

## MANY, MANY THANKS TO GARY!

**Editor's Note:** My original plan was for Gary to supply me with the factual information, which I would then edit into a third-person article that would read more like an interview. What he sent me was so charming and genuine, I decided to print it just as he wrote it. Here's Gary, in his own words:

My first memories of any kind of dance are when I rode along with my father to pick up musicians for a dance at our farm in Kansas. I was probably 4 or 5 years old. My folks were involved in social and square dance, and they took an active role in putting on the local dances.

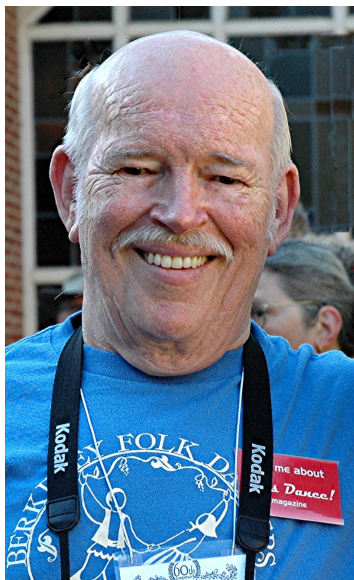
We moved to California in 1942. After the war we moved to a house in San Anselmo. I loved it there. We could ride our bikes to the movies in San Anselmo and San Rafael. While we lived in San Anselmo, my folks became involved with a square dance group in Brown's Hall in Mill Valley. My folks eventually ended up running it, and hauling the equipment back and forth. Dad was one of the callers, but he welcomed other callers. We had people carpooling from Turlock and bringing their caller! I would program the round dances, and I bought some of the records.

Tamalpais High School in Mill Valley had a folk dance club, and I quickly joined as a freshman. The girls were expecting a bunch of jocks to join, and all they got was one skinny freshman! The club didn't last long. On rainy days, the gym classes for the girls would be held in half of the gym and they would do folk dances. I fell in love with the music.

A friend who was old enough to get a driver's license heard about Changs classes at the College of Marin, and we started going there. We did some great dances (nearly all couple dances). I remember learning Hopak and the Russian Peasant dance there. I loved those dances then and I still do, even though I'm too old to do them as they should be done.

I met my first wife, Marie Sandgren, at an event that my folks put on to introduce square dancing to a riding club in Sleepy Hollow, San Anselmo (they did that kind of thing a lot). I would go along to help set up the equipment and demonstrate dance figures. Marie was the niece of a friend of my folks and they asked me to take her to the dance. I did, and found the love of my life. We were married for 39 years before she died of colon cancer.

We were square dancers and social dancers, and Marie knew a lot of Charleston steps which she would throw into swing dances. We also belonged to a square dance club in San Rafael, and I became the entertainment chairman, tasked with hiring the callers for our monthly parties.



Gary in 2007. Note the red badge: "Ask me about *Let's Dance!* magazine." – Photo by G. Milton

I edited my first publication at this time. Marie and I belonged to a young married group at my church that wanted to start a monthly magazine to inform people about the church and its activities. I named the magazine "Waterlog," and I bought a Gestetner automatic mimeograph machine to print it.

Our square dancing came to an end when I was put on a night shift at the Independent-Journal. Square dancing was changing a lot by then and had separated from the folk dancers. If you didn't go to regular dances you wouldn't know the new dance figures, so we hit a dry spell for dancing.

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After Marie died I didn't do anything for two years. Dismayed by my weight gain. I decided to take a square dance class for the exercise. I mentioned that I used to do folk dancing, and a folk dancer friend at the club accompanied me to the Marin Balkan Dancers, where I met Irene Croft. I was immediately impressed by her character and intelligence. I was also impressed that I knew only a few of the dances they did!

One night we carpoled to Ashkenaz and they played a waltz. Irene asked me if I could waltz. "Of course!" I said, and we set

off. Halfway around the floor I stopped and said that this might go better if she let me lead for awhile. Irene was noted for her quick temper and when she didn't explode, I felt I might have chance with her! We were married in 1998 in Reno, Nevada, while attending a Tamburitza gathering. Irene died of a bad heart in 2012, and I miss her tremendously.

Irene and I were both interested in advanced dances and we would attend Marcel Vinokur's parties, Irene so that she had an opportunity to do the great dances and me so that I could learn them. Out of that desire came the Advanced Balkan class at Ashkenaz. I would line up great teachers of the classic dances and we would have a Sunday afternoon learning/dancing from teachers like Dan Unger, Todd Wagner, Martin Frost and Davida Munkres.

We joined the Folk Dance Federation and when the group sent a thank you letter welcoming us to the Federation, I was disturbed by the terrible reproduction of the letterhead. I printed up a ream of new letterhead with clean fresh type and sent the box to the Federation President at that time, Laila Messer. When the editor of *Let's Dance* (the magazine's name didn't have an exclamation point then) quit in early 2004, and Laila started looking for someone to do the next issue, she contacted me. I told her I would print the whole magazine for just a little more than her source had asked just for doing the layout. I did the job, the Federation liked what I produced, and that was the start of nearly 13 years of producing *Let's Dance!*



Gary's first issue of *Let's Dance!*

Gary started a group just so he could learn some hard dances. Then he started a yearly thing just to make other dancers happy. He played Santa to me one year and made Let's Dance! appear in my mailbox for a year. Gary has been around long enough to have strong opinions: the old dances are the best ones. I'm happy to have known him for so long, and honored to have him call me a friend. – Dan Unger

I can only say that he seemed to epitomize the idea of hard deadlines with a soft-edged landing.  
– Memo Keswick

Thank you, Gary, for coercing me into writing my first article. Who knew it would lead to 13 years of collaboration!? You have done wonders with the magazine and it's been a pleasure working with you. Happy retirement. – Eileen Kopec

Patient, agreeable, generous, kind, and very flexible are just a few words that describe Gary and his excellent Let's Dance! publishing. Job well done, Gary! – Denise Heenan



Gary has been easy to work with as an editor, quietly giving of his time editing, compiling, and printing – work few of us would willingly do, a soft-spoken gentleman fond simply of folk dance and family. His retirement will enable him to sit back in his easy chair and read Let's Dance! at his leisure or let them pile up on the living room side table if he chooses. Wishing you the best of happiness, Gary! – Kevin Greek

Gary Anderson has retired as editor of *Let's Dance!* magazine after nearly 13 years. It is a rare gift of tenacity and stamina that keeps someone in that job for so long. Most of the past editors lasted a few years. Vi Dexheimer (1959-1972) and Gary Anderson (2004-2016) were the two editors who felt it was more of a calling than a job. I hope I can live up to the standards he has set. – Loui Tucker

When I returned to international folk dancing, I found Gary Anderson and Irene Croft's wonderful Advanced Balkan class. It was there that I got to know Gary and his vision of notable dances. I asked him what about these dances he liked and he said they were real, unique, and captivating. I thank Gary for his unfailing support while I was President of the Folk Dance Federation. I am fortunate to have found Gary. May our dancing paths cross forever. – Lucy Chang



Gary and staff writer Eileen Kopec in 2007 – *Photographer unknown*



Gary with first wife, Marie, and son Eric, approx. 1975 – *Photo by G. Anderson (using a timer)*



Gary with second wife, Irene – *Photo by G. Anderson (using a timer)*