



## CHIEF OF CHATTER Claudia Littlefair

This issue takes an inside look at today's caller. How does a dancer end up calling? What kind of education is out there? What is

CALLERLAB, and why would this organization be of interest to a dancer?

An excerpt from 'Square Dancing Magazine, March, 1982' describes the Traditional Square Dance Caller:

"Frequently the caller was a musician in the band, often as not the fiddler. He'd announce what the dance was to be, then prompt/call it as he fiddled. Calls were simpler then and "cage the bird" might activate the dancers for two minutes or so. In the Chicago area even through the 1930's you could attend dances where each square had its own caller. The caller's spot was the #3 position which, for logical reasons was considered the #1 position. This was because, as the orchestra started, a nod from the leader would tell each caller to start his call. The trick for each caller was to be heard by the other seven in the square. Because each caller would likely be calling a different dance, if there were seven squares of dancers there could be seven different sets of calls going on at the same time."

Times have changed! In an excerpt from 'The Caller Text – The Art and Science of Calling Square Dances, 1985', Bill Peters describes today's caller:

"A square dance caller these days needs to be master of an extraordinarily wide range of specialized skills and techniques.

- While he no longer needs to be a fiddler or a musician, he does need to understand music thoroughly and he needs to be able to use it effectively.
- While he is not an actor, he displays a considerable degree of stage presence;
- While he is not a public speaker, he is proficient in diction, enunciation and vocal clarity;
- While he is not the kind of singer who performs before a spectator audience, he is concerned with such things as pitch, rhythm, breath control, and musical phrasing;
- While he is not an acoustical engineer, he has the know-how to provide clear and audible amplification for all kinds of square dance events;
- And while he is not an entertainer per se, he pursues at all times the theatrical flair of a professional showman."

It's been interesting watching my husband, Dave, transition from dancer to caller over the past eight years. It seems there's no

end to the time spent on this "hobby" or the music one must acquire, or the various pieces of equipment. And never mind the time and effort expended to transfer from records to computer! But we wouldn't wish it to be any other way – the experiences and friendships far outweigh the time, effort and money spent!

**Q: HOW MANY DOGS DOES IT TAKE TO CHANGE A LIGHT BULB?**

**A#1: ROTTWEILER: Make me!**

## WELCOME TO CALLER SCHOOL!

- Submitted by Gary & Eileen Smith



It has taken a whole village of callers to teach some of us to call. We, the newer callers, are a work in progress. I am thankful to experienced callers such as Wayne Russell, Murray Few, Lorne Smith, Tony Oxendine, Jerry

Justin, Daryl Clendenin, Doug Davis, Bob Weller, Emil Paquette, Gary Winter, and Phil Hansen for freely sharing their knowledge. Whether in formal 'caller college' or more informal settings, each of these individuals has helped me to grow and develop as a caller.

**Are we short of callers, or are we short of dancers?** Sounds like a chicken and egg question. According to the statistics, there is a shortage of callers in ratio to dancers compared to historical measures. This, in turn, contributes to the shortage of dancers. It's obvious we do need one another.

For me, becoming a caller was initially to keep square dancing alive and well for own club in Whitecourt. As I began to learn more about calling, it became a passion and a hobby which has happily filled MANY hours of leisure time. Calling requires an investment of time spent practicing, preparing for a dance, and travelling; and money in the purchase of supplies and equipment. It is the passion and the pleasure shared with others which keep me going.

**Why attend caller school?** There are so many skills required to become a successful caller: the understanding of the moves, choreography, timing, how to use the equipment, computer software, the voice and delivery of the song or patter, how to teach, and even showmanship. The easiest way (if there is an easy way) is to learn from experienced callers.

**The classes are great fun.** We learn about systems of calling through memory, mental images, modules, and eventually sight calling. We learn about the number of beats required for each of the calls and how to teach each of the moves. Many calls can be issued from multiple positions. Smooth flow is something we all strive for.

Getting up in front of a live audience for the first time is quite a challenge. Things that can easily be seen from the dance floor by an experienced dancer are sometimes missed by new callers on stage. I received an explanation of this concept in one class: the microphone acts as a vacuum cleaner and sucks the thoughts from the brain. It seemed plausible to me at the time.



Multiple classes or 'caller college' sessions have been required for me to have the light

bulb of understanding eventually come on for different aspects of the craft. Having different instructors helped me to appreciate varied teaching methods.

**Caller language discusses FASR** – Formation (eg. waves, lines), Arrangement (eg. boy-boy, girl-girl), Sequence (in and out), and Relationship (eg. head boy with corner). We also learn a concept called symmetry – what is going on in the opposite side of the square is equivalent to the side you are focusing on. We learn to try catering to the needs of the dancers and attempt to make their evenings fun. We are taught how people prefer learning different ways, eg. verbal, written, doing, etc. And I have learned an alternative F-word when the dancers are in error – FREEZE!

**It is truly quite amazing all the facets callers need to gain mastery of to become competent.** We also learn to care for our voices. Programming a dance is an interesting topic – adjusting to the capabilities of an audience and ensuring success. We adjust the dance through the evening in terms of level of difficulty. We learned about quick 'get outs' or how to get your dancers back to their home position in very few moves. Caller ethics is an interesting topic – meeting our obligations to dancers and clubs is important. We must care for one another as family.

**I would like to see future caller schools incorporate associated learning for club leaders.** At CALLERLAB many of the sessions benefit club dancer leaders – topics such as building a club (recruiting), how to hold parties, welcoming new dancers, marketing, visitations, solving communication problems, etc. These topics, if presented to local club leaders, could be of significant help to build and strengthen dance clubs. Sessions could occur when the dancers weren't needed on the dance floor at caller school.

**We need both callers and dancers.** The better each is educated – the stronger our activity will become. We owe it to future generations to keep the activity strong.

*Thanks for reading about Caller School. (I did graduate!)*

**A#2 BORDER COLLIE: Just one. And then I'll replace any wiring that's not up to code.**

**A#3: BOXER: Who cares? I can still play with my squeaky toys in the dark.**

## WHAT IS CALLERLAB?

- by Claudia Littlefair

CALLERLAB is an international organization of callers, established in 1974, with its roots going back to the mid-1960's. Its mission statement is: "To foster the art of square dance calling, and improve caller skills." Some of CALLERLAB's accomplishments are:

- **Universal Dance Programs.** More than 20 years ago, CALLERLAB members developed dance programs (mainstream, plus, etc.) that have been accepted world-wide. These dance programs let you go anywhere in the world and dance.
- **Universal Call Definitions.** CALLERLAB members documented and negotiated an international agreement on the definition of all the calls we use. For the first time ever, calls were taught the same way in California as they were in New England—or "old" England, Germany, and everywhere else.
- **Publications and Caller Training Program.** CALLERLAB has printed and published thousands of pages of documents and other materials to assist callers AND dancers, and developed a Caller-Coach program to improve caller skills.

### Why Attend CALLERLAB Conventions?

Last year I attended the annual CALLERLAB Convention for the first time. It was held in Reno, Nevada. I was amazed at the number of sessions available for dancers! In fact, over the 3-day convention which offered 40 sessions, there was only one session that both Dave & I attended together.

Meeting, conversing with, and dancing to professional callers was amazing, too. Evenings were busy with dances, talent and skit nights. In addition to receiving practical marketing ideas and for Dave, calling skills, the Convention renewed our enthusiasm for promoting this great activity!

This year's convention is being held at Springfield, Missouri, March 29 to April 1. The theme is '**Talk It Up #squaredancing**', and one of the many sessions offered is '**Step by Step How to Use Social Media**'. Check CALLERLAB's website for convention details: <<http://www.callerlab.org/>>.

*PS: Following the Convention, we plan to spend a few days in Branson, and if you're at Convention, come join us, too!*

**A#4: LAB: Oh, me, me!!! Pleeeeeeeze let me change the light bulb! Can I? Can I? Huh? Huh? Huh? Can I? Pleeeeeeeze, please, please, please!**

## CHATTER CLOSE-UPS

*Editor's Note: Our Dance Community is an interesting mix of people, each with a story to tell. If you have someone you'd like to see featured in this section, email me and I will be happy to contact them.*

*Below is the story of how David & Marlene Symington's lives were shaped by square dancing, and the route that Dave took to calling.*

### DAVID SYMINGTON, Calgary Caller

It was 1972, and after watching my brother and parents square dance for two years, the caller asked my parents how old I was –

I was 7 with my birthday in a couple of months. So instead of me watching another year, they let me try it and as they say, "the rest is history".

"Heel & Toe" in Edmonton was a kid's club for ages 8 to 12. Later, when Edmonton no longer had a Teen Club, the age was extended to 16 or 17. Our club was run by the kids with the assistance of the



David's 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday Dance  
November, 2014, Airdrie

caller, Al Deby. We had a full slate of officers and averaged 6 to 8 squares. It was a fun club with campouts, bowling, ice skating parties, sleigh rides, BBQ on Mother's Day, and Valentine Day parties. During EDSA dances, which averaged 15 squares, our club sold pop and did the coat check. During our breaks a few of us would go to the upper level and watch the adults dance and saw how pretty it looked.

When I was 13 I broke my arm and couldn't dance. While at a special dance for Camp HeHoHa, the caller, Morris Trach, felt sorry for me and asked me to do background vocals on a song I knew. This was the start of my future calling career. For the next two years I did singing calls off and on under the tutelage of Morris Trach, but couldn't grasp the patter so I gave up calling and continued dancing. At the same time another caller who was starting up was Tommy Dakers, who currently calls in Calgary.

In 1980 my parents took me to my first convention, in Calgary, where I met other teen dancers from Twirling Stars, Calgary and the Bandalaros from Red Deer. The next four years I danced with the Bandalaros, and to this day remain in contact with a lot of them, including Ida Murray and Lorne Smith.

In 1984 I joined the Dance-A-Lots Round Dance club with Clem & Doris Nadon. Back then we didn't have all these different phases, and danced only waltzes and two-steps. I joined the Country Kissin' Kickers in my early 20's with Jerry Pierce, where I did some singing calls. Two up and coming callers from our club were Danny Lemoine and Barry Sjolín. Unfortunately the two clubs I was dancing with folded, and so I, too, quit dancing.

I moved to Calgary and worked for a DJ company owned by Al Moody. He directed me to the Swinging Singles club, which is where I met my future wife, Marlene. We married in 2000. That year we went to Penticton, and caller Dave Patterson remembered me from Edmonton and asked me to call a tip. After doing that tip I knew I wanted to get back into calling. Back in Calgary I started again under the tutelage of Sam Stead. I attended Caller School with instructors Bob McMillan and Bob Fyfe. This was followed by some guest calling, with round dance cueing by Marlene - but no regular club.

I got my first club caller experience in 2003 when Bill Cook started a 10-week intro to square dancing in High River. After a few weeks he became ill and asked me to take over. After the 10 weeks we decided to keep going with the rest of the dance program. The club was named Wildrose Ramblers and it continued for three years. I also started guest calling for the Olds club.

Our son, Travis Ross, was born in 2004 – the week before Calgary's National Convention, which I had originally planned to participate in. I was hired by the Airdrie club when caller couple, Roger & Paulette Vipond retired in 2008. Marlene tried to keep up with the cueing, but it was too hard to practice with our son on her shoulders, so I took over the round dance portion, too.

We have been members of the Calgary Callers Association for 14 years, and are members of Central Callers and the Square & Round Dance Instructors of Alberta Association. We have served in various executive positions and have also served on the programming committee for two Alberta conventions. Currently, I call mainstream for Airdrie, Olds, and guest call for Calgary, Red Deer and Rocky Mountain House, and I love teaching New Dancers.

It's been over 40 years and I still love dancing and calling. I extend a big thank you to all the dancers and callers I've met through the years who have supported me and given me great advice. Keep on dancing and having fun!

**A#5: GERMAN SHEPHERD: I'll change it as soon as I lead these people from the dark, check to make sure I haven't missed any, and make just one more perimeter patrol to see that no one has tried to take advantage of the situation.**

### MARLENE SYMINGTON

I started square dancing in my early teens with a group of ranchers southwest of High River. I don't recall if we followed the Callerlab program, and I think we only danced for a few months. What attracted me to square dancing at the time were the pretty dresses that the ladies wore. Throughout my teens I wanted to continue but every time it was offered in High River you had to have a partner to join.

I moved to Calgary when I was 27. I was never a fan of going to the bars, so to meet people with similar interests I took one year of ballroom dancing. Then I decided to see if there were any square dance clubs that didn't require a partner and that is how I met Shirley Major and the Swinging Singles in September, 1998. Even though I was learning to square dance with caller Sam Stead at the Swinging Singles; one of the square angels invited me to join the Twirling Stars with callers Art and Tim Moehler, for extra practice time. They also invited me to participate in their club visitations, which allowed me to dance to other mainstream callers in the area while I was a new dancer. I graduated in April, 1999 from both clubs.

I started to take round dance lessons with caller/cuer Joe Griffith in September, 1999 but then Joe decided to move the club to Strathmore where he lived. It wasn't convenient for me to commute so I never completed the lessons. Through the years I learned to round dance by watching the other dancer's footwork and also having that one year of ballroom dancing helped me.

Dave joined the Swinging Singles in September, 1999, we started dating in November, engaged in December and married July 1, 2000 at the Western Heritage Centre in Cochrane. And yes, we did have square dancing at the dance with callers Bill Cook, Judy Obee, Sam Stead and Dave, and Al Moody was our DJ.



With the assistance of cuers Judy Obee, Frances Levitt and Paulette Vipond, I learned to cue rounds, and did so until our son, Travis, was born on July 23, 2004. I didn't think I would miss cueing rounds but when I hear Dave practicing his rounds then I wish I was still cueing.

At a square dance in 2005, I recognized a couple from when I first started square dancing in my early teens. It was so nice to see someone from my past and reminisce old times. I thoroughly enjoy my years as a square dancer because I enjoy the fellowship and being able to forget the outside world for a few hours. Square dancing to me is about good times and everlasting friendships.

**A#6: DACHSHUND:** You know I can't reach that stupid lamp.

**A#7: JACK RUSSELL TERRIER:** I'll just pop it in while I'm bouncing off the walls and furniture.

**A#8: OLD ENGLISH SHEEP DOG:** Light bulb? I'm sorry, but I don't see a light bulb?

**A#9: POINTER:** I see it, there it is, there it is, right there ...

## CHATTER CHATS with CALGARIANS Daryl Caswell & Barbara Schneider



### **When did you join square dancing?**

Five or 6 years ago. The timing was perfect. Our work situation had changed, and we were looking for a "couples" activity. We both enjoy dancing and a work colleague, who was learning to square dance, told us how much fun it was. In our second year, we took plus

lessons and started round dancing.

### **Daryl, describe your musical and professional careers.**

I'm a professional engineer and a professional horn player (part-time), and also play the Swiss alp horn. My first job was as principal horn with the Canadian Opera Company. Then I played in the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra (CPO) until 1983. I have been principal horn player with Red Deer Symphony Orchestra since its beginning in 1986.

In 1982 I began to train as an engineer and finally got a PhD in 1996. Up until 2011 I was a Senior Instructor in the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Calgary, with graduate degrees in both engineering and music.

### **How were you able to combine your two passions – engineering and music?**

Since 1986, I have founded and run a home business – a manufacturing and design company that specializes in tools for the music industry, such as reed knives, bell plates, mutes, and sound reflectors.

Because of my music background, I was aware of the problem that oboe players had in sharpening the knives they use to make their reeds. I used my engineering knowledge in metallurgy to develop a high carbon steel blade with a comfortable wooden handle. We make about 1500 knives a year. I also authored a book, with Barbara as editor, titled "Reed Knife Sharpening".



My experience as a horn player helped me to develop a mute that is known for its significantly improved tone. The manufacturing process is labor intensive, and this is reflected in its price (\$300). I am one of 3 people in Calgary who repair musical instruments, which again allows me

to use my experience in engineering design and metallurgy.

### **Barbara, describe your musical and professional careers.**

I had a long career as violinist in the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra – from 1974 to 1989. I have since stopped playing the violin because of the physical problems that many musicians experience and the endless practicing. I was ready for a change.

I have an M.A. in Communications Studies and a PhD in Education. I became a professor at the University of Calgary in 1998 and recently started a new position as Head of the Communication, Media & Film Department. Prior to that, over the past ten years, I conducted research and published, with a particular focus on schizophrenia and homelessness.

**How were you able to combine your research work and square dancing?**

Since 2011, a colleague, Liza McCoy, and I have been researching and studying different aspects of square dancing. Our research has involved becoming active club members, doing interviews and focus groups, taking photographs and conducting a survey.

In the fall of 2012, Calgary & District Square Dancers Association (C&D) approved a survey that was sent out to the C&D square dance members. The survey looked at issues like our image, clothing preference, single dancers, recruiting, integrating and retaining new dancers.

**Note to Readers: The survey results (19 pages) are a separate attachment to this email.**

In addition to researching dancers, we also wanted to research callers. To get a better understanding of the calling process, we decided to attend a caller school. The only one available at a time when we, too, were available was in Vancouver and was hosted by the Gay Callers Association. It was a rewarding experience but I could never be a caller because I just don't have the visual spatial ability needed to see how the calls fit together.

**Daryl, you retired earlier than anticipated from University - how did that come about?**

Just prior to joining square dancing, I contracted Bell's Palsy. It caused permanent eye damage, which severely reduced my ability to read. For example, ten minutes of reading for me would be equivalent to eight hours of focused reading for you. It meant that I had to quit teaching.

**Recently you purchased the custom engraving business, Peony Enterprises, from round dance cuers Ron & Donna Baba. What are your future plans for this business?**

Yes, we added this new home business. We do custom engraving for club badges, specialty badges and engraved graphics.

We have two adult children with special needs, and felt that this might be a business that they could both be employed in.

**A#10: NEW ZEALAND SHEEP DOG: First, I'll put all the light bulbs in a little cluster ...**

**A#11: COCKER SPANIEL: Why change it? I can still pee on the carpet in the dark.**

**A#12: GREYHOUND: It isn't moving. Who cares?**

**A#13: CHIHUAHUA: Yo quiero Taco Bulb.**

**THE CAT'S ANSWER: "Dogs do not change light bulbs. People change light bulbs. So, the real question is: How long will it be before I can expect some light, some dinner, and a massage?"**

**TWO G-R-R-REAT ALBERTA EVENTS!!**

Mark your calendars for TWO extraordinary dance weekends, each attracting 250+ dancers from all over Alberta and beyond! **Alberta Jamboree**, August 21 to 24, in Fort Saskatchewan, and the 47<sup>th</sup> annual **Alberta Dance Convention** on September 5-7 in Lacombe! How do these events differ? The following article was written by the Convention 2013 Chair, Norman Demeule, and appeared in the *Convention Chatter #2013-TWO*.

**ARE THEY DIFFERENT?**

**Jamborees and Conventions**

There is a great deal of difference between Jamborees and Conventions. Jamborees can be sponsored by a Club or group. Participating instructors (Callers/Cuers) are selected and paid, much the same as a regular Square Dance. A good example would be a weekend Jamboree featuring one or more instructors. Jamboree dance levels and scheduling are determined by the sponsor Club or group with the cooperation of the hired instructors.

Conventions are sponsored at the highest level of the region with the support of its members. For example: Alberta Conventions are supported by Alberta Federation, the Zone Association, as well as an appointed Convention Committee, and sometimes a host Club. Some exceptions to this rule have occurred, but only because of extreme circumstances. To finalize the acceptance process a Convention Letter of Agreement is then drafted and signed by all participants. The Convention Committee has the responsibility of setting fees, setting up the program and scheduling the event. Instructors indicate their willingness to participate, and are placed on the program under direction of the Convention Program Chair. Instructors pay the same registration fee as everyone else, and receive no remuneration for their services.

Alberta Conventions have been held annually for 45 years during the Labour Day Weekend in September. The Alberta Federation AGM must be held during the Convention weekend in order to maintain Alberta Federation bylaws.

Both events are great events, and should not compete against each other.

## THE CONVENTION EXPERIENCE

### *Letter Received by Alberta Square & Round Dance Federation*

"As we drive towards Alberta, we remember the past experience of the Square and Round dance convention, always looking forward to the accommodating dancers of Alberta, along with the directions of their callers and cuers. This is the reason of our priorities attending this event.

Upon our arrival at the registration desk, the attendees almost know about our late arrival and with no pre-registration, they have no problem allowing us to attend this great event. The Alberta dancers sure uphold the traditional friendliness and forgiveness on the dance floor, with all the errors during the dance, there seems to be a way to recover and continue. Being a minority from Manitoba, we are accepted with open arms on and off the dance floor. With each passing year, the friends grow into a proportion that we feel that we are part of this great event.

We hope the Alberta Federation continues the tradition of multi-calling and change of venue, which makes this event so unique. The program the Federation uses, exposes not only the callers, but the dance locations. This brings all the dancers, far and near, to all areas of your great province.

In closing, we appreciate the yearly invite, and cherish the moments with dancers, callers, cuers and the committee, who organize this event.

Sincerely,  
Alex & Marney Hrycewich, Manitoba"



2012 Alberta Dance Convention, High River – 29 Callers & Cuers

## THE JAMBOREE EXPERIENCE

### *Submitted by Rudy Neufeld*

Alberta Jamboree Dance Society was formed in 2011 with the mission to provide dancers with positive and pleasurable opportunities to enhance their dancing skills.

The organizing committee presently consists of twenty-eight people from around the Province, with the current president being myself, Rudy Neufeld of Red Deer. Caller Gary Winter has been instrumental in the organization and continues to be a driving force.

Jamborees have been held every other year since 2009, and that brings us to our upcoming event, Jamboree 2015 to be held

August 21<sup>st</sup> to the 24<sup>th</sup>, in Fort Saskatchewan at the Dow Centennial Centre. This is a state-of-the-art complex designed to host a variety of recreational and cultural events and we are excited to host our event here. The large gymnasium was the location of a jamboree-sponsored dance in 2013 and the dancers and the caller, Gary Winter, were pleased with both the floor and the quality of sound. Banquet rooms with hardwood dance floors will also be utilized. There is free RV parking on site and two hotels (Comfort Inn & Suites and Super 8) are within easy walking distance.

For our dancing pleasure, our callers are Gary Winter, of Edmonton; Steve Edlund of Surrey, B.C.; and Jerry Jestin of both Yuma, Arizona and Delburne, Alberta. All three began their square dance history as youngsters and by the time they reached their teens all had begun their calling careers and can all claim to be international callers. For the enjoyment of round dancers, Ron and Donna Baba of Medicine Hat will present the round dance program. They bring nearly 50 years of teaching and cuing experience to the dance floor! Highlights of previous Jamborees include:

- The atmosphere and high level of energy in the dance hall, with many dancers never leaving the floor, just forming new squares in anticipation of the next tip.
- The enjoyment of dancing to callers performing together; even sitting and listening was pure pleasure.
- The impromptu street dancing with tail-gate calling by Gary Winter, prior to the trail-out dance at the last Jamboree.



2013 Alberta Jamboree Callers  
(missing: Cuers Ron & Donna Baba)

Registration forms are on the website (see address below). So, set aside this weekend in August to partake in this memorable event!

## DANCE & RELATED WEBSITES

Edmonton & Area: [www.edsda.org/promenader](http://www.edsda.org/promenader)

Red Deer & Area: [www.centralalbertadancing.com](http://www.centralalbertadancing.com)

Calgary & Area: [www.squaredancecalgary.com](http://www.squaredancecalgary.com)

Alberta Convention: [www.squaredance.ab.ca](http://www.squaredance.ab.ca)

Alberta Jamboree Dance Society: [www.albertajamboree.com](http://www.albertajamboree.com)

Past Issues of Convention Chatter & Alberta Chatter:

[www.squaredancecalgary.com/conferencenews.html](http://www.squaredancecalgary.com/conferencenews.html)

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