



# American Callers Association

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Newsletter

## **MORE FIFTY YEAR CALLERS**

In the April newsletter we reported on the callers that we knew had been calling for fifty years or more. We asked that if you knew of a caller that has been calling fifty years or more to let the office know and we would send them a Certificate of Thanks and Appreciation suitable for framing and a 50- year lapel pin recognizing their years of calling .We have two more callers to add to the list: Don Carlton of Utah and Wayne Nicholson of Alabama.

On behalf of the board of directors and the membership of American Callers we would like to recognize and thank all callers, no matter which organization or program they support, for their dedication and service to the square dance activity and extend to those callers that have been calling for fifty years or more a special Thank You for what you have done for the activity. It would not be here if it were not for callers like you.

We received a letter from Mitchell Cari a dancer who is the President of Associated Square Dances of Superior California. Mitchell did a great job of saying what so many dancers and callers have been saying for years.

This letter is included in our newsletter. American Callers does not agree with the numbers of calls to be taught or the number of weeks to keep people in classes. If we had 65 calls and taught 15 to 18 weeks, we could have 3 classes a year and revive square dancing much faster. His statement about the music ACA does not agree with. We don't have to get rid of "Turkey in the Straw" because we don't use it any more. We have some very good record producers that spend lots of money to bring good music to the callers and dancers and we should support them so they keep bringing the good music that you can dance to.

Mitchell is saying almost the same thing that American Callers has been saying for over 10 years. Mitchell hit the nail on the head. This can only be done with dancers and callers working together. It's time to put your best foot forward, put your ego in your pocket and stop saying we are right and they are wrong because if you were right, we would have so many people we could not find halls big enough to handle them. A good test of right or wrong is if you don't have the people, then you are wrong. They are just not buying what you are selling.

## ARE WE SAMEING OURSELVES TO DEATH?

My name is Mitchell Cari and I have been square dancing since 1989. I have been in local, regional and statewide leadership positions since 1990, serving and promoting an activity I love. In my almost 20 years of dancing I have seen a steady decline in the number of square dancers. In my almost 20 years of dancing I have also seen several marketing studies trying to explain why our numbers are falling. What **I HAVE NOT SEEN** is a strong effort to fix what is broken.

The marketing studies have repeatedly pointed out three major negative points about square dancing that inhibit our ability to recruit and retain new dancers:

- 1) Negative memories of square dancing in grade school years.
- 2) Women don't want to wear the frilly skirts and petticoats.
- 3) It takes too long to teach a dancer to dance at floor level.

I believe we need to develop a plan NOW to change some of these things or we are going to see square dancing as a fun, healthy, social activity die a painful death in the very near future. Our current dancers are not getting any younger and we are not bringing in new younger dancers to replace and supplement us.

### The Plan:

- 1) Develop a program for teachers using modern music and energetic calling.
- 2) Emphasize dancing in more casual attire is acceptable. Prairie skirts, pants, even shorts in the summer time. *(ACA does not agree with shorts anytime. Prairie skirts yes)*
- 3) Develop a call list that can be taught in 25 or less weeks. Start a program to begin new classes twice a year.

This is going to have to be a concerted effort by the dancers and callers to change our activity to bring it back to life. I have tried advanced dancing and I have danced with new dancers. I can appreciate why some dancers go on to the advanced and challenge levels of dancing. It helps to maintain their enthusiasm and interest in dancing. But the fact is, that advanced dancing does not bring in new dancers. **YOU DO NOT START AT ADVANCED LEVEL!** And our advanced dancers are getting older too.

## IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

- 1) Provide music and dance instructions to teachers at little or no cost. (This is an investment in our future). **GET RID OF THE 'TURKEY IN THE STRAW' MUSIC AND DANCING.** The music should be changed about every 5-10 years to keep it current with the new generation.
- 2) Include the change in attire requirements in our advertising.
- 3) Teach 85 calls to dance at floor level. In the classes that I have participated, it seems most people can learn about 3-5 calls per night. After that they go 'doe eyed' and stop learning. So a 25 week program should be able to teach a dancer about 85 calls.
- 4) Callers are going to have to work harder at making dancing fun with 85 calls. I have been to mainstream dances and had a wonderful time because the caller worked hard at making the choreography interesting and the music was lively. Keeping interest and enthusiasm high is possible but being a lazy from the stage will not get it done.
- 5) The resurrection of quarterly calls will also add to the fun and interest but not deter from the 25 week teach program.

Square dancing is a fun, healthy, social activity. Those of who dance know that. But the general public does not.

Now is the time to change square dancing to make it more appealing to our society. Our society has changed. Computers, home electronics and loss of social interaction are all symptoms of the changes in our society.

Square dancing is changing too. It can be a negative change, as in **an ever quickening death**. Or it can be positive, **a program to bring in more, younger dancers**. The choice is ours. **NO action is a choice**. But changing is also a choice. Let us change to see our activity revived.

I cannot do this by myself. And my club cannot do this alone. This has to be a national/international effort. I am writing to you because you are leaders in the national and international scene. I am just a dancer who does not want to see our activity die and be buried wearing frilly skirts, petticoats and knowing 200 calls. You can dance 200 calls ALONE, ALL BY YOURSELF. Or you can dance 85 calls in a room shared and enjoyed by younger enthusiastic dancers intermingled by older and more experienced dancers.

For me, I would rather dance 85.

### **DANCE 85 TO REVIVE!**

Mitchell Cari,  
Square dancer,  
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We wish Mitchell and everyone in square dancing that wants to see this activity revived the best of everything and we will do anything we can to help. ACA has a large membership of caller and most of them feel that we need to change the amount of calls that a new dancer must learn to dance at floor level. Now I know that some of you are so level conscious, you don't believe that there is such a thing. Well I don't know how you can call above the composite capability of any floor that you are calling for- "that's Floor Level."

As I see it, the first thing we have to do to bring about this change is to agree on a program that will appeal to those younger people we are trying to attract to square dancing. The American Callers "One Floor Program" has less than 85 calls. Now if we could bring that number down some more, we would have a program that could be taught in 15 to 18 weeks. That could allow us to teach 3 classes a year. After one year just think how many more contacts we would be able to reach for recruiting. This is the key to reviving this activity- people getting people. That's the only way it has ever been done and the only way it ever will be done. In the last few years I have seen clubs spend thousands of dollars on newspapers and radio ads and not even get one phone call. Person to person works.

## **CALLER TO CLUB RELATIONSHIP:**

**What is the position of the club caller in today's square dance environment? Many dancers have varied opinions, but the following has worked for me for 40 or so years and I truly believe that it breeds success, not only to the club and caller, but to our square dancing activity.**

**Many people believe that the club caller is ONLY a paid entertainer and should have no bearing or input into the success of the club he is currently calling, or that we have caller run clubs with no elected officers. All of my clubs have voted to make me a member of the club, to actually show that their caller is more than just a paid entertainer, but has the legal ability to be a part of the club function and activities. As dancers come and go, many clubs change officers each year and with the low numbers of active dancers, we sometimes get the new dancers elected as club officers, not having the ability to make decisions for the club since he has not been around for only a short period.**

**All of my clubs have officers that manage day to day, month to month activities for their respective clubs. Once a year, the officers or the executive board meet to discuss the activities of the club for the rest of the year. I have 99 per cent of the time participated in the meeting to give outside input and to be able to know if the caller is available for the events the officers select at this meeting. We discuss new adventures as well as old adventures to be re-enacted for the current year. We talk about club lessons for the coming year and determine the best time and place for the club and the caller. We set the ground rules for the class and make sure that everyone knows that the caller is the instructor and totally runs the lessons with input from the officers from time to time. We create new activity with input from the caller as to how to make the club grow and prosper, and discuss non-dancing agendas that keep the interest of our club dancers and guest.**

**All of these items are listed by the Executive Board and brought before the entire membership for approval or disapproval. Over the years we have had little disapproval for activity unless there is a date change conflict or something of this nature. Each member of the club votes, including the caller/member, and the club functions under these guidelines.**

**I, as a caller/instructor for 40 or so years, do think the caller and club membership have to function as one unit, communicating our good times as well as discussing our problems as a club group to resolve them and move forward. I truly believe that a club that "Plays Together, Stays Together". We plan many outside activities for not only each club, but all the clubs as a unit. We plan Christmas dinners (non-dancing), and picnics, exhibitions and other activity along with our regular club activities to keep membership interest at a high level. How can a caller not be a focal point in what happens to the club with his relationship to that club, other than a paid caller?**

**Callers should get involved with their clubs and help them grow and prosper if you are for continuing our activity. Experience is a good tool for clubs and the Caller should be the "Greased Wheel" that makes the Club successful and strong. Get involved with your clubs, be an Advisor, Councilor, or what ever it takes to be a part of your clubs, and not just the CALLER!**

**Ronnie Purser  
A.C.A Caller & Rep. Alabama**

Contra Page: Call this the third rail of contra dancing. I will proceed cautiously, with Diane looking over my shoulder for sure. The subject is "dress".

Let us consider, then, in order of their appearance (1) what I would like to see, vis-a-vis "dress" (2) what I can be sort of happy with (3) what I don't like and thus have a problem with. The choices are "prefer", "O.K.", and "trouble". The dancing under consideration not square dancing, it is Western contra.

Men first! Prefer. Long sleeves, trousers, shoes with leather soles. O.K. Long sleeves, trousers, shoes. Trouble. Short sleeves, shorts, sneakers.

Ladies? Prefer. Ankle length dresses, skirts, low shoes, leather soles O.K. Knee-length or prairie skirts, low shoes Trouble. Slacks, shorts, high heels, full petticoats.

Western contra dancers are also club square dancers. The number who are not is small. When square dancers come to their contra club they come as a mixed dress group. Some wear square dance clothes, others make adjustments. The most conspicuous adjustment is a long full skirt for the ladies. Twirling full skirts can be great fun, especially when doing chains and reels. For this reason a kind of pressure can develop to get all of the ladies into "contra" skirts. The temptation is real because a contra line of long skirts can look and feel spectacular. But - **careful now** - it is a mistake to go' down that road if doing so threatens to divide the dancers. Caller beware!

Shoes! There is no substitute for the advantages that come from leather soles on wood floors. Of course, that is just as true for square dancing. When there is a difference it comes from the edge contra 'has in the way that it uses the 8 and 16 count "phrases" built into the music. The nature of the contra timing process invites dancers to maximize the advantage that comes with smooth moving shoes. Contra dancers feel there is something wrong if they cannot (a) move smoothly (b) get there together (c) get there at the right time. Since square dancing has the same theoretical objective, the difference - if there is any - is best understood by doing some floor watching. But, the subject here is "shoes". For me, the more I see leather soles on wood floors the better for the whole dance picture. I am aware, of course, that for special reasons other shoes may be better but that is a different matter entirely.

Trouble? "Trouble" has roots in the difference between "fun" and "dance". Trying to describe the difference is a good way to get into big trouble, fast. The old standby answer "you'll know it when you see it" is helpful only if you already know what you are looking for. Too much "fun" by some takes away from the fun that others come to the dance for. Dress, in my view, is a reflection of the difference. To which I say quickly, if you are thinking about "fancy" and "money", forget it. Diane made her own skirts.

These are some equivalents which are substitutes for the familiar **SWING THRU...BOYS RUN** from eight chain thru formation, facing couples or ocean waves. For the following equivalents if Touch 1/4 is used for facing couples it can be replaced by Single Hinge for ocean waves. Needless to say, if you have them already in waves they do not need to Step To A Wave.

**Equivalents For  
SWING THRU...BOYS RUN**

- 1.. RIGHT & LEFT THRU...VEER LEFT
- 2.. TOUCH 1/4...GIRLS RUN...PASS THE OCEAN...BOYS RUN
- 3.. STEP TO A WAVE...GIRLS TRADE..RECYCLE...VEER LEFT...
- 4.. TOUCH 1/4...SPLIT CIRCULATE...SLIDE THRU
- 5.. STEP TO A WAVE...GIRLS RUN...HALF TAG...SLIDE THRU
- 6.. SWING THRU...BOYS TRADE...SWING THRU...GIRLS RUN...  
TAG THE LINE - RIGHT
- 7.. STEP TO A WAVE...GIRLS TRADE...GIRLS RUN... TAG THE LINE...RIGHT
- 8.. SPIN THE TOP...BOYS RUN...GIRLS TRADE...COUPLES HINGE...
- 9.. SWING THRU...GIRLS FOLD...PEEL OFF
10. SLIDE THRU...RIGHT & LEFT THRU...DIXIE STYLE TO OCEAN WAVE  
GIRLS RUN LEFT

Much of the time we find SWING THRU...BOYS RUN...BEND THE LINE used in choreography. This is really an uncomfortable move for the ladies and if you do not want to Couples Circulate before calling Bend The Line then try some of the following equivalents.

**Equivalents For  
SWING THRU...BOYS RUN...BEND THE LINE**

1. SWING THRU SINGLE HINGE...BOYS RUN
2. TOUCH 1/4...SPLIT[Box] CIRCULATE...BOYS RUN
3. SLIDE THRU...PASS THRU...PARTNER TRADE...REVERSE  
FLUTTERWHEEL
4. SLIDE THRU...RIGHT & LEFT THRU...LADIES CHAIN
5. PASS THE OCEAN...RECYCLE
6. STEP TO A WAVE...RECYCLE...SLIDE THRU
7. SQUARE THRU...PARTNER TRADE...FLUTTERWHEEL
8. PASS THE OCEAN...GIRLS TRADE...RIGHT & LEFT THRU
9. (STEP TO A)WAVE...GIRLS RUN,...HALF TAG...BOYS RUN
10. SWING THRU...SCOOTBACK...SLIDE THRU

As in the other equivalents, if you are already in a wave you would use Single Hinge instead of Touch 1/4 and you would simply omit Step To A Wave. Slide Thru, Square thru, etc. are applicable also to ocean waves.

## Equivalents

Following are some various ways to use calls and get to zero box (wave) From a static square with patter calling (The same as Heads or Sides Square Thru...Step To A Wave). The square may or may not be rotated

180 degrees but that is immaterial in patter calling.

Numbers 1 thru 7 terminate in facing couples while 4,5,6 & 7 can also be used as ' equivalents for Square Thru from facing couples.

Numbers 8 thru 12 terminate in Box Wave.

- 1.. HEADS(S)" PASS THE OCEAN...PING PONG CIRCULATE...EXTEND...  
RIGHT & LEFT THRU
- 2.. SIDES FACE...HEADS FORWARD...EVERYONE PASS THRU...U TURN BACK  
LOAD THE BOAT
- 3.. HEADS(S) STAR THRU AND SPREAD...STAR THRU...CENTERS PASS THRU
- 4.. HEADS( S) TOUCH 1/4 AND ROLL... SLIDE THRU
- 5.. HEADS (S) SWING THRU... SWING THRU... SLID THRU AND PASS THRU
- 6.. HEADS(S) 'SINGLE CIRCLE TO A WAVE...SLIDE THRU
- 7.. HEADS(S) SPIN THE TOP...BOYS RUN...WHEEL & DEAL...PASS THRU
- 8.. HEADS(S) RIGHT & LEFT THRU...PASS THE OCEAN...EXTEND
- 9.. HEADS(S) STAR THRU AND SPREAD...STAR THRU...DOUBLE PASS THRU  
TRACK TWO
- 10.. HEADS(S) TOUCH I/4...BOYS RUN...TOUCH 1/4...FOLLOW NEIGHBOR...SPREAD
- 11.. HEADS(S) PASS THRU...CHASE RIGHT...SINGLE HINGE...EXTEND
- 12.. HEADS(S) SWING THRU...GIRLS FOLD...PEEL THE TOP...EXTEND

### Right and Left Thru Equivalents

- 1.. SWING THRU...GIRLS RUN...VEER LEFT...U TURN BACK
- 2.. STAR THRU...DIXIE STYLE TO AN OCEAN WAVE...GIRLS RUN...WHEEL & DEAL
- 3.. SWING THRU...BOYS TRADE...SWING THRU...GIRLS RUN...HALF TAG - RIGHT

### Ladies Chain Equivalents

- 1.. SWING THRU - DOUBLE... GIRLS RUN... HALF TAG - RIGHT
- 2.. PASS THE OCEAN...SWING THRU...SINGLE HINGE...BOYS RUN
- 3.. PASS THE OCEAN...GIRLS RUN...HALF TAG.- RIGHT...SLIDE THRU