
Obituaries

Kathleen (Kay) Chevalier

Kathleen Chevalier passed away April 22 after a short illness. She was a long time Changs member, having joined in 1945. She was 88 years old.

Here is the interview with her which was in the Sept/Oct issue of Changs Bulletin along with Ernie Drescher's:

KATHLEEN (KAY) CHEVALIER—Kay joined Changs in 1945. At the time she lived in Alameda with her parents. Once a week she took a bus over the Bay Bridge to San Francisco, to the TransBay Terminal at First and Mission. There, she boarded a streetcar to Geary and Stockton where she transferred to another streetcar to North Beach to get to Changs. There was never a thought that she, a young woman, could not be out at night by herself dancing and getting home at night.

In those early years, Changs met at the Italian American Athletic club. She smiles as she recalls the address...1630 Stockton Street...her voice full of pleasant reminiscence. It was a truly special place for her. She commuted to San Francisco by bus and streetcar to go folk dancing; before that she commuted to the City by ferry and streetcar to go to college. Lux College was a school for women, which offered training and degrees in recreational counseling and dental assisting. She remembers that address as well, 16th and Portrero.

"I did all my studying on the ferry. When they changed to bus service, the time saved was only five minutes," she lamented.

After graduating from Lux, she worked as a recreation director in Alameda. For a special treat, she took groups of teenagers over to Treasure Island for the 1939-1940 World's Fair. "You could turn them loose and never worry about them. They would be where you said they should be when it was time to go home." She thought a moment. "You'd never do that today."

At the Fair, at the 'Estonian Village,' she saw men and women dancing in costume. "They were having such a good time! At Lux we were all girls and had learned a dance or two but this was so very different!"

When the war began in 1941, many of the young people at the recreation centers enlisted in the services. Kay went to work for a contractor building floating dry docks.

She continued folk dancing. Her memory was jogged when she read the interview about Sidney Messer where he described the first folk dancer he ever saw, the baldheaded Yul Brynner look-alike wearing a red Russian shirt.

"That must have been Russian Bob" Kay thinks. "He was a WONDERFUL dancer. He would stand in the middle of the dance floor, arms akimbo, deciding whom to select as a partner. Every girl was thrilled when asked to dance by Russian Bob." One of the dances for which he selected Kay was the hambo. "I didn't even know the hambo but with him I could do it."

At Changs she met Bob, the man she would marry. Folk dancing became their life. They became active participants. Kay served as registrar for Changs; Bob as president. For the Federation, Bob was editor of Let's Dance magazine for two years and served as president for one year.

"Folk dancing changed my whole way of life," said Kay.

"I met many wonderful people and made many lifelong friends. Changs was special to me. And so I choose to remain a member. I am happy to help keep Changs going."

I asked her to close her eyes and picture Changs as she knew it. "What to you see?" I asked. "I see LOTS of people dancing, VERY happy, having a GOOD time." She opened her eyes, still reflecting, remembering. "They had a bar there, too."

We both burst out laughing. "Of course you have to realize I never went there," she smiled.

—*From Laila Messer*