to feel that I could do a better job teaching using records and tapes, than trying to get through this class to become a successful caller.

**LT** Criticism based on what? Was it a criticism of gay dancing?

**KJ** No, it was the criticism that would normally come up in a caller's school anyway. I think what happened was that I lost some confidence in my own ability to become a caller. I knew I was doing a good job using records and tapes because I had such an extensive collection and had it so well organized. I could walk them through whatever I thought was the tricky part of some of the hash calls, then put on the record, and they **learned** that way. I had confidence in my ability to teach **that way**, and I didn't want to subject the dancers to my apprenticeship in calling. Over time, I just kept developing that collection of records and tapes, and after a while, I decided I didn't really want to learn to call.

You asked if there were callers who were interested in calling for us. I guess the answer to that is "no," for a long time anyway. Finally,

after a few years, we interested Bud Bennett, who is an excellent caller, in teaching an Advanced class for us. This was probably about 1987 or '88, a couple years after my calling class. There were a lot of good, solid Plus dancers among the Rainbeaus who wanted to take Advanced. They had been seeing Advanced probably at convention, and the carrot was out front.

I hadn't developed records and tapes at the Advanced level. I had made a conscious decision in my record collection that I wasn't going to tackle Advanced. We talked to Bud Bennett, and Bud said he would call for us at his own hall, a square dance hall on his property. He has his house up front, and then behind is what was originally a garage, but he has totally converted it to a very nice dance hall that can accommodate up to eight squares. Anyway, he called Advanced classes for us two years.

Since then, in the past couple of years, we've interested quite a few local callers in calling for us. We're finally at the point where we're not afraid to approach local callers and just ask them. Right now, we have monthly "fun" dances, and we have a different caller every month. Things have finally changed and turned around, but it's taken a long time. Now we can even begin to be a little choosy: there are some callers who would like to call for us that we probably won't hire, because they're not good enough!

**LT** Your story reminds me of our situation in San Antonio. When I arrived there a year ago, the accepted wisdom among our square dancers,

even the people who had danced with straight clubs in San Antonio for several years, was that there wasn't a caller in Texas who would call for a gay group.

When the club started, we started with Rusty Fennell, who had had some exposure to gay squares at the Albuquerque fly-in a couple years ago. Then Rusty had other commitments, and he was too expensive for us, anyway. For our second class, we bought a set of tapes from Rusty which was OK, but it was not really what we needed. The tapes didn't give us any breadth at all, they just marched us through the calls.

Anyway, I got a list of the callers in the San Antonio/ Austin area during one of the straight festivals, the Alamo Jamboree, and I simply started with the "A's," and started calling. I would say "We have a group that wants to find somebody who will teach our Basic/Mainstream class. We are a gay group. Would you be interested?" Amazingly enough, I went through the first ten, and at least four said they would, or at least that they would consider it.

Finally we arrived at Terry Kephart, who had been president of the Texas State Caller's Association for a couple of years, and her question was, "Would your group have a problem with a woman caller?" I said, "No, I don't think we'd have any problem with that at all!" And she is now calling for us. She has, of course, talked about us to other callers in the area, and we're getting now feedback that "so-and-so would love to call for you, so if you have a function..."

**KJ** I talked to Terry Kephart the other day at the Gay Callers Association meeting. This is an aside, but one of the projects I've taken on is to list all the callers, straight or gay, across the country and Canada, who are willing to call for gay clubs, and I'm constantly updating it. Right now there are almost 300, and I've had Terry Kephart on there.

**LT** You've been with gay square dancing from the beginning. What are the highlights of that experience for you?

**KJ** The highlight is the almost year-to-year development and growth. I was talking to Art Smith this morning, and we were reflecting back on the meeting in Miami where the association was formed. Although we recognized the need for a national organization of some kind, I don't think any of us in our wildest dreams could have imagined that nine or ten years later we would be attending a convention of more than 1100 dancers.

I think all of us, but certainly I can speak for myself, see what square dancing offers for the gay community: the chance to be together. At first it was an opportunity to get together away from the bar environment. It also offers the mental challenge, the physical exercise, a chance to travel. It's just wonderful to see how our vision of all of those things being a strong offering to the gay community is now being recognized by so many people. Gay square dancing has become the life for so many people.

**LT** It seems to me that every tune I hear of a new club forming, you are in the background

somewhere. I know it's a standard suggestion that if someone is interested in starting a club, "Call Karl Jaeckel!"

**KJ** Part of that is because over the years I've tried to keep accurate contact lists. I think at first my intent was more to help and in some way support those clubs, but more recently my interest is just in finding out who the contacts are and distributing that information. One of the lists I have is "IAGSDC Regional Contacts," and it lists by state all of those individuals who have an interest in gay square dancing, but who aren't associated with a club. In Delaware, for example, there's a guy, supposedly in Wilmington, who is trying to get a group going. I had a contact in Hawaii at one time, but I don't think that's accurate now.

**LT** In other words, you are like Freeman Stamper, an "information freak," and you keep yourself organized so you can provide that.

**KJ** Quite often I get calls from people wanting to know what's going on here or there, or wanting to give me a name, or help me with information. I've encouraged that, and I hope it can be useful. Freeman and I are much alike, and fortunately there is room for both of us, because our projects are different. His effort in producing a travel guide is primarily for dancers who are traveling and who need the contact information.

The list that I've just described tells about individuals who are interested, but have no clubs to associate with. Another list, and this one is actually more important, is a list of all the clubs,

their delegates and alternates, together with the club P.O. Box. Some clubs receive their mailings at a club P.O. Box, other clubs don't have a P.O. Box, but the delegate gets the mail. In some cases, in fact, D. C. Lambda Squares is one case, where there is a delegate and an alternate, but a third person, Larry Perrin, receives the mail. So it takes quite awhile to keep track of exactly where all the mail for all the clubs goes. This also lists when the clubs were granted membership by the Association, and what their dues status is.

I need to go back home and take all the information from the meeting yesterday and get this updated, but following the Albuquerque convention there are exactly forty-three IAGSDC full-member clubs, and four associate-member clubs.

**LT** Any regrets in your association with gay square dancing?

**KJ** The only regret that I would have is that there are other things, non-dance activities, that I would like to be involved with, and because I'm so committed to square dancing, it chokes my available time for other activities. I still have a strong interest in my genealogy, and I would like to be able to pursue some research along that line. I finally at one point had to decide that I didn't want to take on even small genealogy projects, because I didn't want to leave them hanging. I just closed the door on it completely; I had to limit my focus. Other than that, I guess I have no regrets.

**LT** This is your chance to toot your own horn. Anything else that you have either done over the years, or that you are maintaining, like these lists? You talk about your scrapbooks, and they sound as though they are quite a complete record.

**KJ** I recognized early on that the record of our activity was important, and would become more important over time. I started a collection of scrapbooks, and I've just started numbering them. What I have is a series of seventeen three-inch binders that are full, and I'm ready to start the eighteenth one. They are well organized, and I've put a lot of time into it. The focus is primarily Rocky Mountain Rainbeaus, but there is a lot of IAGSDC-specific documentation and records included.

One of the projects I'd like to take on is to go back through that series of scrapbooks, and separate the Rainbeau history from the IAGSDC history. I have I AGSDC stuff in another place, and it needs some help with organization. Now that I've been elected Executive Administrator, that's something I'd really like to get to. I'd like to have a well-organized set of scrapbooks, or maybe some other kind of organization, to keep a record separate for the Association.

A couple of years ago, at Vancouver or New York, I recognized that somebody needs to keep a complete set of photographs of each of the clubs at all of the conventions. We each individually order one here or there, but how interesting it would be if we could look three or four years back at the size of Chesapeake Squares'

representation and see what changes have taken place! Who was involved back then? Who went to the conventions?

What's happened over the last two or three years is that the Association now is agreeing to purchase a full set of photographs at each convention. Usually the photographers are willing to cut the price for us, because they're getting so many individual orders anyway. I'm trying to order 5x7's on a consistent basis. The photographer this year tells me that there were 36 clubs that were photographed.

I have the photographs now for the past three or four years. Actually, I have all club photos taken since "Star Thru the Golden Gate," the San Francisco convention in 1986. There are no photos for "Peel the Apple," New York in 1989, because that year the photographer did not follow through and nobody received any photos. Also, I have club photos from the 1983 Miami fly-in, and some from "Promenade Along the Rockies," Denver in 1985.

One of the responsibilities I have as Executive Administrator will be to collect convention data, not club-specific data, but convention data, board meeting data, and copies of all previous IAGSDC newsletters, and to provide a central repository for it. It will probably mean buying some cabinets. Actually, that's not the part of this assignment that I'm really looking forward to. I enjoy keeping up with the contacts, that's the part I **do** enjoy. The idea is that the position is somewhat ongoing, to provide continuity from board to board, so that

the board can change with some flexibility, but yet have this constancy in the background. I hope that I can maintain this position for awhile.

**LT** Anything else that you think should be on the record?

**KJ** No, my mouth is dry, too. I think we've done a pretty good job covering what I know of the early years from 1981 to 1984. From that point on, there was more organization out in the clubs, more clubs were being created, and I was not as involved in that. There were lots of other people who know those years, from 1985 on. There certainly aren't many around now from the early years. Those people who were around are dear friends, because we can share those memories.

**LT** The sages of the movement?

**KJ** I don't know about that. We were just there at the time.

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*EDITOR'S NOTE: From his vast repository of documentation, Karl has provided the following excerpt of an interview by Larry Brown of Russ King, who, with Larry and others, was involved in the beginnings of Western Star Dancers in San Francisco. The excerpt is enclosed here for the amplification it offers of events mentioned by Karl in the above interview. Karl could provide no additional information as to the origin of this interview or about the rest of its content.—LT*

**RK** = Russ King

**LB** = Larry Brown

**RK** One thing that was very different [about the beginning of Western Star] is that the first two classes were dominated by people that had some prior exposure to square dancing through the old Foggy City Squares, which was characterized by a non-contemporary approach to square dancing. At Foggy City Squares there was no hash and no encouragement to mix up the squares and learn both positions, or to dance with different people. One normally danced with the same square all evening, and never stirred the bucket. This was one way of getting around the problem of how you keep track of who's dancing which role, but it got rather stultifying after a while.

[That was one of the reasons why], after a while, Western Star spun off Foggy City Squares. But, before that happened, I remember a night [*EDITOR'S NOTE: Thursday, April 22, 1982, according to Karl*] after I had been dancing with Foggy City a few months, when a bunch of guys from the Mile High Squares from Denver came as guests.

I thought, "Oh, gosh, this'll be really interesting to dance with people from another group, and I made sure I got in a square with some of them. It was people like Bob Sutherland, Tim Cannon, Karl Jaeckel, and Mike Hart, that I remember dancing with. Soon we could see that they obviously were confused by some of the things we were doing. For their part, they threw in little styling things that I wasn't quite used to.

I tried to go along, but was slightly thrown off and a bit confused, thinking, “Why are they doing this?”

And they were quite startled when, after a break, we squared up with the same people. I thought to myself: “Gosh, they don’t seem to know a whole lot about square dancing for people who have been square dancing as long as they have!”

Then, sometime over the next twenty four hours, I realized that I had the situation quite backwards, and that obviously there were different approaches [to square dancing] of which we were in complete ignorance. So, when I heard that Western Star was trying to get started at the

old ACT Rehearsal Studio, I decided to check it out and see what was going on. Did you ever go there?

**LB** Yes, a couple of times.

**RK** The five founders were Scott Carey, Ron Douglass, Agnes Smith, Roger Perry, and Dennis Ficken, and four of them were on the [old] Foggy City Squares Exhibition Team at the time.

**LB** So you were in Foggy City when you joined Western Star?

**RK** Oh, yeah.

## CONVERSATION WITH ART SMITH: THE SEATTLE “EXPLOSION” AND THE VANCOUVER CONNECTION

*EDITOR’S NOTE: Art Smith is one of those individuals who make involvement in gay square dancing worth the effort—a heart of gold, generous to a fault, and as soft as butter at room temperature. Art was instrumental in bringing square dancing to Seattle, where the numbers of people who came together merit being called an “explosion” of gay square dancers. He was also involved in getting things started in Vancouver. The following interview with Art took place on April 12, 1990 at the Vancouver convention.—LT*

**LT** = Luis Torres

**AJ** = Art Smith

**LT** Tell something about the background of your involvement in square dancing.

**AS** Well, one day I was talking to my next door neighbor over the backyard fence, and he was telling me about the National Gay Rodeo in Reno. It sounded interesting, and I decided to go. He encouraged me to be sure to go and see the Barn Dance that took place at the rodeo, because he thought that was the best part of it.

**LT** By the way, what year are we talking about?

**AS** We’re talking about 1982, and this was in the summer time. So I went to the rodeo, and made sure I went to the Barn Dance on Friday night, and there were literally 1,500 or 2,000 people at this County Fair/Exhibition Hall kind of building, all crowded around the dance floor.

I worked my way to the edge of the floor to see what they were looking at, and it turned out to be clogging, and two-stepping, and square dancing, and I had never seen any of that done

in a gay setting. I became so emotionally involved with it that I started to cry, and I pulled away from the crowd and walked around for a bit until I got my composure back, and then worked my way back to the floor, and the same thing happened again!! This happened **three** times. I had a wonderful time at the rodeo, and got very excited about the possibilities of that kind of entertainment.

At the airport and on the way back to Seattle, I started approaching people I knew who had been to the rodeo, trying to get names of people who might be interested in any kind of Western dancing. So when I got back to Seattle, I immediately made some flyers and put them up all over town and in all the gay establishments, inviting people who were interested in any of those three dance forms to contact me. At the same time, I contacted the *Seattle Gay News* and asked for their help in getting some interest going.

I also contacted one of the bar owners, Harvey (I forget Harvey’s last name now), who owned the Eastlake East Tavern, which had a large dance floor in it, and over the next couple of months, I finally made contact with about five

or six fellows, and we had a couple of meetings. We commissioned two of the guys to hunt down a caller and made plans for the first event.

By then it was a week before the event, and they still had not come up with a caller, and I realized that the reason was they were former square dancers hi the area, and were kind of squeamish about revealing the fact that they wanted a caller for a gay group. So I got on the phone, and within two hours I had found a square dance caller. As it turned out, the caller was a traditional caller, so for the first three nights we danced, we did traditional squares.

Now, back to the first night: At 7:15, I had the caller there with her three-piece band, under an agreement that I would guarantee her \$150 out of the \$250 she originally wanted for the evening. Anything over that was hers.

**LT** So, in essence, she would get the whole pot?

**AS** Yes, she took a risk at one end, but stood to benefit at the other. Sheri Nevins was her name. So 7:15 came, and there were maybe eight or ten people there, and I was really getting nervous. But by 7:30, there were 56 people in the place!! We had a full floor. By the third week, we had over 90 people, and hi the meantime, I realized that the bar would not be big enough, so I arranged for us to go to the Odd Fellows Hall, but by the fourth and fifth evenings, it became obvious that we could not stay at the Odd Fellows Hall.

My long-range goal was to get the activity out of the bar environment and into one that felt

more comfortable, so I had been talking to the Pilgrim Congregational Church about using space there. By a board vote of ten to one, the church board elected to allow us to come and use their basement.

I had also put an ad in the paper, because the few fellows who had contacted me before we had started kept urging me that we had to go to Modern Western square dancing. My concern was that the activity should be available for the largest number of people to enjoy, and I feared that if we went to classes and a strictly structured program, that was going to restrict numbers. But P. J. Divino kept pushing me in the direction of Western squares. My argument was that according to common wisdom, if something was going very well, you should not mess with it!!

But all the other clubs were Modern Western, except for San Francisco, where Skip Barrett had a bastardized version of square dancing that was sort of his own development. He just taught them figures, rather than teaching them what each call was, so they would just dance to the record, and sometime they would be two moves ahead of what was being called.

So, I put an ad in the paper for a Modern Western caller and got two responses, but one of the fellows, when he heard it was a gay group said, "Well, I think I'm going to be busy that night!" This, although my ad had been very specific about the date, etc. Walt Cavanaugh was the second fellow that called, and his response was, "I don't care what you do off the dance floor! If you want to square dance, I'm willing to teach you!"

His voice over the phone sounded sort of gruff and redneckish, so I said that perhaps he'd better come down and watch us one night first, and he came the last night we were at the Eastlake East. He was a big, strapping, sort of fatherly fellow, quite obviously not a member of the gay community, but even though it was a whole new world for him, he was very open to teaching us. So he became our first caller, and he was our caller for two years.

By the fifth or sixth evening, we had our first meeting at the Pilgrim Congregational Church, and we've been at the church ever since. By then we had almost 140 people in the class! The thing took off like wildfire.

We decided to split the class and have another session at the Eastlake, but that didn't work out too well. Anyway, even with attrition, we had 120 people in the class, and in May of '83, we graduated 87 people. By then, we had started a new class in February.

That February of '83, the South Florida Mustangs had decided to have their first fly-in, with four clubs participating: Mile High Squares from Denver, the Mustangs, Western Star Dancers from San Francisco, and three of us from Seattle: Jim Goeres, myself, and Tom Dickson. And on the last day of the gathering, Sunday evening, in the patio of the Crossfire Saloon in Hollywood, Florida, two of us from each of the clubs got together and developed the concept of our association, establishing certain attitudes. [See: "From the Archives of the IAGSDC#3."]

For example, it was to be a non-competitive activity; the association was going to be called National Association of Lesbian and Gay Square Dance Clubs, because we wanted to be inclusive. I think that was San Francisco's input; they always tended towards the "politically correct" approach. We sent out notices to all the clubs that we were going to have a big meeting to ratify the association concept at the Gay Rodeo in Reno.

At Reno, about 80 of us sat down and discussed the association, and the women there felt that we were all one family, and that although men are referred to as "homosexuals" and females as "Lesbians," the "family" name was "gay," and that was what we should be called. So through the women's encouragement, the name was set.

The organization was first "national" at the Reno Rodeo, and then became "international," by the following fall, because by then the Vancouver club was also starting.

**LT** Which clubs were in existence by then?

**AS** To my recollection, we had San Francisco, Seattle, Portland, which was getting started, Sacramento—two clubs run by Dave "Happy" New Year, one in Orange County and the other in Palm Springs, both represented by him, Albuquerque, Denver, and the South Florida Mustangs.

The decision was made to have a first general meeting next year, which was the beginning of the convention pattern, and apparently because so many things had been

happening out of Seattle, they decided to hold it in Seattle. I'm under the impression that we were the first club to have a paid professional caller, the first club to have bought our own sound system, and the first club to have four or five members go to caller's school. Also everyone was amazed at the numbers we were able to attract.

I believe Harlan Kerr was made president, and Doug McPherson and Agnes Smith were made chairmen of that convention. I had no idea what a "convention" meant, and when the event actually started, I was just stunned with delight. Doug and Agnes knew what they were doing, and knew what the dynamics would be, so it turned out to be very wise when they decided that rather than have people housed by local club members, we should have it at a hotel with everyone staying there. That way the energy was concentrated in one place, and it was nothing short of phenomenal.

They had the Seattle Men's Chorus singing, they had the mayor of Seattle welcoming the gathering. It was interesting to me several months ago, when I was watching the tape from that convention, and noticed that one of our Seattle square dancers, John Paul Olafson, gave the invocation. In it, he mentioned the "still mysterious disease of Acquired Immune Deficiency that was taking its toll on our community," so, although we did not know then how it was coming about, we were already feeling the impact of it.

I also noticed that the color bearers at the convention were "Thumper," whose real name I don't know, and Gary Way, and both of them have passed away from AIDS since. That convention tape is a very precious tape, and it was then I realized how valuable our tapes are, because they capture the joy of the occasion and the images of a lot of people who are no longer with us.

**LT** Why do you think that Agnes Smith and Doug McPherson were so right in their ideas for the convention format?

**AS** I don't know about Doug, but my sense was that Agnes Smith had been an activist back in the '60s, and she was a very aware, astute, very bright person, and I think that she had been involved in organizational function handling in some way. I don't know that for a fact, but that is my impression of it.

**LT** So you think she had experience dealing with large groups?

**AS** Yes, and I believe it was her idea to have the convention right at the hotel with everybody staying there. Harlan Kerr worked very closely with the two of them, so he would know. Agnes and Doug were the real "technicians" of square dancing; their energies were directed to really doing it right.

In my opinion, they sacrificed the social aspect somewhat, which is where my energy was

directed. For example, Doug had been teaching for the club, and because he was so demanding, his classes were not fun, so eventually the club asked him not to teach anymore. Out of his whole class, I think only two people graduated. My experience has been that a club has to have a balance of work and fun; if it's all work and no fun, people get bored with that. They're there to have a good time.

**LT** So how did the convention go off?

**AS** I had nothing to do with the organizing of it; I was strictly a spectator, but from **that** point of view, it was simply spectacular. They had thought of more things than I had ever imagined, and when I saw the minute details involved in having the convention come off, I was astounded. They had even thought of having dance cards in the program, so that people could keep track of who they had danced with!

The convention badges were also uniquely done. They were cut out of two-layered plastic with a little rhinestone right in the middle. They had a program that was just first quality, and they had a gorgeous, simple poster showing these white cranes that have a red top, just in a position of taking off hi flight, and two joined hands, because the name of the convention was "All Join Hands."

I think the lesson is that when you have people who really know what they are doing, you should just let them go ahead and do it, because those two produced an incredible convention.

And the work they did then served as a model for the next few conventions, each convention adding to the wisdom and experience for planning future ones.

**LT** How were things developing in Seattle in the meantime?

**AS** Our first graduation in Seattle was May 1, 1983, and it was held aboard a very large ferry boat on Puget Sound. There were people there from Portland. It was an extremely prideful moment for all us.

**LT** You said that some of you had gone to caller school. Why was that necessary?

**AS** I guess we were just anxious to learn everything and learn it well. We quite early found out that our classes were so big that we could very comfortably afford a caller. In fact, our classes were so big that we got permission from the church to have two nights of square dancing each week, Tuesday and Wednesday. The first class continued to dance on Tuesdays, and then our new class was held on Wednesday, each with a paid caller. So, for two and half years or so, we had a caller two nights a week.

I realized that we had to have more dance time than just one caller could give us, and that we had a problem with the caller owning the equipment and the records, because we couldn't create our own parties independent of the caller. I had been holding the club funds, and we saved to buy a reconditioned sound system.

Then we spent several hundred dollars on records. At that tune, my phone bill was rarely less than \$160 or \$170 a month, because I was constantly on the phone with people around the country, playing records over the phone back and forth, getting an idea which ones were good, and finding out where to buy them. We also traded information on how to handle this or that situation. Scott Carey in San Francisco, and Jim McMahon and Dean Hofmann in Florida were the three most helpful people to me in those early days, when I didn't know a damned thing and was trying to piece it all together.

The caller got a little miffed at our buying our own equipment. He didn't like the idea, and felt a bit threatened by it, but it was the right move to have made. It allowed us to create our own time for dancing apart from the classes. We had had a couple of big dances in rented halls, and found that it cost a lot of money, because some of the halls cost around \$300 for an evening, plus the cost of the caller, which was \$35 a night originally. In view of the numbers of people we were getting, we doubled his fee very early on, and he appreciated the fact that we were not taking advantage of him.

Then we started dancing at The Brass Connection on Saturday evenings early, from 6 to 8:30 p.m., before the regular crowd started to come in. We could hold four squares on that floor. A year or two later, Neighbors opened up with a larger floor, so we moved there. But every Saturday, we had a square dance session with records.

When we graduated the second class, there were some problems integrating the new graduates into our dancing, because some of them felt intimidated by the more experienced dancers. There was some impatience going, but eventually we got those things ironed out. I tried to gear the records toward the less experienced dancers, in order to give them time to build their confidence. Since then, I have watched other clubs develop, and it seems like all of them go through something like this.

One of the things I have learned is that you have to be aware of other people's needs. Sometimes you have to handle situations that you would rather avoid. One of them involves drinking, which I am now convinced more than ever just does not mix with square dancing. I've also experienced that if a problem is handled early on when it surfaces, you can do it with the least wear and tear involved.

**LT** You still haven't told me why it was necessary to have three of you go to caller's school!

**AS** I guess we just wanted to do it! We thought it would be great for us to develop talent from within our own group.

**LT** Were there any gay callers available at that time?

**AS** "Happy" New Year from California was the only one available at that time, that I know of, but we were just not used to bringing in a caller from outside, paying airfare, plus fee, etc.

The San Francisco groups used him several times. But anyway, Jim Goeres and I finished the school. He did great at singing calls, I was better at patter, but I noticed that I did not get much applause when I did a singing call.

I think my problem was that I was brought up in a Hindu ashram as a kid because I was born into that faith, so when all the other kids nine or ten years old were learning popular songs and getting into Western rhythms, here I was in an ashram doing Hindu chants! Anyway, I never learned rhythm, and it showed when I got behind the mike and tried to do a singing call. I probably would have been great at Hindu chant square dancing, but that was not a possibility.

Anyway, I soon decided to give up on calling, but I could teach a class with my patter, and I did it several times, including when I started coming to Vancouver in the fall of '83 I had a good collection of records by then, so I would do my own patter, and when time came for a singing call, I would save my ass by putting on a record by Jack Lasry or some other caller, who could do it much better than I could. I have a lot of respect for people like Chris Phillips and Bill Eyler, who have developed wonderful skills in calling.

**LT** Just for the record, what the hell were you doing in a Hindu ashram?

**AS** Well, to put it in more modern terms, my parents were the “flower children” of the 30’s and ’40s. In those days, they referred to them more as “bohemians.” When my dad was a

teenager, he converted to the Hindu religion. He was 15, and he was already married and had a child, so he was doing everything way ahead of schedule. I was the second child.

And what was even worse, this was during the Depression. My dad has told me that one of his jobs with the WPA (ED: Work Projects Administration, a Depression-era job program) was singing with a choral group, and that’s how he supported the family. By the way, when I say Hindu religion, I’m using a generic term. He actually converted to a modified version of one of the Hindu sects, Yoghananda Satanga; in English, The Self-Realization Fellowship.

When the war ended, Yoghananda told my father that if he would move the family to California, they would continue to develop him as a priest or minister, since he had already taken over the church in the Boston area, and eventually they would give him a church in California. So, at age 9, I moved to California, the San Diego area, and I was there until I was almost 15. So, that’s why my rhythm stinks!

**LT** I guess it’s not that your rhythm stinks, it’s just Eastern, instead of Western!

**AS** Well, I could’ve done wonderfully at morning chants, but that was not called for in square dancing.

**LT** In those early years of square dancing, what was the relation like between the established clubs and those that were just being organized?

**AS** Personally, I was involved with the Portland, Vancouver, and New York City clubs, cooperating with them by exchanging square dance music, letting them copy my material, and so on. We were always on the phone. Ken Pollock and I were on the phone constantly, sometimes an hour and a half at a time.

There was a very close camaraderie among these people, and just like Jim McMahon and Dean Hofmann had nurtured me when I was trying to get things going here, I, in turn, tried to help others. And I know Ken Pollock did the same thing with others, so I know for certain that my experience was not unique. I was just a link in a process that repeated itself over and over: receiving love and support, and passing it on in turn. I haven't yet met a gay square dancer who was not willing to stop whatever he or she was doing to help whoever was asking for help.

Doug Barnett in Baltimore and I also exchanged a lot. In fact, in the course of the first two years or so, I wrote a booklet, 64 pages or so, about how to start and maintain a gay square dance club, and Doug Barnett helped me with that. There was a lot of nurturing and a lot of support among the clubs, and there still is. I have a collection of about 100 records, and although it's at home now, for the last three years it's been bouncing all over the country between clubs that are just coming together.

**LT** What was your relation with Vancouver, and how did it come about?

**AS** Agnes Smith, and perhaps Doug McPherson, and I came to Vancouver, hoping to be able to plant a seed somewhere, find some bar that had Western dancing, or was willing to move in that direction.

**LT** So you didn't have any contacts beforehand? This was just an exploratory venture?

**AS** Somebody had told me to go to John Barley's [Tavern], because they had some Western music they played every once in a while. So I did, and the bartender told me, "Oh, you want to talk to Carol Roberts. She'll be in a little later."

**LT** Who was Carol Roberts?

**AS** Carol was the co-owner of the bar. Anyway, I hung around, and later on met Carol. I told her what I had in mind, and she said, "Wait just a minute!" and disappeared into her office. When she came back, she had several articles that had appeared in the *Seattle Gay News* about our square dancing activities, which she had clipped out with the intention of eventually contacting us. So she was very receptive, since it was something she had already had in mind.

Carol was very supportive, and that was pretty much the initial contact. In the meantime, John Mace had been contacted to teach Western square dancing, but he was an airline pilot, and his schedule suddenly changed, so he couldn't do it anymore. He called me, and I agreed to pick it up. They had just had a few lessons when I took over. I think we had around two squares to begin with.

This is why I feel a bit uncomfortable when I am referred to as the founder of Vancouver. I may have planted the seed, but Carol Roberts was the actual founder, and without her energy, her spirit, her love, nothing would have happened. She has been a strong and very positive influence on the group.

**LT** I understand that Carol is not gay.

**AS** No, she is straight, and at that time was—maybe still is—married to a gay man. She is very low-key and very working-behind-the-scenes, but the truth is that her whole energy has been for the support of the club. Murray Lush was the first president of the club, and when he was dying, Carol and the rest of the club were at his bedside 24 hours a day, day in and day out, until Murray passed away. She was there all the time supporting Murray and supporting everyone else who was supporting him. She's really an incredible person! I have tremendous admiration for her.

My feeling is that the Vancouver club has grown because of their common effort and Carol's support. This is a very warm and open club, and for me it's like coming home every time I come back here.

**LT** Going back to your experience in getting things started in Seattle, how do you account for the overwhelming response you got for an activity that was so foreign to what was common in the gay community at that time?

**AS** I have often wondered about that, because I was an unknown, so it was certainly not because of me. I think the time was just right, because disco had been going on for a long time, and people were getting somewhat tired of it, so they welcomed an alternative. Maybe that was some of it. We had a live band and a live caller for the first few tunes, and that may have helped, but even after the band was long gone, our classes were huge.

What I think is that it was a new activity, and a lot of people were just ready for it. What was interesting was that like the old saying "money makes money," we had such a large group of people to begin with the first night that they served to publicize the activity and bring others in. In those early days, there were no political issues, no factions to deal with, we were all at the Basic and Mainstream level, so levels were not a question. We just had to try to keep on top of things, because everything was happening so fast.

While we were still at the Odd Fellows Hall, on the fourth week or so, I noticed one gal putting her jacket on, and I asked her, "Are you leaving?" She said: "Yes, there's not enough women here!" I told her, "Well, if you come back next week with a friend, there'll be one more; if you just leave now, there'll be one less!" She still left and never came back, so I don't know if I handled that situation correctly, but I still think my answer was the right one.

We tried very hard to bring women in: we went to women's bars, contacted women's groups, etc., and although at times we've had up to 20 women in the class, in the end, they seem to pull away. What the dynamics are exactly, I'm not sure, but the women don't seem to hang on proportionately as long as the men. I think that's a shame, because we have so many gifts to share with each other that that is a lost opportunity.

**LT** Of course, there are the unusual cases like the Albuquerque group, where more than 50% of the members are women.

**AS** The best thing I can come up with is that, being sensitive to how women may feel, if I were to come into a group where there were only three or four men and 80 women, I might feel very intimidated. I would love to see groups where the numbers were 50/50.

**LT** One thing came to my mind in hearing you try to explain why the activity was so successful in Seattle, and that is the following: It seems to me that the whole Pacific Northwest area is very outdoors-oriented, very sort of healthful, clean-living-activity-oriented, and I wonder whether that might have played a role. You had a particular mindset to benefit from that was also present in the local gay community.

**AS** That might very well be true. I came up here from Los Angeles, where the atmosphere for gay people was very oppressive, and people were very isolated. But here, I was just stunned at the number of activities that were available for gay people: the center section of the *Seattle Gay*

*News* had more than 200 organizations listed, and not all that existed were in there. In 1982, people seemed more open to exploring possibilities.

Perhaps we were also benefiting from the changes of attitude forced upon the community by the AIDS epidemic, since we presented a very good alternative to the bars, or cruising parks to meet people. We were removing social interaction from the meat rack to the square dance floor, where you meet at a different level and under different circumstances.

**LT** What about the conventions? You've seen them all. How have they developed from your point of view?

**AS** They've developed **fabulously!** What else can I say? There are a lot of things that happen because of the conventions. For the local clubs, there is a lot of growing and maturing in the process of planning a major function. This is not a five-and-dime routine, and our conventions have all been first-class events.

There is only one convention that I have mixed feelings about, and that was the Denver convention, which was put on by a man who had dual interests. WayneJakino was his name. His first interest was promoting the Colorado Gay Rodeo Association, and he planned the convention for the weekend preceding the gay rodeo. My perspective was that much of what I was exposed to in the course of that convention was really a promo for the rodeo to follow. As a result, I did not feel that family closeness, that same dynamics

that are a part of our conventions. Don't get me wrong, though. The Denver convention was fabulous; it was a good convention, but there was something different about it also.

Conventions are a proving ground for people who are willing to put their asses on the line. And they are another example of the family feeling among gay square dancers: people who are willing to work their butts off planning a huge party for the rest of us to enjoy.

**LT** How did you get started videotaping the conventions?

**AS** I don't remember what the motivation was when I bought the video camera, other than I wanted to videotape the San Francisco convention. I had seen a video of Seattle, but there was none of Denver, so I wanted to have San Francisco on record. I went out and bought a \$1,600 machine, and, as I usually do where square dancing is concerned, I sunk myself into it, deciding to do it so that people who wanted could have copies of the tape.

I was concerned from the beginning with keeping a record of our activities in Seattle, a scrap book with clippings and photographs, and I guess this was just an extension of that concern. Right now I am pulling away from doing the videotapes, but I've asked Scott Carey if he would become the repository for the tapes in the name of the association, because I feel that these tapes have become invaluable history. They must be available so that someday in the future people can still see the tremendous love and the

tremendous courage that was present among us. It's very heartwarming for me to go back and see these tapes again, because now with the AIDS epidemic, there are always faces in them of people who are gone.

**LT** So Seattle was taped? Who made that tape?

**AS** It was a fellow by the name of Alex...I forget his last name now, but it's on that first convention tape. Agnes and Doug asked him to do it, and he had produced it using home equipment, so the edited copy was almost fifth generation home video, pretty fuzzy and indistinct. Alex died of AIDS, and I asked his lover if I could borrow the original and re-do it on modern equipment. He loaned me the tapes, and I re-edited it and added some footage with a background of downtown Seattle in it, did some music dubbing, etc., but it was **his** tape.

**LT** And Denver?

**AS** Denver wasn't taped at all, and I think perhaps that was part of my motivation, because I felt that a video was an important record. There were a few private cameras, but none of that material has been made available.

**LT** When you think back on your involvement in square dancing, do you have any one particular favorite experience?

**AS** There have been many overwhelming experiences. We had been dancing for about four months, had started our second class, which had 120 people in it, and there were about 30

angels helping out. And when 7:30 p.m. rolled around, and Walt got up on the stage and started square dancing, and I saw gay men and women helping each other learn something, and enjoying themselves, that overwhelmed me and I started to cry.

You've got to remember the generation I come from. We were held down tremendously, and there was **absolutely nothing**. The Mattachine Society had a newsletter called "One," and that was about the only publication of any kind that was positive about being gay. I was kicked out of my home because I was gay, I was kicked out of the service because I was gay, even though I hadn't actually done anything. All my favorite uncles rejected me and didn't want me to have anything to do with their children. There was no area of safety for us. In my heart I knew we were wonderful people, and it was terribly frustrating not being able to experience the beautiful side of gay people as a group doing something constructive.

So gay square dancing has always been something very moving to me. At the San Francisco convention, I had to leave my workshop to go to the bathroom, and I had to walk down a long, long hallway, past classes, and workshops, and a callers' class, and by the time I got to the bathroom, I was a mess!! Tears were just streaming down my face. It was something new and wonderful.

Even now, at every convention, there is a point where the energy gets so intense that I just lose it! I feel we're passing on a dynamic of

spiritual growth for gay people, and that is terribly important.

**LT** What do you mean when you say you were kicked out of your home?

**AS** My dad had divorced my mom, left the ashram, and moved to Long Beach, where he had remarried. In spite of the Hindu philosophy that our karmic condition makes it OK for us to be where we are, because that is our karma and we are "unfolding," the ashram leaders realized that I was gay and asked my mother to send me away to my dad.

I went to live with my dad, and there, his new wife realized that I was gay, and my dad and his wife kept me under constant supervision. They guided me to school and back, and I was not allowed to be on my own or with other young people my age. One day, I ran away, but the San Diego police picked me up and brought me back.

The next day, my dad took me to a psychiatrist, who had me open my shirt. He pointed to my chest and said, "See, you have hair on your chest. That proves that you are not a homosexual!" With that, he recommended that I be committed to an institution. My dad refused to do that, but he brought me home and kept me locked in my room. Finally, after three weeks of being locked up, I broke the window and ran away again, went to my mom, and told her the whole story.

She told me to go back to my dad, that she would have a talk with him. The next morning,

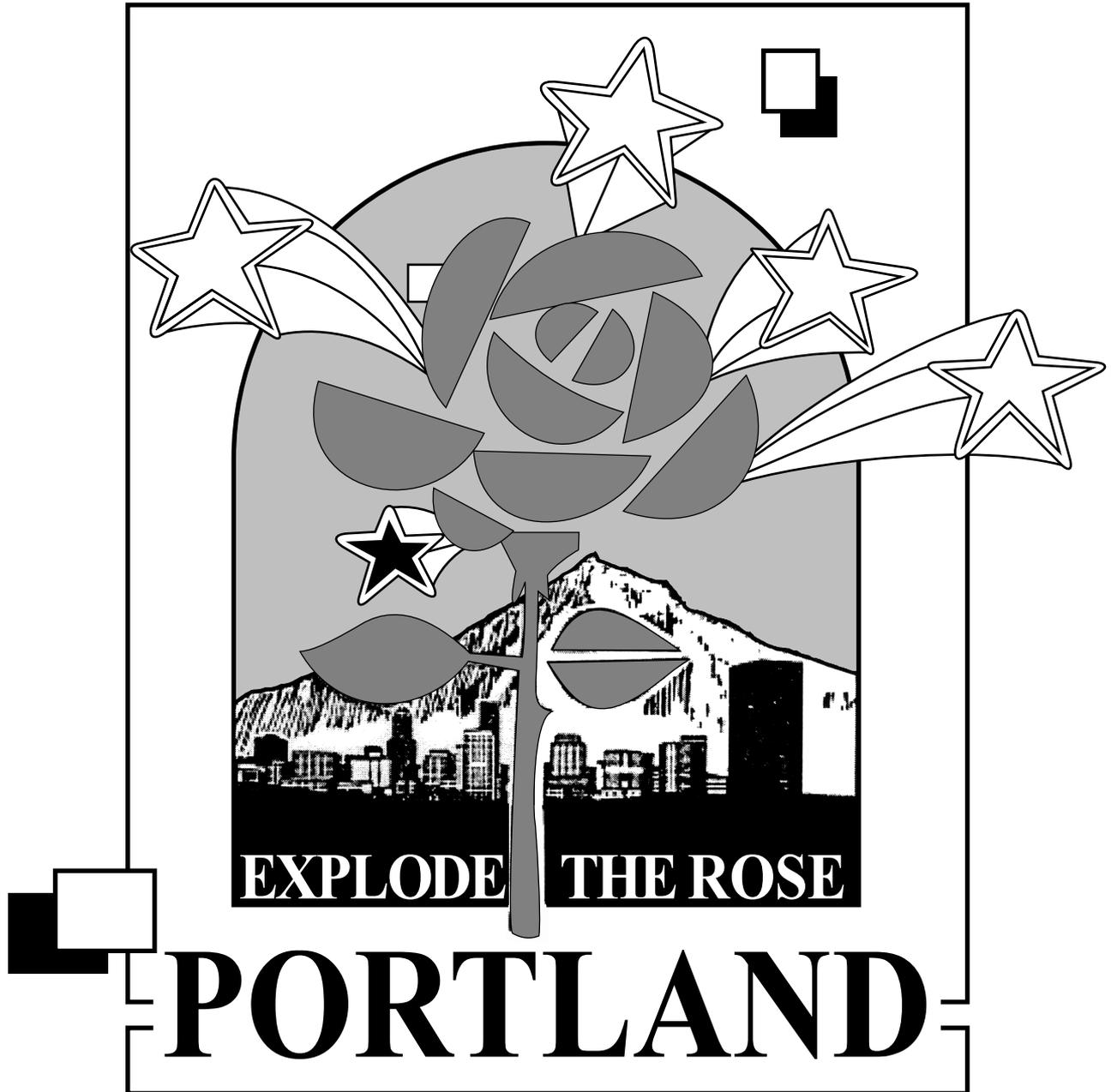
I had my “talk” with my dad, which ended when he slugged me across the room and yelled at me, “You cocksucker! Go in the house, gather your things, and get out of here!” So, at age 15, I was out on my own, and I didn’t see my dad or talk to him for seven years.

One day, years after that, I woke up and decided I loved my Dad, no matter what he had done, so I called him long distance and told him, and since then, we’ve been in the process of coming together again. In his way, I feel that he has totally accepted me. I think it’s a sad

commentary on Christianity, Hinduism, or any religion that they make a parent turn away from a child because the child loves differently.

I am sure all this is in the background of my feeling towards gay square dancing. I have a very warm, fulfilling, loving experience in square dancing. When people say that the great thing about square dancing has nothing to do with dancing, I tend to agree wholeheartedly. The most important thing about it is the love and the friendships it creates.

# 1987 IAGSDC CONVENTION



Fourth Annual Convention  
of the  
International Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs

July 3-5, 1987

## **FROM THE ARCHIVES OF THE IAGSDC #4: MORE ABOUT THE SEATTLE “EXPLOSION”**

*EDITOR’S NOTE: Few of the gay square dance clubs have had to deal with the problem of having too many people show up for dancing. That was the problem in Seattle, however; when Art Smith organized the first classes in the Emerald City. The first document below shows a rather unusual way the new Seattle group found to deal with the dual problem of small space and large numbers of dancers, before the group moved from the Eastlake East tavern to their ultimate home at Plymouth Congregational Church.*

*The second document is a feature article from Lights: A Lesbian/Gay Features Magazine, a Seattle publication. The article appeared in the May 27-June 9, 1983, issue of the magazine. —LT*

### **DOCUMENT #1: A FLYER DISTRIBUTED TO SEATTLE’S WEDNESDAY NIGHT CLASS AT THE EASTLAKE EAST**

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#### WELCOME TO WEDNESDAY NIGHT SQUARE DANCING

While we are here at the Eastlake East, we will be doing primarily traditional square dancing. When we move to a larger space, we will be shifting more to Western Square Dance and the instruction of it for beginners.

The response to square dancing has been so good, that we are OUT OF ROOM. In the event that more people are here than the floor can accommodate, we would like to ask your cooperation to allow everyone ample opportunity to dance. To facilitate that, we may ask before each dance that people with a stated birthday month sit out that dance, unless there is room on the floor. This will give you a one-dance breather, allow you a chance to watch, and provide everyone with plenty of dancing opportunity. Thank you for helping make this dance enjoyable for all.

We are working on getting a larger space and need your help. If you know of a larger hall, 30 x 50 feet or bigger, check it out. Get the price per hour or per night, the nights it is available, and note any extras, like seating, band platform or stage, etc. With the facts collected, call Art Smith at 789-2668. We all will really appreciate your thoughtful assistance.

**DOCUMENT #2: ARTICLE ABOUT THE BEGINNING OF GAY SQUARE DANCING IN SEATTLE FROM THE SEATTLE LIGHTS MAGAZINE, MAY 27-JUNE 9, 1983 ISSUE**

**SWING YOUR PARTNER!  
LESBIAN/GAY SOCIAL DANCING IN SEATTLE.  
PUDDLETOWN SQUARES**

*by Reb*

Tuesday evening, Broadway, eight o'clock. A white-haired married couple pauses to peer at the commotion through the open door of Pilgrim Congregational Church.

"Looks like they're having fun," he says.

"What are they doing?," she asks.

"Looks like dancing. Square dancing, it looks like."

"In the church?"

"Right there in the basement." He pauses. His voice is tentative. "I think it's fellas dancing with fellas."

He pauses again. Longer this time.

"Sounds like they're having fun," she smiles.

He shrugs his shoulders, shakes his head slightly, then smiles, too. "Looks like they're having fun."

The Puddletown Squares provide some of the best press on a positive gay lifestyle anywhere. They're clean, American, healthy, and unabashedly gay. As he tells the story of the dance club, Art Smith apologizes. "I can't keep from getting choked up," he says, and daubs his bright, sensitive eyes.

Smith attended the National Gay Rodeo in Reno last year and was moved by "the gentle, caring touching" he saw in a gay men's square dance group there. He decided he wanted to start a similar group in Seattle, and last October organized the first square dance evening. "It's so important to be able to meet people in a social situation that isn't necessarily sexual."

Evidently, lots of Seattle gays agreed with Smith. Within two weeks, the original group of 55 had mushroomed to over 130, had outgrown two locations, and had begun to meet twice a week. All this because a guy who knew next to nothing about square dancing wanted to learn something about it with friends.

The Puddletown Squares offers a 26-week course in Western square dancing. They are the only gay club in Washington, though they are helping start groups in Tacoma, Bellingham, and Spokane. With 200 members, they are the largest gay square dance group in the nation, and the largest of the hundred square dance clubs (the rest are straight) in Seattle.

Tuesday nights the class meets, and Wednesday experienced dancers can come for social dancing. The group is now run by a nine-person board made up of men and women. And Smith has been asked by the recently created National Association of Gay and Lesbian Square Dance Groups to write a booklet on how to start a square dance group. The reason for this phenomenal growth is baffling, until you talk with Smith.

His caring face lights up. “When you see those barriers being broken, all of them, there’s old, young, fat, skinny, men, women, handicapped, all out there together, it’s just so human and special.” Smith laughs as he tells how the group’s caller, Walt [Cavanaugh], had to work at distinguishing the dancers. “Walt is used to watching the couples in the head square and marking them as ‘the guy and gal with blue shirts,’ ‘the guy and gal with,’ etc. He’d never been faced with a floor where most of the couples were same-sex, so he started us wearing colored baseball caps so he could keep the couples straight, or rather, keep them in order.” The Seattle group started what is now the national trend to mark couples with colored visor caps.

At the same time as he emphasizes the social and personal importance of the group, Smith is very serious about the educational possibilities as well. He pulls out a list of the 3500 figures that comprise modern square dance. He is fluent with terms like “curlique” and “scoot backs” and “dos-a-dos,” and is proud to have graduated ninety dancers who learned more than fifty figures in the first six-month class of the group.

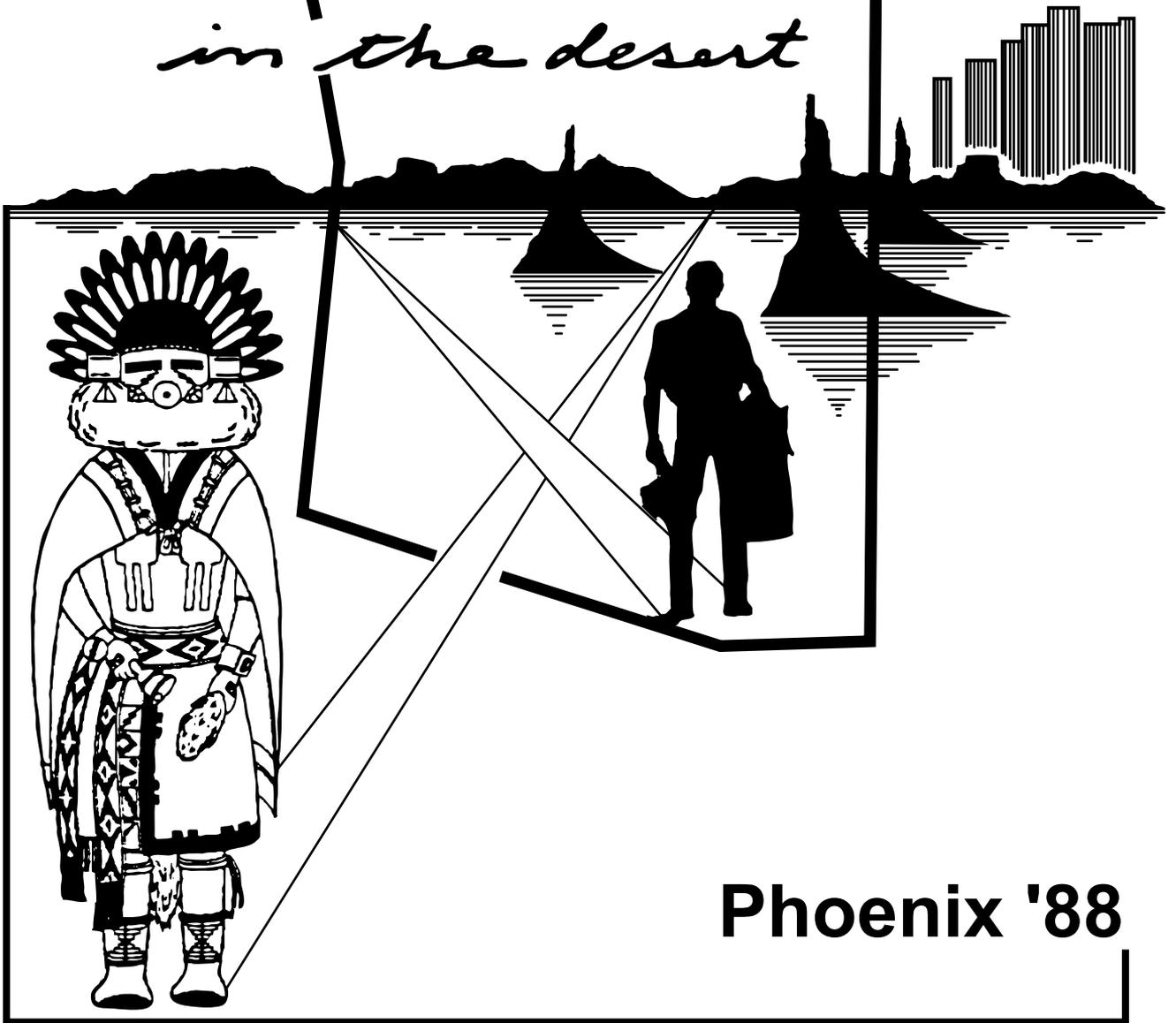
Smith also hopes that the group, which charges \$2.00 per person per evening, will be able to use any extra money that comes into benefit causes in the gay community. “We’re a beautiful community,” Smith says earnestly, “and when straight people see us, they see that we don’t just lurk in bushes and baths and bars. We’re loving and healthy—and we like to dance.”

The group works hard to offer alternatives to bar life. A lot of other activities could offer those alternatives, but there’s something none of the rest of them could duplicate—that feeling in your toes when someone grabs you from behind and sweeps you out onto the dance floor as the music is cranking up in all its corny, wonderful glory. There’s something special about groups of gay men and women holding hands, with themselves, and for the first time in a long time, with each other.

Puddletown Squares recently elected new officers. The new officers are Don Fleharty, president; Harlan Kerr, vice-president; Gary Way, secretary; and Alan Johnson, treasurer. Puddletown Squares founder and original president, Art Smith, was elected to the board of directors. Other board members are Agnes Smith, Maxci Moon, Cheryl Marek, and Marne Perry.

# CROSS TRAILS

*in the desert*



**Phoenix '88**

**Fifth Annual Convention  
of the  
International Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs**

**May 19-22, 1988**

## PLANNING THE FIRST CONVENTION IN SEATTLE: A CONVERSATION WITH AGNES SMITH

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Agnes Smith, a straight woman, was involved in gay square dancing from the very beginning: first with Skip Barrett's Foggy City Squares, then in the founding of Western Star Dancers, and finally with Puddletown Squares in Seattle. In the following conversation, Agnes talks about her involvement in square dancing and about her role in planning the first convention of the IAGSDC and in carrying the event through. Agnes makes some interesting observations placing the gay square dance movement in the larger context of events in the gay community at large in the 1980s. The interview took place at her home in Seattle on October 7, 1992.—LT*

**LT** = Luis Torres

**AS** = Agnes Smith

**AS** Do you have a series of questions? I don't know how you want to approach this. Do you want to just talk?

**LT** Don't worry, I'll guide you.

**AS** OK. I was thinking about what to say to you. It's very complex, you know? It's complex, and yet it's simple.

**LT** First of all, tell me something about you. Where are you from originally?

**AS** I grew up in Wisconsin on a dairy farm. I lived there until I was 21, moved to San Francisco, and lived there through 1983. Then I moved here to Seattle. I was in San Francisco for about ten years, give or take; now I've been here in Seattle close to ten years.

**LT** What do you do professionally? What is your work?

**AS** I'm in the transportation industry: I've worked for steamship lines since 1973, and right now I work at the Port of Tacoma. I'm an operations superintendent at the port.

**LT** What do operations superintendents do?

**AS** They coordinate cargo on and off ships; we have to also run a lot of the double-stack trains. We load those out and discharge them: train stuff and ship stuff, cargo on and off. I've been involved in transportation for close to twenty years now.

**LT** Now comes the sixty-four thousand dollar question: How did you, a straight woman, get involved with gay square dancing?

**AS** I was thinking about that, because I knew that would come up. How did I get involved? It has to do with just life, you know? I was living

in San Francisco, working for steamship lines there. The guy that sat right next to me was gay. He was in the closet at work, but I kind of suspected that he was gay. I would make comments every once in awhile about other gay people that I knew, trying to make him understand that it was OK with me if he was gay.

But he never opened up to me on that score until I broke up with my boyfriend. I was going through this immense emotional trauma: this was, after all, the first love of my life. I was having an awful time getting over it; crying constantly for two months, and my friend at work perceived my emotional turmoil. He was going away to a cruise in the Caribbean, and there was going to be a going-away party, so he said, “Agnes, I want you to come to my going-away party.” I said, “OK, that would be great.” He said, “It’s going to be at the Endup.” Do you know the Endup in San Francisco?

**LT** I’ve heard of it.

**AS** It was a gay disco. At that point, I had never been in a gay bar, or disco, or anything before. He said, “It’s gay”, and I said, “That’s OK, I’ll come.”

So I showed up that night. I walked in maybe fifteen or twenty minutes before he came. I didn’t know anybody. Finally, he walked in and was really surprised to find that I was actually there. We had a couple of beers, and then a bunch of his friends came and we all started dancing. I had a great time that night, and from that time, I became personally involved

in the gay lifestyle, and had a lot of openly-gay friends.

Then I changed companies, and Scott Carey was one of my co-workers at the new company. I knew he was gay, and I let him know that I had a lot of gay friends. Gradually, Scott and I became friends. Around Thanksgiving weekend, two or three years before Western Star was started, there was a disco called...

**LT** The Trocadero Transfer?

**AS** No, not the Trocadero. There was another one like the Trocadero, only it was a little bit more upscale. I can’t remember its name now; you’ll have to ask Scott. But, anyway, this disco was putting on a square dance presentation, and Scott said, “Do you want to go?” I said “Nooo, I don’t want to go to that. It sounds too hokey!” He insisted: “Come on, come on! Put on a cowboy hat, and let’s go!” So he finally talked me into it.

Scott and I, and maybe a couple other people went, and the presentation was by Skip Barrett and his Foggy City Squares. And at the end of the presentation, they offered classes. We thought it was just a hoot, so we signed up for classes, and the rest is history!

**LT** So this is actually how Scott got introduced to square dancing himself?

**AS** Yes. I think it was Scott and I, and one other person who went to that presentation, but I forget who that third person was.

**LT** So, obviously you danced then with Foggy City Squares for awhile?

**AS** Yes. We met a lot of people and it was fun. There were all kinds of different people. I think it was probably the first class Skip offered, and when you have something new like that, the initial people who get involved are sometimes the most expressive people, and there were a lot of expressive people in that class! Just a wonderful group of people, and we just had a wonderful time.

But to understand what went on, you have to understand something about what San Francisco was like during that time. At that time the gay explosion in San Francisco was just enormous. In a year's time it just ballooned. Involved in that there was a huge transient population. People would come and stay for six months, and then they'd leave. It became emotionally draining for you to make friends and then have them constantly leave. After you had lived in San Francisco for five years, you got to the point where you wanted to find other people who were going to stay around, and you sought out people who seemed more stable, because you needed that emotional base.

Together with this gay explosion there was an involvement in politics at all levels. Skip was very heavy-handed in his control of the group, and there were things going on that Scott and I thought were not in the best interest of the group, but of Skip's own personal interest. And we finally got tired of all his stuff. We wanted a group of people that basically wanted to socialize together, dance together, and just have a good time.

Three other people were involved: Ron Douglas, Roger Perry and Dennis Ficken. I don't know if either of those two last people are still alive. I think Roger died for sure. And at one point, Dennis was using heroin; he was a real junkie. I suspect that he might not be alive, but I'm not sure. If he is, nobody knows where he's at. They were lovers—Dennis and Roger were lovers—and then Scott started going out with Ron around that tune.

It was Scott who said, “Why don't we just form a more democratically-run club as an option to Skip's 'dictatorship'?” So we did that, and that's where Western Star came from.

**LT** In your recollection, did the fact that Skip did not use the Callerlab format play any major role in your decision?

**AS** No, because we didn't know what Callerlab was at that point.

**LT** So at that point there was still no contact with anybody else in the larger world of square dancing? This was your own situation, and you all were simply reacting to what you thought was best for you at that point?

**AS** Right. So we formed Western Star, and we got some donated space at the ACT theater in San Francisco that we could use. We publicized what we were doing by word-of-mouth or we put out a couple of flyers...I can't remember exactly what we did, but we started meeting there and square dancing on our own.

**LT** What was ACT?

**AS** ACT is a theater downtown on Geary. They had classrooms and dance spaces upstairs.

**LT** So you were using their facilities, but you were not associated with them?

**AS** Right. We just needed a place to meet other than somebody's living room, and so we got them to let us use it for free, because we were on a total shoestring. We had no money at all.

**LT** Just the will to get something going.

**AS** Just the will. So we started meeting there, and we met, I think, only about two or three times before Bill Klein showed up. Bill Klein was a Challenge dancer, and he was the person who introduced us to Callerlab, the concept of levels in square dancing, and everything else that people in regular clubs get to know from the beginning.

**LT** How did you operate before Bill Klein appeared?

**AS** The five of us: Roger and Dennis, Ron and Scott, and I, would meet in Scott and Ron's place, and we would work it out dance by dance. We had some records, and some kind of teaching materials with diagrams. When the record said: "Make an ocean wave", we'd say: "What's an ocean wave?," and look it up. We'd work through the records in the kitchen until we thought we understood the calls, and then we'd go the following night and we'd teach the

sequences of calls for a couple of songs to the rest of the group. That's the way we began dancing.

Actually, that was also the way Skip taught. He didn't teach calls; he taught dance patterns song by song. Basically that's all we knew. We wanted to expand that a little bit, and so we were working along the same lines, trying to figure out the calls. It hadn't dawned on us yet that there was an entirely different way to do it. We did that for about four sessions, and then Bill Klein appeared on the scene.

**LT** Do you have any idea how Bill Klein came to Western Star?

**AS** I think it was through word-of-mouth, or maybe he saw a flyer. I don't know if Bill's still alive, but you'll have to ask Bill what prompted him to actually show up. I guess it was just curiosity.

**LT** How did he reveal himself to the group as a Challenge dancer?

**AS** He danced with us once or twice, and then he just started talking about it. We were totally mystified, so we said, "Can you teach us this stuff?" He said, "Oh, yeah, sure!" So it developed from there.

**LT** But he was a not a caller, he was a dancer.

**AS** He was a dancer. Right.

**LT** How did things go on from there?

**AS** From there, gradually over a period of time, we made the decision that we should go with Callerlab, since that was the way most people seemed to do it out there. Then we heard about other groups: the South Florida Mustangs, and Denver, and Scott established contact with those groups. We also began attending the gay rodeo in Reno, and we started meeting people from around the country. Eventually, it was decided to establish a national organization.

**LT** Were you involved in the preliminary discussions that led to the establishment of the national organization?

**AS** I was a little bit, but I was more heavily involved in Western Star. Scott and I were good buddies. The five of us were trying to organize Western Star without a clue about exactly what we were doing. It was sort of like the cosmos forming...all swarming around together. Scott and I always sounded ideas off each other. We both thought it would be fun to have the association. For us that seemed a natural development, that there should be a national association, and that we should make square dancing available for everybody, because we were having such a good time.

That period seemed to be aswarm with activity. Scott would come to me and say, "Hey, I just talked to the South Florida Mustangs, and da-da-da-da." We'd hit that off back and forth, and say: "Yeah, that sounds great! Do it! Go ahead!" It was like being in the middle of a think-tank, with ideas just flowing and popping.

Scott was more of the liaison-type person, so he was in contact with everybody else.

**LT** In all of this, did the question ever come up about what were you, a straight woman, doing involved in an organization of gay men and Lesbians?

**AS** I would say it probably occurred to some people, but it wasn't really a problem. We were all great friends, but I think probably because of that, Western Star adopted the philosophy that it was open to anybody. I'm assuming that that was done because of me, without it ever being said. We were just friends. How could you set up an organization and exclude your best friend?!

I don't think anybody actually thought we were going to go out and attract thousands of straight people to the group. It was just that there are some people who would fit in, without their presence being a big deal. Those people would be around.

**LT** Were you aware of any other straights involved in gay square dancing around that time?

**AS** No.

**LT** So Reno came, and the idea of the national organization. What happened then?

**AS** We just started holding classes and getting more people involved, people who could teach. Basically, it was dancers who taught initially: the more advanced dancers would just volunteer to teach. That's basically the way we ran it. It was dancer-taught for a long, long time.

**LT** As far as you remember, what was your first contact with a professional caller?

**AS** In Western Star? Shoot! I don't know...I can't remember who the first straight caller was. But one person that helped out during that time was a gay caller from Long Beach. What was that man's name?

**LT** "Happy" New Year.

**AS** Yes, "Happy" New Year, Dave "Happy" New Year! David. At some point we realized that having a caller would be good, and we had become acquainted with Dave at the Reno rodeo in 1982. We invited him up for a couple of functions. After that, he would come up periodically and call special events for us. So Dave was probably the first professional caller we were exposed to.

**LT** But, on a regular basis, was there any caller who worked with you?

**AS** I don't think there was an "on-a-regular-basis" caller. I think we were just holding our classes and dances. I left San Francisco at the end of 1983, so probably up to the time I left San Francisco, there were no straight callers involved at all.

**LT** What was the reason for your move from San Francisco to Seattle?

**AS** I had what I personally called "concrete fever." I was burned out on San Francisco, and I needed some, let's say, spiritual input. I felt

spiritually depleted. I was offered a job here with the company that I was with, and so I transferred up to Seattle.

During that preceding, say, year-and-a-half in San Francisco, we were in contact with Florida, we were in contact with Art Smith in Seattle, we were in contact with Denver, and Dave Happy New Year, Bill Klein, Scott. Those were the people who provided the impetus for the national organization. Basically, what was happening in most areas was that people would go to a couple of square dances or see an exhibition, and they loved it! It was like a spontaneous thing.

**LT** What was the situation like in Seattle when you arrived?

**AS** Art Smith had Puddletown Squares going, and they were holding classes. I can't remember who was teaching the classes up here. I think that what really broke open having straight callers associated with gay square dancing was the convention. Up to that point it was pretty much a self-taught thing: whoever we could find that knew anything about square dancing at all would teach the classes. [EDITOR'S NOTE: This perception is not correct. Art Smith had a straight caller calling Puddletown's classes from early on.—LT]

**LT** The club here was a going concern when you arrived?

**AS** Right.

**LT** Had they graduated any classes?

**AS** They had graduated maybe one or two.

**LT** How did you get involved in the first convention?

**AS** I moved here, and the first week I just went to square dance with Puddletown Squares. I knew Art, and he introduced me to the board of directors. One of those board members was Paul McPherson. Gradually over, say, a period of a month or two, Paul and I became friends. I lived on Queen Ann Street at that time, and one night, Paul said that his brother, who also lived on Queen Ann, needed a ride home, and asked whether I could take him along. I said, "Sure!" The brother was Doug McPherson. I gave Doug a ride home, and then, periodically, since we lived in the same area, he would ride with me. We weren't like "friends" then; we were just square dance people together.

One weekend John Paul Olson and Bill...I'll think of his last name later... had planned a getaway to Whidbey Island for the square dance club. Doug asked me if I could give him a ride to the island. I picked him up, and that was the first time that Doug and I really "talked" just as people. We were talking about science fiction and science fantasy books. He was telling me about some of the books he had read, and we were discussing that. Then, all of a sudden, on that ride up, I clicked onto who Doug was, and Doug and I became extremely good friends.

I had moved up here at the end of December, and Reno was happening sometime in that period,

that following fall. A bunch of us went down. We had an exhibition group, a Puddletown exhibition group, and Doug and I were involved in that. A lot of the meetings for this group would be held at Doug's house. We did these shirts for the exhibition, and we put all these rhinestones on them, and we sewed this little fringe on, and we practiced, and practiced, and practiced, because we wanted to make it look good.

And at Reno that year it was decided that we should have a national convention. So the question was: "Where should we have it?" I knew that the time was right to have the convention. I mean, I knew that conceptually, the time was right.

**LT** How did you know the time was right?

**AS** It's just that in any situation, for anything you do, there is a window of opportunity that you need to seize right at that time, because it might not be there a year later. I just knew that that window of opportunity for the square dancers was right then, that if it wasn't seized then, it might...who knows?...

**LT** It might dissipate?

**AS** Yes, it might dissipate. I knew that. And I said to Doug, "We need to have it. We need to have a convention!" And basically, what it boiled down to between us was: "Well, since we're the only ones who really, concretely see that this needs to happen, let's have it in Seattle. Let's just do that."

So, when they were tossing around the idea, and they said: “Where should we have it?,” Doug and I said, “We can have it in Seattle!” Everybody else said: “Fine, somebody else is going to do it, so that’s great.” There wasn’t any real big discussion about whether it should be here, there, or some other place. Everybody knew it would be a monumental task to pull it off. So, if somebody was willing to do it, the rest of the clubs were willing to go along.

Everybody knew Doug and me, and they trusted that we would at least give it our best shot. So that was that. As far as the convention, I would say that I was the person who recognized it, and Doug was a master at organization. I would say to Doug, “We have to do it, and I personally don’t know how to do it. But I know it has to be done.” Doug would say, “Don’t worry about that, because I can organize it.” So Doug and I took on the responsibility of making it happen.

**LT** What was there in Doug’s or in your background that made you think “convention” rather than something else? Can you explain that?

**AS** Rather than something else, like what?

**LT** Like something on a smaller scale? Like being content with fly-ins, or with having demonstration teams from various groups gather together somewhere?

**AS** All my life I’ve been involved in group-organization stuff. Doug also had a varied

background with different organizations. I would say in that sense we were both very directed towards the conventional approach, that is: if you have an association, at some point you have a convention to bring that association together.”

**LT** What was Doug’s profession?

**AS** He worked for US West, the telephone company. He was what they called an engineer, which is probably what we would call right now an “information systems specialist.”

**LT** That was the organization in his background?

**AS** Do you want some of Doug’s background?

**LT** Yes.

**AS** Doug was a tremendously interesting person. He grew up in New Mexico, and he attended a seminary when he was in high school. In the seminary they perceived that he was gay, and they kicked him out.

**LT** This was a Catholic seminary?

**AS** Yes. After high school, he joined the navy, and was in the navy for several years. This was during the 60’s. During the time of Vietnam, Doug, just as part of his life processes, perceived that maybe the war was wrong, and that he was gay, and that maybe he should get out of the navy. He requested to be released, but had a hard time getting out; they put him through all kinds of hoops.

He got out eventually, and he became a tour director for Greyhound buses, and worked at that for three or four years or so. After that, he started with US West. That was his job history, but he was always active in all sorts of organizations.

Doug was an incredibly organized person; he was truly a master of organization. Working out the nitty-gritty of the convention was not a major problem for him. From the beginning, he was from the school of thought that no one should be excluded from the convention, that we had to keep it absolutely open, because once you start to limit it, it will never stop. He was adamant that there would be no exclusion of anybody.

But, in order to realize our vision of the convention, we had to pull a little coup d'etat here. We had gotten the convention idea going, but there was a convention committee selected, and they had held a few meetings. Their vision of it was that it should be just like another big dance weekend. Doug and I argued: "No, no, no! It has to be bigger than that, or nobody's going to come." We kept insisting at the convention committee meetings, and, finally, they said, "Fine. If you want to do it that way, then **you** just do it." We said, "OK, we will!"

**LT** Aside from the organizational concept, what was the difference between your approach and their approach?

**AS** They didn't have the vision about making it a really special event. To them it was just a dance

weekend, but instead of having it with twenty people, you'd have it with seventy-five people. Our idea of scale was that it had to be a big party, it had to be special, and it had to be wonderful. To do that, you needed that different level, kind of a geometric level, of looking at it, and you had to be willing for the concept to just explode. Some people don't like that; they like to keep it neat and tidy.

You just have to put this in the context of the whole emergence of the gay movement. It was this whole celebration of being able to be out of the closet, and this was just one part of that. It had that same energy. It was an opportunity to say, "We are **gay** square dancers, with the emphasis on the **gay**." Right? Boom!

Doug and I started contacting all the gay organizations in Seattle. We told them, basically, that we were having this first gay square dance convention right here in Seattle, and that we wanted their input, participation, assistance, whatever. We thought they should support it, because it was a wonderful thing. And we got tremendous support from every gay organization and group in Seattle, including gay businesses, gay newspapers, and even the whole "court" scene.

**LT** By "court" you mean the drag queens?

**AS** Yes. Doug was absolutely adamant that it had to be open, that there was to be no exclusion of anybody. And we got real community support in Seattle for the event. And the success of the event came out of the various groups in Seattle

being willing to support the convention, because we were dealing with a no-money situation: We started with no money at all, and we had to raise, I don't know, I would say at least fifteen to twenty thousand dollars to pay for it.

**LT** You, as the convention committee?

**AS** Right.

**LT** How did you go about raising fifteen thousand dollars?

**AS** We just did a think-tank approach again. We brainstormed on the question: How can you raise money? What can you do? And people just came up with ideas. Well, you can ask for donations, you can have raffles, you can have garage sales, you can have a program and have paid advertisements in it and use any profits from that. And, of course, we needed lots of volunteers.

We held garage sale upon garage sale upon garage sale, every week for several months, and we raised an **enormous** amount of money from garage sales. Because the whole community was included, all sorts of people would contribute and participate. I am sure that a lot of people made a conscious decision just to go buy something, just to help out. We became experts at garage sales. And we got together at least enough to make the initial payments for the hotel, so that we had a facility.

Beyond that it was just like living paycheck to paycheck, basically. Whenever we got some

money, we'd do the next thing. Sometimes...a lot of times...we went out on limbs. The callers, for example, were a major "out-on-the-limb." We didn't have enough money to even **begin** to cover their expenses. I forget how much it was—perhaps three to five thousand dollars—and we hired them having no money. We just trusted that we would get it.

**LT** What was your particular bailiwick in all this? Did you have a specific area that you were handling in all this organization?

**AS** Doug and I were, I guess, what you would call the co-chairs; we truly were. We handled everything: from the garage sales, to working up the registration form, to making sure somebody was doing the flyers. We did it together.

**LT** Now: first of all, this was the first time something like this was happening. Secondly, it was sponsored by a gay organization. Don't tell me you didn't have major problems getting things like hotels, and so forth!

**AS** No, we didn't. Maybe part of the reason was the time; maybe it was Seattle itself. Seattle tends to be liberal in a very laid-back way. It's not like California: there's no demand that you be "politically correct" up here. I would say that Doug's approach also had a lot to do with our success, because if you come from a position of being extremely open (which was Doug's position), people tend to be open back to you. Doug would sit down and explain the situation, then he would ask, and people just said "Yes."

The only thing where we thought we might have trouble was when we decided to ask a straight national caller to call for us. There, we thought: “Oh, oh,...**this** may or may not happen!” I told Doug, “We’ll just send out a whole bunch of letters. I know that there is somebody out there who is going to respond.”

The letters went out, and Paul Marcum called. You know, in any company or corporation, the top management sets the tone, and with us, Doug absolutely set the tone with his insistence on “openness.” He was that, and so, when he talked to people, they just melted.

**LT** So you eventually got Paul Marcum and Elmer Sheffield?

**AS** Right. Paul Marcum was the first person who called us back. He said that, at first, he had thought it was a joke; that the letter had been sent by some of his buddies, who were putting him on. And we said, “No . . . no. This is serious.” It was Paul who suggested, “Why don’t I get my friend Elmer Sheffield to come along?” We said, “Great!”

So, Doug and I were planning the convention, and while we were working, we’d be calling each other at work about 30 times a day. Doug called me at work one morning, and he said, “Guess who called me last night? Paul Marcum! He wants to come and he wants to bring Elmer Sheffield.” I said, “Well, that would be great! How are we going to afford it?” And he said, “I’ve already booked them, Agnes.”

**LT** How about the hotel? Did you just have one hotel in mind and approach that hotel and they said “Yes”, or did you approach a number of hotels?

**AS** I think we approached maybe three or four. We were basically looking at what land of dance space they had. It wasn’t really in our minds that they would flat-out refuse us. That wasn’t even a question for us. We were a legitimate group, and we wanted to rent space. It was not a big deal to us.

I think we considered the Westin, the Sheraton, the Park Plaza, and the Madison. The Madison had the best dance space and the most amount of rooms, so we just worked out a deal with the Madison. We worked with the Madison and they were fine.

**LT** Do you remember how many people you needed to cover the costs?

**AS** No. I would say it was probably somewhere between 150 to 200 people, and that was the attendance. All I know is that we had just enough people attending to cover our commitment to the Madison, that we would get a certain number of rooms sold in order to get a break on the facilities.

**LT** Well, how did it go?

**AS** Wonderfully, wonderfully! Have you talked to people who attended?

**LT** Yes, but I want your opinion.

**AS** It was everything that we wanted it to be. It was! We were pushing that budget right up to the last second. My big fear was, “Doug, how are we going to be able to afford this?” He’d say, “Don’t worry. We’re just going to do it.” That was the first convention.

And as far as “me,” the reason I got so intrinsically involved in all this was that back in San Francisco, when I first got to know gay people and I was breaking up with my boyfriend, one day I was just sitting in my kitchen and I thought, “Who supports me the most in this whole situation?” And the answer to that question was: my gay friends. So, this was my gift back to my friends. It was an appreciation from me to them for what they had done for me personally. That’s how I personally felt the need or the desire to do this. But, I can tell you that it was fun! It was flat-out fun!

**LT** Beyond the sweat and tears?

**AS** Beyond the sweat and tears, it was fun!

**LT** Do you have any recollection about how Paul Marcum and Elmer Sheffield reacted at finding themselves for the first time in a gay square dance situation?

**AS** They loved it! They loved it because the audience was so expressive, because the energy level and the enthusiasm were something that they found incredible, and because of the way they were treated. When they go to the straight

conventions, you know, sometimes they have to stay in some funky old motel. Well, we had suites for them, and we had flowers in their suites; we had people pick them up at the airport and escort them around, and we made sure that they were happy, that all their needs were met. They found that phenomenal, just phenomenal. They were bowled over, I think, by the appreciation, and the attention to detail. And they had a wonderful, wonderful time.

**LT** Did they have their wives with them?

**AS** Yes.

**LT** Both of them?

**AS** Yes, and their wives loved it, too, because we did special things for the wives also. They had never been treated like that before at a convention.

**LT** What about the convention program? How was that developed? Was that something that you and Doug developed?

**AS** That was the work of the whole convention committee. We got input from all over the country; and we took all the ideas and just sat down and worked the program out. But again Doug’s non-exclusion idea was reflected here: If this is what the country wants, then this is what they’re going to get.

**LT** His idea of non-exclusion went beyond the square dance community?

**AS** Yes, yes. As far as the Seattle convention was concerned, we viewed it as a convention for the whole country. Whatever the rest of the country wanted was what was going to happen at the convention. There was input from all of the clubs that were around at that point. Doug spent hours on the telephone saying, “Now, what do you want? What do you want this to look like?” And he took all of that input, and we developed the program from that.

**LT** As far as your involvement, and as far as how the convention went off, do you have any regrets about that first convention?

**AS** Heck no. It was truly an experience. There were a lot of people on the convention committee who did special things. Like the design of the program: that came from Bob Jones and Ron Lindsay. Bill Depew (who danced with the *Fistful of Crinolines* also) kept track of the money. He was like the “semi-official accountant.” He had this little red clip purse, one of those little clutch purses, and after every garage sale and every money event, all the cash went into this little red clip purse. All the money for the convention went through that little red clip purse!

**LT** I’ve only attended conventions since the New York convention, and I always find that the Grand March is always a very emotional event for me. What was the first Grand March like?

**AS** I don’t think that we had originally thought about it at all. I think it was actually maybe Paul Marcum who said, “Are you going to have a

Grand March?”, and Doug and I said, “Yeah, sure, we’ll have a Grand March.” Then we thought about it in the committee, and decided that it should focus on our camaraderie, our togetherness, and, at the same time, our separateness.

**LT** What has happened to these people you’ve been talking about?

**AS** Doug died last year; June 30th of last year. Bill Depew died about a year or a year-and-a-half after the convention. Bob Jones lives up north someplace; I haven’t seen him for awhile. Ron Lindsay, he was Doug’s lover, lives here, in north Seattle. A lot of the key people have died, due to AIDS. The group that was there week after week after week after week, a lot of those people have died. Then there was another group of say, about twenty people, that was just around a lot, that helped a lot. They’re still around, pretty much.

**LT** How long did your involvement in square dancing continue after this first convention?

**AS** I square danced until maybe about five years ago. I went up through C3. And then I danced with the *“Fistful of Crinolines.”* I did a lot of dancing, but, finally, I found that, personally, I had just overextended myself; I burned out and I needed to regroup. I’ve been going to school for the last two-and-a-half years, and I’ve been taking care of some personal stuff that I needed to take care of. I haven’t been around square dancing at all for five or six years, but I’m still

in contact with a few people like Scott, so I still hear the news.

**LT** So, when are you coming back?

**AS** Hey, I've got forty-four more credits to go in school!

**LT** What are you working on?

**AS** I'm getting a Bachelor's in computers with an AA in electronics. I have forty-four more credits to go, and then I'm finished with that.

**LT** And you're doing this aside from your full-time job?

**AS** Right. Yes. I have that thing about putting my hundred percent in, you know? Sometimes it catches up with me.

**LT** Can you think of anything that we haven't covered?

**AS** Not really, not really.

**FROM THE EARLY DAYS IN MIAMI, SAN FRANCISCO, AND LOS ANGELES:  
ANNA DAMIANA TALKS TO  
DEAN HOFMANN, SCOTT CAREY, AND BEN TELLER**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This conversation, recorded by Anna Damiani in San Francisco on April 30, 1989, covers the early days in three of the centers where gay square dancing developed and took root, as experienced by Dean Hofmann, the only person—to my knowledge—who has been accused of making a career of moving around the country becoming a member of one gay square dance club after another; Scott Carey, one of the founders of Western Star Dancers; and Ben Teller, who was active in Los Angeles.—LT*

**AD** = Anna Damiani

**SC** = Scott Carey

**DH** = Dean Hofmann

**BT** = Ben Teller

**AD** What I'd like to do is not only to trace back when the IAGSDC was first formed, but also the birth of the subsequent clubs. And I know there's some GREAT dirt out there! [General raucous laughter.] I mean, I don't just want the historical "nice" story, I want the **real** story, and having Dean Hofmann, Scott Carey, and Ben Teller here should help me get some "good top soil!"

Dean, I know you were with the Mustangs from the beginning. What can you tell us about that?

**DH** We didn't even have a name when we started. We just started square dancing in a bar called the Double R. One of the guys in the bar got the idea to do this, because they did not have any business on Sunday afternoons, and they thought this would be a way to bring some in.

We started dancing at 4 p.m., and, to begin with, the sets never changed. We had three sets to start with, and you always danced the same spot and with the same partner. Each set was sponsored by a different business: set number one was sponsored by the host bar; set number two was sponsored by the Club Baths, that was the set I was in,...

**Someone** It figures!! [General laughter.]

**DH** And then number three was sponsored by Uncle Charlie's, another bar. And they provided uniforms and everything. We danced that way for a long, long time, starting in January 1977, and never even gave any thought to forming a club, because someone else was taking care of the organizational details.

**Someone** Did you have a caller?

**DH** No, no, it was all to records, so you had to learn all the calls that occurred in each particular record before you could play it. And then **this** set would sneak off to somebody's house and

learn a new call, then come back and put their record on, and when we got to that new call, the rest would break down, and they'd laugh. [General laughter.] We also had a *Square Dance Encyclopedia*, and when we'd hear a call and didn't know how to do it, we'd look it up in the encyclopedia and try to figure it out. Of course, no one knew for sure, but if everything came out right in the squares, we figured that we had puzzled it out correctly. The result was that we learned a lot of things wrong from the beginning. But as long as you came out where you belonged, no one cared!

**Someone** Was that the first gay square dancing in the whole country? In 1977?

**DH** Yes, and we danced for a long, long time that way. Our first trip out of Florida was when we went to Houston, probably in the latter part of '79 or the early part of '80, but the only reason we went was that the airlines advertised a special fare of \$75 to Houston, so we all decided: "Let's go to Houston and square dance there!"

We called a women's bar in Houston and asked them if there was any square dancing there. And they said: "Oh yes, we square dance in Houston!" And we called up a men's bar, and they said the same thing. But, what it amounted to, was that neither of the people we talked to knew what the hell square dancing was. They didn't square dance at all; they two-stepped or they line-danced, or something else in Western dance, but they did not square dance.

We went to one bar, and **nobody** came to watch; it was just us and the bartender. We square danced, and we left. [Everybody laughs.] We had just found the bar in the guide book, and had assumed it would be just great. Then we went to a place called Brazos River Bottom, and we square danced there. They sort of let us. I mean, we were pushy; we were certainly **not** invited. And I remember we had a photographer with us, and when he snapped some pictures, the bar staff got all worked up. They said: "We don't allow pictures in the bars in Texas!" It was all very different.

While we were dancing there, a man came up to us from a bar called The Exile, and there was a Country/Western band called The Mustangs in Texas in the early days, and they heard we were in town, and they came and got us and hauled us to dance at their bar, and that's where we had all the fun. We stayed in a gay guest house and had a real nice weekend. And that was our first out-of-town trip.

But our first trip to visit another square dance group was to Denver. We heard that they had started a group in Denver, because Craig McCarthy from Florida had moved up there, and we heard about it from him. So, I and Kenny DiGenova (Mustang Mary) decided to go and take a look, but the word got around, and first one person would say: "Can I go along?," then another, and first thing you know, we had about twelve people making the trip.

Here were twelve queens traveling [general laughter], and we were met at the airport with

flashlights! They took us right straight to Charlie's (Denver's Western bar), and they let us square dance, even though it was late at night already.

**AD** Do you remember what year this was?

**DH** Oh, God, I don't know for sure, but it was '79 or '80; maybe right around '80, because that's when we became more cohesive as a group, and quit doing drugs.... [General laughter.] But, we went to Denver, and they treated us so neatly there! I remember on Saturday morning, they gathered us up in cars and took us up into the mountains, where we had lunch. And a couple of us from Florida had a huddle and decided that we should pick up the tab for it; then **they** had a huddle, and when we went to Charlie's that night, they had a big sign over the bar that said: "FLORIDA MONEY IS NO GOOD IN COLORADO!" [All laugh.] So we couldn't spend any money at the bar that night, but we made a lot of lasting friends that weekend!

**AD** Do you remember some of the people involved?

**DH** Yes, Wayne Jakino, who now runs Charlie's, Bob Sutherland, of course, we knew Craig (McCarthy), Karl Jaeckel, and a bunch of others from Denver. The old timers don't seem to have dropped out of that group. That's why our group has always had a special affinity to Denver and the group there.

**AD** Do you remember any details about the first trip to Reno, to the Reno Rodeo?

**DH** Mmm-hmmm! [General laughter.] I don't know how many there were of us, but there was a bunch of us from Florida, a bunch from Denver....That was in '82; I think there was a rodeo prior to that, but that year, as far as square dancers were concerned, there was Miami, Denver, Sacramento, and San Francisco. Skip Barrett was their caller. We went to square dance with them, and it turned out that we just could **not** dance with the San Francisco group, but we could with anyone from Sacramento or Denver, because they also had learned according to Callerlab, whereas in San Francisco they had learned something else.

**AD** How did you learn Callerlab?

**DH** We did it without realizing we were doing it, because we learned to records and the records had been done using the Callerlab format. No one had told us to wait three beats before we executed a movement, but in San Francisco they would hear "right and left through," then they'd go: "one, two, three, four," and do it. Their stuff was more heavily choreographed.

So, anyway, at the rodeo we couldn't dance with them, but "Happy" New Year was in the crowd somewhere, and he came up and told us he was a square dance caller. He called just one tip, but there were more people from San Francisco there than from any of the other three cities, so we **still** could not dance together. We had a caller that was calling like we were used to, but we still could not dance with the people from San Francisco.

Knowing this, we got Happy to get his equipment out of his motor home, found an electrical plug out by one of the horse barns, and we set up shop. So it was Sacramento, Denver, and Florida dancing outside, and San Francisco dancing inside! [Raucous laughter.] So then, these people from San Francisco started wandering out to where we were to see what we were doing, and started joining us. And as long as we were in the majority, it worked real fine.

However, pretty soon a bus rolled up and somebody stepped out and said: “All you people from San Francisco, get on this bus. We’re going home!”

**AD** Was Skip Barrett just picking up his toys and taking them home, or was it really time to leave?

**Someone** Boy, she sure gets right to the point, doesn’t she? [Laughter]

**SC** I wasn’t at that occasion, but I’ve certainly heard about it, because I was a member of Foggy City Squares, the San Francisco group, from the very beginning. Dean is right: we didn’t really learn calls. He would tell us what to do, and the only way we recognized them as calls was that some of them were repeated in other records, but what we did was to memorize a certain pattern to a certain song. And every week we went, we’d learn a new dance.

Yes, Skip Barrett is a whole long story. He was kind of an Elmer Gantry type of character. He was very charismatic. It was the late ’70s and

early ’80s, and a lot of things were happening in the gay community in terms of “gay pride:” the bands had just started, the tap groups had just started, the choruses had just started; everybody was really into gay organizations. And gay square dancing had also just started, and we were filling up the Trocadero Transfer with 10 or 20 squares. It was just wild; there was great enthusiasm, and it was a lot of fun.

And there was really nothing wrong with it, if it had been billed as what it was. It was more like traditional dancing, where you learned a specific dance and then went home. But it was billed as “square dancing,” so we did not understand what was going on when we met other square dancers. Skip was very much in control: he had his performing team, and there was a “casting couch” to get on the team, and you always had your specific square where you danced, and your specific position within that square. I was the “number 3 lady,” and that’s all I ever danced. And we never did a “roll away with a half-sashay!”

Because my square had joined Foggy City early, our place to dance was to the front of the hall, and then, as someone left our square, we would keep an eye on the new class of dancers, and, if there was someone we really liked there, we would watch them for a while, and when we had an opening, we would invite them to join our square. We were a “very privileged square,” because we were way up to the front!

After about a year and a half of that, and after a lot of Skip Barrett, we broke away. We

formed Western Star, but we really didn't know what Callerlab was. We knew there was something else out there, and we wanted to have something else out of square dancing. We were dancing on Geary Street in an ACT studio. We were there for about three weeks, when Bill Klein showed up and asked: "Would you guys like to know Mainstream?" Our reply was: "What's Mainstream?" He was a C-4 dancer, and he offered to teach us Mainstream.

Bill proceeded to teach us Mainstream in 10 weeks, one hour a night, but it helped that we had some background in the moves from Foggy City Squares. Then we moved to the Y, and danced in the lobby of the Y for 10 weeks. During that time, the South Florida Mustangs came to San Francisco in '83.

Dean, were you with that group?

**DH** No, that was after the Reno Rodeo, and a friend and I had driven on to Salt Lake City. But I think six of the Mustangs went on to San Francisco from Reno.

**SC** Yes, they went over to Skip Barrett's, and they couldn't dance with them, so then they came to Western Stars, which had two squares at that time at the lobby of the Y. And...here were all these people from South Florida,...**and they knew Mainstream!!** [General laughter.] They danced with us, and we found we could all dance together. It was a real revelation for us.

That was when they invited us to come to Miami the next February for a "fly-in." We

packed everyone we could, and we flew to Miami.

**DH** There were 10 of you who came to Miami. There were also 8 or 9 from Denver, three from Seattle, and a few from some other places.

**BT** What kind of facilities were you dancing in at this time: church basements or what?

**DH** We were at a bar called The Crossfire!

**ALL** [Clapping and laughter.]

**AD** How tasteful!!

**DH** That was Chris Phillips' doing: He and his lover built this bar for a square dance place. Neither of them liked the bar business, but they felt it was the only way to give the square dancers a home. I don't think it was financially very successful; perhaps they used it as a write-off on another business!

**BT** Was Ken Pollock dancing with San Francisco then?

**SC** No, New York had not been founded yet.

**BT** But I thought he was out here in San Francisco and got his introduction to square dancing here.

**DH** I think Ken first discovered dancing in Seattle, and there was another guy who helped start New York, who learned what he knew in Miami.

**AD** I've heard that that fly-in in Miami was where the idea of a national organization was born. Is that right?

**DH** It was hatched and born right there. In fact, I remember that you, Scott, and Ron Douglas were the representatives from San Francisco, and Art Smith and Jim Goors from Seattle, Bob Sutherland and Craig McCarthy from Denver, and myself and Ken DiGenova from Miami. Those were the delegates, and Wayne Jakino from Denver kind of conducted the meeting.

At the time, each club was given a task: Miami was going to see the information got published in the various gay media around the country. Denver was supposed to initiate incorporation in the state of Colorado, since their two delegates had experience in their involvement with the Colorado Gay Rodeo Association. Seattle, or Art Smith, was supposed to produce a book of instructions on how to start a gay square dance group in your community. And I don't remember what San Francisco was supposed to do.

**BT** We were coordinating the dance activities for the next rodeo in Reno.

**DH** That's right! Art Smith had seen us dancing at the rodeo in Reno in '82, and he was so enthused by it, that he went back and started to work on getting square dancing going in Seattle. He got my phone number in Reno, and someone else's in San Francisco, and God!, he called me every Saturday night for the next two years!!

[Laughter all around.] But, he got the thing off the ground, and he did it right!

**SC** After Reno, we heard about this "Happy" New Year character who had called at the rodeo. We had been teaching with records and tapes, and we **really** needed to get a real live caller in, so that we could show people that there was an alternative to Skip Barrett. At the time, a lot of people thought that Skip Barrett was the only person in the world doing gay square dancing. So we called Happy New Year and offered to fly him up to San Francisco. He accepted, and we flew him up for two dances, one in October and the other in November, and that way we got people to see that it could be done differently.

Lo and behold, the week before Happy New Year's first dance, we got a call from Art Smith, saying that he was thinking of trying to get square dancing going there, so we said: "Come this weekend!! Happy New Year is going to be here, and we can tell you whatever we have learned in getting our club going." And Art did just that.

**DH** It seems to me that in Florida we knew about the other clubs: the Sacramento club, Happy New Year in Los Angeles, and we knew about Albuquerque, but no one from Albuquerque ever went to the rodeo. That's why we insisted that Albuquerque be made a charter member of the association, because we knew of their existence, although we had never met anyone from the group yet.

**BT** Where did Skip Barrett come from? Was he a straight square dance caller who got into the gay community or what?

**SC** No, he was gay.

**BT** Had he always called?

**SC** No, he knew nothing about square dancing, but he had a lot of charisma and a voice...he was like a Georgia preacher. I'll give you an example: We'd be halfway through a singing call, and he would stop the record dead. Then he would say: "There's not enough enthusiasm out there, and if you don't jack that enthusiasm up, I'm leaving the stage and walking out. LET'S HEAR IT!" And everybody would just scream when we started dancing again, and off we went!

**AD** You know, I never saw the "Mustang allemande left" until I went to South Florida, to a fly-in.

**DH** You know where we got that? It was from Jack Lasry. He had a big straight square dance hall in Hollywood, Florida, and we'd go there. I have to tell you about that, because he has so many records out...

**SC** And he's taught so many gay square dancers!

**DH** Our group would go to Jack Lasry's hall, there'd usually be four or five guys. Anyway, one night we were there, and he called Chris Phillips aside and said: "Chris, I don't want to criticize anybody's lifestyle. You and your friends are all good dancers, you're all at exactly

the same level, but not a single one of you remembers where he learned it."

He had never said anything to us before, but he told Chris that he had received a letter from Seattle asking to see if he would be interested in calling at the first gay square dance convention, and apparently that was what had put him onto us; he just put two and two together. He said that initially, he did not think the offer was real, and that it was probably from one of his caller friends putting him on as a big joke.

But, he told us that at the time he was on a dialysis machine and could not travel too much, so he wrote Seattle declining the offer. We got Elmer Sheffield from Tallahassee and Paul Marcum from Tennessee. Later on, when I met Paul Marcum at the convention, he said the same thing: that when he first got the offer from Seattle, his first thought was that one of his buddies was putting him on. But, just for kicks, he decided to answer the invitation, and it turned out to be a real nice thing for him.

**AD** Didn't the convention committee send out invitations to just about every known caller in the world?

**DH** I think Art Smith had a caller's directory, and they used that to send the letters out. They didn't get too many answers, but the ones they got turned out to be all right.

[Conversation about the Reno Rodeo III in 1984 follows. Due to the sound quality, it is impossible to transcribe details, but the general gist is that

the organizers were not ready to give the square dancers any special time or attention. They were thrown into the program together with cloggers, two-steppers, folk dancers, and others. This experience helped convince the square dancers that they needed to have their own gathering, where they themselves were setting the program. Doug McPherson and Agnes Smith are credited with being the force behind the first convention in Seattle. They fought those who envisioned the square dancers' gathering as a big fly-in, with out-of-town visitors staying in local people's homes, and dancing only to the local club's caller, rather than to special visiting callers.]

**DH** I remember 39 of us went from Miami, where I was living then, to Seattle for the convention, and that was really big time! We made shirts and everything.

**SC** I guess the convention organizers really didn't have any idea who was going to show up until they actually got there?

**BT** Dean, what percentage of the Mustangs was that group that went to Seattle?

**DH** I think it was all the club but two people! We really pushed this. We loaned money to people who didn't have it, so they could go, and we roomed four to a room.

**Someone** Do you remember how many squares there were at the convention?

**DH** They had a big hall, and 21 squares comes to my mind, at the most. And I think most of the

programming was done by the callers. At that time only Seattle had a full-time caller, so the rest of us had no idea about programming. All we knew was how to dance to a record.

**BT** When did Chris Phillips start calling?

**DH** Like I said earlier, we had three sets in Miami, and Chris was in the third set, just as a dancer.

**BT** I thought he came in as a caller!

**DH** Oh, no, he came in as a dancer, and just sort of drifted into calling. The Mustangs were his guinea pigs for a long time, but we could see him improve day by day. He would walk us through things—he was good at that—but sometimes he would have 45-minute-long walk-throughs. [All laugh.] I could've killed him many times! For example, we would walk through the entire choreography before we would put on a Plus record. But, you learned, and never forgot it again!

**SC** What about L.A.?

**BT** Well, it was the Mustangs that influenced me. The *Advocate* did an article about gay square dancing, and the Mustangs were featured in it. This must have been in the spring of '85. I had been a folkdancer, and I had taught a gay folkdance group at one point, so when I read that article, I thought: "Wow! Gay square dancing! That's wonderful!" I wanted to start something similar, so I actually went out and bought records from a square dance shop, and I was fully

prepared to try to teach a class, when I came across an ad in the paper saying “Happy” New Year was offering classes.

So, I went to the class. That must have been in the fall of ’85. As I remember, there were two levels going on at the same time. One of the problems was that he had been teaching, and someone new would come in the class the following week, so things sort of ground to a halt while this person was introduced. This kept happening, so we kept starting over and over again.

Another problem was that he sort of mixed up the different levels. Within the first couple of weeks, he was teaching “relay the deucey!” [All laugh.] Well, slowly, we learned the stuff. In the meantime, I had bought the booklets with all the Mainstream and all the Plus calls, and I became aware that sometimes he did not teach the calls exactly as they were described in the booklets, so I ended up always taking my booklets to class with me!

He also never quite remembered what he had taught the week before, so sometimes he would teach a call, and then he wouldn’t use it for weeks, then he would call it, and nobody would know it. At some point, I said to Happy: “Gee, you taught this last week. Would you mind going over it again?” And he would say: “Oh, I’ll get to that!” But he never did.

Then, I told him that I had this complete list of the calls, and that I would be willing to keep track of what he had taught, so that we would do

it systematically....[Pause] Well, it made sense to me! [All laugh.]

**AD** When was all this happening?

**BT** It must have been in the fall of ’85, because my first convention was the one in San Francisco in ’86.

As I said, I was a fanatic folk dancer, and there was a degree of disorganization to the way we were learning that was upsetting to me. The way he taught drove me crazy. I didn’t know anything about calling, nor could I compare him to other callers, but the approach just bothered me.

He had told us about the convention, and I had planned to go, but the convention was in April, and I calculated that the way he was teaching it, he would not get us through the Plus list by then. So, I went to a straight Plus club, and the difference shocked me because the guy who taught this class was a good teacher, very systematic, he explained clearly, etc., and that opened my eyes. And when I got to the convention, I was really amazed.

I also found out that there were other clubs! We didn’t have a club, exactly. We just paid admission. There were no officers, and we had no influence on how things were run. Only at the convention did I discover that almost every other gay club was run by the people in the club, and not by the caller, so this set me thinking. All the other clubs seemed to be having so much more fun than we did, even though on paper, we had the largest club, since he claimed that everyone

who came in once and paid admission was a member of the club, whether he stayed or not.

The other thing I discovered at the convention was that these other clubs had dances, which was something we never did. So I came back from having danced Plus at the San Francisco convention, and I wanted other people to play with, so I decided to teach a Plus class by myself. By then there was a lot of grumbling and enough people were disgruntled so that we decided to give a dance. We printed flyers, and in January of '87, we had our dance. We had announced that the dance was to tapes, and that there would be no instruction. At the dance, we handed out a questionnaire asking people whether they would like to have a similar function once a month. A lot of people said yes, and that way we got a list of people to work from.

There was a big question whether Happy was going to be invited to this thing, or whether it was going to be done as a secret. I was all for letting him come and dance, but I didn't want him to call, and, when I got wind that he was coming to the event, I called and told him so. The original idea was not to compete with him. We thought that he could go on teaching his classes, and we would just put on monthly dances. But, when he saw the questionnaire, he interpreted that we were trying to form a club, and he walked out of the dance.

He then printed a letter, which he handed out to his class, saying that in every organization there is a rotten apple, set out to destroy the organization and undermine the goodwill created, and that I was that rotten apple. He basically asked people to either be loyal to the "New Year's Resolutions," or stop coming to his class.

**SC** It seems that Happy and Skip Barrett had a lot in common! They wanted absolute control or nothing! But by then, we had discovered here in San Francisco that you can have more than one club in a large city, and everyone can have his fun!

**BT** Happy also started something in Palm Springs, but the story was that he was not getting enough people there to make it worth his while to make the drive, so he let them die.

So we formed our club to dance once a month to records and tapes, and continued that until the fall, when we decided we were going to start classes. What was interesting was that the better dancers from Happy's group started coming over and dancing with us. They were the ones who had gone to the convention and had turned on to square dancing.

I must give Happy credit for one thing, however, he was really good with beginners. He could take a floor of new people and get them moving around and having a good time.

**STEPHANIE SPEAKS:  
WESTERN STAR'S FREEMAN STAMPER  
ON RECORD**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: No one who has attended an IAGSDC convention could have possibly missed seeing Stephanie during her annual appearance at the convention's banquet: impeccably dressed, tasteful jewelry, high heels, **HUGE—and I mean ENORMOUS**—hair, and a mustache. And, if by any chance one has missed Stephanie, one surely has caught her alternate appearance as Mama Jo Bradley, parading with the rest of the Bradley girls, all in chic matching outfits.*

*Behind those two "public personalities" is the quiet, soft-spoken, Southern-gentlemanly Freeman Stamper; another one of those unique persons that gay square dancing has produced. Freeman is "into" everything: not only is he a pillar of his home club, San Francisco's Western Star Dancers, but he is also the single driving force behind such things as the Bradley Bell directory, the Travel Guide for gay square dancers that all of us depend on for contacting other clubs, and, most recently, the idea of producing an IAGSDC medallion to single out those of us who can mark attendance at ten of our conventions.*

*Although soft-spoken, Freeman has some very definite ideas about how gay square dancing should operate, and he is not shy about voicing these ideas. He also has some interesting notions about how IAGSDC conventions might be organized in the future--conventions like the 15th one, the 20th one, and beyond!*

*This interview took place on May 23, 1991 at the Miami convention.—LT*

**LT** = Luis Torres

**FS** = Freeman Stamper

**LT** Freeman, where are you from originally?

**FS** I was born in Columbia, Louisiana, in the northeast corner of the state, just south of Monroe. That's where I went to college. Then, I was in the Army. The Army stationed me at the Pentagon, and I was stationed in the Washington, D.C. area for about two-and-a-half years. After that, I just stayed on and lived in the Washington metropolitan area until 1977, when I moved to San Francisco, just on a whim, with a friend who was moving there.

**LT** I have heard you talking about starting to do drag in the Washington area. This was not while you were still in the Army, was it?

**FS** No, I was out of the Army before I started doing drag; my first time was in December of '71. I had only come out gay in September of 1970...while walking up and down the boardwalk in Atlantic City during the Miss America Beauty Pageant.

**LT** How appropriate!

**FS** I was on a Department of Defense weekend-trip thing. My roommate was some jerk of a twerpy little man that I couldn't even begin to recognize today if he walked through the door.

**LT** Was this a vacation? I can hardly imagine that it was Department of Defense official business.

**FS** No, no. It was just a vacation. The Department of Defense had a travel service that always had these little excursions they were putting groups together for. One such excursion was a trip to the Miss America Pageant, and that had always been one of my lifetime dreams. I'd watched Miss America faithfully every year on television, and had always wanted one day to go to the Miss America Pageant.

**LT** Were you disappointed?

**FS** Not at all! It started a whole new life for me!

**LT** Now, what about your square dancing? Where did that start?

**FS** My square dancing started in San Francisco. I took a folk dance class in college, and I had had exposure to just a few simple square dance moves. Then, when I moved to San Francisco in 1977, my life consisted of ushering at the Opera House and working my butt off. In 1983, I decided that I needed to make some more friends and do things that I enjoyed.

I've always enjoyed dancing. I didn't start dancing until I was in the eleventh grade, when I did it behind Mother and Daddy's back. First dance I ever learned how to do was watching Dick Clark's "American Bandstand." It was the "mashed potato." At any rate, I was looking for some gay dance activity, and I was hoping to find

ballroom dancing, because I had very much enjoyed ballroom dancing.

There was an article in the *Bay Area Reporter* about a group called Western Star Dancers, and it mentioned they had some classes about to start. Just the year before, I had gone to an adult education class in sign language, and the teacher paced the class more towards people who had already had some exposure to sign language. I felt totally lost, and, ultimately, I dropped out. This experience was fresh in my mind, so when I called and got Scott Carey on the phone, I started quizzing him to death about the group's classes: "Is this really for beginners? You're not going to go and make everybody play "catch up" or anything like that, are you?" I was reassured, so I went to the class, and I haven't left yet!

**LT** So you still dance with Western Star?

**FS** It's the only club I'm a member of. I'm an honorary member of Squares Across the Border and Finest City Squares, but other than that, I dance only with Western Star.

**LT** That was 1983, this is 1991. That means that you've been around square dancing almost from the beginning.

**FS** Yes, I've been to all the conventions.

**LT** What does square dancing do for you?

**FS** For me square dancing means a place to be myself. I've often wondered about what there is in gay square dancing that takes a large

collection of people and makes them friendly and loving, joining them in a close bond in a very short period of time. There's something very magical about that, and I finally decided that it is because square dancing attracts a particular personality type.

It's a personality type that enjoys working together with others, but also has a way of being autonomous, because, when it comes right down to it, you can't do **everything** with your partner. Left allemande, after all, tells a couple to turn in opposite directions. So people who have a cooperative nature, but an individual personality, seem to fit in with square dancing, and that is particularly the case in the gay square dance community.

I feel a lot of support around square dancers. I like the mental exercise. I like hash more than I do singing calls, and I like hard hash, although we don't get to dance real hard hash very often, so you tend to lose a lot of the edge off your skills. I angel at almost all of our classes, and in every class, whenever I'm listening to the instruction, I will learn something that I did not know or had not retained from my prior dancing experience.

Square dancing to me is a collection of people that I really enjoy being with, and who seem to enjoy me for who I am. I'm not in square dancing for the exercise, although that is a good benefit. I came dancing because I was looking for friends. That's why I wanted to start ballroom dancing, looking for friends, doing things I enjoy.

The person that I moved out to California with had his own style of friends, and with them, I was sort of a tag-along. Those people had no interest in me or in getting to know me, so I just decided it was time for me to do something else. I really was looking for friendships which were centered around dancing.

The first time I saw that two of the guys from Western Star had rhinestones on their shirts, I said: "Aha! This place is for me." One of the guys in the class had a little party, just a pot luck. I went, and I wore my diaphanous burgundy chiffon evening gown. I went in drag to that party, and it all sort of worked out. Square dancers give me a place where people allow me to do drag, and where I feel comfortable. It really is the friendships that I make in the activity that mean so much to me.

**LT** You say square dancing is a place where you can be yourself. Can't you be yourself if you go to a bar and do drag there? I mean, there are whole courts of people who do nothing but drag!

**FS** There are whole courts of people, and that's what I was involved in in Washington. In almost all instances, however, it is a very bitter, vicious environment to be in. The court system in San Francisco supposedly exists for charity. The amount of money those people throw away having cocktail parties, and this and that, just to be voted into a title seems terribly imbalanced with their supposed objective to raise money for needy causes. That just doesn't make any sense when people go and mortgage their home to become the "empress of such-and-such," when

they could have probably funded a lot of medical research with that money.

**LT** They actually do that?

**FS** That's what I hear. So I'm not interested in organized drag anymore, but drag is very definitely a part of my life. My Stephanie character is very definitely a part of my life. It is part of my square dancing. And, to be myself, I could go to a bar but I'm not a bar person because I just don't fit in with that scene.

Stephanie could go to the bars. I dress in drag because I like the attention that I get. You run into a crazy mix of people when you're in drag in a bar, and I didn't want to totally lose my whole identity as Freeman, just because people didn't care anything about Freeman; they only cared about Stephanie. That's what it would be like if you just decided: "Oh, I'm in the mood to go in drag so I'll go to the bar." If you go to the bar in drag, you always get people trying to put the make on you. And I just don't go home with people when I'm in drag, because they don't know what they're getting, and I don't think it's fair for me to let someone be mesmerized by all this big hair and lots of jewelry.

**LT** So you feel there's either a different kind of people attracted to square dancing or there's a different quality in the atmosphere that brings people together in square dancing that distinguishes it from other activities?

**FS** Yes, I do believe that. There is quality in the atmosphere. But the quality cannot be

achieved without the individuals there, so I think that it's a special combination of personality traits, character types, and inner needs that people have, that bring them to square dancing and allows them to get the most out of the activity.

Those are the people I seek out. I don't seek out the people who are racing through the programs, just because there's more to learn. They probably end up not being excellent at any program they dance. I've stopped at the Plus program, although I took Advanced. But I basically didn't like the people at Advanced, so I just don't dance it anymore. One day I'll really learn to dance Advanced, and I'll probably go on into Challenge...but I'll save that for when I'm too old to do anything else.

**LT** So you're really taking your time going through the square dance program?

**FS** Very definitely. I'm a very strong proponent of that approach, and will never stop saying that people should halt at the end of each program before they go on to the next program, just to get their reflexes ingrained. There is nothing more exhilarating than to be in a square where the square never breaks down during the entire tip because everybody's brains are working. You can almost see the cogs going, and you sense that the dancers are having fun because it is all working. That is such a high, such a great feeling!

**LT** Have you gone into the straight community at all as a gay square dancer?

**FS** Not on a regular basis. Western Star normally goes to the “Golden State Roundup,” or at least a group of people go to that festival. We don’t go and just dance as same sex couples all the time, not even in San Francisco. But I don’t go to regular square dances, because there’s so much work to be done for the gay association. I go to Western Star on Monday and Wednesday nights, and, when I’m on the board, I have additional board work. I’ve managed the Western Star database since 1983, and with this 10-year veteran’s medallion project that I’m working on and Bradley Bell, I always have things to do.

**LT** Now that you bring that up: you obviously have done more in your life than just serve in the army, do drag, and square dance. Tell me about some of the things you have been involved in.

**LT** I’m a secretary by training.

**LT** A legal secretary?

**LT** I work in the legal field, although I’m not a secretary anymore. I have a Bachelor’s degree in secretarial sciences. It was also called “office administration” by the time I graduated, but it started out as secretarial sciences. It’s a four-year degree. So dealing with information, and handling paper, and typing, and such things are just a natural part of my being. I just love stationery supplies, and I almost hyperventilate when I go into a stationery store or an office supplies place. It’s just like I want one of everything!

Back in ’84, I produced a Western Star membership directory. The club had already published one, and I volunteered to take it over, because I thought I could do a different job with it. While I was working on it, I decided that I would have a little insert in the middle of it that I’d call the “Travel Guide,” where I would list the other clubs and when they danced.

So ’84 was the first year the little “Travel Guide” appeared in the Western Star directory. From the reaction I got, I thought that it might be useful to share the work I had done to collect all this information: about the clubs, and when and where they dance, and phone numbers, and contacts. So, for the Denver convention in 1985, I had the “Travel Guide” printed separately and had a cover put on it. Initially, I thought that I was going to sell it, and I set up a little table and was charging \$2.50 for them. But I didn’t want to stand at that table the whole time, so I think I sold about ten of them, and then I decided I would give them away. And I’ve been doing the “Travel Guide” since then.

More and more people have come to depend on it. At each convention, there are people waiting for the “Travel Guide,” and it had better be there! The “Travel Guide” is something that I’ve done for the gay square dance community, because I felt that it was information that they needed and wanted to know. One of the greatest joys in my life is to get a little note from someone that says: “I really do appreciate the “Travel Guide.” I use it all the time.”

It costs a lot of money now to print it. It costs me right around \$800 to produce the one for this year. I don't try to sell it because I don't want to stand there and take care of the sales. I don't want to put it out on the honor system either, because it would hurt me if people would take it without paying—which is inevitably going to happen—so I just give it away.

**LT** What about the “Bradley Bell?”

**FS** That originated among a little group of us, all members of Western Star. At one of our Western Star Dancers' retreats, we had a cabin-decorating contest, and some of the guys called their tent “Petticoat Junction.” The whole thing was a play on the old television series with Kate Bradley and her daughters, and the train, and Shady Rest near Pixley, and all that other stuff. Anyway, they made me an honorary member: they actually gave me a “member,” and it says “honorary” on the bottom of it, so Mama Jo Bradley is still an honorary member; she's not a full-fledged Bradley member.

Portland in '87 was the first time that the Bradleys made a public appearance dressed alike. The convention was just about over, and we were sitting around the bar. I said: “Hey guys, if we Bradleys have our own square dance club and our own town, we need our own telephone system. And if we have our own telephone system, we need a telephone directory. Let's start selling subscriptions and create a telephone directory for individuals.”

They agreed to do it, so for a whole year we planned it, and at the Phoenix convention in 1988, we had forms in the registration packets for people to join Bradley Bell. This year, 1991, we're soliciting for the 4th edition and people are starting to look for Bradley Bell every year.

I think that all these projects start small and first have to build up a credibility factor. People have to believe that a project is going to have some constancy. I think that's another thing that people like: a measure of the constant, and square dancing also provides that. The calls are always the same calls. People really do need constancy in their life, and Bradley Bell seems to fulfill part of that need.

We call it Bradley Bell after Southern Bell, and Pacific Bell, and Northeastern Bell, and all that, and we think it's been very successful. We have over 300 in the database. We have about 250 who subscribed to last year's edition, and we're hoping to have about 400 or so subscribe to this year's Bradley Bell.

**LT** Tell me about your IAGSDC medallion project.

**FS** Since I've been to all the conventions, I have seen the kinds of bonding that takes place among people at our conventions, and I decided in 1989 that I wanted to do something that would recognize individuals who had made a consistent contribution. There are not enough jobs for everyone who is in a gay square dance club to

have a productive, rewarding task. Similarly with conventions: there are lots of jobs to do, but there are not enough of them for all 600 attendees at this convention to do. So, in my mind there is value in just attending: somebody's got to support by dancing.

When I was doing drag in Washington, I participated in five "Showstoppers" shows, and we got a medallion commemorating five years of being connected with this show. I wore it whenever I was in drag and representing the awards club of Washington, D.C. So, I decided that I wanted to do a medallion for the IAGSDC.

When I started the project, I learned that the Seattle registration information and the Denver information had been destroyed, so I have set about to create a database for every person who has participated in our conventions, keeping track of what conventions they attended. I'm doing this through just looking at pictures, looking at programs, asking other people to fill out cards, other people who were movers and shakers in square dancing hi '84 and '85 to look at my printout and change information, update it, add names.

At some point, we'll look through all the videos that are in existence. I think it'll probably take me about 6 or 7 years to come up with what we believe is the final registration for Seattle and Denver, but I do believe that I'm going to get around 99% of all registration information for those conventions. The New York convention has a hole in its information, because the information that was supplied to me was only

about 300 and something names, and that was only last names. But I used Bradley Bell, my own personal Rolodex to supplement it, and, by also using my Vancouver, Phoenix, and Portland databases, I was able to get a lot of first names. But there's still a big hole in New York.

I have asked for all the information, but I don't beg people for information. If they don't sense the urgency of what I'm doing, I will find a way to do what I want to do. I just cannot sit around and wait for people to give me vital information, so I will find those 300 names without having to beg for another list. I'm going to have a table set up in the registration area with binders containing this information. Names are listed alphabetically, and I ask people to check if I have all the conventions they have attended, check the spelling of their names, check their address, their phone numbers, and update what club they're with.

I have a friend who is in the plumbing supplies business, and he has plumbing parts cast in Taiwan and mainland China. He is going to cast the medallions for me. When people have attended 10 conventions—they need not be consecutive; just 10 conventions—they will receive a ceremonial medallion that will be on a ribbon, much like the medals at the Olympics, or something intended to have that kind of pride about it.

I have the artist's renderings of the medallion that will be on display at this convention, and, by next convention, I'll have an actual prototype of the medallion. Then I'll decide how many I want

to order, and the first ones will be presented at the 10th convention in Seattle. I have fairly well determined in my mind that there'll be a bronze for 10 years, a silver for 20 years, and a gold for thirty years. You have to look down the road; you've got to look forward and plan.

I just think that 10 years is a long time for people to be committed to an activity, to friendships, to interaction; that 10 years is a long time for such a large body of people, and I just believe it should be recognized. I hope that one day the IAGSDC will grow, and that the association will take up and manage the project.

I'm also hopeful that one day we'll be able to get someone else to manage Bradley Bell. I already have my eye on Gordon Goss at the National Square Dance Directory in Mississippi. In fact, Gordon Goss has an ad in the 1991 Travel Guide for subscriptions to the National Square Dance Directory and also for American Square Dance Magazine.

The National Square Dance Directory, a world-wide publication, has listed Western Star and several other clubs as a gay clubs. I met Gordon in Las Vegas in December of 1990, when I went for the "Dancin' and Chancin'" festival. I talked to him for awhile, and he said that "gay" was just another piece of information people should know. He doesn't care whether people are gay or not. Well, he has had some flack about listing gay clubs, but he survived it all. Anyway, I'm hoping that Gordon Goss will one day pick up the Bradley Bell.

I also would like to find a convention facilitator who puts on square dance conventions, who has connections with hotels, and things. They, as a consultant and as the planner, can use the local hosting club as a resource to determine how to do this properly, but all of the registration information, and tours, and all that other peripheral stuff becomes the job of the convention facilitator, who does all the actual work. This would free up all of the local people to just enjoy the convention, and I don't think it would cost any more money than it costs doing it our way. I'm hopeful that within ten years, we'll be able to find some kind of convention facilitating service that would be interested in hosting and putting on our conventions.

**LT** But are you talking about a gay business service doing this, or...?

**FS** No.

**LT** To my way of thinking, one of the things that happens when you have all these people locally tied up doing a convention, is that you get the kind of convention you want. Wouldn't what you suggest mean for our host clubs to sort of give away or let the control over the convention out of gay square dancers' hands?

**FS** No. I want these facilitators to do all the grunt work: putting down floors, receiving registrations, keeping track of registrations, acknowledging registrations, etc. The local club or the host club would say: "O.K., we want to have this kind of tour," and they might still be the host, checking people in. I don't think this

happens yet in any kind of convention situation, but I want it to work that way and I'm going to try to see to it that it works that way eventually.

Someone's got to look forward down the road. With a service like that, the Grand Rapids club in Michigan, which has only 11 members, could host a convention, because they can do all the general hospitality work and set the tone of the gathering, while someone else did the grunt work. One of the reasons I went to "Dancin' and Chancin' " in Las Vegas was because that event was put on by a convention facility, not by a square dance club, and I wanted to talk to the people involved. Gordon Goss was one of the producers.

I talked to him because I wanted to find out what he was doing and how he was doing it. I've had this concept for about 2 years and I haven't done anything with it. It turns out that that convention planning group is looking at conventions with registrations of 5 to 10 thousand, so they would not be interested in a small square dance convention like ours, but who knows? As soon as I can find some time I'm going to contact those people and see if I can't get them interested.

A convention planning service like that, with a chain of conventions they put together, can probably negotiate with hotels for rates and things, and they can probably get them cheaper than what we can when we go into a city on a one-time basis. Such a service could come to the Fountainbleau, or go to a Hilton hotel 30 times a year. The IAGSDC only has once a year, so it can work that way.

**LT** Have you considered or have you approached, for example, common ordinary meeting planners, because they do exactly that?

**FS** Yes, I have thought about that. It's just a matter of finding time to do it. I also want to broach the subject with the IAGSDC's executive board, to see if they will allow me to do this investigation, or work with some people doing it with the IAGSDC name attached to it. I'm probably going to do it whether or not they say yes, but I'd like to give them the privilege of saying yes. But it'll probably be done whether they say yes or no

**LT** Obviously you are the person who sees needs, who sees things that have to be done, who sees opportunities to do things, and you don't wait for someone to take it up. If somebody doesn't jump in and do it, you will do it. And you said earlier that there aren't enough jobs in a club to go round for everyone. However, my experience at the local level, is that oftentimes there are more jobs than there are people who are willing to do them. How have you coped with that problem throughout the time you've been involved? Obviously one way of coping is to do it yourself!

**FS** It's true. My experience is that you need to work with people in order to find out who has real staying power. Very often in any group, there are those who do, and those who don't want to do the work, but want the respect that comes from doing the work. You'll soon recognize the true leaders by their assertiveness, their ability to orchestrate things, and to make things happen.

The danger you run into in working with the “doers,” is that they are usually willing to do more than one thing at a time, and when you have new people coming in, you often can’t see jobs they can be charged with, because those tasks are being done by other individuals. It is best to be alert to dividing responsibilities when it makes sense to do so.

There will always be good club members, and there will always be bad ones, just like there will always be good square dancers, and there will always be bad square dancers. As long as I can do what I do and maintain my equilibrium, that choice is my choice. I could have said no, so when I am sitting in my apartment, working at my computer, while other people are out going to the bars, or going on picnics, or other things, that is my choice. I don’t feel a burden in sitting and doing productive work while other people are having time to just enjoy each other.

**LT** It seems like the person who is at the head of the column usually gets hit with stones that are thrown from the back. I mean, a person who is doing many things in a club tends to become super-visible, simply by the fact that he or she is doing those things. But the result is that there are always those who feel somehow grieved by the fact that this person is visible. They don’t seem to see the connection between the fact that there are things that need to be done, that this person is doing them, and that **that** is the reason why that person is visible.

I would be delighted to find a way to bring those two things into harmony. I have, on

occasion, heard complaints in my club that this isn’t being done properly, or that we don’t like **that**. My answer is that board meetings in most clubs are open, and, if you feel strongly about it, then come to a board meeting and express yourself. Or, if you want it done a different way, volunteer and do it your way. And, if you want to do neither of these, then, please shut up and stop taking potshots at those who are doing the work.

**FS** That’s exactly right, and the only way you can deal with it **is** to tell people to shut up and go do it, if they want it done. I do believe the only thing that you can tell people, if they want to complain, is to do it themselves and let that be their contribution. I don’t believe anybody will ever be able to orchestrate a program where you can get people to do something they don’t want to do. I guess if I looked at all the things that I do, the thing that I think I do best is connect people. And that’s very important to me: to connect people and let them see ways to keep in contact with each other.

**LT** That reminds me of your comments when you received the Golden Boot Award at the New York convention: that you had spent all your young life not being able to communicate with the people around you, and that square dancing gave you a situation where you have all sorts of opportunities to communicate, and you were reveling in doing so. Can you go into that a little bit?

**FS** Well, when I was a child, my mother was always at home, and my father was away at work

from 7 o'clock in the morning until 6 p.m. He was a mechanic, and I have a twin brother, and a sister who is seven years older than we are. We were never allowed to go home with children after school and play with them, nor were we allowed to bring people home from school with us to play with us. We weren't really allowed to invite people over to play on the weekend, either, although, occasionally, Mother would let us go play softball, if she knew that the only person that she'd allow us to be with, the town doctor's son, was going to be there. Then we could play with other people who would go and play baseball. But I spent all my life until 1963, when I graduated from high school and went to college, doing nothing but going to church, going to school, and being at home with my mother, my father, my twin brother, and my sister, although she had married by that time.

Mother was a very strong-willed person. I have told her that she is a mean person, although the church was very central in our lives. God knows that I never even hinted that I wanted to stay home and watch the rest of "The Wizard of Oz." I was in college before I saw the complete "Wizard of Oz" film, because we always had to leave and go to church. I mean, to even hint that you didn't want to go to church because you wanted to watch "The Wizard of Oz" would have been enough to get a big beating.

It was not a pleasant childhood. When I discovered square dancing, I found people who wanted to talk to me, and people who wanted to stay in touch with each other. And the things that

I had been missing emotionally all the years of my life at home, were finally fulfilled in this atmosphere of square dancing, so that those people I have met there really are my family.

I don't do anything else today: I either am square dancing, I am doing something for square dancing, or I am doing something with the friends that I have made at square dancing. Other than that, I have no social life, but I never stop. I have a few friends from ushering at the Opera House, where I ushered for eight years, but I don't keep in touch with them regularly.

Communication to me is very important. I grew up not being able to communicate, and never learning how to have difficult conversations with people, how to disagree with someone and still love them. It is a concept that I am still working on: to be able to disagree and love. I grew up with the understanding that, if you disagreed, there was punishment connected to disagreement.

It's taken me a long time to get past that and start to build assertiveness. The assertive side of my personality first started to come out after I started square dancing. I've always felt very lonely and unappreciated for my efforts and for the work I did, although I was always trying to excel and be the best. I still want to do good, but it's not necessary for me to be the best. It is extremely important for me, however, to provide an opportunity for other people to share what I've already shared. That's very, very important to me.

**LT** You've talked about the 20th convention and the 30th convention. How do you envision them? Do you envision continuing interest being generated in square dancing the way it is? Do you think there's got to be changes made, so that people will continue to be attracted to the activity in the gay community? How do you envision things changing in these 20 or 30 coming years?

**FS** I don't believe that square dancing in the gay community is as ripe for change as it is in the straight square dance community. The straight square dance community has got to break down the concept that this is a family-oriented activity, that it has to have strict parameters within which you can participate, that men and women must come to square dances as partners.

The concept of solo or singles-oriented dancing has got to break through in the straight square dance community, so that singles don't feel left out in the couples-oriented straight community. The reverse is also true: that couples should not have to feel out of place at a singles convention. Each person should be just another dancer on the floor.

Once the straight community starts to be more open to individual dancers, that will allow people to feel more at ease in interacting with a broader range of square dancers. I think that there will always be a need for the gay square dance association, and for the organization to have a convention once every year, but I believe that later on, the straight community will start to participate more actively in our conventions.

It's just absolutely amazing to me that every caller who calls for us talks about the energy in gay square dancing.

If the gay community can give any legacy to the square dance community as a whole, I believe will be in the ability to be bidansual. Paul Waters, from Orange County, who has called for a lot of the gay clubs, had never heard us use the term, and it blew his mind as a concept. I think our contribution will be the idea that it is fine to dance either role with equal proficiency, if you want to do so.

I do believe that we will get to the 20th convention, and I believe we will get to the 30th convention. I don't know what they're going to look like, but I believe that we will get there. People, human beings, will never ever lose the need to have a healthy, happy experience of sharing with other people. The only thing that will destroy square dancing—in both the gay community and in the straight community—is the clubs that insist on teaching too fast, thus causing the attrition rate to be accelerated. That might kill off all square dancing.

I think that all square dance clubs have to have a commitment to a teaching system which encourages their dancers to dance one program for a longer period of time before they start to try to learn the next program. I have already started talking with Paul Marcum from Nashville, Tennessee, and I'm going to try to get the callers to do their part: that is for callers to refuse to call star tips at a level above the highest program that is offered by the hosting entity. That would be

the first step towards people not feeling like: “I am not good enough yet; I must go and do that.”

Some callers seem to need to feed their own personal self-esteem by calling a tip or two at a higher level, while the majority of the floor sits out. I don’t care if there are 20 A-1 dancers and 10 Plus dancers in the hall. If the hosting club is a Plus club, Plus should be the highest program that is offered at that dance experience.

**LT** At the same time, you have to deal with the other people, the ones who feel they have to rush through Plus, and A1, and A2, and whatever else, and who refuse to support a club’s activity unless it is for their level, so, in order to be able to have a floor which has experienced dancers to make the dancing more interesting, or make the dancing go more smoothly, organizers seem to have to throw that bone of the star tip.

**FS** I don’t believe that there is a person who is swayed not to come to a dance by the fact that they won’t get to dance one tip at a higher program. I do not believe you get another \$5 at the door because you gave them that one star tip. My feeling is that, if that is the only reason they came to the dance, I would rather they stay home. I just don’t believe that it is necessary to do that in order to get people there.

The Mainstream and Plus clubs have to accept the fact that they are a stud service for higher programs, and that there will always be the need for people to go on. But if you have a good program at Mainstream and Plus, you have quality education. We at Western Star believe

we have extremely good quality education. We take longer to go through a class. Our dancers, by the time they graduate Mainstream, are far ahead of people who rushed through Mainstream **and** Plus in the same period of time.

The clubs have to be willing to accept the fact that those people who need A1, A2, and Challenge, if they need it badly enough, they will use their own organizing ability and form their own little group. And I don’t find that an unhealthy situation at all. The problem with the way that some of the upper program clubs are forming, is that they immediately start to be exclusionary and don’t allow everyone to come to them. But, if people have that need, and that’s the only thing that’s keeping them in square dancing, let them take that energy and set up the hall, set up the mike, book callers, do their lesson plans, all that other stuff, so that the workers back here at the Mainstream and Plus levels can continue to have enough energy and enthusiasm to support a constant influx of new dancers. If you don’t have new dancers, you’re not going to have a club at any level for very long.

**LT** All right, now. When you answered my question about 20 years, 30 years, your answer was directed mostly towards interaction between the gay square dance community and the straight square dance community. How about within the gay square dance community? Is it feasible that we’re going to be able to continue to attract people 20 years from now, 30 years from now?

**FS** Yes. I do. I think we haven’t even begun to let the world know that there is this whole

collection of gay square dance clubs. I mean, there are people in San Francisco who don't even know there are gay square dance clubs, and we'll just have to find ways to advertise, to get the word out to those people.

I think that the interaction between the gay and straight square dance community will be of assistance, because it will then allow the people who are in the gay clubs to be more visible, with less fear of being caught. I want to take an ad in the ballet, and opera, and symphony programs in San Francisco and elsewhere. That's what I would like to do. I'd like to take an ad there for all these gay people who are going to those events and don't even know we exist.

I'd like to try and do some unconventional things. One year, this was around '84, KQED, the PBS station in San Francisco, was having its pledge drive, and I called up and put Western Star down as volunteers for the next time they had their membership drive, to answer the phones and be on television. And we did it, and I didn't tell anybody I was doing that. I didn't want anybody else to get the idea before I could get it executed. Western Star Dancers was right up there, and they announced our name on the air, and we gave them a little blurb to read, saying that we were a gay club that was primarily for the gay community and their friends. And, lo and behold, the public got to see all these gay square dancers up there answering those telephones.

**LT** You didn't get any flak for that?

**FS** Well, there were some people who called in and would make nasty little remarks, but, by and large, it went well.

**LT** But what about within the club? I mean, did everybody go along?

**FS** Those people who didn't want to go, didn't go.

I do think that the gay community must slow down in its education program. It absolutely must slow down or we won't be able to sustain our growth. There are only so many worker bees, and it takes a lot of effort to try to come up with a program for a lot of dancers. Not everyone is capable of doing that. The ETT McAtees, and the Lu Torreses, and the Scott Careys, the Karl Jaeckels, and the Freeman Stampers, and the Anna Damianis, or the Ken Di Genovas...those people just don't exist in bountiful numbers, and they cannot stretch themselves out to provide four different programs on the same night. They need a chance to stop, and relax, and breathe...and dance, and have a night off.

I get very angry at conventions whenever I see on the program that they are having long sessions of "intros to the next program," because what was happening was that people came to convention and were introduced to a **whole** new program. Then they went back home and beat up on their club to provide this and that dancing opportunity for them, when the club didn't have the resources to do it.

Many of the clubs are struggling to just provide what they are providing, and I think that the convention was getting totally out of line in taking on this extended teaching function. So, I started bitching about that, and last year the intro sessions were truly just intros. This year they are truly intros again: just a few calls. But even that's very dangerous. If your clubs can't provide the programs, why do you have to have your dancers introduced to this material?

**LT** One thing we have done in Chesapeake Squares is to refer people who want to learn Advanced or beyond to straight classes. They go, and either they get themselves a straight partner or, in some cases, go as same-sex couples. This does two things: first, it releases the pressure on the club to provide that level for just a few people, when it doesn't have the resources, and, secondly, it establishes a friendly contact with people who would otherwise not come in contact with gay square dancers. I think the results are amazingly positive.

I've been in an Advanced class this last year which was all straight couples, dancing with a straight partner. People see your badge, and immediately the questions start: "Chesapeake Squares? I've never heard of them. Where do they meet?," etc. I am usually vague in my answers; I don't volunteer much information, but, by the end of the class, people are coming up to me and making comments that clearly indicate that they have made inquiries, and that they know that it is a gay club. They make it clear that it's perfectly all right, that they've accepted the idea.

What about the 10th anniversary convention? Do you have any words of wisdom for the readers of this publication about it?

**FS** No, no words of wisdom, although I'm very anxious for it to get here. I just hope that Doug McPherson is still alive for it. He hasn't been to the last few conventions because of his health, and I want him to be able to see what an impact he and Agnes Smith had by insisting that the annual meeting be a full-fledged convention and not just a bigger fly-in, by pushing for having it in a hotel, by arranging for national callers to be there. [EDITOR'S NOTE: Unfortunately, Doug McPherson died before the 10th anniversary convention. See the interview with Agnes Smith in this volume.-LT]

**LT** Speaking about national callers at conventions, were you involved in any way in getting Paul Marcum and Elmer Sheffield to the first convention?

**FS** No, that was all Agnes and Doug McPherson's doing. They sent out letters, and, by coincidence, Paul was the first to answer. When he agreed to come, he asked about bringing Elmer along. Both of them were known to Agnes and Doug because they had recorded the "Honky Tonk Queen" singing call, which was very popular among gay dancers.

**LT** But you know them personally and maintain contact with them, don't you? What have you heard from them about what their experiences were after calling for the gay convention?

**FS** Oh yes, we've talked about that. Elmer Sheffield lives in Tallahassee, Florida, and owns a body shop there. He said that he had a customer once, who was a square dancer, and that this man queried him about his calling for gay people. Elmer says he told him: "Well, I look at it this way: I'm a square dance caller and I sell that service to people. Those people bought my services, and I didn't have to do anything other than what I normally do to provide that service. Their money is as good as anybody else's money. You yourself own a business. Do you usually turn down business because a customer is gay? I'm a caller, and I have the right to call for anyone who wants to hire me!"

Paul Marcum did have a festival canceled in Mississippi, very close to the Florida panhandle, and he wanted to sue them about it. But, talking to him on the phone, I advised him against it, because he would, in effect, have had to become a gay-rights advocate in his suit, and I didn't think that was where he was ready to go. It was likely to jeopardize his profession and his family's livelihood. I told him, "You have a son who's in high school. Do you know what's going to happen when the story hits the newspapers and the streets that Paul Marcum is defending the right to call for gay people, and, therefore, defending gay people? Your son is going to be

brutally intimidated and antagonized at school. Are you ready to deal with that?"

Elmer Sheffield also had a call from the very same people, to ask if he called for gay community. He said: "If you're asking me if I'm calling for them this year, I am not. And if you're asking if I'm going to call for them in the future, I don't have any contracts as yet, but, if I were asked, I don't know what I'd do."

Recently, while I was working on the Travel Guide, I had a call from Bill Peterson, a caller out of Michigan, who had gotten my name from Vern Weese. He said that Vern Weese had told him we were very energetic dancers, and he was very interested in calling for us. He was going to be in San Francisco in July, and was wondering if we might want him to call a dance for us.

This sort of dropped out of the sky: this man records for Red Boot and is a very well-known caller, so it's very exciting for people to start to come to you to want to share the experience with you. That is very, very rewarding to realize that you are consistently turning out such quality dancers that the callers want to call for you. There's a great deal of pride for me in that. And it all started because Elmer and Paul took a chance.

**THE WILDE BUNCH AND  
THE BACKGROUND OF GAY SQUARE DANCING IN NEW MEXICO:**

**AN INTERVIEW WITH BILL EYLER**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: One of his business cards identifies him as "Billi-Vanilli: Internationally-Known Lip-Synching Nude Square Dance Caller," but when he leaves his day-to-day secret identity as a mild-mannered accountant, Bill Eyler becomes perhaps the most popular and talented gay caller to come out of the gay square dance movement to date. In this interview, which took place in Seattle on Monday, April 9, 1990, Bill talks about the origins of Albuquerque's Wilde Bunch and of his experiences learning to call. He also points out one of those small, fortunate connections that abound in gay square dancing: the connection between the establishment of the Albuquerque and Phoenix clubs.—LT*

**LT** = Luis Torres

**BE** = Bill Eyler

**LT** Tell me something about your background, Bill.

**BE** Directly after I finished college in 1976, I decided that I did not want to be an accountant yet, which was what my degree was in, so I moved to the Grand Canyon, where some friends of mine worked. I met Jim Bailey the first day I arrived, but I knew him only as an acquaintance for several years.

In the meantime, I got married and divorced, and in 1979 Jim and I got together, and we lived together at the Grand Canyon for a couple of years before we decided to move.

**LT** How long have you lived in Albuquerque?

**BE** Jim and I moved there in March of 1981. We were looking for a town where we could find gay people to socialize with. After we moved

there, it actually took two years to find somebody and to start square dancing.

**LT** How far along was square dancing in Albuquerque when you started dancing?

**BE** When I first moved there, it didn't exist. When I got involved, I was in the club's second graduating class. At that time, we had classes starting every four months. So I was not one of the founders, but rather in one of the first few classes; there are a few of us still dancing from that class.

The Wilde Bunch was led at that time by Don Durham, who eventually moved away in January of 1985, but most of what he was doing was teaching through singing calls. It was a very tight group, about 15 or 20 people at that time, and we became friends very quickly. The progression through Mainstream would have been normal for the straight world, but it was a bit slow for us. Don never did any hash calling

at all, but he was able to keep our enthusiasm really up, which was very good.

**LT** Why only singing calls?

**BE** Because that was all he knew. When he was learning square dancing, he was in San Francisco, I believe with the Foggy City Squares, and I think it was at the time when they were learning from Skip Barrett. Don was also involved in the transition period when Western Star was formed. Anyway, he was able to get a group of people in Albuquerque to become interested and start learning.

And an interesting aside is that apparently he was the one who got Ted Oakes involved in square dancing, because they were lovers at one time, and that's the way square dancing got its start in Phoenix, also. This was at about the same time as Albuquerque began.

**LT** What Skip taught in San Francisco was not really "kosher" Western squares. Was that what you learned in Albuquerque also?

**BE** No. I don't know where he learned it, but Don had gone through the Mainstream program, but that was as far as he had gone at that point. He wanted to bring square dancing to the gay community in Albuquerque, but apparently he had had no teaching experience, so it was a "learn-as-you-go" situation.

**LT** And at that time the group had no contacts with the straight square dance community or with straight callers?

**BE** There was one dancer who was involved in the straight community. He kept some contact there, and Don also eventually got involved with a singles group called "Duke City Singles." He came out to a number of people in that group.

Early on, a lot of this went right over my head, but people were talking about Reno a lot, because that's where a lot of the contact among gay square dancers was taking place, at the gay rodeo there. For the first two years, Wilde Bunchers would make a trip to Reno, and they described the atmosphere there as if it were a mini-convention. I think it was in '83 when the first official gathering took place in Florida.

In 1984, there was one person from Albuquerque who was able to go to the convention in Seattle, so that made us a charter member of the IAGSDC.

**LT** So at that time you would not, for example, get a straight caller to come in and call for the group on occasion?

**BE** No, not at all. For one thing, it was a very small group, and it did not feel like the straight groups we went to, because most every thing was done in a teaching mode. Most of the dancers had never been to a "dance." It was in 1986, I think that we hired our first straight caller, Paul Infanti, a young guy who has since moved to Chicago. But we were actually one of the first clubs that was able to contact straight callers, long before Denver or Phoenix did. And we've never had a problem as a group dealing with straight callers or straight clubs.

Straight callers are usually more than anxious to call for us. We try to “break them in” gently. Our caller for the Balloon Fiesta fly-in last year and his wife got so excited about our club that they have become members. This is sort of unusual: most of the time there are single straight individuals who join gay clubs, but it is rather unusual to have a married couple do so.

I guess I have a different perspective on this question, because I am very involved in both the straight and gay square dance communities.

**LT** What about your calling? When and why did that start?

**BE** Don Durham and I were fairly close friends from the beginning; we’re the same age. He was taking courses at the University of New Mexico, and all the time he was in Albuquerque, he kept telling people that he was leaving. There was no one else in the group who was interested in learning how to teach a class, so in September of ’84, I started teaching my first class. This year, I’m teaching my 16th! I got addicted very quickly.

**LT** How did you go about learning to call? Did you just do it by the seat of your pants? The usual procedure is to apprentice with an established caller.

**BE** At first it was all “seat-of-the-pants,” but then I started attending all sorts of straight dances to see what was going on and to observe the callers. I have the tendency to learn better by observation than by reading to start with.

Then I got involved in a “callers’ college” in Albuquerque; there were eight of us learning, and that was in late ’85. But I had been teaching for a year before I started learning “officially.” Paul Infanti led the callers’ college, and was extremely supportive to me. Looking at the other caller-students in that group, I gained a lot of confidence.

**LT** Why was that?

**BE** Well, I quickly realized that I was able to do certain things that they could not do. Besides, I had a headstart on a lot of them, particularly because I had a club to work with, and none of them did.

Then, about four months later, after I finished the callers’ school, I started calling for my first straight dances. I was a bundle of nerves to begin with, but I got over that. I continued to call for them for about a year, but it was 35 miles to where I was calling, and I got burned out driving there every Friday night.

At the Wilde Bunch, we expanded from Sundays only to Wednesdays and Sundays, and started adding more programs. Right now, I am calling two nights a week for the Wilde Bunch, and two nights a week as guest caller for one of the 23 different clubs in the Albuquerque area. I’m extremely active in that area.

**LT** How is your club schedule divided at the Wilde Bunch? You say you call twice a week: is one night a class?

**BE** I usually treat all class nights as if they were “workshop dances” rather than outright class nights. On Sundays we actually have three programs going right now: We have an Advanced dance every Sunday, a Plus dance with an AI workshop, and then we have a Plus class, so it gives us an opportunity to have all our dancers from Mainstream through Advanced dancing together on one day.

We also have a Basic 49 class, which we teach in 15 weeks, but through the following 15 weeks when we teach Mainstream, we teach at a somewhat more casual pace, ending the last five or six weeks of the class by having all dances.

**LT** And you find that works better than the usual two semesters or sessions of classes?

**BE** Yes, what we decided a long time ago was to break it up into ten week segments, because we know that there are a lot of people who are doing this for a lark, that is to say, they are not interested in carrying on further, and we decided that 15 weeks was too much like a college situation, with semesters and such. It has always worked for us.

**LT** The reports that I get are that the Wilde Bunch, of all the square dance clubs in the IAGSDC, is the one club that has the largest proportion of women in its membership. Why is that?

**BE** I have never seen anyone in our club who was radical in his or her feelings about gay men

or Lesbians. Our current president, Sue Steketee, has told me stories about how in the past she was the kind of Lesbian feminist separatist who would not even speak to a man, but joining the Wilde Bunch with her lover, started her getting to know men again and finding out that she could get along with them. I don’t think there’s any magic formula.

**LT** So your club does not do anything consciously to attract larger numbers of women?

**BE** Albuquerque has a very organized Lesbian community, and for a small metropolitan area of 500,000, there are large numbers of organizations for the gay community that cover all sorts of interests. Our publicity goes out through these organized groups, but we don’t consciously go out to recruit women any more than we do men.

**LT** What is your relationship to the club now? Are you a member who just happens to be a caller?

**BE** When I decided to seriously take up calling, I worked to put through an amendment to the club bylaws, which declared that the caller could not be a member of the board. My connection with the club now is as a hired caller. I go to all the club functions, and to board meetings if asked for input, I work with the class director on new class policies, and I prepare the curriculum for all the classes we have. Officially, I guess I’m not a Wild Buncher, because I’m not paying dues.

**LT** When did you start going out as guest caller?

**BE** I started getting calls pretty quickly, and right now my engagements are pretty evenly divided between straight and gay ones. Things really started picking up a lot in the past year.

**LT** What is currently the relationship between the Wilde Bunch and the larger straight square dance community in Albuquerque?

**BE** It's pretty limited, although a number of our members go out to straight dances as individuals. There is a local umbrella organization of all square dance clubs in the area, and the Wilde Bunch is not a member of that.

**LT** Is there a reason for that?

**BE** The topic has never been brought up. I am sure if it did, there would be people who would want the club to become a member.

**LT** What about your relationship with straight clubs? Does the fact that you're gay or that you have a connection with a gay club ever come up?

**BE** It has never come up. I am known in Albuquerque as a gay caller, but the question has just never come up as an issue. Nor did it come up as an issue when I joined the local callers' association, which I did as soon as the callers' school was over. In lieu of the traditional apprenticeship period, Paul Infanti gave the association a full description of the Wilde Bunch and what I was doing with that group, and how

often and how long I had been calling for them. As a result, I was voted as a full member of the organization immediately. One caller quit the association because I was allowed to join, but that was one out of 22 callers in the organization. Most of the callers are very supportive of each other, although not necessarily of new callers.

**LT** You have participated in gay square dancing as a dancer and as a caller. What is the appeal of the activity as you see it?

**BE** Have you ever watched me on stage while I am calling? Square dancing has brought some significant changes to me personally. I was not a "touchy" person before I started square dancing, and now I can hardly keep my hands off people! Jim and I didn't know very many people in Albuquerque when we first lived there, because we lived sort of far out of town. Then we joined the Wilde Bunch, and immediately we had this large family situation.

It was a wonderful support group, and continues to be so. When we lose people through AIDS—and last year we lost three—our people are like an amazing family that just gathers round at any necessary point.

**LT** Do you see any major differences between the gay and straight square dance worlds?

**BE** I dance a lot with straight groups, and I enjoy that also, because there is a feeling of closeness there as well through the common interest. I think there's actually less difference between the two groups than some people would

like to believe. There's a difference in average age, and there's a difference in the level of activity, but I don't think there's any really fundamental difference.

Perhaps the basic difference in gay and straight groups is that among straight groups each club has a certain program they follow and that is that: if they are a Plus club, or an Advanced club, that's what they are, and their classes and their activities only aim at that level. In gay clubs, you generally find a broad mixture of levels, with multiple programs going on. And the reason is not only that the clubs are small, but also that they serve people who want to dance with other gay people, and that fact is as important to them as the core activity is.

I think that in Albuquerque we are fortunate in that there is very strong support in the club for the Basic and Mainstream programs. All our Advanced dancers will be out on the floor dancing Basic when that is the level being danced, because they realize that that's where

our future dancers come from. For our club, progression in square dancing is not linear, but rather circular, and that has kept me personally involved. Once that circular progression breaks down, a club is in real danger.

**LT** When you think back on your seven years involvement in gay square dancing, what kind of memorable experiences come to mind?

**BE** For me every convention has been memorable, simply for the numbers of people involved. There's an almost spiritual energy that is generated at those times. Ten years ago, I could never imagine knowing as many people as I do now, and knowing them in so many different cities. Jim and I have had some wonderful times...now I'm starting to sound like Dale Evans, and my makeup is going to start to run...but really, our involvement has helped keep us together. It has made us realize that our interests are diverse, and that they should be kept that way, rather than trying to force each other into doing what the other enjoys all the time.

## THE DYNAMIC DUO: DESISTO AND PRESTON

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Gay square dancers have many favorite callers, but few people will deny that Mike DeSisto and Johnny Preston have a special rapport with the community. When the two of them are in top form, they can keep a floor dancing continuously for an entire hour, and nobody complains. The following interview took place after the New York convention in 1989. We've all gotten older since then, but I don't think that our relationship with Mike and Johnny has changed very much—LT*

**LT** = Luis Torres

**BE** = Mike DeSisto

**JP** = Johnny Preston

**LT** Mike, you're from Seattle, Washington, that's the area where you do most of your calling, and Johnny, you're from Southern California.

How did you get started calling for gay groups? Let's start with Mike.

**MD** I started close to five years ago, at least, when Puddletown Squares approached me. A guy named Johnny Cozel, who had first started calling for them took me up there one night. I called for them one time, and I decided yes, this is what I want to do! And I've been calling for them pretty much ever since. I taught their class this year, and I will be calling their Basic/Mainstream class next year. First night we had 12 squares, and at the end, we graduated 68 people.

See, they have a pretty unique deal going up there, because of the Timberline, a gay Western bar. I go up there the second Friday of each month and call Plus dances. And you have all

these people standing around going: "Yeah man, that looks like really cool stuff!" The club floods the place with flyers, and before you know it, you have another class going with 12 squares in it.

**LT** So you get a lot of good exposure from dancing there? It's not really a question of having to go out and talk to people who have never seen square dancing before.

**MD** Yes, the Timberline holds 8 to 10 squares, and when you get the music going through a thousand-watt disco system, with huge woofers and what look like wall-to-wall speakers, you create an impression. The guy who owns the place is a square dancer, and he runs the sound for you, so you don't have to use your remote or anything. He knows exactly what to do for you.

When the audience sees how much fun the dancers are having, they realize that there is an alternative to just going out drinking every night and try to find someone to get laid with. This way, they can square dance, and have fun, and do something that is more productive.

**LT** And maybe get laid in the process?

**MD** Yes, maybe.

**LT** What was it like for you when you started calling for the gays in Seattle?

**MD** It was really scary! The first night of lessons we had twelve squares, the place was just packed with people, and I'm looking out at the floor and thinking, "Oh, shit, they're all men!!" I had certainly never taught a class like that. But, after about the second night, we all started getting into the groove.

These guys were the most vocal group I had ever encountered, and they would add sexual connotations to anything I said, and go "OOOooooohhhhhhh!", so I had to learn to either watch what I said, or just roll with the reaction.

**JP** I remember the first time I called for gay square dancers. It was in Portland, and I started out a singing call to "Jamaica Farewell," without thinking of the line "Down the way when the nights are gay...", and when I got that to spot, the floor started whooping and yelling, and I totally lost it and had to start all over again! I was very apologetic, but after the tip, the dancers came up to me and told me I didn't have to apologize.

**LT** What's the balance between your calling for gay groups and straight groups?

**MD** For every night I call for the gay groups, I probably call three nights for straight ones. But, often, when I am not calling at home, I am

calling at fly-ins for gay groups also: Albuquerque, Atlanta, Toronto, all just this year.

**LT** And Johnny, how about you?

**JP** This is interesting, because this is the first time I've heard all this. Our experiences are totally different. Mike has a job during the day; I call full-tune, so my calling experience is different. I started two years ago doing the convention in Portland, Oregon. I believe the way my name got into the gay community was through two dancers in Denver who had come to some straight dances that I had been doing, and over a period of a couple of years had been exploring to see whether this was something that I would be receptive to. Finally, I got a phone call asking me whether I would mind doing the convention in Portland.

I said: "No, I wouldn't mind at all!" Quite honestly, the first time I did it, it was a whole new experience for me, because I come from a small town in Michigan, and to me gays were people who lived in places like New York, or San Francisco, or even Miami...I knew about Miami! I was not familiar at all with the gay experience. However, I was a true dyed-in-the-wool Liberal, and this was an opportunity to put my calling where my opinions supposedly were!

So I went and did the festival there, and the unbelievable amount of energy, and the unbelievable amount of warmth that I got back from it, made me feel so good that I am at the point that I would consider canceling a previous

engagement so that I can come back and call for them. They really made me feel like I was somebody special! And every entertainer you will ever meet will tell you that that is what it's all about.

**LT** So you admit that callers are entertainers?

**Both** Oh yes, certainly!

**JP** I studied theater arts in high school and college, and I hoped that one day I would be working on Broadway, a few blocks from where we are now, but I realized that that is a one-in-a-million chance, and square dancing gave me the opportunity to satisfy that need to be "on stage." Any caller will tell you that it's nice to get paid at the end of the dance, but to get a good response from the floor is something special, and, boy, you can't get it any better than you can from gay dancers. They really make you feel special.

**MD** And they appreciate what you do, also. My experience is that a lot of straight square dancers will give you a good hand too, but they seem to be saying: "You'd better be good, 'cause we're paying you lots of money!" With gay dancers I feel like we are all involved in something bigger, and we are here to have major fun.

**JP** Every time I go to do a dance, straight or gay, I go in there with the intention of giving the dancers one hundred percent of my abilities, and I start out to do that every time. But the energy that you get back from the floor feeds you, and especially at the conventions and fly-ins, I seem

to be able to rise above my own hundred-percent mark. I seem to be able to give them 110 percent, and I feel much better about my own performance. Maybe it is because they seem to appreciate it more, but I somehow feel that my voice is stronger, and I can do more than I usually can.

**LT** I can tell you from a dancer's perspective, that I just finished Mainstream last April, and I find myself dancing at the convention and wondering how in hell I just did the last sequence of calls!

**MD** One of my guys from Seattle just finished Basic lessons last September, and he was dancing when I did the introduction to Advanced here. This guy was like obsessed: "Give me more, give me more!"

**JP** When I lived in Detroit, I called for Black groups, and I got a similar feeling with them. These seem to be chances for people who don't get the same opportunities all the time to cut loose, and I got the feeling that not only was I entertaining, but I was giving something special back, also. And that makes you feel good, too.

I don't teach any classes. What I have done for the gay groups is that I have called the last three conventions, and I did a fly-in in San Francisco this year. But I call full-time, so I am booked years in advance...through '92 now. The only thing that I can do, if someone wants me between now and then is to try to do some juggling, and I have to beg my wife to let me take some of my supposed time off to schedule some

other things. The Southern California groups aren't as organized as Seattle or New York, which have much larger organizations.

**MD** I think the Mustangs in Miami seem to have a pretty good organization, also.

**JP** Southern California does not seem to, and I can't just drop previous commitments, but I have talked to a few of them, and they certainly feel like they are welcome to come to my dances in the area. There are certain times when I work for other clubs, and when they ask me whether it's all right, I have to tell them that it's not my decision.

It is a problem when they want to come to certain events and they don't want to come with girl partners, but with their **own** partners, and maybe I don't have the courage, or maybe I think there is an alternative approach to it, but I can't just say: "Well, if you won't have them, you can't have me either."

Gay dancers are used to a different set of rules than the standard square dance rules: Drinking at the dances, for example. And "square dance attire" is loosely enforced, to say the least!! (Both laugh.) So those differences can cause a problem. When I am in the straight community, I enforce their laws. If they say they want boy-girl partners only, I sometimes have straight ladies who have lost their husbands, and they are not made to feel welcome. That also bothers me, but it's not my role as a caller to change those rules. I think it's nice that there is the gay square dancers association, where they

can dance according to the rules they set for themselves, get the callers they want, etc.

**LT** Do you know of any events when gay square dancers have approached the organizers to see whether they could attend and have been turned down?

**JP** Well, in my own clubs in San Diego, I have had several gay dancers who wanted to dance, and I felt the best solution was to pair them up with several single ladies I had in the clubs. There, my job was to try to find partners for these ladies. They asked whether they could bring a square of guys and dance together, and I had to tell them that was not possible, because we use computer squares, and the rule is that if you come, you have to mix in with everybody like everyone else.

Situations vary. I call, for example, at a retirement community for some people who are rather set in their ways. I think that as I get more involved with the IAGSDC, I'll become wiser about how to handle such situations, but I am not sure just how much more integrated gay dancers want to be in the straight community.

**MD** My experience is that they get bored at straight gatherings, because the energy level is only half as high, and the level of complexity of the calls has to be kept down.

**JP** I call differently for each group, and how I would handle each situation has to be different for each also. In some groups, their level of confidence in their own dancing is not so high

that they could handle a couple made up of two men. That would just be too confusing for them.

I am continually amazed when I call for gay dancers that they can keep the roles clear when they are dancing (sometimes I am amazed that I can keep the whole thing..., can we use the word “straight?”). When I call “boys run,” everyone knows exactly who is supposed to do what, but they also have confidence in the caller, so at that call they **expect** the person next to them to be a girl.. .and most of the time **they** are right and **I** am right!!

**LT** How about you, Mike, have you had any experience in trying to bring gay and straight dancers together?

**MD** The only experience I’ve had was at the Seattle Center. We have regular free dances that they put on during the summer time sponsored by the Central Puget Sound Council, which is the umbrella organization for the straight community, and the guys will come down and dance. And I guess, I’ve been kind of nasty, because when there is a caller that has been giving me crap about calling for the gays, I tell the guys, “As long as you’re going to be here, go ahead and square up right in front of him; it’ll intimidate the shit out of him!! You can dance so much better than he can call, anyway!”

**JP** I have heard of some situations in the Seattle area, where some of the guys at the more advanced levels have wanted to go to dances, and they were kind of refused.

**MD** Yes, I’m familiar with that situation. It was a particular group where the caller lost quite a few of his people when the gay dancers started coming regularly. I always tell them to come as a full square if they come to my dances, or to come with a woman partner. I hate to ask them that, but that’s the way things are in the city, and the straight dancers won’t accept it any other way.

**JP** I know in California, the El Camino Reelers in San Jose, which is primarily a Lesbian group, they will pair up and come to dances when I am calling. Once again, I think that my wisdom [in handling these situations] will increase as I acquire experience. Right now, I don’t feel qualified to carry a standard out front.

I remember one time in the Detroit area when I was calling a dance, and some Black dancers came, but, all of a sudden I saw them leaving. I stopped them and asked what had happened, and they said they had been told they were not welcome, so I told them that if they were not welcome, then I was not welcome either, and I told the club that. They replied they were sorry I felt that way, but the Blacks were not welcome there—and I don’t know if you know that I am half Black myself—so I told them that they had just lost their caller for the evening!

I don’t know where that comes from, but [the straight dancers] don’t even like it if two women who have lost their husbands dance together. I am not sure what ground they stand on.

**MD** You know what I think? It's not just two men dancing together or two women, I think that what scares everybody is AIDS. It's the question: "If I touch him, can I get AIDS?" Among straights that's the first thing everyone I've talked to about it brings up. At least that is the case in Seattle.

**JP** I don't hear that from people. I think that might be true in more isolated parts of the country, but I have guys who come to my dances, and everyone seems to know that they are gay, but as long as they dance with a girl partner, it seems to be okay. I think the sight of two men dancing together somehow confuses them and makes them feel uncomfortable. And I don't really think that most of the guys in the gay square dance community want to make people uncomfortable. I think they would rather gradually work to be accepted.

**MD** That's why I make an effort to make nights when I can go and call for the gay groups. Many of them have basically learned square dancing by themselves, listening to records, and trying to figure things out. I think that's the way Art (Smith) did it when he started things in Seattle.

I remember the first time I came to call for them and tried to do some sight calling. They were stumbling, because no one had ever stacked any calls on them! They looked at me and seemed to be thinking: "What in hell is he doing?!" That's why I think these fly-ins and conventions are so good for the gay dancers. You have intensive workshops, good caliber callers, and the result is a really good experience.

**LT** I have heard that at the first convention, they had Elmer Sheffield and Paul Marcum calling, and when they went back home they had some repercussions for associating with gay dancers. Have you heard anything about that?

**JP** I heard--and I have heard that this has happened to other callers as well--that one of them, I think it was Paul, got a letter from the local association telling him basically, "you either stop calling for the gays, or you don't call for us," and his response was to tell them " 'Bye!" I'm sure he talked to them and asked them to reconsider. They really have no grounds telling a caller who he can call or not call for.

**MD** If you go to a square dance anywhere, the people in general are basic people, they are simple and kind of down-home; they are not extravagant. If you go to a bar, you see a different type of people. What I tell people is that that is the same situation among gay square dancers, they don't necessarily come in whips and chains...

**JP** (Laughs) I'm about to disagree with you!!

**MD** Now, come on! Gay square dancers are on the whole just plain people, and I won't take any crap in the straight community about calling for them. I tell them that these people have been nicer to me than anyone has ever been before, and I love them as if they were my brothers, because that's how I see them. I'll cancel anything or book clear into '97 if they want me to call for them.

In fact, I've already got a plan that when I die, I'm going to send tapes back, 'cause I don't ever want to miss out on it!

**JP** Well, I think that when you go to a festival or a convention, you get everything out on the floor: you may have farmers, but you also have bankers. You have people with a tremendous eye for fashion, and you have others who come looking frumpy. You have people with good manners, and you have people who are jerks. And I think you get the same thing in the gay community.

I think there are gay dancers who, when they go to a straight activity, will act pretty much the way they think their hosts will want them to act. But, when they come here to their own convention, they feel pretty much open to express themselves in a way that they have felt suppressed to do most of their lives. So, all of a sudden, they have this situation where they can come and square dance, and they can get into the Honky Tonk Queen Contest if they feel that way.

All the people in my clubs at home know where I am this weekend, because I have described gay conventions for them, and their reaction generally is: "Hey, that sounds like kind of fun!" But anyone who tells you that gay conventions are "just like every other square dance convention," is not telling the whole story!

It **is** different, and it took me some getting used to. Remember that I grew up in a small community. My idea was that gay people were just like everybody else, except when they came

home at night, they lay down with someone of their same sex. Well, that is not exactly true, there are differences. Like, wearing a hula skirt and a feather boa while you dance because you feel like it!! I have to admit that I am getting an education. But when you cut through all that stuff and get to the heart of matters, **that's** where everything is the same. Actually, it's **not** just the same; I think the hearts are just a little bit larger in the gay community.

**MD** Yeah, bigger, a lot bigger. And there is such a love you feel here! Like when Freeman [Stamper] got the Golden Boot Award, I was fighting back tears!

**JP** Well, I didn't fight them back! I get a little glassy-eyed even talking about it. He was one of the first people I met among the gay dancers, and I think that he's one of the most wonderful people I've ever met in my life.

**LT** You're both married and your wives come to these events. What is their reaction to them?

**JP** My wife did not come with me the first time I called, which was for just one day. I guess it was a sort of try-out! My wife grew up in California, and she was a lot more comfortable with it than I was. The first year I was really nervous. After all, from the technical point of view, the calling is not easy, either; it's a whole different ball game.

And I'll tell you what the nervousness was: it was not that it bothered me [being among gay people], but I was afraid that I would react in a

disrespectful way, that I might stare too much. And then I found out: It's OK to stare, and it's OK to be surprised, because they want your natural reaction.

The first time I saw one guy run up to another and jump up and throw his legs around him, I have to admit I was taken aback. I come from an area where even girls don't do that with a guy! I was struck by the obvious sexual openness, and I'm no prude by any means. I **still** stare when a guy reaches around and grabs his friend in the ass, but initially I was afraid that that might be misconstrued as being unaccepting.

My eyes were like saucers that first time! And, of course, the dress was different than anything I had ever seen. At that time I had not yet ever been to San Francisco before, so I had never walked down the Castro and seen something like that on the street. I was not ready for the open sexuality of gay people when they are among themselves. And it was kind of a test of my liberal opinions.

**MD** The first convention my wife went to, we were pretty lucky, because we got involved right off the bat in the Honky Tonk Queen Contest, and at that time it was all held in a little room, where we were all crowded together, and Cathy and Paul Marcum and I were the judges. From that time on, my wife just loves to come to these events. She usually has a real low energy level, she needs at least eight hours of sleep every day, but when she comes to convention, she just keeps going and going. There's no stopping her.

You see, my wife normally does not trust men. She knows how some men are, and in square dancing she has heard about the reputation of some callers. But here, she sees men as just people; there's nobody that's going to hit on her or bother her. If they come and put their arms around her and give her a hug, she knows that it's because they are honestly glad to see her. And there's a lot of the guys who get after me if I don't bring her with me. They really like her and she really likes them. And the same thing is true in Seattle. She goes out and square dances or twosteps with them.

**JP** I did, too!! Last night I twosteped with Art Smith. I must admit that I was a bit uncomfortable, but...

**LT** But you'll get over it, won't you?

**JP** (Laughs) The one thing I learned is that they respect me enough so that none of the guys is going to do anything untoward, and that they are no different from me from a sexual point of view. When I was single and running around, I certainly did not want to go to bed with anyone who did not want to go to bed with me, and I feel the same way here.

I know I'm going to get flirted with-and I did-but I also know that no one is going to push me to go to bed with them, and I think that that is where the nervousness comes that most straight people would feel when they are first confronted with a gay gathering. Every once in a while I feel the stares when I walk by...

**MD** Yeah! Especially when you're walking up to the stage, and you're up front and everyone is behind you looking at you. But I just think, "Hey, it's OK!;" in a way, it's actually flattering.

**JP** At least it shows you that you're not out of the running yet! It feels kind of good to be "breaking hearts" again. (Laughs.)

**LT** What can you say to sum up your experience with gay square dancers?

**MD** On the whole, what they have done for me basically is make me a better caller and a better person. They have allowed emotions which were inside me to surface. Things that I never expressed, I feel freer to express now, mostly where my affection for other people is concerned. There for a while, I was a real asshole because when I got divorced, my wife really screwed me over, and I really hated the whole world. I had nothing good to say about anybody.

When I started to call for these guys, my experience with them allowed tenderness to come out. It was a humanizing experience.

In Seattle, I've been happy to see at the Timberline that where before it used to be primarily guys, now the women also come out in numbers. It's given the community a central place to go where the Lesbians can meet the men and the other way around. They now seem to feel that they are all in it together and can work with each other. You can see that at the conventions as well. The first couple of conventions, the

women were not very visible, but now you see more and more of them.

**LT** In describing gay square dancing you both have mentioned **energy**. Have you got any ideas about where that energy comes from?

**Both** Youth.

**MD** You look out on the floor, and the majority of the gay square dancers are young. They are not much over thirty. A few are older, but the majority are on the younger side. They go and go and go!

**JP** I think there is something more than just youth. I am not quite sure about it yet, but I wonder whether it is the suppression of natural expression that has occurred in their lives for so long. I am sure that the opportunities for recreation have been restricted, and when they do find something that they **can** do and they **like** to do, they go at it with all the energy that they possess. It may be youth to some extent, but when I look out on the floor, I can see people who are older as well!

**MD** What Johnny says makes some sense.

**JP** I think also that [while they are dancing] they feel young, and they are allowed to feel young. And I think that has something to do with square dancing. It's a synergetic effect: you have the suppression of gay life on the one hand, and then you have square dancing on the other, which affords the opportunity for expression and enthusiasm. You can see something similar in

the youth hall at the national [straight] conventions: you are going to see a similar attitude there and a similar freedom of expression with the whoops and the twirls, and the grinds, and the kicks. It's energy being allowed to release itself.

**LT** I think you have a good point there, and I was thinking specifically of what Freeman Stamper said [when he accepted the "Golden Boot Award"]. He explained that he is an information freak as a result of not being able to talk to his family in all his years of growing up, and now, with square dancing, he has a huge family and he talks to everybody, so it all pours out at once.

**JP** I do believe that he was the one that planted the seed of that thought in my mind, and that I formulated my idea from thinking about his words after his speech. The hyper-expressiveness comes from a previous history of suppression, and I was also associating that with the Black community and anyone else who has been suppressed. When they are first allowed to express themselves freely, it just has to be a hyper-expression.

**LT** Will we be seeing you at future conventions?

**Both** Oh, certainly!

**MD** The way things are shaping up right now, we probably will be at your conventions for the next five years, and by the time the 10th anniversary convention comes in Seattle, we will have probably called for all but three of the

conventions. And I must say that I am proud of that. With this group, you have to be on your toes: if they like you, you're going to stay, but if they don't... But they give you a fair chance to show what you can do.

**JP** I think Freeman put it very concisely when he said that because of the technical difficulties that are involved in calling for a gay floor, calling for you really separates the good callers from the mediocre ones. I think he's a **very wise man!!!** [Both laugh.] I think I'll throw that into my resume: "Made the grade with the IAGSDC!" I agree with him that calling for gay groups has made me a technically better caller. My concentration has to be higher, and by now I can almost do it as easily as I can with a floor of straight squares.

**LT** By the way, how the heck do you as callers approach a gay floor? How do you "memorize" squares?

**JP** There are several techniques that one can use. I don't know how Mike does it, because we've never discussed it, but I look for something that hits me as easy to remember in a particular square. It might be a couple that has the tallest guy and the shortest guy, which should be easy to remember. Once I have that couple, then I have to look on either side of them to see which of those two couples would be the easiest to remember. I try to do that with two or three squares.

In a singing call, you're dealing with a memorized pattern, not something you're making

up as you go. At a straight dance, when couples wear matching outfits, all you have to do is match colors, and you can keep track of five or six different squares. Here it's tougher, and you can do it with maybe two, or, if there is a really unique situation in a square, maybe with three.

But once you have the two side-by-side couples you remember, you just try to reconstruct that picture in your calls. You also start out with certain memorized patterns that help you when you see the correct corners come together.

**MD** My system is pretty much the same, except that when I am calling the higher levels, I try to concentrate on the boys: whether they are together

or apart in ocean waves or lines, because that automatically tells me where the girls are.

**JP** Once you get to a certain point, there are only three or four possibilities, and you can work the people in the middle of the square until you have what you need.

And there are techniques you can use to find out what you have out there. You can call, for example, "all the boys do a U-turn back," which sounds like a piece of choreography, but really tells you where everybody is. Then you can use another sequence of calls to bring the squares back to where you want them. It's really simple and makes you look like a genius!!



**Sixth Annual Convention  
of the  
International Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs**

**June 30, July 2-4, 1989**

## HOW MUCH WOOD? AN INTERVIEW WITH DON WOOD, SEATTLE

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Don Wood is one of Seattle's Puddletown Dancers' favorite callers. Not only is he an ace caller and an excellent teacher, but he is also a computer whiz. With Jim Detweiler (of Timberline fame), Don has begun issuing his own records on the Marlette label. The following interview appeared in About Puddletown, the club newsletter, in August 1990.—LT*

**APD** = About Puddletown

**DW** = Don Wood

**APD** Let's start out with your history. When did you start calling?

**DW** I've always been interested in music. I've played guitar in several bands mostly with choirs, choruses, and church groups. I was the lead singer in a band in Guam when I was in the service. I started square dancing in 1959; my folks were square dancers.

**APD** What do you do when you're not calling for square dancing? What's your "real" job?

**DW** Well, I'm known as a Computer Information Systems Specialist. I work for the State of Washington's Department of Labor and Industries, and my current job is consultant on systems designed to employ local area networks and personal computers. I'm also the manager of a group called PC Services.

**APD** How do you manage to get away from a full-time job to do fly-ins and other dances?

**DW** Well, I watch my time very carefully. I utilize my vacation, holidays, comp time, and things like that.

**APD** Do you consider your calling "work?"

**DW** No. It's pure pleasure.

**APD** When did you first start calling for Puddletown?

**DW** I was calling up in Lynwood for an Advanced level club. We were having Plus dances, also. A friend of mine, Jack Harden, had called a couple of dances for gay groups, and one day I got a letter in the mail from a representative of Puddletown Dancers, who explained that he and members of the group were going to come out to my dance. They wanted to hear me call, and perhaps get me to call for Puddletown and for BOQ.

In all candor, I was totally taken by surprise. At the time, I was a good-sized bigot, I think. I called Jack Harden and his wife Lee, and said "I don't know how I'm going to handle this." My opinion then was that gays didn't have any business in square dancing, and that was with very limited, or actually next to zero knowledge of the gay community.

I think it was Lee Harden who turned my attitude around. She said, "Let me ask you this.

Do you usually ask your dancers what they do in bed at night?” And I said, “Absolutely not! That’s none of my business.” And she said, “Then is their sexual preference any of your business?” And I kind of took a step backwards, and I said, “Well, I’ve got to think about this.”

So I did some relatively deep soul searching. I realized that I was a very big bigot, and that it was not my place to judge anybody, let alone people that I had never even met before. That was about four or five years ago, I guess; it’s been a long tune. I agreed to call a couple of dances for them, and I went down to the church [Pilgrim Congregational] for the first dance.

**APD** Were you nervous at that first dance?

**DW** Absolutely. In fact, a lady who used to dance with me in Tacoma in 1981-82 was at the dance. She and I had been good friends, and I didn’t know she was gay. Anyway, she was there, and she came right up and gave me a hug.

That was a minimal shock compared to the next one. I turned around, and across the room, standing in back, was a fellow I work with, someone relatively high in the State processes. My mouth must have hit the floor. I walked up to him, and I didn’t know what to say. He looked at me and said, “Don, I’ve known you long enough to be confident that you’d be discreet.” And he’s right, because at work I never bring the subject up. I’d never do anything to hurt him. But it was really a big surprise. Having the two of them there, however, helped to ease the nervousness.

It’s been a good four or five years, and I’ve enjoyed it. This club has only made me a better caller, because I have to be much more aware of positioning. Also, I’ve said this before, and I believe it to my very soul, if I could bottle the energy of gay dancers and sprinkle it among the straight clubs, square dancing would revive in its most robust form.

**APD** We’ve heard a rumor, and not knowing you well, I’m just going to ask this: Is it true that you either just recently got married or are planning to get married soon?

**DW** What you’ve heard is true. Val and I were going to get married in June, but the timing just wasn’t right. We had too many things going on, so we decided to postpone. We’re going to get married on New Year’s Eve in Las Vegas.

**APD** Does Val know what she’s getting into?

**DW** We’ve been together for three years, going on four now. She came from a square dance family; her father is a caller. She’s been involved in the activity ever since she was a kid. Not only does she know what she’s getting into, but she’s a very big part of my square dancing life. She’s my best friend and my worst critic. She is absolutely sensitive to what I’m doing; she’s both supportive and sensitive, and that means a lot to me.

I’ll tell you a statement that a friend of mine made. We were doing the OK national, and he came up to me and said, “You’re one of the luckiest guys I know. That girl really cares about

how good you appear on stage, how well you sound. That kind of support's something that you can't buy."

Some callers' partners tend to work the crowd, glad-hand a lot of people. Val's not a person like that. If she comes up and she lets you know that she's fond of you, you can count on it that that's real, that it's not phony. And I appreciate that!



**Seventh Annual Convention  
of the  
International Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs**

**April 12-15, 1990**

**WE'RE ALL FANS OF ANNE'S!  
AN INTERVIEW WITH ONE OF THE FAVORITE CALLERS  
OF THE GAY SQUARE DANCE COMMUNITY:  
ANNE UEBELACKER**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Anne Uebelacker is one of the most talented callers in all of Western square dancing today. She was immensely popular with gay square dancers from the beginning, and her popularity among us soared when she "came out" as one of us. Anne is a charming, intelligent person, with a quick laugh and a sharp sense of humor. This interview affords IAGSDC members a glimpse of Anne "off the platform." The interview took place at her home in Vancouver on October 5, 1992.—LT*

**LT** = Luis Torres

**AU** = Anne Uebelacker

**LT** Let's start from the beginning. Where were you born? Where did you grow up?

**AU** I was born in Peterborough, Ontario...many years ago; small town, nothing particularly exciting in my childhood. An only child born to parents both of whom were born overseas, one in Scotland and one in England. They had a very heavy ballroom-dance background and they played a lot of instruments. My father had a dance band, and when I was a kid, I went with them to the local club and played for dances. That's what I thought most kids did on Friday and Saturday nights until I was about eighteen.

**LT** So your father did this professionally?

**AU** Yes, he was a drummer, and during that I time, I just automatically went with them. Of course, I was the youngest person in the band.

But my parents also did a lot of ballroom dancing in competitions. They were one of the few

couples I have ever come across who actually took dancing lessons from Arthur Murray himself.

**LT** All right, so when did the square dancing come into the picture?

**AU** My Mom and Dad started to dance first, and they danced for about three years. I never paid it any attention during that time. I thought it was kind of a hokey thing to do. All the young people I knew had the same attitude: "Oh, I had to do that in high school!"

Finally, I had moved up to Toronto for my job for about three years, and I would come home weekends to visit them, but they were never home. They'd always be out square dancing. And finally, one weekend when I came home and they said, "Oh, we're sorry, but we're going out of town dancing this weekend again!" I finally said: "O.K., just tell me **where**, and I'll come there for the weekend, too!"

The dancing was at a campground, and it was a typical story: they were one person short for a square, so they threw me in despite my protests. By the end of the weekend, I was

dancing pretty much at the Advanced level. It was do or die, I had to just get in there and do it. And that was it: I've danced ever since!

**LT** What about calling? When did you start with that?

**AU** It actually started the same weekend, without my knowing this. The caller was a young fellow named Jimmy Lee from Flesherton, Ontario. Although the dancing was fun, it was the choreography that I found really intriguing. I was more interested in how he moved everybody around and got them back to then- positions, so he sat down with me, and we talked for a while. Finally, he said, "Well, if you want to learn how to call, I suggest you learn to dance first. But there is a really good callers' school coming up in about six months, and you might consider taking part in it."

The school was with Kip Garvey and Jack Lasry, two very good American callers, and I decided to take a chance with it, even if I might end up not liking it at all. But I walked out of the school that weekend with my mind made up that **that** was what I wanted to do. I started working at it, calling to just "basement groups:" one square, until I got a really big break.

I was lucky to find the other callers really helpful: Lee Kopman was a big, big help; Russ Howell from Texas gave me my biggest break. We were at a big weekend in Pennsylvania; it was 110 degrees at this tent ground, and we were

all in shorts and T-shirts. He came up to me and asked: " Do you have your stuff with you? " I said "Yes," and he replied, "Good, you're calling the next tip." I said, "But I've never called for this many people before!" " Well, now's a good time to start!," he said.

So he put me up on the stage, and I actually was calling C-3 at that time, although I had never danced it, which is really a stupid thing to do. But they were short of callers at that level, and he said, "We really need you to do this, so, you'd better learn quickly!" So, I got up and called the tip, and got hired, after just one tip, to call in Chicago and Boston!

**LT** Right on the spot?

**AU** Right on the spot...and for a whole weekend. I said to them: "My God, I haven't called more than about three tips!!" But their reply was: "Well, your dates are about two years down the line, so you've got plenty of time to get experience."

**LT** You said earlier that you were away from your parents on your job. What kind of work did you do?

**AU** I was a veterinarian.

**LT** My God, the things one finds out doing these interviews!! [Both laugh.]

**AU** Yes, that's what I did in my former life. Obviously you didn't know!

**LT** And you practiced for how long?

**AU** Four years. In that time I was also doing part-time work with a computer company...just doing key-punching and other stuff to make a little extra money so that I could support my habit of square dancing.

**LT** Was your veterinary work with small animals, household pets and such, or what?

**AU** Yes, small animals...mainly because I was allergic to horses and cows. That's what I really wanted to do, but it's really tough to follow that line of work when you can't walk into a barn.

**LT** Did you try working "from a distance?" Cow faith-healing or something like that?

**AU** [Laughs] No, I never tried that approach. There was a period of time when I had four Irish setters in the house, and **they** were allergic to people while **I** was allergic to them, so **they** were taking shots for me and **I** was taking shots for them! Kind of a strange situation, but, as you can see, we still have a dog.

**LT** And you're still allergic to it?

**AU** Yep!

**LT** What years are we talking about when we speak of your beginning to call?

**AU** I've been calling now for seventeen years, and I was the first Challenge female caller. There were always female callers in the lower

levels, but I was the first breakthrough for women at the upper level, and I have to thank the guys, my male colleagues, because they really encouraged me. Some of them said: "Look at our ranks. They're all male. We really need a female influence here."

I think the nicest part about the whole experience was that they never treated me as "one of the boys." When we discuss choreography, we're all equals, and they treat me the same, but when we walk out, they still open the door for me, and I think that's great. And when I finally made the National Challenge Staff, which was my own personal goal, they were happier than I was! It's done on a voting system, where they vote to select the top ten Challenge callers to serve on the staff, and I was able to achieve it a lot faster than I expected.

It had some drawbacks originally, being female. I went to a dance one weekend in Cleveland, and I walked in the door and started setting up my equipment. A couple came up to me and asked: "Is your husband calling tonight?" I said, "No, I'm calling the dance." "Oh," they said, "we don't like female callers." I asked, "Have you ever danced to one before?" "No, but we don't like them. Do you really mind if we don't pay for the evening until after the first tip to see if we're going to like you or not?" I was spitting nails by that time, but I said, "No, no problem at all!" They came up to me after the first tip to tell me that they had decided to stay! I felt like giving them their money back and telling them to go away, but I restrained myself!

It all worked out O.K. in the end. The guys tease me a lot, and they do really rotten things to each other when they are calling, teasing things. But there are still a lot of people who, when they see a female walk up and take the stage, they'll go and sit down. It's taken time to overcome that. At the same time, being a woman has its advantages at times; you're a novelty because of your sex: "Oh, this is different! We've never danced to one of **these** before!" You can play it for what it's worth, one way or the other.

**LT** I'm surprised to hear that you had a relatively easy way into calling, because from talking to other women callers, I get to hear a lot about the difficulties they have had: how they are seen sometimes as a threat, etc. Do you feel that your case was different than that of the average woman trying to get into calling?

**AU** I think the difference was that I was trying to get into Challenge calling, and it's much easier to get accepted by the Advanced and Challenge dancers and callers. They're much more forgiving, they're more helpful, and they also know that there are not as many callers who can do those levels. They don't seem to care if you're green and have two heads, if you can call and are decent at it.

I really can't say that I had any really major problems. Everybody along the way was really helpful. I'm also relatively easy going, so things don't bother me, but most of the guys were super-helpful. Only once did I have a major problem, and I don't think there it would have mattered whether I was male or female. It was

at a convention in Montreal, and I had just finished almost an hour's workshop in the Advanced hall, and this rather drunk individual brought his square into the hall and squared up. I told them before they squared up that this was the end of a workshop and that, if they had not had the calls, they were likely to have difficulties dancing. But after a while, he came storming to the platform screaming and yelling because he didn't know the calls. He pushed the equipment right off the table, and was ready to beat me to a pulp.

That was the only really negative experience I had in all my years of calling, and I don't know that it would have mattered **who** I was in that situation. It would've happened to anyone who happened to be up on the stage. I don't know **why** I had an easy time of becoming a caller, but I just did.

**LT** I also hear from women in calling that they have difficulty with the music, because the bulk of it is recorded by and for male voices.

**AU** **That** is true. There are a lot of singing calls that I can't use because my voice is not in that range, but fortunately I don't have a high voice, so that makes it a little easier. When I find a singing call that I **can** do, I usually go out and buy twenty copies of the record!! But you can adapt, and you learn how to do it after a while.

Sandy Bryant is the only other female caller that came along and has been able to get into Advanced and Challenge calling, and now that we've led the way, maybe other women can get

in, too. But at the higher levels, you first have to prove yourself. Once you do that and are accepted, then you have to work even harder to stay there. People get rather blasé about your calling, but they can get very feisty if you mess up. They're paying good money for us to be good, so we have to do our homework.

**LT** What is your schedule like nowadays?

**AU** Horrendous! I'm far too busy for my own good right now. When I started off, I wanted to go full-time, and the only way to do it was to stop everything else and hope that the bookings would build up enough so that I could make a living at it. Again, it was very easy; things fell into place very quickly, and I was as busy as I wanted to be at the end of a year.

Now, I'm at a point when I'm booked up five years ahead. There are certain weekends that I write in the book as a code for me to take them off, but if there's a particular dance that I really want to do, I'll use up that time. It's tough, not being home a lot, because I still have my son here, and Gail, and other things to come home to, so I need to take a few more weekends off.

**LT** How do you handle your schedule? Do you book a certain number of weekends?

**AU** Right now, I take two weekends off: Christmas and New Year's. It just happened: people would phone and say: "I want **this** weekend or **that** weekend," and I would say, "Yes, yes, yes." Then I realized I had to start being selective because I can't go, say, three or

four hundred miles for just one dance anymore. I've got to have more than that. So then I started asking for a minimum of at least three dances, and they would phone back and they would have those three dances. So I had to go through with commitments on that basis.

There's no set pattern. Some groups want to roll over and have the same weekend every year, and I have those as standard dates. But now I'm backing off on some of the weekends, especially those on the East coast that I used to be able to drive to, but can't anymore. I've written them all letters, and most of them understand the new situation. They can't afford to fly me there, so I've given them enough time so they can get someone else, or I've gotten somebody else for them. There's also lots of places on **this** coast that I would have liked to go to, but haven't been able to before. There's different options available, I guess.

**LT** What was your first engagement abroad?

**AU** My very first one was into Boston. Then, outside North America, England, Germany on a tour, France, and after that Sweden, and, following that was Japan.

**LT** Do these come with any regularity?

**AU** Yes, I take Japan every two years, and Sweden also every two years. The other one was a special tour that somebody else put together and I thought I'd like to go on, so I put my name down on the list. They immediately said, "Oh good, now we have a caller!" I hadn't really

planned to work, but that's how it turned out. And since it paid for my tour, I agreed to it. I'm going back to Japan next year (1993) in the winter.

Those are really neat trips. You feel like royalty in Japan, because they do **everything** for you. And you don't dare go to a store and casually say: "O, gee, that's nice!," because you'll have it waiting for you when you get back to your hotel. For them it's a real novelty to have you there, and it's much cheaper to bring one person over and pay for the expenses of the weekend, than for them to travel some place else. They really look after you: not only your hotel, but your meals also are taken care of, and they are always careful to take you sightseeing...sometimes for six hours in a taxi! Things are very expensive there, but for them it's cheaper to bring you than for them to travel abroad to a festival.

**LT** Do you find any remarkable differences in square dancers say in Sweden, or Germany, or Japan?

**AU** To be truthful, most of the overseas dancers are much better than the American dancers at the same level. If we're talking about straight clubs, there is a significant difference, mainly because of the age groups involved. We have a lot of older people who dance in square dance clubs in both Canada and the United States, so the reaction time is different, speed of calling is different; the degree of difficulty can be the same, but here you have to give them longer to do the moves.

The European clubs are more like the gay clubs. The energy level is high; they don't like to sit down. "Don't give us breaks, for Heaven's sake!" In Sweden, and probably there in particular, they just don't sit. When they say it's going to be a three hour dance, they really mean three hours of dancing. They'll change partners or change squares, and you take the record you just finished off and put a new one on, and they're all ready to go again. It's like a marathon.

**LT** Is it just a question of a lower average age, or a difference in attitude?

**AU** The age is much lower, and the attitude is different. They don't have regular callers; a lot of their groups work with tapes, so they don't know they are as good as they are until they venture to the States to one of the nationals or to some festival, and **then** they find out. I think we tend to be a little bit lazy at times.

It's the difference in culture, really. The Japanese are very structured in everything they do, and they tend to be very good at everything they do, because I think they are taught that way from birth: that you should try your very, very best at whatever you undertake. Most of their dancers are about 30 or 35 years old, and they have a unique system where everybody brings their whole family to the dance and there is like a baby-sitting circle, where all the kids are in the middle while a group of parents goes off and dances. Then they come back and watch the kids while the next group dances. The attitude is

very, very different. They are there to learn, and yet they still are able to have a good time with it.

Nowadays they are starting to loosen up. When I first went there, the dancing took place in total silence. They were having a good time, but I had a hard time understanding that. When **our** dancers are having a good time, they're rowdy! About ten minutes into the tip, I turned to the caller beside me, who was Japanese, and asked him: "Moto, are they having a good time?" And he said: "Oh yes, they're having a marvelous time. But you see, we usually dance to tapes, and we have eight squares in the room. If someone speaks, the rest of us miss the next call, and that is not polite!"

It took them about three days to loosen up. And they didn't know the noises and the silly things that we do to some of the calls, so we spent a whole tip teaching them "sound effects," teaching Japanese dancers to be rowdy!

**LT** How about the language difference? I know that they learn the calls in English, but I still have a hard time picturing how you call a square dance in a foreign language setting.

**AU** Most of the Japanese dancers know at least some English, but they are very hesitant to use it, because they are afraid that their English will not be good enough and they will embarrass you in some way, or they'll say something wrong, so, instead, they will just smile and bow a lot. They'll always come up and say thank you, and they are extremely polite with you, but it took an after-party and three or four beers, before I

discovered that everybody in the room could speak English.

After they loosened up, they came up and wanted to speak English to me. "Can we try our English on you?," they would say. "Yes!," I'd tell them, "I've been waiting all weekend!" I also went and took some night school courses in Japanese before I first went, so I knew a bit of Japanese, and I felt the same way they did: I didn't use it, because I didn't want to offend anybody.

After that after-party the very first time, we all settled down and had a great time. In Sweden, all the Swedish dancers spoke English. A lot of them had a very British accent, because their teachers were from England or had studied there. Germany was no problem whatsoever, either. They all spoke at least a little English.

It became sort of a game after a while: they would teach me a word in their language and I would use it for a while, and I would teach them something in English, and they would play around with it. There was never any real barrier anywhere at any time; there may have some stiffness during the first hour or so when no one knew exactly what to do. I was never in my life so glad to pick up the mike and start calling, because then I didn't have to say anything; but that feeling didn't last long.

A lot of the foreign dancers now come to the Advanced and Challenge Convention in Virginia Beach or to the national convention. At the last national in Cincinnati, there were 14 or 15

Japanese dancers, there were about nine Swedes, and a lot of people from Britain. The dancers are traveling more now to dance to real callers rather than to tapes.

**LT** When you go abroad, are you the only caller on the bill, or do you work with other local callers?

**AU** In Japan I'm the only one, but in Sweden I work with three of their local callers. It was rather amusing, because I was dancing, and the caller told the dancers—in Swedish—that he was going to call the rest of the tip in Swedish only. Of course, I didn't know what he had said, but everyone was laughing and giggling. Fortunately, we were dancing Mainstream, so I was able to figure out what we were doing.

They also have their own peculiar accent, particularly when they pronounce their "j's" like "y's," and the very first time he said "Yoin hands and circle left," I thought I was going to die. There's also a call "Jaywalk" on the C-list, and they said "Yaywalk," but none of that causes major problems.

**LT** When you're calling, you usually give the call and then have some "helpful elaborations" to cue the dancers along or give them reminders of the moves involved. Do they do the same in their language?

**AU** Yes, that was the only problem I had. If I was going to teach a new call, especially in Japan, one of the local callers would stand by and translate what I had just said so that they all

understood. Most of them could catch it, but when you're doing a workshop you need to be sure that everyone understands what's happening.

One really unique experience was sort of by accident in Germany. We were on a boat cruise going down the Rhein with two busloads of tourists. One was a Canadian square dancers' bus, and the other was a German bus. A third busload came that was also all German. We were all together on this ship that had a German "oompah" band on board. We had one fellow who dances with us, Herbie Sykes, who is also very fluent in German.

The Germans were asking where we were from, and what we were doing in Germany, etc., so we told them we were square dancers. They wanted to know what square dancing was, so he volunteered to show them, and arranged for the band to play. We ended up square dancing to the "She's-too-fat-for-me" polka!

The Germans were fascinated and wanted to find out how we did that, so I told Herb that, if he would help me by translating, we could do sort of a "first-night" session with them. So we had each dancer pick up a German partner and we got them in squares. I would explain in English and Herb would translate in German, and we had more fun that day than on any other part of the trip!

Actually, we never did see the Rhein, because we were too busy square dancing inside the ship for three and a half hours to this oompah band playing the same piece of music! By the

time we were done, there was absolutely no language barrier; we hit it off just marvelously, and when we had to go our separate ways, it was like family breaking up.

**LT** What was your first contact with gay square dancing?

**AU** Originally John Fybalsky from San Francisco was the one who introduced me to them. I was coming into town to do a PACE (Pacific Advanced and Challenge Enthusiasts) weekend for the straight clubs, and I had Sunday off. He called and asked me whether I wanted to have a dance to fill out my weekend, and I said, “Oh, sure.”

He said: “You may have a little problem with this, so I want to tell you ahead of time.” I couldn’t figure out what he was talking about or what kind of a group this could be. He continued: “I have a gay group here that I call for, and they are very good, so I wondered whether you might want to call for them.”

I told him I had no problem. Then he said: “Oh, one word of warning: It’s Mainstream and Plus, but you’d better write cards if you’ve never called for them before.”

**LT** What did that mean, “write cards?”

**AU** He meant for me to write down the choreography, and he warned: “Write difficult stuff!” Well, I don’t trust most people who come to me and say they have “good dancers,” but John I do, so I decided I would do as he suggested. The “Stanford Quads” also came up

that night, a university group he called for, so they were much younger than the usual dancers. Well, that was one of the fastest dances I have ever called; the night just flew by!

When I got there, I didn’t know quite what to expect. I was very familiar with gay people, because I had been friends with Harlan Kerr for a lot of years before, and I had been to some of the bars and dance places with him without a problem. But I didn’t know what to expect of gays as square dancers. As it turned out, I used just about everything I had written down during the first tip, and the tip was something like 3/4 of an hour long! When I asked whether they wanted to stop, they said: “No!” And the rest of the time it was “faster, faster!”

I left there on a high: “I can’t believe this,” I said to myself, there are people here who can **really** dance!” It was so high energy and so full of life that it was just beautiful. I was used to floors of 70-year-olds, where you had to be careful that their hearing aids were up to par, etc., so it was a completely different experience, a different kind of group entirely.

That was my first contact, and then for another three times that year, when I went back out to California, I called for gay groups: Foggy City, and others, and it ended up that I was calling more for the gay groups there than for the straight ones.

**LT** What year was this?

**AU** Probably 1982 or '83. And then Seattle picked me up for their first Goodyduck Festival, and from there, other clubs started asking for dates. Then, about three years after that, I got a call from Chris Homer in Toronto, who told me: "I got your name through the grapevine!"

It turned out that he knew someone in New York City, who knew somebody in San Francisco, who knew someone in Seattle, who had recommended that they call me. Then he added, "I just want you to know that we want to find a caller, and that we have 55 men; no women!" I said: "That's no problem!" He couldn't believe it: "It isn't? Well, I've phoned ten local callers already, and they all hung up on me, so I figured I'd just tell you ahead of time, just in case." So I changed my schedule a bit, in order to pick up their club on Thursday nights, and that's how we started the Triangle Squares in Toronto.

Joe is calling for them now that I've moved to Vancouver, which is the first full-time job that I've had working with a gay club. But I now do probably 50% of my calling for straight clubs, and the other 50% calling for gay clubs; maybe somewhat higher than that since I've moved to Vancouver. Most of my weekends are with straight festivals.

**LT** When did you meet Joe, and when did you get married?

**AU** We were married in 1984. I met him in Toledo, Ohio, at the American Advanced and Challenge Convention. We had Todd in '86;

and we went our own ways about two and a half years ago.

**LT** What was your maiden name?

**AU** Redden.

**LT** What was your professional relationship like, yours and Joe's?

**AU** To begin with it was an ideal situation: you had two callers who could sit down and discuss choreography, bring two different points of view to your profession. It worked out very well for about two years. It became very obvious after a while that, unfortunately, I was picking up more dates than he was; and I guess that's tough on the male ego. It became a major problem between us after a while, and we just started drifting apart.

Other than the calling, we had no problems, and at one point we both decided to stop calling. That, however, lasted only for about three days. It was, after all, an occupation that I'd wanted and worked for all my life, one where I enjoy working and where I enjoy the people. I just couldn't see abandoning it. The time may come when I get tired of the traveling, but.... That was another problem for us, the traveling, because he'd be going in one direction, and I'd be going in the opposite, and when we did see each other, it was just through the week. Even then, at night we went in different directions, because we had different calling dates. His dates started to drop off, and it caused a lot of bad feelings. So I guess

it is not a good thing to have two callers in the same house!

**LT** Is there a significant difference between gay square dancers and straight square dancers?

**AU** They're miles apart! The first thing that you notice is the range of ages. The next thing is that the enthusiasm level is ten-fold with the gay square dancers. Because of the age difference, I think, the proficiency level is much higher among the gay dancers; they're much better dancers in, I would dare say 100% of the clubs, than comparable straight clubs.

There **are** some clubs in the straight community that dance at the level of the gay clubs: I know one in Chicago, another in New York, another in San Francisco that have extremely good dancers, and they are the people who make it their business to be the best they can at what they're doing.

I think another thing is the dress code. I actually detest wearing those pettipants. I suppose they cover a multitude of sins on these women who are 70 and 80 years old...

**LT** But they also expose a multitude of sins!

**AU** Yes. Some people are just not meant to wear that stuff. The attitude is also totally different between gay and straight dancers. The gay square dancers come **to dance**: they want their money's worth; they don't want to waste time sitting around doing nothing.

When we call a dance for a gay club, the breaks are short, and that's what they expect. When you call for a straight club, to begin with you do a two to two-and-a-half hour dance at maximum, mostly two hours. Then, you call a ten-minute tip, followed by a ten minute break. Ninety percent of the clubs also have two rounds in-between, so you end up doing three tips in an hour, if you're lucky. Then, partway through, they stop to have a coffee break for half an hour. They're paying good money, but that's all they want from you!

You also have to keep your pace much slower, so you back your tempo down to about 40 or 42, whereas with the gay groups I run it at 46 or 47, and on singing calls, you just crank it up even higher. It's actually an effort to keep that in mind so you don't forget to slow down when you go to a straight group. One time in Mesa, Arizona, I wasn't thinking about it and forgot to notice the age level of the floor. I started out at about 45, and after about 15 minutes, I realized that they were just about dying on the floor. At the end of the tip, they said: "Do you mind if we have a **very long** break!" It turned out that the oldest couple on the floor was in their 80s!

I think a lot of it is mental attitude. I watch people like Stan and Bill from the Prime 8s, who are both in their 70s, but their mental attitude is very young. They get out there and dance, they don't do a lot of sitting, and they are always there until the very last minute. When I look at people their age in the straight clubs, who have to have a long break every other tip, I wonder how tired

you can really get when you're only doing three tips an hour!

You have to go into each group with a different mental attitude, because they're both having a very good time in their own way. You can't call anything unusual at most of the straight clubs, either. It has to be fairly standard positioning, and they're happy that way. But, if you keep it fairly standard positioning with the gay groups, they look at you and wonder whether you're playing games with them and are lulling them so you can hit them with something **really** hard!

**LT** How many of the conventions have you done?

**AU** Four. I started in Phoenix, then I did New York, but couldn't do Miami when they changed the weekend, and then the one in Albuquerque.

**LT** What experiences stand out in your dealings with gay clubs?

**AU** All the conventions are memorable, because each is so different, but I guess what stands out is the enthusiasm and the appreciation of the dancers. They let you **know** when they enjoy what you're doing, and I sometimes find that very embarrassing, because I don't know what to do with myself.

I guess the hardest thing is to realize from one convention to the next that a lot of people are missing. I find that a real problem for me. You're almost afraid to ask: "Where's so-and-

so?," if they're not there. This year in particular, there were a couple of people I hadn't seen for a while, like crazy Fred Castro from New York, who is a very unusual person anyway. But if Gail had not warned me ahead of time, I would not have recognized him when I saw him.

That's the down side of it. But there's also an up side, because people are always very compassionate. I look at the ones who are there, looking after the ones who are sick, bringing them to the convention, where they can't participate physically, but where they can at least enjoy being there. It's something that you don't see at the straight conventions. And it's nice for me because you feel like you're home. People come up and greet you, and ask about your family, and they're genuinely interested.

Probably for me, because I'm Canadian, the most memorable convention was the Vancouver one. I guess I didn't think of myself as being very patriotic, but I found out that maybe I was.

**LT** Oh, the Vancouver convention was **very** special. I think that most people felt that and would agree with that.

**AU** There was something about it, a certain atmosphere that was there right from the first minute you walked in until the moment you left. I don't know whether it was an organizational thing—the way things were done—or what, but it seemed like the people who ran it were everywhere at one time, and were looking after everything at all times. No one had any major

complaints, and, if there were complaints, they were able to smooth things over. That one had to be the top for me.

**LT** When you began to be associated with the gay square dance groups, did you suffer any repercussions? Did you have any kind of feedback from the straight community?

**AU** Ooooooh, YES! When I started calling for Triangle Squares, the subject came up in some of my Challenge groups at home in Toronto, groups that I had called for about ten years in some cases. I had people come up to me and say:

“We hear that you’re calling for gay groups now.”

“Yes, I am.”

“We don’t think that’s such a good idea.”

“Don’t you, now?”

“Well, aren’t you afraid of catching something?”

“No, I’m not.”

“There’s a major problem with AIDS in that community, you know.”

“I understand that, but that’s not a concern of mine right now. Those people come to dance; I don’t have to go home with anybody, do I?”

There were about six couples who decided that they would not come back until I stopped calling for gay clubs, and, in particular, for Triangle Squares in Toronto. Out of those, four couples came back eventually.

Since Gail came on the scene, I’ve lost some of my dates, particularly in the southern states, but they were fair about it. The guy who called

me said: “We don’t think it’s a good idea for you to call here, because you might run into major problems. This is a very redneck area, and we just wanted to let you know.” At least they were telling me why, rather than just canceling without saying anything. He felt rather bad, but he didn’t think it could be done.

I guess it hasn’t been a negative experience, other than those few instances. Most people have been very supportive. In Peterborough, Ontario, where I used to live—a very small town—a few people came up to me and told me they had heard rumors that I was calling for a gay group. Finally, I announced from the stage: “Yes, it’s true that I am calling for a gay group in Toronto; they dance on Thursdays at such and such a place, and here’s the level they’re dancing. If anyone is interested in visiting the club, I can make arrangements.”

Actually, my father was the first one who made the breakthrough. He said he wasn’t sure that I should be doing it, but he didn’t think he could ask me not to. So I asked him one night: “Would you like to come with me and dance with the club?” He’s like me, he’s a dancing fool, but he said, “No, I can’t do it yet.” So, I told him, “When you think you can, let me know.”

Three weeks later, I got a phone call from him. “Would you pick me up on Thursday?” I picked him up, but we didn’t say anything about it on the way to Toronto. As we were going into the hall, I turned to say something to him, and we ran into each other, because he was so close to me!! So I told him, “No, Dad, you don’t have

to be my second skin!” He said: “I don’t want to dance! I just want to sit and watch.”

So, he sat on the front of the stage, almost underneath my table, but that lasted only about five minutes, because one of the fellows came up and asked: “Does your father dance?” I said, “Yes,” while he was looking at me with great big eyes. “Oh, that’s great, because we need one more for that square over there!”

He turned to Dad: “What part do you want to dance?” Dad said: “Doesn’t matter. I can dance either.” “Oh, good!!” And **that was it!** He discovered that this was FUN!!, and since he’s like the gay square dancers in that he likes to whoop it up, and since he is a good dancer, he was a big hit. At the end of the night the reaction was: “Oh, Anne, thanks for coming...but bring your father again!!” He was on a first name basis with just about everyone in the club.

About six months later, his girlfriend, who is a Mormon, decided that she wanted to come along, too, because we had had an open house at our house, and we had invited people from all the clubs we called for. We had warned people ahead of time that we intended to invite people from Triangle Squares, and that if they chose not to come, that would be fine. The funny part was that about 20 of the fellows from Toronto came down together, and the straight dancers couldn’t tell who was who!! They had to ask: “Where are the gay ones?” And I would tell them: “The guy you’ve been sitting and talking with for the last hour is one of them!” “Oh!”

Anyway, that was a breakthrough. And then Dad showed up with his girl, and all the guys went over to greet him. “And who is this lady?” They took her over, got her in a square, and, after a while, she said to me, “Gee, I’d rather dance with **them!** They’re more fun!”

**LT** How old is your father?

**AU** He’ll be 70 this year...going on 30. The funniest experience I ever had with him was his first visit to a gay bar. Last year, I took him to Japan with me, and since I had to stop in San Francisco for five days, he came with me there, too. He’d never been in the city, and we were arriving on his birthday, so I called ahead to Harlan Kerr and asked if he could do something to celebrate.

So he said: “Sure, I’ll phone Robbie down at the “Rawhide,” and I’m sure he’ll do something!” I gulped...a gay bar...but then I said, “Oh well, why not!” So I did the dance for the gay dancers, and, as usual, they took him over, and got him in all the squares, so he knew everyone by the end of the night. Then, all of Foggy City went with us to the Rawhide.

We walked into the place, and there was this great big banner across the back of the hall: “Happy Birthday, Bill! Welcome to San Francisco!” He asked Harlan: “Did you tell this guy?” “Oh, no! It must be a coincidence!”

The bartender, Robbie, is an Irishman, and he and my father hit it off right away, so Dad

didn't pay for a single drink all night. Dad is a very good ballroom dancer, but he had never two-stepped before. He watched for a few minutes and then said: "O.K., I got this!, Let's dance!"

We danced a couple of times, and then a tall, good-looking fellow came up to me and asked:

- "Who's that fellow?"

- "That's my father."

- "Can I dance with him?"

- "Don't ask me! You're going to have to ask him. And, by the way, he's straight!"

- "I don't care. I just want to dance with him; he's so good!"

So he asked Dad, who replied: "Oh, I don't mind...as long as I get to lead!" And that was the last time I danced with him all night. He always had line of partners waiting to dance with him!

Well, I spent the rest of the night talking to Robbie. When we got home that night, Dad said: "That's the best birthday I've ever had!!" The next night, when he arrived at the square dance, he turned to Harlan and said: "Harlan, are we going to the Rawhide tonight?"

**LT** Has he ever been to one of the conventions?

**AU** No, not yet. He would have like to come out to the one in Albuquerque, but he's too busy: he teaches ballroom and line dancing among other things, and his schedule didn't end until the week after the convention, so he couldn't come.

**LT** Now, let's see...how do I phrase this question?

**AU** Oh, don't be polite!

**LT** O.K., what about your sexual identity: you were married when you first became involved with gay square dancing, and now there have been some major changes...tell me about it.

**AU** [Laughs] O.K.!! You know the saying, "I tried it; hated it!?" No, actually, being married was not all bad. Joe and I had a good relationship, but it was also a marriage of convenience, because I felt that I was getting on in years and I wanted to have a child. It was sort of an agreement between us more than anything else: he wanted to be married; I didn't, but I wanted to have a child, so we did get married.

We got along well for a while, but eventually the calling got in the way. I guess for me it was a case of the right person not having come along yet. I was very comfortable with the gay situation, and found it much more fun anyway. As I said, Harlan and I had been friends for years, and he had taken me along to all sorts of places, where I danced with whomever asked me...either sex.

I had always looked and sort of admired, but thought: "Darn, I'm straight; I can't do that!" It took Gail coming along for me to start thinking that there was more to what I was feeling than there should be, if I was as straight as I thought. I phoned Harlan one night, and I said: "Harlan, I have a problem. I find that I **really** like this

person from Vancouver.” “O.K....” “But, she’s female!” “O.K., so what’s your problem?”

So he came up the weekend after, and—poor Gail—Harlan “checked her out” for me. We just sort of got together after that. I guess it took a two-by-four to get my attention; I was the last to know, because it seems that everyone else was just waiting for it to happen!! I was oblivious to the whole thing; it was sort of a surprise, but then, it was **not** so much of a surprise. **Why** I didn’t know before, I don’t know. Perhaps the right person had not come along.

**LT** So it was not like so many of us who have known all along that there was “something,” but had repressed it, or had tried it, but circumstances did not allow it? For you this was something that you discovered in yourself after being a mature adult?

**AU** Yes. I guess when I look back, especially at my teenage years, the high school years where you “hang around with the phys ed teacher,...” Now, in retrospect, I know what was going on, but as I said, a two-by-four would have helped. There was, in particular, this group of women who were all curlers in the winter, and played ball in the summer,...they sort of took me along. They looked after me, because they were older than I, and I always thought what a great bunch they were, but it took me years to realize why they were always together.

**LT** So sexuality never entered the picture between them and you?

**AU** No, but I always wondered why they always looked after me so well. I would like to go back now and talk to them again. It was probably the same situation: they saw what I didn’t!

**LT** You’ve mentioned losing some calling dates in the South. Aside from that, what has been the reaction among square dancers and among callers?

**AU** The callers have been really good. I deal with a particular group among callers, because at the higher levels, I work with the same nine or ten guys at a lot of weekend functions. At first, I didn’t say anything at all about it. Gail just sort of appeared on the scene, but she has tried to stay very much in the background.

But finally I decided that that approach was stupid, and I just brought it out in the open. A couple of them said: “We don’t care one way or the other; we’d just like to know what we’re dealing with.” There were only one or two, and one fellow, in particular, who have a problem dealing with it...strangely enough, not us as a couple, but men together. I guess “it’s O.K. for the girls, because they’re still women,” but it’s not for the men.

**LT** So, because they’re women, whatever they do is immaterial?!

**AU** Yes, that’s the attitude he has. And he likes Gail: he and she both like to drink Scotch, so I guess he thinks she can’t be all bad. But the rest of the callers I deal with include her now. When we were at Virginia Beach [the Advanced and Challenge Weekend], some of them came for me

on Friday to “go and ‘do’ Chinese food,” as we’d always done, but I said I couldn’t go, because I would not go without Gail. They saw what the problem was and said: “We meant you **and** Gail!”

With the dancers, it’s been a different story. Some people have been very rude, and they come right out and say to me that they don’t like what is going on. But, just because they pay their five dollars doesn’t mean that they get to tell me these things! I come to call, not to have them judge my personal life. Some will not dance to me at all, and they’ll come up and tell me why. Others have come up and said that they’re a little shocked, but, if that’s my preference, they wish me all the best.

A few of the questions have been about Todd: “How is he dealing with it? How can you bring up a son without a man around the house? “ Well, I take him to the gay dances at night, and he has all the uncles he could need right there! And they say: “No, no, no, we’re talking about real men!” So I have to explain that these **are** “real men!” Actually, he has dealt with it very, very quickly. Gail moved in, and that was that.

I had been up to Vancouver, and the plan was that we were eventually going to get together in April when I moved back to Peterborough after being in Florida for the winter. Gail called and said: “I can’t wait until April!” So, I said: “Fine. Come on down now. Clear things up in Vancouver, and come on down whenever you can.”

Two days before she was supposed to move in, I still hadn’t told my Dad or Todd, and at that point, Dad didn’t know—I thought—what was going on. I sat him down one night and put a bottle of Scotch in front of him.

His immediate question was: “Do we have a problem?”

- I said, “Weeeeee, yes.”

- “It’s obviously a big one!”

- “I might as well get it all out in one breath: First of all, I’m gay; secondly, I have a female lover from Vancouver; and thirdly, she is moving here in three days with her little dog.”

- He said: “Oohh! Gail?”

- I was flabbergasted: “Yeah...How did you know?”

- “Well, I talk to her on the phone more than you do, because you’re never home! And besides, I already know all about Gail: she drinks Scotch, and she sounds like my type of person!”

- I said: “You have no problem with all this?!”

- “No, not really. I’m just a little concerned about Todd, and how he’s going to handle this.”

- “Well, let’s give him a chance to find out.”

So, Gail moved in, and it was sort of: “Oh, hello Gail...Ooohh! I want the dog!” And the dog has been his ever since. He’s really adapted very, very quickly. There hasn’t been any problem at all. Even at school: we both go over when it’s “meet-the-teacher night” or something like that. Nobody has given us a hard time about it. We are still very careful around the straight dancers: They accept our being together...as

long as one of us is at one side of the room at the other is at the other side!

**LT** And Todd?

**AU** The only slight difficulty we've had was one night back home in Peterborough. First of all, I must tell you that Joe gets on very well with both myself and Gail, and that he is really glad that we have Gail here now. Anyway, he decided that he was going to do an A1 class, and Gail decided that she would really like to do the class. She asked Joe, if he thought that would be all right, and he replied that, since it was his club and **he** had no objection to it, he couldn't see that anyone else had anything to say about it.

The funny part was that she ended up dancing as partners with my father's girlfriend, who is **also** Gail, and they were the first same-sex couple **ever** to dance in Peterborough. Joe has a girlfriend, Linda, who was sitting there waiting for him to finish the dance. I decided to go with Todd and pick Gail up, and, as it happened, my father came to pick **his** Gail up also, and we both happened to walk in at the same time.

So Todd says: "Hi, Grandpa! Hi, Dad! Hi, Gail(1)! Hi, Gail(2)! Hi, Linda!" It was like he needed a scorecard to keep track of all the players! He had no problem with it, but I'm sure that the people who witnessed all this were totally blown away.

Joe and Linda lived 15 minutes away from us, so Todd could go over there and spend time with his Dad. He could be with us, or he could

spend time with his Grandpa. Moving out to Vancouver has changed things a bit, but not in a negative sense.

**LT** Why the move to Vancouver?

**AU** I was made a very good offer, and on top of that I felt I needed a change of setting. Besides, Gail is from here, and a lot of her friends are out here, although she did not want that to be part of my decision. It was tough to leave Dad there, but we gave him a chance to come with us. He turned it down. He said: "Not right now. I'm happy here; I have everything I want right now. But, I'll come out and visit."

**LT** You've talked about your dad; how about your mother?

**AU** My mother died of cancer about 12 years ago. Crazy lady! Apparently, she and I are quite a lot alike. Very outgoing person, somewhat opinionated; we got along very well together. Her death was very hard on both my father and me for a while. Then he came into my bedroom one night with a bottle of champagne and plunked himself on the side of the bed. I asked: "What's going on? What's the matter?" He said: "This is really silly: both us are pulling each other down thinking about your mother's death, and I think it's time we said 'that's enough of this,' and got on with our lives." So, we drank a toast to new beginnings.

It was a complete turn around for him, because it had been a very strong marriage. They went **everywhere** together; both were dancing people, liked company, and I was included in

everything. It was tough for a while, but he has found a very nice lady and, even though she is a Mormon, she has managed to cope with our situation. Gail can sometimes use what we might call “salty” language...

**LT** Are you talking about **his** Gail or **your** Gail?

**AU** Oh, **my** Gail! His Gail would never say anything like that, but she has readily accepted the situation. Come to think of it, most everyone has: we’ve had a few nasty people, and we’ve gotten a few ugly phone calls, but, on the whole, the good outweighs the bad.

**LT** How heavily are you involved in the Gay Callers’ Association’s schools?

**AU** **Very** heavily. There’s a lot of really, really good talent out there in the gay square dance community, and I feel that, since a lot of people helped me along the way, I want to try and give some of that back. Gay people are very much like the European and Japanese dancers: when they get into something, they really go all out with it to its fullest.

At the convention this year, we had very large classes of people wanting different things out of the school. Some wanted to know how a caller does the choreography. “What does the caller really do up there? We see you come in and pick up a microphone, and it all seems very easy to that point.” A lot of them, when the school was over, had made up their minds that never in a million years would they like to do it for a variety of reasons. Some find out that they can’t physically take standing up in front of

so many people; their stomachs won’t let them. Others find out that there is a lot of work involved and they don’t want to put that much time into it, particularly because it means that you don’t get to dance that much. I try to do both, so I can get to dance with Gail and so that I can keep up my own skills.

To me callers’ schools are very important, because that’s where we get our new people from, and there are still many clubs that work with tapes and have no one to call for them. I guess that the only objection I find comes out of the school itself because a lot of people tell the students: “O.K., you went to callers’ school, so now call...preferably like Mike DeSisto!” They don’t realize that behind Mike there are 15 years or more of experience.

I would like to have every dancer take part in a callers’ school, because it would give them a new appreciation of what it takes **behind the scenes** to put a dance together. The dance is only the end result of a process, but it is what most people see or are aware of. Most dancers don’t really understand what we do. If they did, they might not be so quick to criticize or to be critical, especially of the new callers. You hear some dancers say of a caller: “Oh God, he’s awful!” Well, he’s only called twice in his life...What do you expect?

I have a tape that I played this year at caller’s school when some of them started getting discouraged because they couldn’t sound like professional callers. I introduced it as a tape of a new caller that I wanted them to critique; I wanted them to analyze it and point out what the

person was doing wrong. They really went to town with it, and then, finally, someone said, “We only know a few female callers....That’s not you, is it? “ Of course, it **was** a tape of one of my early calling efforts. And they said: “You’re kidding! That’s just awful!” So I asked them if they felt better after hearing it!

After the school, if they can get the bodies to work with and the people to support them, a lot of them will make **very** good callers. They have the capability of being outstanding callers, even though a lot of them choose to call only for the gay groups, but they could do both. Some prefer, however, the high-energy dancing that they get from the gay groups.

**LT** I have some very definite ideas and feelings about what happens on the dance floor and what I see happening with some of the gay callers, and I’d like to explore that with you.

Before **I** came to Western square dancing, I did folk dancing of various kinds and traditional squares and contras for many years. What I loved about the activity was the emphasis on **dancing**, i.e. **movement to music**. I’ve been dancing Western squares now for several years, and I’ve been dancing Advanced for a couple of years. My experience is that in square dancing, the higher the level, the smaller the **dance** content of the activity becomes.

**AU** That’s true in some cases, but it depends on the caller. It depends on how they put their choreography together. Some callers are “mathematical types,” and, with them, you go **here** and stand, then you go **there** and stand.

Other callers write their material so that it is challenging, but it still moves to the music.

I think that a good mix of about half and half at the Challenge level is good, because it is a bit of a mind game. It also depends on the level of the floor: if you have a weak floor, it’s probably not a good thing to do too much of the “mind game” things, because they’re having enough trouble keeping it all together anyway.

Sometimes it’s misjudgment on the caller’s part: not being able to tell which one to do, not being sensitive to how the floor reacts. Sometimes the floor is rather difficult. You walk into the room, and you have the hotshot dancers up front who are moving right along, but you have to notice the squares in the back that can’t keep up. For me, the choreography should change at that point, but it does not always do that.

**LT** It seems to me that whenever you walk into a C hall, first of all the music is down so low that you can’t hear it, because the calls are so complicated that you **have** to hear every word the caller says. Then, the movement that takes place seems to have no rhythm or relation at all to the music that is playing.

The end result is a kind of “mental masturbation:” you’re in there for the drill rather than the dance, and that drill could very well be performed without any music at all! I’ve seen more “dance” content in aerobic classes than in Challenge dancing!!

My concern is that because gay square dancers like the fast and challenging dancing,

and because some of our most prominent gay callers have so little musical sense, these callers are influencing the new callers coming up and the dance content of the activity is ultimately going to be totally watered down even down to the Plus level. Dancing to some of these callers seems to consist of rushing from one move to the next at breakneck speed. They have their turntables turned to a speed where it would not be comfortable for a normal person to **walk** to the music, not to mention dancing, but dancing be damned! And I really have a problem with that.

**AU** Again, that is a matter of caller judgement, and some callers cannot see what they are doing to the floor. There are too many things going on at the same time, and they lose track of the floor.

Sometimes, particularly at gay events, by the end of the weekend, you've been calling for a huge amount of time, and a lot of people are not used to that, so by that time they tend to lose their sharpness and to slide onto automatic pilot.

**LT** But it must also be a matter of the caller's training—which is why I'm talking about this with you—and of the caller's talent and instincts. Take Mike DeSisto, for example: he may be totally washed out physically at the end of a fly-in or convention, and he may be hungover to boot, but, when he gets behind the mike, he **makes you dance!** His stuff just flows.

**AU** Yes, Mike's certainly a master at it.

**LT** And that's the kind of thing I miss: that flowing from figure to figure. What I wonder is

if there is some way to bring out that quality or to teach that skill to the new callers coming up.

**AU** I guess it depends on who they are working with after they leave the caller's school. We send them back with a very basic groundwork of what they need to do and how to put choreography together. After that, they need time and practice, and they need the dancers to let them know when they are failing at something. And I don't mean hollering from the floor! That's certainly not good timing, but during a break, the dancers certainly should tell them what **their** reaction is to their calling.

We **can** try at the calling school to make them aware of this, but it takes time. One of the things we do is to tape a student's calling and then make them get in a square and dance to it. That's a sure way to point out what works and what doesn't!

**LT** Well, what do you see in the future of gay square dancing now that we're going into our tenth year?

**AU** It's growing by leaps and bounds. It's one of the few areas in square dancing nationally that is growing. I think that the popularity of Country/Western dancing—two-stepping and line dancing—has been a big help, because it has allowed square dancing to connect with a “modern” dance form and overcome some the old feeling that square dancing is “that hokey stuff we did in school.” And gay square dancing is so different from straight that it is sometimes closer to aerobics. I don't see that it can go anywhere but up.

The number of clubs is growing all the time. I had a call from a fellow in Detroit, who wanted to know if I could come and call for them. I said: "I didn't know there was a club in Detroit?" His response was: "We don't have one yet, but we'll have one by the time you come here!!" And he had three squares when I visited them.

If the clubs continue to work together as they have thus far, I think everything will be well. There has been some in-fighting in some places because of the levels, and I think that has to be watched, but it's something that they can work around. It's not a negative thing to want to go on to Challenge, because there are some people who will want to do that. The problem comes from the "level snobs," who get into Challenge and then consider anything else to be "slumming."

There should be a level for everybody, but if you don't have dancers being trained at Basic and Mainstream, in the end you're not going to have anyone available to go into Challenge, either. I realize that people don't have all the time in the world to dance with classes at every level, but there is no excuse for making someone who is dancing Mainstream or Plus uncomfortable because they are doing it.

More calls doesn't always mean better. There's nothing more satisfying than to see a Basic square get back to their partners and wonder: "How did we do that!!" It's marvelous. And a lot of people lose that as they move up through the levels. There's too much of a push for the higher levels now, even when people are

not ready for it, and the clubs have to beware of that.

But aside from all that, I think our future is positive, and gay square dancing is also becoming more visible in the straight community. Gay dancers are dancing more often with straight clubs, and are being accepted by the dancers there...even in same-sex couples. I remember in California when I first started calling there, gay dancers would come to my dances and did not dance together, because they had been told by other callers not to do so. I encouraged them, and after a few years, I heard that Stan and Bill had been elected **as a couple** to be presidents of the straight club they danced with!!

Nowadays at conventions and big straight gatherings where gay dancers come in visible numbers, many straight dancers seek them out, because they know they'll have better squares with them than with anyone else on the floor. In fact, at Virginia Beach last year, there were eight or nine squares of gay dancers in the different halls. They wanted to all dance together at one time, and they had to stay in the back of the hall and "hold themselves back," until the tip started, because they were so in demand!

**LT** But, isn't it true that that is the case more at the Advanced and Challenge levels than at Basic through Plus?

**AU** Yes, that's true. The Mainstream/Plus mentality is different. They don't seem to be able to deal with two people of the same sex dancing as partners in a square. If you call

”girls trade,” and there’s four “biological” girls in the line, the square is down, and that’s that! And then they’ll get bent out of shape and blame the breakdown of the square on the same sex couple.

The callers themselves prefer calling for gay dancers than straights. At first, they find it very difficult, particularly if they are purely sight callers, because you can have a square of eight men where nobody matches, and partway through, they might change the part they are dancing. But, once they get use to such things, they really enjoy it. Only a few have a problem with it.

And of course, at the conventions they treat you like royalty: they give you airfare, they give you hotel and meals, accommodations are usually outstanding...anything you want, you’ve got.

**LT** Isn’t that standard arrangement for callers at conventions?

**AU** Certainly not! At a weekend in Pennsylvania, I was housed at the most flea-bitten motel you ever saw. The callers were registered there. The carpet was worn through in places, and the rooms smelled terrible. The other caller found out that the section of the motel where his room was had been turned into a seniors’ complex. He was in with all these 95 year-olds, and you could not get in or out of that section without going through a security gate!

The dance was about 35 minutes away. We found the place and went to set up, but were told that we couldn’t set up because the round dancers

were using the hall. We suggested that we use the round dancers’ equipment in that case, and were told that we couldn’t do that. It was a dreadful weekend. No meals whatsoever were included. They handed us an envelope with what was supposed to be our fee, and when we finally opened it, we were \$200 dollars short! Then, to add insult to injury, when we went to check out of that mess of a motel, we found out that the rooms were not paid for either, although we had been told they would be!! That was **not** a weekend we did again!

At another one, I went to dinner with about 25 people, went to the bathroom at the end of the meal, and came back to find that they had all left and no one had paid the bill, so I had to pay it. They thought it was funny, and I never collected from them. That’s why most of us like to call for the gay groups instead!!

**LT** Well, I guess we’ve covered a lot of ground. I should warn you that this is probably going to be read with interest by a **lot** of people. Anything else you would like to add for your “faithful public?”

**AU** Yes....Things have changed for me in a lot of ways since I’ve sort of become “part of the group” now. I really, really appreciate the fact that the gay dancers have always accepted me as a person first, and then as a caller. Initially there were the sort of “barriers” you can expect when you’re a straight caller at a gay gathering, but all those have disappeared now. I think that my “change in lifestyle” is the smartest thing I’ve ever done. I’m just sorry it took me so long to do it!



**Eighth Annual Convention  
of the  
International Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs**

**May 23-26, 1991**

**Miami, Florida**

**PETE DIVEN ON THE LINE:  
AN INTERVIEW WITH THE POPULAR CALLER  
OF BALTIMORE'S CHESAPEAKE SQUARES**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Although it has gotten him in trouble with some of his straight clubs, Pete Diven's style of calling, his use of all-position dancing, and his love for unusual uses for common calls is tailor-made for the kind of dancing that the gay square dance community prefers. No wonder, then, that Pete has become a very popular caller among gay square dancers, particularly those in the East. In the small world of square dancing, one often discovers connections that are not readily apparent. When our San Antonio, Texas club, Alamo City Wranglers, finally found a caller, that caller was Ms. Terry Kephart, who has been able to do wonders with our club. I had known Terry for over a year, when, through a casual conversation, I found out that she had been taught square dancing in Okinawa by the same Pete Diven.*

*Pete has some interesting things to say about the differences between traditional squares and our modern Western squares, and about Japanese square dancers. He also has some very astute observations about gay clubs and some of the problems they are facing.*

*This interview took place at Pete and Kay's home in Edgewood, Maryland, on June 8, 1991. -LT*

**LT** = Luis Torres

**PD** = Pete Diven

**LT** How long have you been calling, Pete?

**PD** Next month it will be 20 years.

**LT** And you're how old?

**PD** [Laughs] I'm 44. I started calling in Japan. I was stationed over there with the Air Force, and I had gotten back into Modern Western squares there. I had tried a few singing calls at the club on base. All of a sudden, the Air Force decided to move all our airplanes out. Our club caller, who worked in the same shop I did, was moved to the Philippines, but I couldn't leave because my wife was pregnant at the time, so I finagled a job at the base. We had a beach on the base,

and I got myself in as assistant manager of the facility, boating instructor, boat mechanic, ski instructor, supervisor of lifeguards, and everything else.

I walked into our club one night, and they told me: "Guess who our new caller is going to be?" I was a bit taken aback, but I told them: "If you can stand it, I'm game." Up to that point, I had only tried a couple of hash calls with our former caller. I had taped them, and, God!, they sounded just awful. But that's when I started calling. The year was 1971, and I called for them from July through September.

I then came back to the States, called in California for about a year, then went to Okinawa. We had two clubs on the island when I arrived, and I started a third one. At one point, I called

for two of them and did guest spots for the third one. When I started out in Okinawa, I was darned near the only caller on the island, but when I left in 1976, there were seven of us! That's also where I learned round dance cueing, because there were people interested in doing it, but no one around who could teach it.

**LT** All this time you were in the service, weren't you? And was all this calling strictly to American clubs on base?

**DS** Yes, I was in the service, and my calling was primarily to Americans, but while there, I helped a young Japanese who was getting into calling, and I helped him start a Japanese square dance club in a town about 45 minutes north of our base.

When you teach square dancing to Japanese, or to any foreigners, for that matter, you have to explain the moves in their language, and then tell them what it's called in English. I spoke quite a bit of Japanese, and could read and write a good portion, but they learn to associate the moves phonetically with the English call, without worrying about why it is called an "allemande left."

That's one of the reasons why you can teach Japanese people in about half the time it takes Americans to learn the same material: Americans have to know why it's called an "allemande left." They think square dancing is English, and it's not; it's a foreign language that you have to learn on its own terms, not in terms of English.

**After** the Japanese have learned it, **then** they analyze it, and they end up being some of the better dancers in the world, at least when compared to American dancers. They take their square dancing very, very seriously...but they have a ball! And they don't take long breaks, either. I would call rounds for them between tips, and, even standing by the turntable, I did not have enough time at the end of the rounds to take the record off and put on a square dance one before they were all squared up and ready to go. And, if you're a dancer and have not been dancing rounds, if you're not ready to rush onto the floor as soon as the rounds are over, you are very likely to have to sit out the next tip! The floor is constantly full, all night long.

I had a great time with them over there, and got to know quite a few of the Japanese callers. I'd love to be able to go back and visit them.

**LT** You said that you "had gotten back into modern squares." What does that mean?

**PD** I'm originally from south central Pennsylvania, between Harrisburg and Gettysburg. Mom and Dad were square dancers, but back then it was a family-type thing, and they took all of us kids, so I'd been dancing since I was a little kid. As soon as we could function on the floor, my Mom would take me, and my Dad would take my sister, and we'd be on the floor dancing squares. But this was more the Eastern or traditional form of square dancing: visiting couples around the set, etc. You learned a routine.

When I was about seven, I took my first square dance class. That was when Modern Western squares were starting to become popular. I remember when they came up with the move “cross-trail thru.” Before that, they had two moves: one called “cross-trail,” and another one called “cross-trail thru,” and there were two different meanings to them.

There was not a whole lot of variety in the traditional squares. They did things like the “Idiot’s Dance,” where Lady #1 would go out to her corner and muss his hair, or kick him in the shins, or give him a kiss, or whatever, and then she would go to Gent #3 and do the same, etc. There was not much in the way of complicated stuff. If you walked into a dance for the first time in your life, never having been to a square dance before or having seen it, you took your place as the fourth couple, and, by the time it got to be your turn to dance, you had seen the whole sequence three times. Number 1 couple would go to their right and do the pattern, go on to the next and do the same, etc. Then Couple #2 started and did the same with all the other couples; then #3 and #4.

Modern square dancing started becoming more complicated. I remember the introduction of “ocean waves:” people thought: “Oh, God, that’s a weird formation!” And there were a lot of people who resented the changes and the complexity. My uncle got into it, but my daddy stayed with the old fashioned type. I never got into modern squares until I got to Japan and learned it there. When I joined the club, I

assumed that it was the old traditional squares. I sure got a surprise! But, I’ve been into it ever since.

In this new square dancing, there were eight or ten times as many moves as I had learned before. Modern square dancing had come into its own by then. A few things were different, though. “Columns” did not exist then; they did not come in until somewhere around ’70-’71, “Diamonds” came in at the same time. It was something that developed over time. Modern square dancing got at least two, and, most of the time, all four couples working at the same time, as opposed to the traditional squares, where at least two couples just stood around all the time. That in itself built in some complexity, but it gave more variety and presented more of a mental challenge.

After learning that, the first time I came back from Japan, I went to a traditional square dance with my parents, and was bored almost to tears! I just couldn’t get excited about it anymore. I could tell exactly what was coming, and it was no challenge. That style of square dancing, however, is still very popular in many parts of the country.

**LT** When did you come back East permanently?

**PD** In ’76, when I came back from Okinawa. I was stationed at Dover Air Force Base. I’d been calling then for five years. I learned to call the hard way. I never attended a caller’s school until I had been calling for about nine years! I did it

through practice, reading books, talking to the dancers and using their ideas. At first, I tried reading my material, and that didn't work very well. I also tried memorizing material, and that did not work either. Then I got hold of a book about "image calling," where you put your square in your head and follow the people through in your mind. I liked that a lot better, and it worked well for me. Today, I do a lot of sight calling combined with the mental image. That works well for my timing, and allows me to help people out who have made a wrong move, or have gotten themselves turned around.

**LT** How did you get connected with gay square dancing?

**PD** [Laughs.] You can blame that on Deb Cohen. I was calling for the "Susquehanna Swingers," shortly after I had moved to the Baltimore area, and Deb came to a dance. She was wearing a Chesapeake Squares badge, and I asked her about it. She was hesitant at first, but eventually she told me that it was a gay club. After a while, she asked me if I'd be willing to call a dance for them, and I told her I'd have to think about it.

The invitation raised a few questions in my mind. First of all: could I do it when you had same sex dancers making up the square? In such a situation, the calling has to be a bit different in the mind's eye. You have to keep track of who is the boy, who is the girl, who is the corner, etc. and try to keep it all together. I wasn't sure I could handle that. Then, I also thought about what would other dancers say.

I thought about it for a while, and came to the decision: To Hell with what other dancers might say! So, when I saw Deb again, I told her I was willing to try it. I told her: "I can't give you any guarantees about how good it's going to be, but I'll give it a whirl!" So they had me there one night.

I'd never been around the gay community in my life, but I had heard all the gay and Lesbian jokes that one hears in the straight community. I'd always thought there was something strange about them. But that first night, I enjoyed the challenge and the ability of the dancers so much, that I was open to come back any time. They also had to get used to me: a new voice, a different way of approaching choreography,...and a straight guy!! It was a bit strained that first night, but they liked me well enough to ask me back.

I called several dances for them, and then, one night, they approached me about being their club caller. After a few nights calling for them, I didn't give a damn what straight dancers might think. Today, I tell people: "If you want to see the most enthusiastic, the most energetic square dancing going today, you have to visit the gay clubs! If you want to go out and have a good time dancing, **they** know how to do it."

The straight clubs are dead; most of them are just waiting to find a place to lie down. There's not a heck of a lot of enthusiasm there, and, if you call anything else but the standard routines that most callers teach their beginners, all your squares break down, so there's no mental challenge for the caller in calling. You

also have to slow the pace down for the straight clubs; they can't dance very fast. Of course, most of them are in their 60s and up; they don't have the energy, or the enthusiasm, or the drive that the gay clubs have.

**LT** How do you explain that difference between gay square dancers and the straight ones?

**PD** I think the age difference has a lot of bearing on it. The average age in the gay clubs is a lot younger than among the straight ones. And to gay people, square dancing is action recreation, whereas with the straight clubs, their goal is more to socialize than to dance. They don't seem as interested in the dance per se as the gays are. For gay people, square dancing is a heck of a lot better alternative than the bar scene for meeting people, and developing friendships, and what have you.

Straight single clubs are somewhat similar to gay clubs, but when people develop a friendship there, they immediately qualify for the couples clubs, so they leave the single clubs behind! Gays develop friendships in their clubs and maintain them within their clubs and support their clubs. We have many straight dancers in the Baltimore area who consider themselves "independent dancers:" they go out and dance at various clubs, but they don't want to stay within one, work for it, and support it. I don't see where that is going to lead, but for the gay clubs, I see big growth ahead all over the country. Gay square dancing is basically still in its infancy. I just hope they maintain the enthusiasm and exuberance that they have today.

**LT** Did you have any repercussions from calling for gay clubs?

**PD** Not that I'm aware of. Around the time of Deb's invitation, I had decided that I had to start treating my calling as more of a business, which I hadn't done before. That was one of the reasons why I told her I had to think it over. But I finally decided: If I owned a store, would I let people tell me how to run my store? If not, then why should I let people tell me for whom I can call or not call? If people don't want to hire me because I call for a gay club, that's **their** problem, not mine. Besides, I enjoy calling for gay clubs.

**LT** What other gay clubs have you called for beyond Chesapeake Squares?

**PD** Several times a year, I call for Times Squares, D.C. Lambda Squares. I've also called Puddletown Squares' fly-in, and twice for the Rehoboth fly-in. I've met a lot of gay dancers from around the country through those engagements. I've also called at least part of Washington, D.C.'s fly-in, and some of the barn dances for the Independence Squares in Philadelphia.

**LT** Do you see any differences among the gay clubs?

**PD** Yes, a few. But I also notice something that I hope someone else will recognize and curb, since I don't have either the ability or the authority to do anything about it, and that is that the gay clubs, like a lot of the straight clubs, are pushing their dancers too quickly through the

programs. They take them into Plus as soon as they've graduated from Mainstream, when they are not fully comfortable yet with what they have learned. They're not "at home" in the square dance world yet, and they're having to go on to something else.

And then, in a short time, you see the same people dancing Advanced and Challenge. Everybody needs a different level of mental challenge to get enjoyment out of the activity, but people should not be pushed through programs. I'd like to see some of the larger clubs "incorporate" to the point where you have, in effect, three or four different program clubs operating under the name of that "corporation."

When the people graduate from Mainstream, perhaps it should be left to the caller's decision whether a dancer is ready to progress to Plus, or whether he or she should dance at that level for a year before taking lessons at the next one. I think you would get a better quality dancer that way, and you might find people who don't want to leave the Mainstream club, because **that's** where they get their enjoyment.

In the straight clubs, you often have a Plus club running a Mainstream class, because there are hardly any Mainstream clubs anymore, and as soon as people finish their lessons, they are told that they have to learn Plus if they want to join the club. Otherwise, there's no place for them to dance. People are pushed, and they get very frustrated. They're having to learn other things when they **still** are not sure about things like "recycle," and "spin chain thru." Then, as

new club members, they go out and try to dance Plus, and find themselves continually breaking down. Ultimately, they quit dancing altogether; they say: "The Hell with it! I'll go bowling, instead!" In the gay world, if you are not seeing this already, you may start seeing it within a couple of years, unless the situation can be brought under control. People need the time to get comfortable with a program before moving on.

As far as the larger square dance world is concerned, I think that a straight square dancer is a **square dancer**, and that a gay square dancer is also a **square dancer**. When you put them together in a square, you have a whole square of **dancers**, not a division between straights and gays, and that's what is important. Someday, I'd like to see the straight world eventually accept the gay square dance world. You can't force that on people, but I think that would be great someday, to see square dancers go out and enjoy dancing without thinking about the differences.

**LT** I agree with you completely that we are pushing people to move on too fast from program to program, or that we are making it possible for them to do so when they are not really ready. On this matter of "incorporating" different levels in a club, to begin with, such a structure would have to be based on large numbers of members in in a club. A small club could not operate that way, and most gay clubs are small. On the other hand, there is the fact that new dancers learn from being in contact with older, more experienced dancers, and if you were to separate the programs, that contact with experienced dancers would be diminished.

**PD** What you say is true, and there is something else, and that is that it creates a division between the people in a club. One thing that I am glad to see among gay square dancers is that the majority of them, even if they dance Advanced or Challenge, will get up and dance with a Mainstream floor. At least the majority do, although I notice that some of your Advanced dancers are beginning to wrinkle their nose at Mainstream and to act as though it were beneath them to dance at that level. There's a lot of that in the straight square dance world, and it is not healthy. Dancers should be able to get enjoyment out of dancing at any level, and they should also remember that square dancing **still** requires at least eight people, even at the Challenge level, and that those people have to start learning at Mainstream to be available eventually to dance Challenge.

Out in Seattle, I met a young lady who considered herself the highest level dancer in the area, and who did not hesitate to tell me so. She was a level snob from the word go. That is the kind of attitude that will tear clubs apart and will do damage to square dancing.

Gays seem to have their clubs better organized than straight clubs, and, although there **are** some freeloaders, your dancers seem to be more willing to work with and for their clubs than some straight dancers are.

**LT** How about your wife Kay's introduction to gay square dancers?

**PD** Kay was with me when Deb first asked me, and she and I discussed it, because she goes with

me wherever I go, and I wanted her to have some input. She said she didn't see any reason not to do it, although she felt a bit uncomfortable the first night also, as I did. But, today, she is a strong supporter of gay clubs, and if anyone says something derogatory about them in her presence, she gets as upset as I do. We've both developed friendships in the clubs, and I'd like to see those friendships remain. We've discovered that gays are just people.

We've matured about a lot of things since we started having contact with the gay clubs. Kay loves to dance, and, although the over-exuberance of gay dancers is sometimes not so good for her back problems, she loves to dance with them because of their enthusiasm. I still can't get all the extra bumps and turns, and whoops, but she has them down pat! In fact, when we get a night off and go dancing, more often than not she'll give me the gay flourishes on "weave the ring."

**LT** I think one of the most difficult adjustments that gay dancers face when they start dancing with straight clubs is the difference in the physicality of gay dancing when compared with the almost total lack of body contact in straight dancing.

**PD** Well, I don't agree with all the flourishes, because they take away from the timing of the moves, but they certainly show enthusiasm!

**LT** Face it, it's bigger than you and me!



**Ninth Annual Convention  
of the  
International Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs**

**July 3-5, 1992**

## FROM D.C. LAMBDA SQUARES: DAYLE HODGE, CLUB CALLER

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Dayle Hodge, a young and energetic caller, says he found just the kind of dancing he personally likes among gay square dancers. He and his wife Tammy are well-known and -liked among members of both the Baltimore and Washington, D.C. clubs. I met Dale when I was learning Mainstream. In fact, he was the first caller I ever danced to, aside from our class instructor. As I remember it, that first tip—at my first Rehoboth “Pass the Ocean, Hon” fly-in—was a disaster, but, apparently, I survived.*

*When Tammy became pregnant with the Hodges' first child, dancers in Baltimore and Washington conducted a survey to suggest names for the child. The decision was that the name should have a square dance connection, and the winning suggestions were “Allemanda Hodge,” if it was a girl, and “Hinge Hodge,” if it was a boy. The child was a girl. She was christened “Erin.” (Not much square dance in that name!)*

*The following interview took place at the Hodges' home in Columbia, Maryland, on July 29, 1989. -LT*

**LT** = Luis Torres

**DH** = Dayle Hodge

**LT** Where are you from originally, Dayle?

**DH** From Pennsylvania. I was born in the northwest corner of the state, grew up in the Lancaster County area, and I went to college in Indiana, Pennsylvania, which is right outside of Pittsburgh. My job brought me down here to the Washington/Baltimore area about five years ago.

**LT** How long have you been calling for square dancing?

**DH** About six-and-a-half years.

**LT** How old are you?

**DH** I'm 27.

**LT** So you started out pretty early. Was this a family thing?

**DH** My parents were taking square dance lessons, when I came home from college on an Easter break. They gave me the book with the calls and said: “Here, learn this. We're going to a dance tomorrow!” It was only a “three-quarters-of-the-way-through-Mainstream” dance, but I was starting from ground zero. Anyway, I read the booklet, I went to the dance, and I made every single mistake that a square dancer can make.

After that experience, I studied the book some more, and we went to another dance before my break was over. That time, I made fewer mistakes. Then, I studied a lot more, and, when I went back to college, I joined a club in the community and started dancing with them. At that point, I met a caller that I had a lot of respect for, and the incident that triggered my interest in calling was that he had us all “roll away a half-sashay,” and then called “head boys center for a teacup chain; side boys right!” I thought: “Wow, that's really neat. I could do stuff like that!”

So, I went up and asked him, if he'd be interested in teaching someone how to call. As it happened, he had another caller student in Pittsburgh at the time, so he said he'd be happy to. I started going with him to dances every single night he called, and he called three to five nights a week. Since I was going to school 12 months a year, I sort of became his shadow. I started slowly trying my hand at it with people I knew, and, while he was calling, he'd point things out to me. Then, finally, I got behind the mike, and started calling.

What really helped me was my interest in it, because I was so strongly motivated—and I still am: in square dancing, in choreography, in music, and in turning on dancers—that I was just not able to get enough. If I could do it 12 hours a day now, I'd just love that!

**LT** And you mean to tell me that your studies didn't suffer?

**DH** Not at all! As a matter of fact, my QPA—quality point average—did not change from before I started learning to call. My wife Tammy's did, but not mine!!

**LT** So, basically, you sort of apprenticed with this fellow?

**DH** Yes. That went on from April to September. What really helped me was that he had his class running, so, once a week, I would go to the class, he would teach, then, I would call one tip to the club people. By December, I could call a tip with no notes...just taking the mike and calling. By

the following May, I could call my own dance, and do it using interesting material. I would force myself to change things, to challenge myself and challenge the dancers.

I moved here in December of '84, and I started calling occasional dances in March, and I had a club by September of '85. From that point, I've picked up other groups, and my calling engagements have sort of snowballed.

**LT** How did you come in contact with gay square dancers?

**DH** One of the dancers from D.C. Lambda Squares, Dick Warren, was dancing with a straight group. He heard me, he talked to me, and asked me if I'd be interested in calling for them, and I said right away: "Certainly!" I was a little nervous the first time, simply because it was a new situation, but everything has worked out very well.

**LT** So you started out simply calling occasional evenings for them?

**DH** Yes. At the time they had a regular caller, Cleve Cooper, I think, but, after I had called a couple of times, they told me he was leaving and asked me if would be interested in being their home caller twice a month. I said I'd be happy to. At this point, I had called a number of dances, but I hadn't made any gay jokes over the microphone. Once Baltimore picked up, I started doing some calling for them, also. I also called for New York during one of their regular club nights.

**LT** O.K. now, is there a difference between gay square dancing and straight square dancing?

**DH** Absolutely! I can't imagine that anybody would say there wasn't. The difference is the energy level. The way I like to call is the way I like to dance. Before I call anything, I think: "Would I like to dance this? Is this something I would like to do?" Also, I like to dance very quickly, lots of kicks, lots of twirls, fast, long, and hard, so, when I call, I'm very happy to call that way, especially to a group that really appreciates that kind of dancing, that has that much energy and that much enthusiasm about dancing.

The only other place where I've seen that land of dancing has been at a couple of straight teen dances. The teen room at a national straight convention is about the only place in the straight world where you're going to find the kind of dancing that gay square dancers do.

In gay square dancing, the one thing you find most often that's different is this: Many times, when I call for straight groups, even if I take a very long break, I'll come back to the turntable and put the music on. People will start to meander, go past the food table once more, and perhaps eventually end up in a square. The record will be halfway through before the floor is ready to dance.

With gay square dancers, I will call 20 minutes to a half hour, take a five-minute break, and, after four minutes, everybody will be squared up stomping on the floor and clapping

their hands, wondering why I'm not calling yet! And I love that! It's a wonderful feeling to feel appreciated, and to feel that those people are there because they **want to dance**, not because "well, it's a social activity, and, as long as I'm here, I guess I might as well dance! I really just came to talk to Martha tonight, but, I guess I can talk to her in-between dances." That's one of the things you can see and feel up front that is really different between gay and straight dancing.

**LT** How do you account for the difference in atmosphere between gay and straight square dancing?

**DH** I'm not sure, but maybe it has something to do with the gay social environment. For example, I've seen Country and Western dancing or line dancing in both the gay and straight communities, and, although the steps may be exactly the same, **there** also, there's a lot more energy put into the dancing among gays than among straights. I really don't know where that comes from. I'm just really appreciative of it!

**LT** So you haven't bothered to try to find out why it's there; you just take notice of it!

**DH** Yes. Tammy and I have talked about it, and she feels the same differences that I do, but neither of us has come up with an explanation. A couple of straight dancers who have danced with gays at WASCA [the Washington area square dancers' festival] remarked that gay dancers dancing in the straight world tend to be very rough, because they're not used to dancing with [straight] women. Men can take it if you

grab their hands and pull back, particularly if they're ready for it, but women can't. One woman in particular, who is married now, said "It's so much fun dancing with them! It's like being single again! But, when they are in the straight community, they need to be aware that women are more fragile."

**LT** Thus far, I've had very little experience square dancing in the straight world, but our club has had a few women visitors from a club in Virginia. I love dancing with someone who gives me some resistance, particularly in a swing or in anything that involves a turn, and both gay men and women give you weight when you dance with them. But dancing with these women was sort of disconcerting, because they were so light and hardly touched you, so when you did a "grand right and left," you almost had to look back when you passed them to make sure that you **had** passed a person. I find it hard dancing with a wet noodle!

**DH** I must say that I've never encountered anyone in gay square dancing that was a "wet noodle" in that fashion! But, when I was first dancing, there was a woman in the club I was with that would come to you for an "allemande left," and as soon as you went to grab her forearm for the turn, her arm would go totally limp!

**LT** How much contact had you had with gay people before you started calling for Lambda Squares?

**DH** When I was in college, I lived for two semesters with someone who was gay, and I had a number of gay friends in college, both male and female. After all, I was a theater major before I went into computer science, and a number of the people in the theater department, both faculty and students, were gay. Once, when I was in college, a friend of mine propositioned me, and I took that as a compliment! He said he hoped he had not offended me, and I told him that I treated it the same as if a girl were to come to me and ask for a date. It's kind of nice to know that you've aroused someone's interest!

**LT** So you were at least aware of the existence of gay people. Having you call for gay square dancers was not like throwing you to the lions!

**DH** That's right, although before my first time with Lambda Squares, I had never been in a place where I was obviously the "sexual minority!"

**LT** So you came into these groups and were able to adapt with no problems, no discomfort?

**DH** My first time calling, I was a little nervous, but I knew at least Dick Warren in the group, and when you go to a new club, it is best if you have one person you can refer to initially, talk to, etc. It's a good way to establish rapport with the club. Dick was there, and I immediately met Tom Pearson and Warren Jaquith, because I believe Tom was the treasurer at the time. They became the people I was most comfortable talking to, and they helped put me at ease.

When you're performing, and calling is a form of performing, you have to establish your position vis-a-vis your audience, and that point, I decided that I would act as though I had been brought into the room blindfolded, so that I didn't know what group I was calling for. I would rely on my abilities as a caller, and I would assess the results afterwards. That first night was a lot of fun, and when they asked me back, the second time I was much more comfortable. Now I have a ball with them, whether I'm calling, or whether Tammy and I go just to dance, or we go to a social, or go out drinking together. At this point, I consider many gay square dancers to be personal friends.

In fact, I got to the point where I can crack jokes over the mike or make comments. In the beginning, I would check things out with some of the people I knew best before I tried them, but now I know pretty much what is going to go over and what might not. Although there seems to be no certainty about that when you go from one group to the next!

At one of the Plus evenings in Washington, someone came up to me and said: "I just love it when you call "spin-chain the queers!" I just couldn't believe he had said that, but I decided that I would go out on a limb and call "spin-chain the queers," and I got a lot of laughs and a lot of noise from the floor. From then on, if I used the correct name, not much happened, but if I called "spin-chain the queers," I got a big response.

So, here I am in New York, calling my first dance for them. I'm calling like there's no tomorrow, and they're eating it up. So I thought: "I'm going to ingratiate myself with these people!" And just about the second sequence I called: "heads square thru four; dosido; make a wave; and spin-chain the queers!" And there was **zero** reaction; I mean nothing! It was one of those times when you feel like you should crawl under a rock, and wish the heck that you had started with this group like with the other groups, instead of jumping without knowing how deep the water was. Fortunately, either people did not notice, or, if they did, no one remarked on it. I've always been very comfortable with gay dancers.

**LT** How about Tammy? What is her reaction to gay square dancers?

**DH** Of all the places where I call, she will go out of her way to go with me to a gay square dance evening rather than a straight one. At this point she is a C-I dancer, but she still has the most fun dancing with gay square dancers. When we moved a few months ago, the people who helped us move were three fellows from the Washington group and two from the Baltimore one.

**LT** You called at "Peel the Apple" in New York. Have you called at straight conventions also?

**DH** Yes.

**LT** What about the difference between those two experiences?

**DH** When you're talking about any convention, the energy level is much higher than at any regular dance. But you probably got as much energy from 600 gay square dancers in New York as you did from 2,000 straight ones at the first straight convention I called in Louisville, Kentucky, or at the Baltimore national convention. There's just a higher energy level overall. There was also a lot of the same kind of "scoping" that goes on at a straight singles convention, a lot more sexual tension than you would get at a straight couples convention. It's something you can feel, more than you can explain.

I felt very comfortable at the convention, although I knew very few people there. There was no difficulty in going up and talking to anyone and making friends with them.

**LT** Was it a positive experience?

**DH** It was extremely positive. Maybe I had high expectations about what it was going to be like, but the experience far exceeded any expectation that I, or that Tammy had. It was challenging for me and it was fun. It's almost as much fun for the callers as for the dancers...and the dancers were having a ball. The only difficulty I had was when I was scheduled to call right after Johnny Preston, and Mike DeSisto had that hour off, so he joined Johnny. I came into the room early, and I knew right away I was in trouble. They were just cooking, and the dancers were having a ball. Johnny's wife turned to me and said:

"This is going to be a hard act to follow!!" And I said to her: "No kidding!" The best thing would have been to just let them call for another hour.

**LT** Do your straight groups know that you call for gay groups?

**DH** I make it a practice not to discuss one of my groups with the others, but there are individuals who know.

**LT** Have you had any negative feedback?

**DH** There was this one girl I know, who I actually was friends with, and asked me if it was true that I was calling for a gay club. I said "yes," and she said: "Why would you ever do that?" I replied: "Because they're square dancers and they need a caller." "But they're gay!" "So.....?" And that was the end of the conversation.

It baffles me to some degree how some people react. I'd like to say to them: "What's the difference? They're all people! If you find someone who has characteristics that you dislike, that's one thing, but don't write off an entire group of people you have never even met on an individual basis!" I have a difficult time with that kind of mentality.

But, I've brought a number of straight dancers to dance with the gay groups, and they've all had a wonderful time.

## **FROM AMERICAN SQUAREDANCE MAGAZINE: THE STRAIGHT SQUARE DANCE COMMUNITY IS INTRODUCED TO THE IAGSDC**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: At the Miami Convention in 1991, Karl Jaeckel told me that he had been in contact with Stan and Cathie Burdick, then editors of American Squaredance Magazine (ASD), and that they appeared to be open to publishing an article about the IAGSDC. Karl asked me to write the article. It was published in the September 1991 issue. That date marked the first time the straight square dance community acknowledged publicly the existence of a square dance movement in the gay community.—LT*

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### **A NEW FRONTIER FOR AMERICAN SQUARE DANCING: THE I.A.G.S.D.C.**

*by L.T.S., Baltimore, Maryland*

A few weeks ago, over the Memorial Day weekend, 650 square dancers—some 585 men and about 65 women—gathered at the luxurious Hilton Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami Beach for a square dance convention. The proportion of men to women may seem strange to ASD readers, but it is no printing error, for this convention was the 8th annual gathering of the IAGSDC, the International Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs.

Gay square dancing got its start in the late 1970s, when a group called the “South Florida Mustangs” began meeting and dancing together. Over the next few years, similar groups took shape in San Francisco, Seattle, and Denver, and eventually, these groups coalesced into a National Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs (NAGSDC). With the formation of clubs in Canada, the “national” was changed to “international,” and the IAGSDC was on its way.

The organization’s first national convention was held in Seattle in 1984. Currently there are some 40 IAGSDC clubs (3 of them in Canada) dancing regularly. The principal emphasis is on Basic/Mainstream and Plus dancing, but Advanced, and even Challenge dancing are gaining more and more adherents within the IAGSDC, with a few clubs focusing exclusively on A and C dancing.

Initially, gay square dance clubs developed by using the dance experience of a few members, and whatever recorded and printed material was available. Some groups worked their way through the Plus level by stopping their records every time they came to an unfamiliar call and putting their heads together to try to decipher the description of the call in the Callerlab manual. Gradually, individuals surfaced who had had some measure of calling experience, and they were able to help the fledgling dancers polish and refine their style. By the time of the first national

convention in 1984, the organization was able to hire two well known national callers, and since then some of the best known names of American and Canadian square dance calling have called either at IAGSDC conventions or at special local club functions.

An interesting parallel development is that enough gay square dancers—both male and female—have become interested in calling that there is now a Gay Callers Association. Calling workshops precede each national convention, and a number of young callers whose roots are in the gay square dance movement have acquired enough polish that they are now in demand for calling jobs with straight clubs in their home areas.

Gay square dancing is active and high-energy, and outside callers who experience it for the first time always remark on the fabulous give-and-take between the floor and the caller. For the caller, gay square dancing is a challenge of the highest order: there is no requirement to have “standard” couples, and, since there is also no square dance attire requirement, all the visual cues of biological sex and color coordinated couples disappear. The caller has to remember which of the men are dancing the

woman’s part and which of the women are dancing the man’s part, but usually, after a short period of adjustment, everyone has a good time.

On the other hand, since a majority of gay square dancers learn to dance both parts (they call it “becoming bi-dansual!”), they tend to be strong dancers with a good sense of position and set orientation.

Contacts between the gay square dance community and the larger straight square dance community have been developing all along at the local level. These contacts have not been without friction at times, but the joy of dancing and the shared hobby seem to overcome any initial misgivings. Many gay square dancers have taken membership in local straight clubs, and some dancers from straight clubs have discovered that they can have a lot of fun at an evening where unconventional dance roles are the rule rather than the exception.

The IAGSDC is looking forward to its 1992 convention in Albuquerque, and especially to its 10th Anniversary celebration in Seattle in 1993. IAGSDC clubs are glad to welcome dancers from other clubs, be they gay or straight. Any takers?

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The ASD article was picked up by club newsletters throughout the IAGSDC, and everyone was dying of curiosity to find out what the reaction had been. Gay dancers who visited straight festivals came up with all sorts of rumors. Finally, I decided the best way to find out was to ask the Burdicks. The following letter was addressed to Karl Jaeckel and Skip Rognlien, who as IAGSDC president was very aware of rumors concerning the article.—LT*

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Dear Karl and Skip,

I'm sending this in a joint letter, since I figured that you both would be interested in this information:

I finally got tired of speculating what the reaction to the IAGSDC article might have been, so I called ASD and talked to Cathie Burdick.

She asked me to guess what the response had been, and when I guessed that they had received several angry letters, she told me that I was wrong. According to her, they have not received a single negative letter. They had received only two phone calls:

- One was from a man in New Orleans, who said that he did not like the article appearing, but that he guessed square dancing was for everybody, and that included gays. (In a sense, he answered himself, but was simply calling to let them know his reaction.)

- The other call was from one of the callers in the ad that appeared opposite the article (for Chicago Country Records). This person did not object to the article per se, but was not happy that it had appeared opposite their ad. Mrs. Burdick says she told him that something had to appear opposite the article, since they could not just run a blank page, and he mumbled, but did not object further.

Other than these two calls, she says that they have not heard one peep from their readers, although they are used to getting angry letters over almost every issue, whether it be changing the women's square dance costume or the business with callers and clubs having to pay royalties for the records they use. She says, however, that they have gotten many nice letters from the gay community and several orders for subscriptions.

I thanked her for the information and speculated that maybe the responses indicated that the square dance world was finally coming of age and realizing that the world outside is changing. I also told her that she could expect to continue hearing from us.

Skip, I'll see you in Washington, D.C.. Is anybody going to the Vancouver fly-in at the end of November? Don and I are, with a few days in Seattle before.

Yours,

LT

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*EDITOR'S NOTE: Shortly after the IAGSDC article appeared, Stan and Cathie Burdick relinquished the editorship of ASD, and the magazine was taken over by Jon and Susan Sanborn, who moved it to California. The new editors have expressed a willingness to work with the IAGSDC, and our organization bought quarter page ads, which have continued to appear in the magazine. The following editorial appeared in the March 1992 issue.—LT*

### EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

Thank you one and all for the support you have shown during this transition period. It has been very appreciated. It has been very rewarding but very time consuming.

**Remember that square and round dancers come in every size, shape, age, color, nationality, degree of wealth and accomplishments, marital status, sex and sexual proclivity. Most dancers readily accept the differences that exist between individuals and that all people possess certain and equal rights.** [*Emphasis —LT.*]

One of the most rewarding benefits of square dancing is the feeling of accomplishment experienced at the moment of meeting one's original corner after going through a series of figures. The seven other dancers could not have done it without you, nor you without them. It's the feeling we strive for, learn for, concentrate and listen for—our “payoff,” as it were. It's part of what keeps us coming back each and every time.

## THE IAGSDC'S "GOLDEN BOOT AWARD:" ITS HISTORY AND A LIST OF AWARD RECIPIENTS, 1983-1992

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The "Golden Boot Award" is the IAGSDC's highest honor, and the announcement of each year's recipient has become a highlight of the annual convention. The history of the award included here appeared originally in the program of "Northstar Promenade," the Vancouver convention in April of 1990. The list of recipients has been updated to include the Albuquerque convention.—LT*

On May 1, 1983, the Puddletown Squares of Seattle Washington, held their first class graduation. During the graduation, the Puddletown Squares awarded Art Smith a "Golden Boot Award" for his outstanding contribution to gay square dancing by having started the first gay square dance club in Seattle and the gay square dance movement in the Northwest.

The original "Golden Boot Award" was an actual Western boot. The boot came from a used pair of boots belonging to one of Puddletown's members, sprayed gold and with gold chains and rhinestones appropriately glued to the boot. The other boot of that pair is believed to be the one atop the Honky Tonk Queen Crown.

Until the summer of 1985, no further activity occurred with this award. Art felt that this award should be shared with other people or organizations within the IAGSDC who were making or had made substantial contributions to the gay square dance movement. After getting an OK from Puddletown, Art approached the president of the IAGSDC, and received a very positive "go-ahead" to make the presentation of the "Golden Boot Award."

The first awardee of the "Golden Boot Award" at an IAGSDC convention was the South Florida Mustangs, who received it at the Denver convention in 1985. The award was an engraved plaque, which was presented at the close of the opening ceremonies of the convention. Subsequent award presentations have been made during the organization's general meeting held at each convention.

The tradition established is that the person or group receiving the award chooses the next recipient, keeps that decision secret, provides whatever form the award is to take, and then makes the presentation to the new recipient at the next convention.

In the words of Art Smith: "The "Golden Boot Award" belongs to everyone, for the spirit that it honors is that of all of us contributing together, sharing our energy, our dedication, and, most of all, our love for each other. When any of us gives 100% of our best, that is the finest example of what the "Golden Boot Award" exemplifies."

## PAST RECIPIENTS OF THE “GOLDEN BOOT AWARD”

1983	Art Smith, Seattle
1985	The South Florida Mustangs
1986	Dave “Happy” New Year, Southern California
1987	Scott Carey, San Francisco
1988	Ken Pollock, New York
1989	Freeman Stamper, San Francisco
1990	Karl Jaeckel, Denver
1991	Harlan Kerr, San Francisco
1992	Keith Snowdon, Vancouver

## THE ORIGINS OF THE IAGSDC BANNER

*by C. Freeman Stamper  
Western Star Dancers,  
San Francisco, California*

*EDITOR'S NOTE: As with the Golden Boot Award, I thought that it would be worth preserving what is known about the origins of our organization's banner. I asked Karl Jaeckel what he knew about it, and he referred me to Freeman Stamper. Freeman found time in his busy schedule to submit the following piece. His story of the banner's origin shows that sometimes something created in a hurry to meet a need can be just the thing, if the right hearts are behind it.—LT*

A national association of gay square dancers had already been conceived at the first fly-in of the South Florida Mustangs, February 12-20, 1983, and Western Star Dancers (WSD) were putting together a contingent for the June 26 San Francisco Gay Freedom Day Parade. The Board of Directors of Western Star approved the expense of creating a club banner that could be carried in the parade. Dennis Ficken, another founding member of WSD, was asked to create the design, and I, a member of the Mainstream class at the time, was asked to construct it.

Several members from other clubs were to join us for the parade, and Scott Carey felt the need for some kind of banner to carry at the front of the combined square dancers' contingent that would clearly indicate the fact that dancers from the other clubs were also present and that there was a larger association that brought us all together. With Board of Director's approval of the expense, Dennis and I, in a mad dash, created the original banner for the National Association of Lesbian/Gay Square Dance Clubs, as the organization was originally called. The banner,

then, was conceived, designed, constructed, and financed by Western Star Dancers.

The white nylon banner material was purchased from The Flag Store, a commercial flag business, to ensure durability. The felt for the letters and the ribbon for the colored squares were purchased from the popular Cliff's Hardware on Castro Street. The colors used for the squares were a selection of available ribbons; there was no time to shop at other stores or order special colors because it was the weekend before the parade.

There really wasn't much precision in the planning of the banner. The length and height of the banner, the size of the letters, and the size and placement of the squares were what Dennis felt was right. Since Dennis and I were working fast, Dennis was a little sloppy cutting out the letters, so I decided to zig-zag stitch the letters on the background with a very short stitch length to camouflage the ragged letters. It was my idea to interlock the squares prior to sewing them onto the background. The rainbow colors for the gay flag, the interlocking squares representing the

lasting bonds of friendship, and the open-ended chain representing the ability to add and grow are all part of the symbolism incorporated into the design of the banner.

The new association banner was first publicly displayed at the pre-parade square dance on June 25, 1983, and was proudly carried down Market Street heralding the square dancers from the association the following day.

While the banner was still not officially sanctioned by the association, it was displayed at the first convention held in Seattle, Washington, April 6-8, 1984. At the business meeting held at that convention on April 8, the name of the association was changed for two reasons:

- Squares Across the Border from Vancouver, Canada, was admitted to membership in the association, thus making it a true international association, and
- The membership voted, almost unanimously, to adopt the word “gay” as an all-encompassing word denoting both female and male homosexuals. Thus, the word “lesbian” and the “/” were removed from the banner.

The latter change produced a further bit of symbolism: I used the letters “i,” “n,” and “e” from the word “lesbian” to create the “inter” in

the **international** of the new name. This act incorporated the importance of lesbians into the international association. (The unused letters remain protected in an envelope in my file cabinet.) So, the placement of the letters really was born out of necessity rather than out of precise planning.

While not specifically a part of the history of the IAGSDC banner, the interpretation of the banner’s design into the IAGSDC convention badge does have a connection to that history. The association’s convention badge made its debut at the second convention (1985) in Denver, Colorado. The badge was designed by Dennis Cossey and Karl Jaeckel, members of the then newly-organized Rocky Mountain Rainbeaus. In an effort to modify the design into something small enough to be a badge rather than a breastplate, Karl, Dennis, and I debated possible changes in the design. It was agreed to remove the duplicate colors in the middle of the chain of squares and to use the blue of the squares at the ends of the original chain for the color of the letters spelling out the association’s name on the badge. As difficult to print as it was, the symbolism of the true interlocking squares was preserved on the convention badge.

**WOMEN IN GAY SQUARE DANCING  
OR  
"THE BELLE IS NOT ALWAYS WHAT YOU THINK SHE IS"**

*by Grace Cummins  
The Wilde Bunch, Albuquerque, N.M.*

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Those of us who attended the Albuquerque convention became well acquainted with the ubiquitous Grace Cummins, who seemed to be performing several jobs at one time (even when dancing), and learned to appreciate her quick wit and her ability to turn a phrase into a sword. Although I don't have to deal with Grace on a regular basis, I have seen what she can do to cut people down to size in her position as editor of her club's newsletter, so, to be on the safe side, I asked her to contribute to this publication. The following article addresses the perennial problem of how to attract and keep women in gay square dancing from the perspective of a club that has achieved some admirable results in that area.—LT*

When I was asked to write an article about women in gay square dancing for the IAGSDC's Tenth Anniversary publication, I figured that the wrong person had been chosen. I don't have any deep insight into why there are so relatively few Lesbians in the IAGSDC, or why women try square dancing for a while and then drop out. Hell, I danced for about two years before I even knew there was a "problem." So rather than analyze the situation, I have decided to give up my chance for a Nobel prize in deductive B.S. and tell you about my experience with a club that went from 100 % men to a 50-50 mix in five easy steps.

The names of the club members will be used to protect the innocent. The club itself wishes to retain its anonymity, but I will tell you that it dances in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and the bunch was named after Oscar Wilde. Hereafter, I will just use the initials W.B.

The W.B. began in March 1983 as an all-male club. It remained that way until early 1985, down and **talked**, one on one. And they danced

when Kris Warmoth, a much braver woman than I, joined the club. Later, she dragged Jean Effron in, and little by little the number of women grew. When I started dancing in 1988, there were still a greater number of men among the members, but not so that I even thought about it. In 1992, the W.B. went 50-50, and it remains that way today with about 110 members.

I asked Kris Warmoth why she took that first scary step to join a "men's" group that also met in a predominantly male bar. Her answer was that she had been in a Country/Western dance class with Bill Eyler, and he asked her to come and dance with the W.B. Was she comfortable? Yes, people like Ric Gonzalez, Bill Eyler, and Bucky Bouxsein went out of their way to make her comfortable.

Then I talked to the other "early girls," and I got the same response. Bonnie Crumpler joined in 1988, and she still credits Ric and Bucky with making her feel welcome. What did they do that was so special? Mostly, they sat with the women, and they asked them to go for

coffee, and they just cared.

A major turning point in our club occurred when everyone (except Bucky) started “talking dirty.” Others may refer to these “sessions” as “frank sexual discussions,” but in fact they are just **talking dirty**. Ric and Bonnie were the co-founders of this ritual, and they make sure that it continues on a regular basis. It has brought us all closer together.

As our comfort level has grown, we now party together, travel together, room together, lend each other money (though no one **ever** pays **me** back). We glory in our sameness while respecting our differences—such as that the men cook while the women bring chips and dip.

We also work hard to keep the club at a 50-50 mix. If a new class is predominantly one gender, we target our advertising to the other gender for the next class. We try very hard to make sure that the club board is evenly split. We support each other, even in small things: At the Miami convention, when the W.B. women were asked to join in the “all-women” tip, the W.B. men came to watch and show their support. We

are very sensitive to each other’s needs. Our men dance gently, and our women try to learn what a red bandanna in the right back pocket with the third button of the fly open and a banana in the left ear means.

The fact of the matter is that I don’t know why gay square dancing started out as a “male” thing. I don’t even care why. However, the vast majority of the IAGSDC members that I talk to want our square dancing to be gays **and** Lesbians. I believe that the initial steps in the “all-or-mostly-all-men” clubs must come from the men. They must actively recruit women, and once the women show up, they must work very hard to include them fully. (**NO**, they don’t have to date them!)

It is not enough to say, “We’re glad you’re here,” and then ignore the women or take them for granted. Once there are even a few committed women in the club, then a partnership must be formed where **all** work together to develop strategies to attract more women, and to make them feel comfortable, and to meet each other’s needs. This goal that most of us would like to see achieved will not occur in a vacuum. We must continue to talk, to plan, and to execute.

## **NUDE SQUARE DANCING: WILL IT CATCH ON? (OR: IS IT CATCHING?)**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The following two articles are reprinted from The Call Sheet, newsletter of the Gay Callers Association's post-Albuquerque convention issue, No. 15, July 18, 1992. Pertinent questions: Have we created a monster? Will future conventions have to have special "clothing optional" halls for all programs from Basic to Challenge? What will Mike DeSisto look like calling in the buff?—LT*

### **THE MOONSHINERS**

*by Bill Eyler*

The inspiration behind the nude dance was the Moonshiners, a real organization led by Kathy Yhip and Laura Green from San Juan Capistrano. They started with a small dance held at a dancer's home at the Phoenix fly-in, January 1991. I called that first nude dance of two tips, using a home stereo system and no microphone. There were nine dancers. It has sorta blossomed since then. The rules are:

- \* No pictures
- \* All must participate by dancing
- \* Men and women must be involved together
- \* Smile

I'm the one to blame for bringing it to Albuquerque. The overwhelming number of folks who participated astonished me. Four callers and at least 170 dancers. (*ED: That's 21.25 squares, to be exact!*) The room I originally booked could hold only six squares. What have we created?

*EDITOR'S NOTE: What have we created, indeed! What Bill fails to mention is that at Huajatolla I in October 1991 (sponsored jointly by the Denver and Albuquerque clubs), there was what was called a "Godiva Tip," held at some ungodly hour in one of the out-of-the-way meeting rooms of the lodge where the dancers were staying. There were around four squares at that occasion, and the most exciting moment of the dance was when a certain young caller from Denver removed his Prince Albert and put a small padlock in its place. One audible comment was: "Jeeez!" -LT*

### **WEARING NOTHING BUT A MICROPHONE...**

If you weren't there, you've heard about it: the Moonshiners' Dance. Twenty-one squares and four callers, performing fast-and-furious Mainstream in a locked room in Albuquerque, every one of them stark naked. And the callers: the inimitable Anne Uebelacker; the inevitable Harlan Kerr; the newly-graduated BJ Dyer; and poor Bill Eyler reportedly feeling a bit left out. It seems he was the

only caller not wearing body jewelry. Never mind, Bill. **Someone** in this organization has to show good taste.

The dance began in a room that proved too small. Square dancers being nothing if not ingenious, the still-clothed late-comers formed a human wall behind which dancers streaked into a larger hall. The rest then stripped down to the required square dance attire: tattoos and jewelry; quite a few pairs of shoes; and one Seattle woman sporting a bow tie. The doors were locked, the air conditioning threw up its hands in despair, and everyone danced. And sweated. Asked one dancer, “Did you ever try swinging a sweaty, slippery body?” No one wearing clothes was allowed in the room; a man trying to sneak in a camera was ejected by the formidable female bouncer.

They danced for an hour, with only one break, during which the Tush Push was performed; Harlan . reported it to be “very interesting from the callers’ standpoint.” Anne said: “Fantasies were fulfilled and fantasies were shattered.” Plans are being laid for a Moonshiners’ Dance in Seattle, where the temperature in July is more civilized. But, don’t worry—there’ll be plenty of sweaty bodies to go around.

*EDITOR’S NOTE: Please note the progression: nine dancers in January 1991, 32 (+/-) in October 1991, 170 in July 1992. From there—**Destination: MOON!!**—LT*

## **NUDE SQUARE DANCING—A CALLER’S PERSPECTIVE: A FRAGMENT OF ANNE UEBELACKER’S INTERVIEW**

*EDITOR’S NOTE: I thought it best to include this portion of Anne’s interview here, rather than with the main body of the interview, for obvious reasons. —LT*

**LT** = Luis Torres

**AU** = Anne Uebelacker

**LT** Tell me about your involvement with the nude tip at the Albuquerque convention.

**AU** It started off very innocently, when a few of the women in Albuquerque wanted to know if I

would be willing to be involved in a nude tip, because they had heard that I had called for straight nudist clubs before. They wanted to know if I’d be willing to do something similar at the convention. I told them I had no problem with that, and they said they expected to have three or four squares at the most.

I asked them if they'd be interested in other callers, because I thought I knew others that would be interested. They said: "Really?! Who?" So I told them: I know Harlan Kerr would do it, and I think Bill Eyler has no problem with it, since he's done it before anyway. And I was pretty sure B. J. Dyer would probably be right there, too. They thought that was great, but that we would probably have more callers than dancers.

When we got there the night when the dancing was scheduled, we got to the top of the stairs, and we saw this huge crowd standing outside. They told us: "All these people want to join us! There are already six squares stripped down to nothing inside, and the hall is full!"

Bill said he had a key to a nearby room that would hold about 30 squares, so we decided to move there, but the problem was how to get six squares of nude dancers from one room, around the corner, to the other hall. They didn't want to put all their clothes back on, but we couldn't have them running around the hallways naked. Finally, someone suggested: "Let's just form a line of the people waiting to serve as a screen. Well, the line was formed, but everybody was facing **in** until Bill issued the command to "about face." Then everyone ran from one hall to the other.

The only rules were: no spectators, no cameras, and you had to strip when you entered. There was a girl, about 5 foot 2, who was detailed as the bouncer. I didn't think she would be very effective, but I didn't know that she has a black belt in martial arts. One guy came in with a camera stuck under his jacket; he came in

through the door and pulled the camera out, and that's as far as he got! He flew out the door backwards!

Anyway, we ended up with 21 squares. We came in and started setting up the equipment, and someone from the back of the hall started yelling: "Uebelacker, Uebelacker, take your clothes off!!" Well, I had never stripped in front of so many people in my life, but I must admit that for me that evening was the highlight of the convention. The energy in that room was like nothing I've experienced in a long time. It was an hour of Mainstream singing calls, and they didn't even want to stop for breaks. The temperature went up to about 110 degrees, because the air conditioning in the building is cut off at midnight.

One guy in the front square yelled: "Oh please, don't stop calling, because if you do, I'll have to look at my corner!!" Gail was dancing with Kristina from New York, who is very nicely put together, and afterwards she said: "You know what the sad part was? I was so busy dancing that I forgot to look!!" People got so sweaty and slippery that you had to concentrate on keeping a hold of your partner.

Halfway through, someone suggested we do a line dance, so Harlan put on the "Tush-Push! " Someone from the floor wanted us to come down and do the dance with them, but we declined, because the sight-seeing from the platform was much more interesting. I've called for a lot of groups, but I think that's the most fun I've ever had calling.

It was fun to watch the difference between the sexes: The guys would come in and strip, throwing stuff in every direction. The girls would come in, take a look at the situation, turn their back on everything, then take off things item by item, putting everything in a neat little pile.

**LT** You say you've called for nude square dancing before. Tell me about that.

**AU** It was on a bet. At a straight convention, a bunch of us were sitting around, and somebody said: "Gee, I bet it would be fun to call at a nudist camp." And the conversation went on from there: If you were focusing on your lead square hi such a situation, what would you write for your head couple's corners as a description..."big feet?" So finally, someone bet Joe and me \$100 that we wouldn't go for a weekend at a nudist camp, and we took them on.

We found a nudist club that was north of Toronto, and made arrangements to go there for the weekend. We'd just arrived on the motorcycle, and I was kneeling down putting in some tent pegs, when a pair of feet and bare legs came up to me. I was terrified to look up, so I stood up quickly and looked at his eyes.

"Oh, you must be new!"

"Yes, we are. How did you know?"

"Well, you're still dressed! We're really glad to have you here!"

The weekend was quite an experience. To begin with, we thought we wouldn't know anybody...WRONG! Four of the couples that were at the convention we had just done in Hamilton, Ontario, were there also. They were members of the club. The very first ones of them we saw, ran up to us to give us a hug, and initially we didn't know how to react. But we got over that part very quickly.

Then they asked us if we would like to do a dance that night, and we accepted the invitation. Well, we did the dance on the tennis court, and we had 35 squares. That was the first time that I had ever called for nude dancers. Then they asked us if we could do it on a regular basis, so it became a once-a-month thing for us during the summer, and they eventually formed a club that danced every week. One of their own members is now calling for them.

**LT** I hate to ask this, but what did they call their club?

**AU** (Laughs) Oh, it was very boring: they just called it the "Beaus and Belles! They don't dance at a very high level, because they only meet during the summer. They have name badges, but they wear them like bolo ties.

It was quite an experience and an eye opener.

**A VOICE FROM DRAG-QUEEN HELL:  
SYBIL CAN'T SHUT UP,  
EVEN AFTER BEING DEAD FOR MORE THAN A YEAR!**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: One of the most memorable experiences of my first convention—"Peel the Apple" in New York—was the Honky Tonk Queen Pageant. The whole thing was presided over by this vision of loveliness in a mermaid dress. The fact that the dress ended in a fishtail, meant that her feet stuck out of a very small hole at the bottom, so she couldn't walk properly. She moved by sort of shuffling from side, and she had to be helped up to the stage by charitable people, who held her up as she hopped from step to step.*

*Once on stage and with a microphone in her hand, however, the mermaid-thing really cut loose, more than likely inspired by the phallic qualities of the electronic instrument. Sybil, for, as I later learned, that was her name, kept her audience in stitches with a constant impromptu commentary on everyone and everything. It was a performance worthy of Robin Williams at his best.*

*The person behind Sybil was Foggy City Dancers' Terry Presley. The story I have heard is that there really is a Sybil Presley, that she is Terry's ex-wife, and that they both used to square dance before Terry discovered greener pastures. One night, done up in drag, Terry was rushing out to a square dance function, but felt incorrect without a badge. Looking about to remedy the situation, he discovered his ex's square dance badge in his drawers (No! No! Not in his underwear; in his dresser drawers. He's not into that!), and he put the badge on. Thus **the other** Sybil was born.*

*Sybil became a popular character at gay square dance conventions, so it was with great dismay that the world of the IAGSDC received notification from Terry the year before Albuquerque that Sybil had died!! Many of us wrote to Terry to complain, but he seems to be firm in his intention not to bring her back.*

*When I saw Terry at Albuquerque, and asked him what had prompted him to do such a thing, his response was that, over the years, he had grown increasingly tired of entering a room and having people turn around and say to him: "Oh, it's just you! Where's Sybil?" (I mean, how much can a person's self-esteem take? Besides, he's not a very good dancer, either!)*

*We tried to convince Terry to visit a medium and see if he could get Sybil's spirit to comment on the marathon Honky Tonk Queen pageant at Albuquerque, just to fill out her description of that event over the past IAGSDC conventions, but Terry was adamant that Sybil should stay dead.*

*In order to give the lady her due, however, we are reprinting the following piece from the program of the Albuquerque convention. **Requiescat in Pacem, Sybil!**—LT*

## WHERE'S SYBIL?

Don't ask us — we've had enough trouble trying to find Waldo. We did, however, ask Terry Presley, Sybil's brother, if he could locate a manuscript that his beloved sister had promised us. Terry's response:

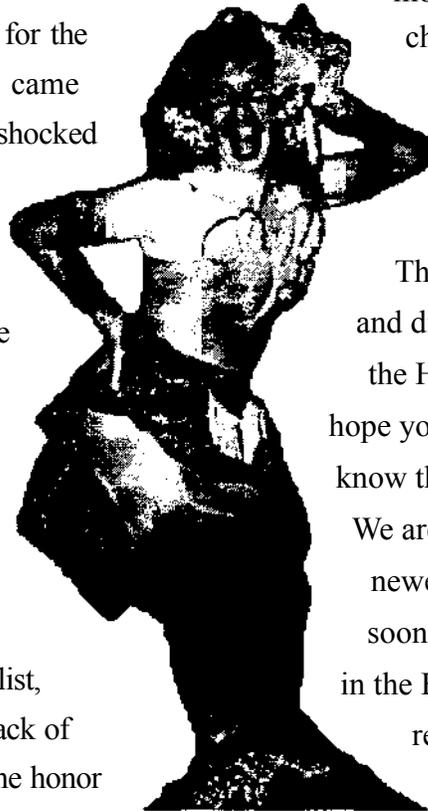
**Mike,**

While going through Sybil's things for the Goodwill (they rejected everything), I came across some private papers of hers that shocked and sickened me. It appears she sold you the rights to a book entitled "Honky Tonk Queen History" and took you for several thousand in advance payments. Mike, there was no book, just some scribbled notes from the hand of my confused and unhinged twin. Though they are filled with the most appalling lies and semi-truths, I felt that, contractually, they should go to you. I'm sure, as a responsible journalist, you would never consider putting this pack of lies in print, but I felt you should have the honor of destroying them. As you know, I adored my poor sister, but, what can I say? She couldn't handle the fame.

I'm so sorry she swindled you so disgracefully,  
See you at the convention,  
Love,  
Terry

**Terry,**

We hate to break with the journalistic integrity that we've established thus far in the program, but, after two days of intense discussion, our editorial staff felt that the public interest would best be served by printing Sybil's "Honky Tonk Queen History." She was, after all, a legend in her own time, though there is considerable disagreement as to what she was most famous for: her beauty, wit, charm, poise, or tacky wardrobe.



### Special note to our readers:

There are occasional inaccuracies and distortions in Sybil's account of the Honky Tonk Queen History. We hope you will overlook them since we know the truth will eventually be told. We are confident that Oliver Stone's newest conspiracy blockbuster, the soon-to-be-released "Sybil, Caught in the Bradley Crossfire," will set the record straight.

### Chapter 1

1984 Seattle, 1985 Denver,  
1986 San Francisco

### The Early Years

(The Ones Without SYBIL)

The Honky Tonk Queen Pageant was originally created in response to a square dance record entitled "Honky Tonk Queen" recorded by two internationally famous callers, Paul Marcum and Elmer Sheffield. Both these callers

were at the first Convention in Seattle. The song was such a hit with Miss Virginia Slim from Seattle, that she created the Honky Tonk Queen Pageant. She not only created it, she crowned herself Queen!!!! What a woman!!!! And by creating the pageant she established herself as one of the most important Drag Queens in all of Drag Queen history! Was it because she was the first queen? NO! Was it because she won the next year in Denver and the next year in San Francisco? NO! Was it because she was one hell of a lady who will always remain in the hearts of all the people who have had the chance to know her? NO! Any one of these would have been more than enough reason for the dear girl to go down in history, but all these reasons were overshadowed by her ultimate claim to fame. By creating the Honky Tonk Queen Pageant, IT WAS THERE FOR SYBIL TO WIN!!!!

## **Chapter 2**

### **1987 Portland**

#### **A Star is Born**

It's 1987, Portland, Oregon, and Virginia finally reveals her genius and how she managed to win the title three years in a row. It seems that every year up until 1987 she didn't allow any other contestants! Is that brilliant or what???? In 1987, she allowed other contestants to run and decided not to run herself (which is good 'cause she would have just won again). The contest was held in her hospitality suite. The room was packed with gorgeous sweaty square dancers, both male and female. The contestants were milling about, the atmosphere an odd blend of casual and tense. And there I was, a young innocent girl from San Francisco, just out for a good time and a few laughs. There were other

contestants. I would describe them but, unfortunately, compared to me they were so blah and pathetic that I can't honestly remember a thing about them. Oh yes, I do remember one thing, they were all unbelievably ugly. But why dwell on the unpleasant. I, SYBIL, won, and things would never be the same. Oh yes, I should mention one important side event. Stephanie, from Western Star, made a brief appearance. I had worshipped her from the first moment I had seen her at the closing of the Gay Games in San Francisco the year before. She was everything I thought a Drag Queen should be — two tons of teased hair. But now seeing her through the eyes of the freshly crowned and universally adored HONKY TONK QUEEN, I saw her for what she really was — two tons of ratty wig. I felt something almost akin to pity for her (or was it repulsion?) But, why dwell on the unpleasant? Anyway I won, I won, I WON!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! A STAR WAS BORN.

## **Chapter 3**

### **1988 Phoenix**

#### **A Star Becomes a Goddess**

At first I didn't think it was going to be a good year. I was shocked to find they had rewritten the rules, and I would be forced to give a pageant at the Phoenix Convention. I had planned to just abolish the whole thing and reign as Queen forever. But things turned out better than I had feared. To begin with, the Pageant had grown. The year I WON!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! there were about 60 people crammed in a hospitality suite, about seven pathetic has-been contestants and ME! In Phoenix the pageant had grown so large, that we moved from a small side room to a main ballroom. There was a mob of over 300 adoring

SYBIL fans, over 25 pathetic has-been contestants and ME! And then a truly wonderful thing happened. They handed me a long hard object. It made me quiver, it made me moist. It was a microphone and it MADE ME A GODDESS!!!!!!! Oh yeah, and this mousey little thing in an overdone dress with enough satin and lace on it to gag a maggot, named Miss Pam Demonium, won the contest.

## **Chapter 4**

1989 New York

### **The Legend Continues**

Miss Pam Demonium shocked the entire square dancing community by performing the first really intelligent act of her otherwise boring and uninspiring life. She didn't show up in New York. This was incredibly wise for two reasons. One, it would have surely hurt her feelings to realize that absolutely no one remembered her or cared that she had shown up, and two, it gave SYBIL the microphone AGAIN!!!!!!!!!! This came about due to the incredible genius of Miss Wella Balsam. Wella is one of those girls that every important organization needs. She was that hard working dedicated person who kept the whole thing going. Of course this dynamic personality was an over-compensation for a basically drippy, wallflower psychological make-up. I mean the poor thing had been a total nobody, completely overlooked her entire life if she had depended on her looks, but what the hell, it kept the whole thing going. And what a thing it had become! In the Big Apple we took over the main ballroom. The huge room was packed with over 700 people, over 40 pathetic has-been contestants and ME!!!!!!

This year the winner was a classic example of the power of the sympathy vote. The previous year she had shown up in a scraggly little grass skirt, bare-footed, sporting a coconut bra, and no hair. To compensate, this year she came dressed to the max with enough hair to make Stephanie gag. (Ms. Stephanie continued to hover around the pageant much like an overdone moth flitting around a flame she could never attain. She also brought along the Bradley Sisters. It is rumored these harpies were the result of a torrid and absolutely disgusting long-standing lust-fest between Stephanie and the entire male population of Des Moines, but it's probably just a nasty rumor, not anything that I would want to get around.) Yes Miss Tami Wynotte, a homely — I mean home-girl, certainly did herself up to beat the band. I would like to say it helped improve her basic looks, but why lie. Anyway, everybody felt so sorry for her she won.

## **Chapter 5**

1990 Vancouver

### **The Dark Clouds Begin to Gather**

Unlike her predecessor, Tami did not have the good graces to stay away. Not only did she show up, SHE TOOK CHARGE OF THE MICROPHONE!!!!!!!!!! The little bitch was disgusting. By imitating my style, my glamour, my every little nuance, she managed to pull the whole thing off. Oh sure, I was there. I was still everyone's best wet dream, but it just wasn't the same. And of course Miss Wella — the doctor says I'll be better any day now — Balsam was there. AND THEY MADE HER A PRINCESS!!!!!! And something about Virginia Ham, which I thought was part of the catering. Obviously the whole pageant was going to

HELL IN A HANDBASKET!!!!!! And to make matters worse everywhere I turned I saw Stephanie with him, Terry Presley, my wicked, evil twin brother. They were everywhere, head to head plotting, scheming, but what would be the result of their devious plans, WHAT!!! The strain was getting to me!!!!!!! Oh yeah, Layona Davenport won the contest. She had heard that it helped your chances to sleep with the judges, and since she didn't know who the judges were, she just slept with everybody who attended the convention.

## **Chapter 6**

1991 Miami

### **Stormy Weather**

Miami, my home town, was a nightmare. My wicked evil twin brother showed up with his woman HE CLAIMED WAS THE REAL SYBIL!!!!!! MY NERVES!!!!!!!!!! I mean she WASN'T A DRAG QUEEN!!!!!!!!!! SHE WAS, WAS, YOU KNOW, A WOMAN!!!!!!!!!! Not that I don't like women. I adore them. But this one was claiming to be me, or claiming I was claiming to be her. It was all so confusing. With that slime Stephanie just smiling like Tammy Bakker at a two-for-one tacky makeup sale at Woolworths. And Terry whining "why does everyone always want to see Sybil, why doesn't everyone want to see me?" ( I had patiently explained to him that there wasn't much of a market in the world or popularity for aging leprechauns, but some people just can't face reality, sad isn't it.) It was all too much. And then, on top of it all, that miserable excuse for a Queen, Layona Sofa, or whatever her name was, brought the entire Chicago Rehabilitation Ward (they called themselves the SHE-DEVILS,

never were truer words spoken) and then turned the pageant into a full blown extravaganza!!!!!! Sure I was still everybody's reason for living, but it was just all becoming too, too much. IT ISN'T EASY BEING A SEX GODDESS LET ME TELL YOU. Anyway this thing from New York, who confused Vogueing with making faces won and I can't even remember what her little pretentious one name was: Cher, or Mystique, or DOMINO, or something like that. And there's Terry with that look of murder in his eyes, and Stephanie with that wicked, wicked, wicked, smile, and all those PATHETIC HAS-BEEN CONTESTANTS!!!!!! But I'll show them. I'LL SHOW THEM ALL!!!!!! I've found an incredible Beverly Hills Doctor who has agreed to SURGICALLY IMPLANT A MICROPHONE IN MY THROAT AND THEY'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO STOP ME THEN, NEVER, I TELL YOU!!!!!!!!!! This year ALBUQUERQUE, and then THE WORLD!!!!!!

### **Mike,**

This was as far as she got. It seems Sib met her untimely end, not long after writing the last "chapter", on the operating table of a local veterinarian who had lost his practicing license many years ago during a malpractice suit involving several prominent citizens from Two Egg, Florida. It's really all too sad. As previously stated, these are obviously the rantings of a mad woman, and the ugly rumors that both Stephanie and I were volunteer Candy Strippers at the Animal Hospital where Sybil met her sad, sad end are just that, ugly rumors.

Terry



**Tenth Annual Convention  
of the  
International Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs**

**July 2-4, 1993**

**Seattle, Washington**

## THIS SQUARE DANCING...IT'S PRETTY NEAT!

by Jeff Barlow  
*Capital City Squares*  
*Sacramento, California*

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This article, printed originally in Capital City Capers (November 1992), the newsletter of Sacramento's Capital City Squares, and addressed to the club's new class, does an excellent job of detailing the delights of gay square dancing... even for those of us who had to be dragged, kicking and screaming to our first open house. Our thanks to Jeff Barlow for consenting to our using the article in this publication.—LT*

I hope you new dancers are enjoying the class. I must admit, however, that I didn't really enjoy my first class all that much. But this year will be Dennis' and my sixth year of square dancing... and our enthusiasm grows every year. Some reasons why:

1) The Convention—I remember damning those non-refundable tickets to our first in Phoenix. “Why are we doing this? I don't even like it! I hate the desert—it's ugly and dusty and dead. What the hell do I do when they call “recycle?” A “workshop” at the convention taught me to recycle. And then we danced...with 800 cowboys and cowgirls. And leathermen! And a square of drag queens riding stuffed animals sewed into their dresses(??).

The energy was about the highest I had ever experienced...synergistic and wild! So much individuality expressed while all working in concert! The convention in Seattle this summer will be the tenth for gay square dancing—and we all know how gay people love special occasions! Knowing how Seattle does fly-ins, I can guarantee you that this convention will be done right!

2) Fly-Ins—There are more than 40 gay square dance clubs across the country and in Canada, and most of them hold a “fly-in” once

a year. A fly-in is a dance held over a weekend. It typically has one or two well-liked callers, and perhaps a Western (two-stepping) dance thrown in late one night. Maybe there's a brunch or dinner as part of the package. Some clubs have theirs out of town, like the fabulous Baltimore party, which takes over two hotels and the convention center at Rehoboth Beach, Delaware.

Most clubs hold the event in town, and will arrange housing for visitors with club members to keep costs down. In addition to lots of attendees from nearby towns, it is not uncommon to get a few from the other side of the continent. By the way...that ugly Phoenix desert...isn't! It's beautiful. So much so that each January since, we escape Sacramento's cold and fog for their wonderful fly-in, where it's warm enough to wear just a T-shirt while ogling the crowd at the gay rodeo held during the day. We then square dance till around ten, and then two-step with those hot rodeo hunks at Charlie's til even I have seen enough men in boots for one day!

We have experienced great Western dances attended by lots of non-square dancers at fly-ins in Toronto and Vancouver. Seattle had a fabulous dance/party on a boat ride on an absolutely perfect day on Puget Sound. And we had the fun

of seeing an extremely popular black caller being visibly incredulous at our reaction to her high-energy calling style at one of her big gay dances in San Francisco. Like to travel, but want a focus for your trip? Want to be confident that you can easily meet people to eat with, sightsee, and...well,...you know? Fly-ins...what a concept!

3) Local Dances—Looking for an excuse to visit San Francisco for the weekend? Need something to do before the bars get going? There are three gay square dancing clubs in “The City,” plus one in Palo Alto. They do surprisingly few fly-ins, but lots of GREAT Saturday-night dances. Most people don’t need a full weekend of square dancing to get them to the City by the Bay, and these dances are always well attended by people from out of town. And that is particularly true of dances held on special evenings, like the one held on Gay Pride Weekend.

4) Extended Family—As you stay with square dancing, besides constantly meeting new people, you keep re-encountering many of the same people—from all over the continent—at the various events. And you start to feel as though you are part of a big family. The people you meet at your first convention tend to continue learning the same level that you are, and the longer you stay with square dancing, the more camaraderie you feel. And it is so easy to talk to people...just “square-up” with them. Sacramento dancers Stan and Bill were the first two people to sign up for the original gay square dance convention in Seattle nine years ago. Their 40th anniversary was a major hit at the Vancouver, Canada, convention, when it was announced during the banquet. And when the Seattle club got ready to

take registrations for the tenth anniversary convention, they sought out Stan and Bill to make sure that they would again be the first to register. How’s that for family?

5) Enthusiasm—That’s what the Mainstream and Plus dancing levels are all about. Until you go to a fly-in or convention, you don’t know the meaning of the word. Square dancing can seem a bit silly while you are taking the class, but get in a room with a hundred or so cowboys and cowgirls up to their collective tits in boots, and vests, and Western belts, and jeans, and leather, and lace...and ready to dance...and you get up for it, ya know?

6) Higher Levels—There are all types of people. For many, the enthusiasm of the Mainstream and Plus levels is what they love. And those levels definitely have the strongest gay identity. Straight callers new to gay events are often astounded by the incredible energy we put into our fun! Like two-stepping, however, there are some limits to how much you can do with Plus dancing. When you dance as much as some of us do, you start feeling a little too familiar with it, and want to have some room to grow.

Well...besides the Basic, Mainstream, and Plus levels, there is also A1, A2, C1, C2, C3A, C3B, C3X, and who knows how many C4 levels. As you get into the higher levels, the emphasis shifts from remembering what to do on a given call to figuring out how to apply the right rules to your given situation. The callers direct you through some very complicated patterns, and you collectively think your way along. It is like a moving puzzle, with eight people all cooperating to solve it. The outward energy tends to drop as

the mental energy increases, but you definitely get that synergetic high that is the hallmark of square dancing!

7) Bonds with “Those People”—Oh yes...at the “C” levels, there are rarely enough people in one town to support both gay and straight clubs...so gays and straights have to mix. Had someone asked me four years ago if I wanted to dance with straight people, I would have told them: “NO WAY!” And we never would have

started Cl if Stan and Bill, then co-presidents of the Roseville TNT’s otherwise straight club, hadn’t repeatedly encouraged us. This past September, our straight friends Bobbie and Merle, whom we met through the TNT’s, were married...and Stan, Bill, Del, Dennis, and I were among only about fifteen of the hundreds of square dancers that they both know who were invited to their warm and very personal wedding.

This square dancing...It’s pretty neat!





# REMAKE THE CIRCLE



**SEATTLE  
JULY 2-4, 1993**

# Colophon

- The entire book was scanned into a computer twice, using a Microtek ScanMaker i800.
- The first pass through the scanner captured all of the pages with typed material, which was run through an OCR (Optical Character Recognition) program (ABBYY FineReader 5.0), and saved as RTF ("rich text format") files.
- The second pass through the scanner captured the pages with graphic material at a higher resolution than the text. The resulting graphic files were passed to Paul Asente for digital clean up and/or restoration. Microtek ScanWizard 5 was used for scanning graphic material.
- Paul used Adobe Illustrator with some Adobe Photoshop, both version CS4, for the digital restoration of all of the graphic elements you see here, including the front and back covers.
- Allan recreated the page number graphics using a combination of Microsoft Windows Paint and SnagIt 9 Editor.
- A team of volunteers, each armed with their own copy of the original (printed) book, manually proofed the RTF files, ensuring that the text was an exact match to the book.
- The proofed RTF files were imported into an OpenOffice 3.0 Writer document template, and reformatted within an inch of Allan's life.
- Regretfully, the document formatting is not *exact* in terms of paragraph and line spacing. The original book was pasted up by hand, not computer. The book was printed in a nonstandard large format. We've done our best to transplant the contents to an 8½" by 11" page.
- Fonts? Standard Microsoft Times New Roman and Arial, enlarged to 102% of normal size in an effort to match the original book's enlarged-by-photostat format.
- Page 220 was the biggest pain in terms of format recreation. This is understandable when you realize it was a chapter on Sybil, "a voice from Drag Queen Hell." Allan never could get a decent scan of the graphic. A revised edition may be released in the future if we can fix it.
- The proofed pages were reassembled into OpenOffice documents organized by chapters. The exact pagination, layout, and line breaks of the original book were recreated manually. Each chapter was exported as a PDF file using OpenOffice.
- The completed PDF files were assembled using Acro Software's CutePDF Professional 3.6.

Why take all this trouble? Because we wanted this book to be searchable, to make it easy for people to find names of friends, family, lovers, partners, and clubs.

# The 10 Years IAGSDC Digital Edition Project Team

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