

# The Ghillies

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## Gazette

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Summer 2006

Quarterly Newsletter of the  
Austin Scottish Country Dance Society



### From the President's Pen

Unfortunately, this month we bid Jamie Boyd farewell. She is going to the Philippines as a missionary to teach. We will miss you Jamie, but we wish you all the best and pray for a safe trip. Please send us updates; perhaps even a report for the Ghillies Gazette. I note that there is a branch of the RSCDS in Manila, so you may be able to get in some SCD during your stay.

Organization of the St Andrew's Ball is progressing. We are delighted to have John Taylor (fiddle), David Mostardi (piano accordion) and Lyle Ramshaw (keyboard) playing for us this year. The ball will be held on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> December, at the Ben Hur Shriners hall on Rockwood Lane. It is very close to Northcross Mall. This hall will provide really elegant surroundings for a ball – not a school cafeteria, and there is adequate parking, unlike some downtown locations! So mark December 2<sup>nd</sup> on your calendars.

We are also hosting a ceilidh on October 14<sup>th</sup> at the McBeth Recreation Center, Zilker Park. Ed Miller is scheduled to perform, so keep this date free as well, as it will be a great evening.

Hope you all are having a wonderful summer.

Safe travel and happy dancing,

Arthur McLean



# St. Andrew's Ball

## News



Austin's 30<sup>th</sup> St. Andrew's Ball is beginning to take shape, at least in the minds and intentions of your 2006 Ball chairs, Anne and Elizabeth.

The Summerfield Suites on Northcross will be the host hotel. It is literally 45 seconds' drive from there to the ballroom, so that all out-of-town guests planning to attend don't have to google TWO new locations this year when they roll into town for the ball weekend!! Another minute's drive and you are on Anderson Lane with a plethora of restaurants and shops. Suites are \$79.00 in our block booking (bedroom and sitting room with additional sofa bed and kitchenette). Two bedroom suites are available too, at \$109. They have reserved the events hall for the use of our guests, should they want it.

Next, a letter and/or email will be sent out shortly to the leaders of all dance groups in Texas past and present asking them for some information which we will use for inclusion in one of our secret commemorative surprises – the 30<sup>th</sup> Austin Ball can't pass by without special marking, so even if your group hasn't yet decided whether or not to attend, we would like you to send us the information anyway! Mysteriuser and mysteriuser, as we say, when our excitement exceeds our grammatical ability!!

Our musicians are the indomitable John Taylor, along with Lyle Ramshaw and Dave Mostardi, from San Francisco.

On Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> October, we will be "puttin' on the Ceilidh" – doesn't quite have the same ring as "Puttin' on the Ritz" but the Ball will take care of THAT, while our ceilidh will be a sensible, sony Scottish fundraiser for said Ball. Ed Miller headlines for us at the McBeth Rec. Center in Zilker Park, so if you are in town, do plan to attend. Tix \$15, incl. refreshments. If you are a current member of ASCDS, we will be calling for volunteer help to run the ceilidh!

While the Ball on 2<sup>nd</sup> December starts at 7.30, Elizabeth and I have never experienced an arrangement for a hall rental where the cost is the same for four hours as it is for twelve.

So, to doubly enjoy this wonderful venue, we have organized a Ceilidh Dance Workshop in the early afternoon – this is open to non-dancers of scd – it's a public event, in fact, to respond to the growing desire for ceilidh dancing in Austin.

Tickets will be sold only to non-dancers (i.e. the public). However, any dancers who are sure they won't deplete their energy for the ball in the evening, are welcome to attend free, as it will be quite helpful to have experienced dancers (or those who know ceilidh dances) assist the workshop attendees.

Do email either Elizabeth or Anne if you have any questions or queries about our Ball plans.

Elizabeth Chennault - [scotland1745@sbcglobal.net](mailto:scotland1745@sbcglobal.net)

Anne Marshall - [acmars@austin.rr.com](mailto:acmars@austin.rr.com) (new email address - please update your file)



# *DANCING IN SCOTLAND*

Oh the trepidation! 40 years have elapsed since the last time I danced scd in Scotland, in high school to be exact, and now I was getting to try it again – voluntarily, this time! Could I finally get to dispel all those flashbacks and memories evoking the stuff of nightmares that kept me away from this wonderful hobby from 10<sup>th</sup> grade till age 45?

I contacted a few scd group secretaries in my home shire before my trip in May, and one name stood out – Miss McKechnie - could SHE still be around – that high school PhysEd. teacher we had for one dreaded period a week for mandatory Scottish Country Dance? I did a little research and discovered that yes, this lady was in her late sixties, and yes, she had been a teacher – now, was it PE or something more benign like quantum mechanics or calculus? Alas, I couldn't get any further information before leaving to decide whether or not I would willingly fall into the abyss.

Just the name had me wobbling and wondering if I would still have to strip to uniform navy blue knickers and white button down shirt to take part in her class! Which reminds me - in school, how come the boys got to wear shorts, and we had to remove our skirts and dance in our knickers? Well, it doesn't really matter now to know that (a) the school uniform did not include PE shorts for the girls, as the uniform knickers were considered 'sturrddy' enough, and (b) Miss McKechnie had the girls remove their skirts because she needed to see if the girls had the ability to work their knees and hips correctly for her crack competition teams. Not that we would ever dare object, or anything. And she wasn't caring about the boys' legs, or that they sniggered at us in our 'navy breeks'...

As we got to High School, the competition teams were almost exclusively made up of girls. In junior high and of course at elementary school level, the teachers trained mixed teams for scd competition, but I can give an example of how this was no longer possible by the time the boys reached high school – my husband had been forced into a kilt by the ability of the teacher to convince his parents that it was an honour to be picked for the dance team. He was bought several pairs of ghillies over the dreaded year in which he was targeted as dance team potential, and each pair mysteriously got lost, damaged or outright destroyed before the rehearsal or the actual competition. On one memorable occasion he turned up to a competition at the Greenock Town Hall in kilt and mud-encrusted Wellington boots over bare feet, no socks or ghillies in sight, and was promptly kicked off the team after that competition to his eternal joy. But not before the official photograph was taken, which we now proudly own, showing 7 shining little faces and one scowling face. 7 pairs of ghillie clad feet, toes pointing, and one pair of bare feet hiding in the background in a defiant stance!

As for Miss McKechnie, I still remember that 24 inch wooden ruler she carried around the gym while we were dancing, ostensibly to keep the beat of the music, but really to be used to smack the bare legs of anybody who missed a step, didn't point toes enough or who insulted her personally by not demonstrating proper extension.

I thought about wearing two pairs of denims tonight, on the lovely drive down the coast to Troon...

When I arrived, however, to take part in one of the weekly dance sessions which make up part of the 18 week summer programme organized by Ayr Branch RSCDS, I thought I had died and gone to dance heaven.

The lady in charge, Helen Frame introduced me to individuals and to the 'chairmen' from other areas in the West of Scotland (I got a few sniggers from some of them when I mentioned the word 'chairperson' or 'chairwoman' – they don't go in much for political correctness back home, and the use of that term, plus the apparent loss of my Scottish accent (what???) marked me as one of those Scots they term "the kilt and haggis

brigade” – Scots who leave the auld country, and then try to become more “Scottish” than they ever were at home by promoting ‘the Culture’ in their new country, while losing their Scottish identity in the process).

I met Miss McKechnie and she was not my ex-PE teacher, although she did teach something in some school. The ladies I met there who were in high school with me cleared that up, and even though we didn’t remember each other from schooldays, we had a shared laugh commiserating with each other at our remembered treatment at the hands of THAT Miss McKechnie!

One of the things that surprised me was that the dancers booked each other for specific dances, so that their ‘dance card’ (by memory) is filled almost before the programme starts. Helen and others spent considerable time making sure I was booked with a partner for at least the first half of the program, before we even started!

I couldn’t remember the names or the faces of everyone I was supposed to dance with, so after each dance, I had to make myself stand conspicuously in the middle of the hall, so that the person designated as my next partner could find me. I think I stood one person up because just as I was about to go and stand like a ninny in the middle of the hall again, someone else asked me to dance. Since the ladies had partnered me with other ladies, I knew that this man was not a designated partner but I danced with him grateful at not having to once more make like a scarecrow in the middle of the hall!

The best thing of all was the fact that everyone was so natural and friendly, and they dance with complete joy, and this allowed me to throw caution to the winds and dance all but one of the dances on the programme (and not just the few I knew) with nothing but a briefing beforehand. I have never before had the courage or felt the environment amenable enough to want to do that.

It turned out that two of the dances had a walk-through – not of the whole dance, but of maybe a less familiar element and a transition element – a few times until people were okay with it. Gosh, socials cater to mere mortals after all! The group ranged from complete beginners to very experienced. Everyone just got mucked in and gave it their best shot. It didn’t make the event fall apart, didn’t take away from the enjoyment for the experienced dancers, and it didn’t intimidate beginners -what a wonderful experience to boost them towards their next set of winter classes!

I spoke with a couple of very experienced dancers (turned out they were teachers) who had impressed me by dancing all over the hall, sometimes in sets which fell apart. I wanted to know what they got out of these rather unstructured evenings. First of all they took exception to it being called unstructured, then they told me that there is no ‘bad’ dance experience, and I started to think “oh, towing the party line” – I’ve heard this theory before, but haven’t seen it much in practice, but I took my chastisement well, since I did see them practicing it there, all evening long!!!

The predominant impression I got was that this was intended to be first and foremost truly great FUN, but I was able to see also that there were more than a few teachers there who were absorbing and discussing things; exchanging experiences of the previous dance to both hone their teaching skills and plan strategy because it was obvious that some teachers had student teachers there too, using the social to teach a few things to help those students on their way to certification (which I was told was coming up within the month), while they were all dancing with every conceivable level and type of dancer. But the emphasis was on the fun they were all having. It was a bit like a big happy family reunion.

Even in the ‘we’re all one big happy family’ atmosphere they appeared to create at Thistle School in North Carolina last year, this freshman and her fellow-freshmen did experience the coldness and that special “LOOK” from dancers from upper classes, when one or other of the ‘not so experienced’ or the ‘they don’t GET it’ category screwed up a dance during an evening ‘social’. Gosh, I couldn’t get over just how much we seemed to spoil that dance for them!!

'THE LOOK' had me sit out for much of the rest of the 'social' in disgust – someone needs to redefine the word 'SOCIAL' sometimes, and call it 'fault-observation class' or 'caste system in use here'.

I have to say my radar and defenses were up, ready to encounter 'the look' in Scotland, and it just didn't happen. I have never felt so relaxed and unjudged, but I did get a lot of accurate and no-holds barred comments about my dancing from some of those teachers, so they were watching and had other objectives than just having FUN, but did it in a way that was completely acceptable to my ultra-sensitive nature, or I would have been off that floor like a shot!!

I observed all of the inexperienced dancers get totally beasted in to all the dances whether they knew them or not! Oh, the years I have wasted here not daring to take part in a dance at a social or a ball unless I 'knew it' for fear of drawing 'the look' or instantly feeling I had 'let down the side' or something equally indefinable but clearly present.

It was so very pleasant being able to dance dances unknown to me, knowing for sure and certain that the ambience was such that I couldn't let anybody down. This was a real SOCIAL. Was it just not caring that I was in a bunch of strangers and would likely never see them again? No, I have danced many times with and before strangers, and 'felt' that the ambience was not conducive to sociable dancing. I need a genuinely sociable ambience, and not one that is contrived as such to be able to really enjoy being on the floor – not only to enjoy being on the floor dancing, but to learn to improve.

I danced with 'chairmen' (all women!), teachers, and some experienced and inexperienced dancers. "Do you know this dance?" "No, do you?" "No, but if the briefer is good, we'll be fine" Well some briefing was messed up and some sets fell completely apart and everybody fell about laughing! All these beginners are clearly being taught from day one that the most important key is to listen to the briefing. I panicked! I have for years had to 'see' a dance being done and even tried walking it through at least one time, and I thought I was going to make a complete arse of myself.

That lasted only for the first dance, and I surprised myself by very quickly becoming relaxed, so I managed the rest of the programme on just the briefing, even when starting from first position. I believe my panic disappeared so fast because everyone was genuinely having a good time and not caring about how they looked; letting down the set, or worrying about what others will think if they screw up. The ambience makes a HUGE difference. I can't stress that enough. I am used to dancing in very tense sets, where everyone is TRYING to relax into the dancing, but can't because of the indefinable but clearly present feeling of having your every move judged and found wanting, unless you came into dancing knowing how to visualize from the first day.

I listened to all the chatter at the end of the dances, with some asking an experienced dancer or teacher to show them a certain move again, or many going over a move in twos or fours, you just got an impression that it was all good. Some people just enjoyed reliving their own disaster in words, and had others in stitches at their descriptions. Nobody's enjoyment was dependent on another's skill or lack of it – but the spirit of help, assistance and cooperation was much in evidence. And then all these inexperienced dancers (and there were plenty of them) got in line and geared themselves up to listen to the briefing.

Helen Frame briefed the whole second half of the programme. For a minute I got a horrible feeling of 'déjà vu' when I heard the words "Could we see some straight lines here?" But while she was speaking, and making further light-hearted requests for 'order' like moving the bottom sets around so that she had four lines down the hall of an equal number of sets ( there were about 120 dancers that night) the band started quietly playing a few notes of some military marching music – something a dictator might have around –a tongue-in-cheek bit of fun being poked at her, and when she said, laughing - "If you don't get into straight lines, I will just have to.... politely ask you again!" And then the band played "Isn't she lovely?". Then after her briefing, when she requested the band wait till she got into her own set at the bottom of the hall before starting to play the dance,

they struck up "Mission Impossible" to the beat of her running down the hall, till she got in place. The hall was in an uproar, and I don't think the lines were straight any more!!

I danced Joie de Vivre with her, and enjoyed it very much. She really loves dancing, and dances with complete joy and abandon. I was told she is held in high regard as a teacher too, and she must be passing that joy on to her classes. It couldn't be otherwise. She infected me with the joy of dancing! As she was briefing Joie de Vivre, she shouted my name over the mic and I froze, but she was just telling me to go and get a place for us in a set. I'd forgotten she was my next designated partner! So, I took a place on the women's side. She finished briefing and took her place on the men's side. Joie de Vivre has an allemande; she is a good 10 inches shorted than me – we started the allemande, and just looked at each other and silently and beautifully changed gender positions to get through the rest of the dance. Seamless, it was!

I had a really nice dance experience with the Ayr Branch and there were no navy-blue knickers in sight!

Anne Marshall, May 2006



## THE GREAT STRETCHING DEBATE

Our dance classes typically begin with some warming-up movement followed by gentle stretching of the muscles used in dancing. Inventive teachers warm us up in many ways, exploring all the variations on marching round the room, or practicing dance patterns with a walking or running step. Stretches are done after the warm-up has increased the blood flow to the muscles; they are held for about 30 seconds and avoid any bouncing movements which might damage the muscles.

Two benefits have been thought to result from stretching during warm-up and also during a cool-down period at the end of class: a reduced risk of injury and reduced muscle spasm and soreness after the class. However, the Strathspey internet list has recently carried reports of medical studies questioning whether these benefits actually occur.

These negative findings seem to be strongest in relation to muscle soreness, with a review article in the British Medical Journal citing five studies which show that "stretching before or after exercising has no effect on delayed onset muscle soreness." Two further studies are said to suggest that "muscle stretching before exercising does not produce meaningful reduction in the risk of injury." The evidence does not absolutely disprove the protective effects of stretching on muscles, but neither does it confirm them.

However, it seems that we should not be too hasty in applying these findings to our own practice in dance classes. During the discussion on Strathspey, Keith Eric Grant (an Scottish country dance instructor who is also a massage therapist) pointed out that the studies reviewed in the BMJ were all carried out on healthy young adults, including students and army recruits. This population, as he writes, is "fairly elastic and less likely to show the effects of cumulative minor injuries and posture dysfunctions. Stretching will not be much of a boon to those who are sufficiently flexible for the range of motion they will need to engage in customary activities." For the rest of us, of course, stretching may still improve flexibility.

Grant's comments also include recommendations on the best way to avoid muscle soreness after exercise. This soreness, he claims, occurs when people exceed their level of conditioning. It results "from micro-damage to the muscle fibres and a subsequent inflammatory response. Conditioning and a gradual build-up of exercise helps, but stretching does not. Prior to exercising, warming up of tissues through gentle movement and slow extension

of the movements to full customary range is helpful. This extension of movement could be thought of as gentle stretching."

Aside from the question of how far one can stretch the definition of stretching, we should be clear that stretching and warming up are not the same thing. In fact, one study involving Australian army recruits had all 1,538 subjects do active warm-up exercises, but only half do stretching as well. So the findings are only applicable to the benefits of stretching; the benefits of warming up are not in question. And stretching can still help us by heightening our awareness of our bodies and alerting us to any potential trouble spot if we feel a twinge of discomfort. The RSCDS is apparently working on a warm-up booklet, and we await it with interest.

Rosemary Coupe  
Editor  
*The White Cockade*



## **You Want Me To Do What??**

Have you ever given any serious thought to how you learn? And specifically, how you learned dancing? If not, and you're one of those lucky folks for whom it "just came naturally" that's great, but for many of us it did not. Over the course of the last two and a half years I have given a lot of thought to what works for me and what does not. I really wish when I started dancing that I had kept a journal. Okay, maybe it is a really girly thing to do, but for me, dancing has been every bit as much (if not more) an emotional and intellectual experience as a physical one. I have never been good at sports, I hated gym class (we had truly horrendous white knickers that looked like one of Queen Victoria's bathing costumes), and I never even considered dancing. I'd much rather read a book thank-you-very-much. But you simply cannot sit still around Scottish music and since I seem to devote an enormous amount of time and energy to Scottish organizations and events I was around Scottish music a lot. You simply have to *move* to Scottish music; if you can sit still without even tapping a foot you're a better (wo)man than me (or should that be I?) Gunga Din.

I really wanted to learn SCD. There was only one problem though. I have a primordial fear of looking foolish. Most adults do, and let's face it, no matter the dance-form you're going to look a bit foolish in the beginning. Still, I dove into deep waters, and yes, there were times I thought I might drown. Dancing does not come naturally to me...and it never will, but it has become a huge part of my life. And it has been an interesting journey of self-discovery. I will never be a great dancer. For that matter, I will never be a good dancer, but I cannot imagine not having dancing in my life. The point is not to be a great dancer, but to enjoy the dance. It is a bit like life really; you can spend so much time worrying about "getting it right," having the high-paying job with the corner office, driving the Mercedes and vacationing on the Continent, that you wake up one morning and realize you never really lived at all. But I digress....

I have learned a great deal about how I learn-and a great deal about how I do not. We have all heard the expression "not being able to see the forest for trees" meaning not to get the bigger picture. For me, in the beginning, it was more a matter of not being able to see the trees for the forest. I could not see the components of the dances, much less how it all fit together. It felt like major sensory overload. And I was sure I was the only one who didn't understand. Was that right hands across or rights and lefts? By the time my brain pulled up the reference for "right hands across" I was already several bars behind. Not to mention was that RHA with the twos or the threes?...and who the heck ARE the twos and threes...just a second ago I was a one and now I'm a

three??? And by the way, remember to listen to the music and smile. There is a lot to remember and for some of us it takes a long time before it becomes second nature. For a social experience, dancing was sometimes really rather lonely for me. That was no one's fault but my own. No one can *teach* you how to relax. And for me, being able to relax was the key to learning. Sometimes we are our own worst enemies. So, rule number one in Liz's Pocket Guide is "relax" (it's only a dance...peace in the Middle East does not depend on you being able to execute a flawless three beat pas de bas; it would be nice, but I doubt Kofi Annan will sit up and take notice).

What might seem like a simple dance to someone who has danced for years, or even danced that dance a number of times, can be overwhelming to the beginner (maybe I'm unique in this and just need private therapy sessions but I don't think so, so beginners feel free to pipe in here...). Learning to dance takes time, perseverance, and patience and having done a figure the week before is no guarantee that you will remember it the following week. It takes time to develop muscle memory, learn the vocabulary, and develop the spatial skills to see the patterns in SCD. While you're trying to focus on your dancing don't forget to buy the groceries, clean the house, get that report in on time at work, pick the kids up from ball practice and ....well, you get the idea. As much as we love SCD we have real lives that keep getting in the way. So, rules number two and three are "come to class consistently and be patient with yourself."

I won't bore you all with the details about my particular journey because I really do want to get to the point about learning styles, so suffice it to say that eventually the vocabulary became second nature and I no longer had to consciously "think" about what "rights and lefts" were; eventually I was able to "bunch" figures together and, later still, anticipate what the next figure should logically be. Believe it or not, and I didn't for a very a long time, sometimes the music really *does* tell you what to do (and by the way, when you start looking at rooms and figuring out how many sets they will hold or practicing your pas de bas while waiting in the check out line you'll know you're hooked).

I have learned that I cannot be comfortable with a dance unless I am comfortable with the geography of it first, but that is just me. I admire those people who can hear a briefing of an unfamiliar dance and dance it through flawlessly the first time. I cannot do that and I doubt I ever will. Walking a new dance through at least once reminds my muscles which direction to go. I have also learned that when I listen to a briefing to condense the directions down to a few key words...and frankly, if the brief is anything but brief, I sometimes tune it out altogether and rely on memory, both muscle and mind. It also helps me to read the directions or the brief for a dance and then visualize it in my head (actually, my computer mouse is becoming quite a nice dancer thanks). So, rule number four is "pay attention and learn what works for you and conversely, what does not."

This started out to be an article on different learning styles, but as most writers know, the written word has a tendency to take on a life of its own and go where it will. So, if you'll pardon my digression of the preceding six paragraphs we'll get down to business. We all learn in different ways and at different rates. Everyone is different- and isn't that the beauty of it? Basically, there are three (or more) learning styles, depending on who you listen to: visual, auditory, and tactile/kinesthetic.

Visual learners learn through *seeing*: they need to see the teacher's body language and facial expression to fully understand the content of a lesson. They prefer to learn though using pictures, images and spatial understanding. They may think in pictures and learn best from visual displays including diagrams, illustrated textbooks, videos, flipcharts and handouts. Some people are able to observe a figure or a dance and then "just do it" (frankly, I think Nike stole that slogan from us). Visual learners are able to do this, a simple demonstration of the figure and they're good to go. Visual learners prefer using images, pictures, and maps to organize information and communicate with others. These people use phrases like "in their mind's eye". They have good spatial sense, which gives them a good sense of direction. I made myself little circles and triangles out of colored construction paper to teach myself progression in the dance.

Auditory learners learn through *listening*. They learn best through verbal explanations, discussions, talking things through and listening to what others have to say. Written information may have little meaning for the

auditory learner until it is *heard*. These learners often benefit from reading text aloud. They are often also good with sound and music. They have a good sense of rhythm and have no difficulty discerning the melody from the underlying beat. I can eliminate this one for myself right off the bat. Don't be offended if it takes me six months to learn your name, I'm not ignoring you, I'm just not an auditory learner.

Tactile/kinesthetic learners learn through physically performing a task; these are people like me who need to physically feel the dance. And there the similarity ends. Kinesthetic learners use their body and sense of touch to learn. These are people who often like sports and exercise as well as other physical activities like gardening or woodworking. Tactile learners learn by doing.

Everyone has different learning styles. Some people may find that they have a dominant style of learning, with far less use of the other styles. Some may find that they use different styles in different circumstances. Others use a combination of styles. There is no right mix. Nor are your styles fixed. You can develop ability in less dominant styles, as well as further develop styles that you already use well. Knowing your learning style will help you develop coping strategies to compensate for your areas of weakness and capitalize on your strengths.

As useful as these categories are they are still rather inadequate to explain the complexity of how people learn. Enter Dr. Howard Gardner of Harvard University who introduced the theory of Multiple Intelligences. Dr. Gardner argued that the traditional way of understanding intelligence (the IQ) and consequently the ability to learn, was far too limiting. The good doctor proposed eight different intelligences to account for a broader range of human potential in child and adult learners. These intelligences are:

Linguistic Intelligence: "word smart"

Logical-mathematical Intelligence: "number/reasoning smart"

Spatial Intelligence: "picture smart"

Bodily/Kinesthetic Intelligence: "body smart"

Musical Intelligence: "music smart"

Interpersonal Intelligence: "people smart"

Intrapersonal Intelligence: "self smart"

Naturalist Intelligence: "nature smart"

Dr. Gardner argued that our schools, society, and culture focus most of their attention on linguistic and logical-mathematic intelligence. We esteem the highly articulate or logical people of our culture. The theory of multiple intelligences proposes a major transformation in the way schools are run. It suggests that teachers be trained to present their lessons in a wide variety of ways using music, cooperative learning, art activities, role play, multimedia, field trips, inner reflection, and much more.

I can hear you asking what all that has to do with learning to dance. I'm certainly no expert, but I can tell you this. My learning style did not seem to fit any of the three traditional learning styles. I am basically at heart a linguistic learner. I love the written and spoken word, but you don't dance with your mouth. My initial response was to immediately go to a book. I read everything I could get my hands on about SCD. I looked at every site on the Internet devoted to Scottish country dance. When that well ran dry I looked at dance theory in other dance disciplines. But you don't learn to dance from a book either. By the time I figured this out I had finally acquired enough muscle memory and absorbed enough vocabulary that I could go to the dance briefs and figure them out...finally!...words!...something that made sense to me. But the words only made sense because they were now complemented by muscle memory, vocabulary of the dance, and time/experience on the dance floor. Eventually, I got better at knowing not only what I had done wrong, but how to compensate (recover) and correct it. I can sometimes anticipate what should come next even if I don't know for certain, and reels no longer terrify me.

Eventually what happened for me was that I developed the skills from each of the learning styles that I needed to learn dancing. I took a bit from the visual style by learning to picture the dance in my head (or dance a lovely

strathspey with my mouse who is a very forgiving partner). I listened incessantly to dance music to develop the “ear” I needed to hear the music and the underlying beat that is vital to dancing. Finally, I learned that muscle memory is essential to my learning. If a dance is new or unfamiliar, sometimes just a quick walk-through will be enough to avert potential disaster (and learning to be assertive and ask for the walk through...remember it is *class* and you are there to learn and if that is what you need to learn take advantage of it...chances are someone else was hoping you would ask).

So, the bottom line is this. Ultimately, no one can tell you how you learn best but you. The trick is being aware of what makes you feel safe and comfortable and what does not, of trying different methods of acquiring knowledge and experience through different media, of developing a support network to get you over the rough patches, and finally, being kind to yourself and giving yourself permission not to be perfect.

I look back over the last two and half years and I am amazed. Not because I have become a wonderful dancer-I have not. I am amazed because I was able to pursue something I really wanted to do, and stick with it: even when I felt foolish, even when I felt like leaving in tears, even when I felt like I held everyone else back, even when I was discouraged and felt sure I’d never “get it.” And every now and again, when the music is good,

when the cosmos is aligned just right and I remember to cut myself some slack, there really is joy in the dance.

Elizabeth Chennault



## The McLeans Dance in England

During our trip to England in April, we had the pleasure of Scottish dancing several times with groups in East Anglia. Gill’s sister, Pam, had sent us programs for two socials being run by separate SCD groups. Many of the dances looked complicated, and were unknown to us. We went with her to two classes beforehand where, we hoped, they would teach us some of the dances. Mostly, they did not. However, they were warm, welcoming and very friendly.

The classes were RSCDA affiliates, but they seemed to concentrate on the geography of the dances, rather than technique. There were several little old ladies present, who knew the geography really well, but had no idea of phrasing. Consequently, they finished their part two bars early, and then gave you a mighty shove (assuming you didn’t know what to do) if you dared to wait until the right bar of music! Generally, the class loved to have a good time, and particularly enjoyed birling whenever they got half a chance.

With some trepidation, we went to the first social, but need not have worried. They kindly walked through every dance, and were very tolerant of us, and helped us through all the dances. Scottish dancing is very popular in the UK, and there are several small groups within a fifty-mile radius. When one group holds a dance, it is well supported by all the surrounding groups. About 50 or 60 people, including about 8 teachers, attended each social. Whenever we didn’t know a complicated dance, Pam suggested we ask one of the teachers to dance. It really helps when your partner can guide you through an unfamiliar dance. They are also very lucky in England that each village has a village hall, which is available for rent at a very reasonable price by any local group; many of these halls were built a long time ago, with very nice sprung wooden floors. Oh that we should be so fortunate here.

For the second social, we were horrified to learn that the MC did not even plan to brief the dances. However, when he found out we didn’t know many dances, he briefed every one, and walked us through the more difficult

ones. I think most of the other people were relieved “the Americans” were there. The floor that night was so well sprung that even when standing still, you were actually being bounced up and down!

We found they took their dancing lightly, but their eating seriously. On both nights, during the intermission, tables and chairs were brought out, and a feast of substantial hors d’oeuvres and goodies was served. Hot tea, coffee and cold drinks were provided, but some of the dancers had brought their own bottles of wine, and everyone tucked in heartily.

We thoroughly enjoyed our experience, and learned some interesting new dances.

Gill & Arthur McLean



### *On Equal Footing: Scottish Country Dancing ...and Football?*

In Lisbon, they know a good sport when they see one. During their **annual Fun and Games Day**, people can compete in many sports including Football, Touch rugby and Scottish Dancing.

While the rules for normal sports are easy to find, the ones used for two team competitive Scottish Country Dancing are somewhat harder to come by. Fortunately, I have the description here, courtesy of Roger Picken:

Two teams at a time are taught a simple dance (like **Dunnet Head**) during each “match” and the winner is the team which performs it best.

Apparently, this is a very popular activity. And, as described, capable of demonstrating that even a simple dance can present challenges by drawing upon one’s pattern memory, one’s sense of timing and distance and *above all* one’s ability to apologize after stomping on the partner’s foot during one of those advance and retire figures.

From the *Strathspey Server*



### **An Ode to Men in Kilts**

As a lass,  
I speak for all,  
There’s nae a man  
too wee nor tall,  
Nor stout, nor lean,  
Nor slightly built,  
Who does nae look fine,  
When he’s wearin’ a kilt.  
And if ye should opt  
To go “without”,  
Be prepared lad  
For a lassie’s shout,  
O’ delight and joy



At what she sees-  
A dandy pair  
O’ knobbly knees!  
So, wear it men,  
With passion and zest,  
Knowin’ full well that  
You’re lookin’ your best!  
And surely some lassie  
Will loudly proclaim,  
“Hands off, girls!  
I’m takin’ ‘im hame!”

Lynne McDole

**YOU'RE LUCKY — YOU'VE THE  
KNEES FOR IT!**

# MARK YOUR CALENDARS!!!

## **Thursday Class Party**

August 3, 7:30pm  
Quicksilver Dance Studio  
Bring snacks!

## **TAC Summer School**

August 6-Aug 13  
Waterloo, Ontario

## **August Class Social**

Tuesday, August 29, 7:30pm  
Quicksilver Dance Studio  
MC Needed

## **Ellie Hayes' Birthday Dance**

Saturday, August 5<sup>th</sup>, Potluck at 5:30 dancing to follow; music by Hugh Morrison  
Ridgelea Presbyterian Church  
6201 Camp Bowie Blvd  
(SW corner of Camp Bowie and Westridge)  
Ft Worth Tx, 76116  
For more information call Ellie at 817-807-3677 or email heart [weecabin17@yahoo.com](mailto:weecabin17@yahoo.com)

## **Fall/Winter Class Session Begins**

Sept 5  
Quicksilver Dance Center

## **Class Social**

Tuesday, Sept 26 7:30  
Quicksilver Dance Studio  
MC Needed

## **ASCDS Fundraiser**

Saturday, October 14, Time TBA  
An Evening of Scottish Featuring Ed Miller  
Musical Entertainment, Food, Vendors, Dancing  
McBeth Recreation Center, Zilker Park

## **Class Social**

Tuesday, October 31 7:30  
Quicksilver Dance Studio  
MC Needed

## **Austin Celtic Association Festival**

November 4-5  
Fiesta Gardens  
<http://www.austincelts.org/festival/>

## **Houston Branch Workshop and Ball Weekend**

October 21-22  
Rice University Ballroom  
Instructor Irene Paterson  
Music by the Music Makars

## **45th Annual Salado Gathering of the Clans and Highland Games**

Robertson Ranch  
Salado, Texas  
November 10-12  
<http://www.ctam-salado.org/Gathering/Gathering.htm>

## **Ball Walk-Through**

November 28 (in lieu of November Social)

## **30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary St. Andrew's Ball Weekend December 2-3**

Ben Hur Ballroom  
7811 Rockwood Lane  
Austin, Texas

