

HONORING OUR OWN

Al and Teddy Wolterbeek

by Megan Wolf

Editor's note: In response to the From the Editor column in the February issue of *Let's Dance!*, Megan offered to write about her mentors, Al and Teddy Wolterbeek. I hope this will inspire others to write about dance leaders in their area so that this can become a recurring column.

I met Al and Teddy Wolterbeek in 2006, when I was sixteen and my friend dragged me to folk dancing at a barn in Shingle Springs. I had no idea that this couple, who are the age of my grandparents, would be a part of my fondest memories of high school. Al would call all us kids "skinny" and "shorty" (even though most of us were taller than he was) and Teddy held tea parties for the girls. The two of them played around as much as, if not more than, all of us.

Their story starts after World War II, when folk dancing became incredibly popular in the San Francisco Bay Area. Al started dancing at 13 in San Francisco, thanks to a friend. He was a natural dancer and was invited to join Madelynne Greene's performing group at 17, when most of the other dancers were in their thirties.

Teddy started dancing with her family in Martinez at 13. They danced at the Shell Clubhouse in a squares and folk group led by Stan Valentine. Teddy and her sisters managed to convince their friends to join the group as well, so they were able to make two full squares of teens.

Teddy's family loved dancing, so her father would take them to festivals, which is where she met Al. It was at a festival in Vallejo in 1951, where Al was performing with Madelynne's group. He was the youngest in the group, so he caught her eye. The next day he asked her to

dance St. Bernard's Waltz and that was it. They married in 1953 in San Francisco, with their reception at Madelynne's dance studio. Teddy joined Madelynne's performing group, and the two of them continued to perform with the group for the next 20 years.

Thanks to their involvement in the group, the Wolterbeeks got an amazing gig performing dances at a lodge in Yosemite from 1959 to 1968. It was an all-expenses-

paid vacation for them and their four children for one week, in exchange for performing two dances each night at the lodge.

The Wolterbeeks moved to Shingle Springs in 1969 and started a vineyard. After about 10 years of limited opportunities to dance, Al met Flossy Duchardt on the set

of *Fiddler on the Roof*, where he was performing Russian dances, and she mentioned folk dancing. In 1981 Flossy and the Wolterbeeks started the El Dorado Folk Dancers in Merv Stouffer's classroom. The group bounced



Al and Teddy during the Hat Kolo at Stockton Folk Dance Camp.

around many locations for a couple of years until Al and Teddy decided to put a dance floor in their old goat barn, thus creating the Dance Barn. The group still dances there. In the 1980s Al and Teddy started hosting their annual New Year's Eve Folk Dance Party, which also continues today. The Wolterbeeks joined Bruce Mitchell's Vintage Dance performing group and the El Dorado Scandinavian group, where they danced for about 10 years.

In 2003, Al and Teddy started hosting the SIFDAC Annual Membership Barbecue on their outdoor deck, which continues to be a local favorite event. Teddy began teaching a women's folk dance class in the Dance Barn about eight years ago, for her Shakespeare Club friends.

In the nineties, thanks to the El Dorado Arts Council, the Wolterbeeks started teaching folk dance in public schools (grades K-12) all over the county. In 1997, the Wolterbeeks were invited to perform at the local high school's Oktoberfest. This led to them teaching the German students basic folk dances. The students enjoyed the dances so much the Wolterbeeks decided to form a teen dance group, Tance El Dorado.

The primary focus of Tance El Dorado was always social dance, but they also performed at many festivals and events. From 2000 to 2010 Teddy and Al arranged for scholarships to enable teens and young adults to attend Stockton Folk Dance Camp. Tance El Dorado exists today, although now it is a group for young adults instead of teens. (Any former teen who has danced with Al and Teddy can tell you that they will always call you a teen, no matter how old you get.) The group has fluctuated over the years, but I would estimate at least 60

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Teddy and Al in an undated photo, probably the 1950s.

young people have been taught in the Dance Barn over the years. Two couples who met in Tance are now married and have children; one of the couples was married with Teddy as officiant. Many of the former teens continue to dance today, some in folk dance and others in ballroom, vintage, contra, Argentine tango, and more!

Al and Teddy have shaped so many dance communities and dancers over the past six decades, and they continue to bring their energy to everyone they dance with today.



Al and Teddy (far left and far right) with their group of teenagers at Stockton Folk Dance Camp in 2010. The author is in the second row, fourth from the left.

A WONDERFUL BIRTHDAY PARTY!

by John Carroll and Nadav Nur

On March 9, Kopachka Folk Dancers were delighted to host a **memorable celebration of Jerry's Duke 80th birthday**. Over 130 guests from all over the Bay Area, including Jerry's longtime friends, former students, and dancers from various clubs, reveled in Zabava's compelling rhythms. For the special occasion, Dina Trageser from Seattle and Pat MacSwyney from Los Angeles, joined Zabava regulars Michele Simon, Tom Farris, and Bill Cope.

Along with birthday cake, champagne, sweets, and assorted savories, attendees were treated to a slideshow of Jerry's colorful life as a competitive swimmer, champion football player, and internationally known folk dance teacher. Jerry's roles as a devoted husband and father were highlighted by his wife, Jill, who delivered a moving tribute to a Kopachka member and a beloved dance instructor. And the entire party was a treat by the most generous Jerry and Jill. Many happy returns, Jerry!

Kopachka dancers are eagerly anticipating a **live music dance party with Balkan Chili**, the Bulgarian trio making its first U.S. tour, on June 8 starting at 8 pm.

Remember: we won't be dancing June 15-September 8, our summer break. Info: Susie Shoaf at president@kopachkafolkdancers.com or visit www.kopachkafolkdancers.com for the Kopachka calendar, directions, parking, and other information.