

KATHY KERR (1947-2021)

by Loui Tucker, with John Nicoara

I think we all hold a special place in our heart for our first folk dance teacher. I know I do. Kathy Kerr taught a folk dance class in the wood-floored basement of the YWCA on the corner of South First and San Fernando in San Jose (the building, designed by Julia Morgan, was demolished in 1973. and is now a parking lot.) Although I eventually took far more dance lessons from Marcel Vinokur, it was Kathy who made folk dance accessible and desirable.

In the early 1970s, John Nicoara, Alan Rothchild, and I all took folk dance classes from Kathy Kerr (then in her 20s). I remember the classes being on Friday nights, but *Let's Dance* magazines from that year note that her classes were on Thursday. John, Alan, and I all eventually became local dance teachers and Alan and I are still teaching 40 years later. I remember learning Haroa Haktana from Kathy. I remember she took pity on my limited budget and let me bring a batch of cookies instead of paying the entrance fee.

John Nicoara had a special relationship with Kathy – but I'll let him tell his own story.

My “sister” Kathy

by John Nicoara

I always loved having Norm Kindig by my side in Marcel's Wednesday advanced folk dance class. We seemed to match one another in perfect harmony. When Norm told me about a Thursday class he was attending at the San Jose YWCA, I decided to check it out. It was in a small room and run by 25-year-old Kathy Kerr and her then-husband Jim Little. I quickly got hooked on this class and became a regular.

After Jim left to take a teaching job at Michigan Tech, Kathy became like a sister to me and I recall taking her to San Francisco to see an ACT stage production of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, after which we headed over to the Jewish Community Center in San Francisco to dance until midnight. We were just good friends having a good time. In turn, she invited me and my 8-year old daughter Anne-Marie to join her for an afternoon at the Renaissance Fair in Novato, and provided us with appropriate attire. But for Kathy, I would never have had this delightful experience.

After her San Jose YWCA class moved to the much larger gymnasium, a Stanford student showed up at the class. Her name was Linda Schuck, and she was President of the Stanford YWCA. One evening she walked up to Kathy and asked if Kathy would like to start a YWCA-sponsored class on the Stanford campus. “No,” said Kathy, “but ask John. He said that he'd like to be a Balkan dance teacher like Marcel someday.” Bingo! Linda made all the arrangements for me, and I started my very first folk dance class in October 1972.

The first quarter was temporarily in the basement of the Palo Alto Methodist Church. The second quarter my class met at the on-campus Old Union Clubhouse, where I went on to teach every Thursday evening for over 17 years.

Remember the James Burke PBS TV program called *Connections*? Well, Kathy was that important connection in my life.



Kathy Kerr at Stockton Folk Dance Camp in the mid-1970s.