

THE NEWBIE SQUARE DANCER... CONVERTED?

By Joanne Rennie



Now that the festivities of the Christmas season have come and gone, we find ourselves going into hibernation. We cozy up by the fireplace, turn on the TV and wait for the winter months to quickly pass, so we can emerge from cocooning and once again enjoy the warm summer months. Winter is a fantastic time of year to enjoy your favorite winter sport but what if you can't do or don't enjoy outdoor winter activities? Should you stay indoors, laze on the couch eating your favorite comfort foods? After all, it's just one more snack – we'll worry about the calories tomorrow... Is it really OK to stay in touch with your

friends via telephone, text or internet, instead of going out in the cold to see them personally? After all...socializing is for summer...Right? What if there is another way to get out there where you can have fun, laugh, socialize and exercise by dancing? Yes, I'm suggesting you get out there and dance. In fact, I enthusiastically encourage you to try Square Dancing.

At this point, you probably have a vision of an old school house or bales of hay in an old barn and you're thinking (with tongue in cheek), "pffff, square dancing is a thing of the past and it's only for the older generation". Well, I can personally

tell you that is exactly what I thought – wow, was I wrong!

A few weeks ago, I met Regina Gerhard, the president of Harbour Lites Square Dancing Club of Prescott, as well as Wendy VanderMeulen, who is a Square Dancing Caller/Teacher during their weekly square dancing night. Regina and Wendy generously shared information on this type of dancing and I must admit I learned so much while speaking with these knowledgeable ladies. Here are a few quick facts:

- * First of all, there is Traditional Square Dancing and there is Modern Western Square Dancing. As with most clubs, the Harbour Lites Club does the Modern Western Square Dancing, which is common throughout the world.
- * It doesn't matter which country you are in, you can find a Square Dancing Club. The dance programs and movements have all been standardized and the Callers always direct the dancers in English ONLY. So if you're in North America, or travelling through Europe or Asia, it's easy to find a club and join in.
- * They dance to all types of music: country western, pop, show tunes, golden oldies and even singers such as Lady Gaga (my vision of the old barn and bales of hay are starting to fade).
- * Square dancing helps keep you fit and is the perfect exercise. It combines the positive aspects of intense physical exercise without the negatives. Square dancing is a low impact activity that helps keep the body in shape. As with regular exercise, square dancing can lead to a slower heart rate, lower blood pressure, and improved cholesterol

profile. Many square dance movements can strengthen your weight-bearing bones and help prevent or slow down loss of bone mass (osteoporosis). It burns off calories, and can even add years to your life.

- * Square dancing is a mental challenge - Reacting to the square dance caller keeps you mentally on your toes. While concentrating on the moves, you escape from your worries and pressures.
- * Studies show square dancing slows the onset of Alzheimer's and other dementias.
- * Although most of the seasoned dancers dress in the Square Dancing clothes, it's OK to wear street clothes.
- * Square Dancing is easy to learn and inexpensive. There is a Square Dance Club dancing somewhere every night of the week.
- * There is no discrimination of sex, single, teens, young or old. Everyone is welcome.

Once I had my information, taken some pictures of the group and watched the dancers, it was time for me to leave. I really didn't want to, as it was such a fun environment to be in, so I waited for the dancers to take their break. I mingled with them for a bit and thanked everyone for their time. When the music began again, I started to take my exit, when all of a sudden someone took my hand and lead me to the dance floor. While I tried to convince him, I didn't know how to square dance, "Oh not to worry" he said with a smile, "it's easy and you'll be fine...you'll see". Up we went, knowing the moment of total embarrassment was upon me, when I would show the world what a goof I could be.

There I was in a square of eight (four men and four women), they knew what they're doing and I'm there smiling on the outside (as if everything was just fine) but my panicked thoughts were: "Oh No! What did I get myself into this time? While the Caller started calling the directions to the dancers, my dance partner guided me with the steps. At first, when I was supposed to turn right, I turned left (Oh how could I have done that? so embarrassing) And when they turned left...I turned right (help!!). But within a



couple of minutes, as we interchanged and swung our partners, I realized they were all gently coaching me (such kind souls) and I was dancing the steps without any issues (HA! guess I'm not such a goof after all). That was when I had an epiphany: It really was easy and this is fun! That's when I stayed and danced some more.

As I headed home that night, I thought about my pleasant evening with the Harbour Lites Square Dancing Club and the people I met. The hall was filled with happy smiles and hugs, feet tapping to the music and genuine friendship. It was obvious they thought of each other as family. This was a very comfortable way to

spend an evening. As I walked, I realized my step was lighter. I felt relaxed and wasn't stressed. Putting it simply, I wasn't tired anymore and I felt wonderful! They say that Square Dancers are the friendliest people in the world and I fully agree. They also say Square Dancing is "friendship set to music". I can't imagine describing it any other way.

If you decide to try square dancing, the Harbour Lites Club dances at the Presbyterian Church Hall Wednesday nights at 7:00 pm in Prescott where new members are always welcome. But I warn you, be prepared to make new friends and have lots of fun! [LH](#)