

AMERICAN CALLERS' ASSOCIATION VIEWPOINTS

By

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The Changing Face of Square Dance Introducing Mark and Dianne

The American Callers' Association in its attempt to be of service to all callers, dancers, and associations has provided current, timely, and effective information on new dancer recruitment, winning ways to retain club dancers, and pitfalls that drive square dancers away. ACA really appreciates the positive comments, encouragement to continue, and contributions from callers and dancers all over North America and 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 is from a dancer's viewpoint highlights how resistance to change with American Society is eliminating square dancing from the growing mainstream population and relegating itself to "Square Dancing Extinctis." This month's article is from Mr. Don Feenerty, founder of the very successful "Heritage Dance Association" and "Square Dance for Life" in West Virginia. Don points out how and why resistance to change will damage square dancing. Don offers this story to point out that unless we learn to change with society, square dancing will continue to decline. ACA advocates that square dancing has the potential to be of interest to all dancers and

does not have to fail if we all begin to change our ways.

Don presents a situational analysis pointing out that square dance clubs all across America are closing their doors for good. Don continues “How many of us have heard about how it used to be with dances every night of the week? Dancers years ago could dance every night and never have to leave town. Well guess what! Those days are gone. Along with that gone too is the open minded sense of adventure that dancers had when they first started dancing. Square dancers have become possessive and unyielding, unwilling to accept new dancers if they don't look and act the way we think they should.”

Don argues that these attitudes are what are holding us back. Don continues you don't have to believe him just ask yourself. Are you ready to accept the changing face of square dance?

Meet “Mark” and “Diane”, two young square dancers who just want to dance and have fun. Mark has a third of his body covered with tattoos. His nose, lip, and eyebrow are pierced. Mark wears eye liner and likes to paint his fingernails black to match the dye job in his hair. Mark dances with Diane. She also has tattoos and piercings, is into weight lifting and likes to wear her crinoline without a dress. They sometime make fun of the music they are dancing to and yell *Yee Haw* and mockingly kick their feet. Are you ready for Mark and Diane? Well you better be because they are the future of square dancing. They are America's youth or Generations X and Y.

Mark and Diane show up every week for workshop. They attend all of our dances and are always willing to go on banner raids. They volunteer for any task our club has,

and they always bring refreshments when it's their turn. In short, Mark and Diane are just about our most loyal dancers.

Don tells a story that last week his group of a few square made a road trip to a dance outside of their federation. As they were walking in everyone smiled and said, how nice it was to see us. Then in walk Mark and Diane. Silence. Snickering followed pointing and finally fears (False Evidence Appearing Real). Mark and Diane sat with their group. They were used to being stared at, but they laughed and had fun. When it was time to square up, the four members were the first ones on the floor. It was just like kick ball time in gym all over again. No one wanted to dance with us. People walked clear around the dance floor just so they wouldn't have to get close. Finally members from our club came to our rescue.

The next tip Mark and Diane waited for everyone else to square up. They watched until there was a square with only three couples, and they sprang into place. Once the dancing began, the dancers in their square seemed to forget about Mark and Diane's appearance. Everyone just danced. After about the third or fourth tip, people couldn't get into Mark and Diane's square. Dancing with them was fun, fast and fulfilling. Why? Mark and Dianne are what we used to be as America's youth, and they are new square dancers. Once everyone got past the fact that Mark and Dianne looked different than they did it did not matter. Mark and Dianne were just like them. Just square dancers.

Don suggests that if your club is shrinking, and try as you may you haven't been able to encourage your friends to dance, consider asking your children or your grandchildren.

Don't be surprised when they walk in with black tears painted on their faces. Offer to loan them that old crinoline you have in your closet, but don't get mad when they wear it as a skirt. Welcome every dancer or visitor who walks through your door. When you see someone new, be quick to dance with them because that is what they came to enjoy. Make them feel welcome no matter what they look like. Why? Because like it or not. they are our future.

Mark and Diane do exist, but not as two people. They are a combination of several dancers in Don's area. Don continues that everyone has seen Mark and Diane, and many have even been Mark or Diane. Don encourages all square dancers to be accepting of all new dancers young or old, gay or straight, hip or square.

The American Caller's Association is very grateful to Mr. Don Feenerty for presenting this anecdotal lesson in square dancing. Don's willingness and desire to revitalize square dancing is praise-worthy. ACA thanks him for taking the time to communicate to us.

Any individual, club, caller, or association who wishes to communicate his/her opinions on this subject is encouraged to contact the American Callers' Association Loulet@aol.com or Dr. Patrick Demerath at pdemerath@troy.edu. Please visit our website and newsletters [@American Callers.com/news](http://AmericanCallers.com/news).

Until next time, happy dancing, see you in a square.