

Happy Valentine's Day

New Friendships – the Overlooked Blessing

By Patrick Demerath

The American Callers' Association in its attempt to be of service to all callers, dancers, and associations provided current, timely, and effective information on new dancer recruitment, winning ways to retain club dancers, and pitfalls to drive square dancers away for most of 2000 to 2020. ACA really appreciates the positive comments, encouragement to continue, and contributions from callers and dancers all over the country and from abroad to continue these initiatives.

ACA will continue to provide information that will help the square dance community recruit, retain and retrieve square dancers as well as encourage the dancers to speak out on the cumbersome dance programs.

This month's ACA Viewpoint discusses the common bond of St. VALENTINE **FRIENDSHIP** that dancers live with each other especially **LONG TERM FRIENDSHIPS** that last lifetimes. Square dancers understand this and often invite people to try square dancing who can benefit in these **FRIENDSHIPS**.

Friendship was St. Valentine's gifts for all dancers. Square dancers often communicate the values and the traditions of square dancing. The prospect might ask or think: "Why should I become a square dancer?" "What would I gain from square dancing?" In my own experience as a dancer for 40 years and as a caller for 35 years, I can remember many instances in which I had received such questions from friends.. Square dancers have often strived to answer such questions about the benefits of square dancing.

Often we answer such questions of "fun, friendship, and fellowship" of square dancing. We can cite the history of square dancing in what it means to people now and to people two-hundred years ago and one-hundred years ago. It is most important is that we attempt to draw attention to the many new **friendships** opportunities of square dancing and cite the many wonderful **friendships** that we all have made. All these **friendships** are a significant part of the square dancing equation to offer non dancers.

Considering the decline in the numbers of square dancers, callers and square dance clubs, we sometimes become disillusioned because we may not provide a convincing statement that would explain this one **friendship** quality benefit most central to square dancing. Sometimes

we may feel that we fail to present a convincing summation of square dancing benefits. What is it that sets square dancing apart from other groups?"

The answer to this question is not evident unless one looks into a square of new student dancers. If we look at them in lessons, we see laughing, fun and a beaming sense of accomplishment. Still, accomplishments are not the elements that set square dancing apart from other activities. Upon looking at the square of new dancers several times, it soon became evident the answer to this question. Student dancers all share in new **friendship** benefits of learning together, which is a most vital element in our beloved square dancing and is required to ensure continuation and prospering of square dancing.

When a person enters the hall for a square dance lesson, all the cares and woes that accompany life in the outside world disappear from his/her memory. Each square dance student dances with seven others in a square in full and complete harmony. It matters little what is their business, education, wealth, or profession. At this point, the person is a square dancer and all else disappears, as the dancers are united in the square following the patten by the caller.

Perhaps clubs who do not stress **friendship** may experience many people dropping out of square dance classes, stopping dancing right after graduation, and are lost to our community. Perhaps, this may be one of the reasons why square dancing is in decline due to a lack of **friendship** in relationship to the various dance programs of competency with their more difficult and complicated dance programs.

ACA recognizes that the long period of lessons equates to earning a Master's Degree from an accredited university. On the other hand, the ACA international one floor program can be taught in as little as 12 weeks, reduce stress on the dancers and callers alike and can encourage **friendships**. ACA further recognizes that the cumbersome mainstream/plus dance program may be helping to decrease the number of square dancers as competency replaces **friendships**, which appears to be the central uniting bond of square dancers. The bottom line is that if we as callers, dancers and leaders allow competency dancing to minimize **friendships**, it will continue to seriously damage square dancing. **Friendship** unites square dancers and can help square dancing grow and prosper.

Any individual, club, caller, or association who wishes to communicate his/her opinions on this subject is encouraged to contact the American Callers' Association at loulet@aol.com or Dr. Patrick Demerath at pdemerath17@gmail.com
Please visit our website and newsletters at americancallers.net

Until next time, Happy Dancing and Happy St. Valentine's Day.