

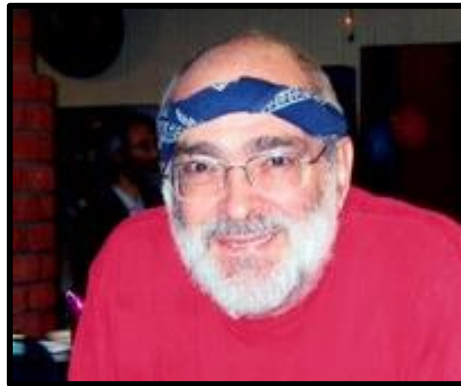
CLIFF JENKINS

March 4, 1938 - September 10, 2021

Cliff Jenkins loved dancing, he loved his land in the Santa Cruz Mountains and, most of all, he loved people. Forty years ago, he and his friends brought all these elements together at a free-standing redwood deck they built at the end of a winding dirt road off of Skyline Boulevard where two creeks meet, and “The Land” (or CliffLand, to some) community was born.

In 2007, Cliff and friends established “Land Dancers” as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization to help support the semi-annual Folk Dance Weekends and periodic Work Days needed to keep it all going. Cliff’s intent was to create a Board of people who shared his passion for community and understood the magic that folk dance, folk music, and working in the woods created. He also wanted Folk Dance Weekends to continue in perpetuity, long after he was gone. The Land Dancers’ Board now includes many next generation dance community members who intend to help carry on Cliff’s vision.

A typical Folk Dance Weekend: Dancers and families camp, play in the creek, share food, make music, hang out with family and friends (sans internet/cell service), and of course, dance. Balkan and Israeli dance, Scottish Country Dance, Irish Set and Ceilidh dance, Contra, Dandiya, Bollywood, and more – Cliff encouraged and celebrated whatever folks wanted to share. Many children grew up coming to The Land, eventually introducing their own children into the community. One weekend not too long ago saw four generations of one family in attendance.



Work Days also brought community together to clear trees and poison oak, split firewood, repair culverts, maintain the deck/kitchen/bathroom, all followed by a feast and a bit of music, of course.

Cliff started dancing in the 70s with Michaela Kinsey’s Scottish dance group in Palo Alto, and did

Irish Set dancing with Larry Lynch, Balkan dancing with John Nicoara at Stanford, International dancing with Marcel Vinokur in Menlo Park, and finally Israeli and International dancing with Loui Tucker. His insistence on dancing (and dressing) in his own personal style was not universally appreciated, but his infectious enthusiasm was loved by all. His t-shirt collection was legendary.

A series of medical problems, dementia, and finally stomach cancer gradually took Cliff away from dancing and The Land, but the community lives on and we’ll continue to come together at the deck for as long as we’re able.

Cliff always encouraged everyone in his dance groups to come to The Land and, indeed, he’d hand out his LandDancers business card to anyone he struck up a conversation with, anywhere. So, be friendly to strangers and tell them to go to www.landdancers.org and contact us for more information. Donations in Cliff’s memory can also be made on the website.

Friends share their memories of Cliff on p. 14

A *Celebration of Life* of Cliff Jenkins is scheduled for **November 20** as Lucie Stern Community Center in Palo Alto. **Details will be provided later.** If you are interested in participating, either in person or by sending us your memories of Cliff, please send email to cliff-memorial@landdancers.org.



Photos by J. Nicoara and D. Bergen.

REMEMBERING CLIFF JENKINS

Cliff Jenkins, as well as Arden Pierce, encouraged the dance community to gather in nature to share food, friendship, and music, as well as dance. Marcel Vinokur did the same thing with his camping/dance weekends in Yosemite. Cliff established The Land in the Santa Cruz mountains. Arden and her late-husband Hiram invited people to their property, also in the Santa Cruz mountains, that they called Planina (mountain). While Marcel's weekends and the weekends at Planina are in the past, The Land will continue to host weekend celebrations of music, dance, and community under the direction of The Land Board. Below some of the dancers who spent many hours with Cliff at The Land share their memories.

Carol Friedman remembers:

The first time I went to The Land, I knew just two people there. By the time my first Folk Dance Weekend was over, I was one of Cliff's best friends. Cliff had this unique gift for embracing everyone. We danced together, sang together, told raunchy jokes together. I drank my first Rusty Nail with Cliff. I will cherish the memory of Cliff and Betsy singing "In Spite of Ourselves" at the campfire. His unique spirit will always be with me, every Memorial Day and Labor Day Weekend. May his memory be a blessing.

Sue Lindner remembers:

I met Cliff at Marcel Vinokur's folk dance class, in the early 90s. It quickly became apparent that I needed to get to know this guy, with his big laugh, great t-shirts, irreverent antics, and serious love of dancing. I was soon laughing at jokes over beer and peanuts at The Oasis (a now-gone bar in Palo Alto), camping out at folk dance weekends at The Land, and joining him for lunches, concerts, and walks.

Cliff had a knack for surrounding himself with people who like to work hard and play hard; he was the seed crystal at the center of a wonderful and generous community of dancers, musicians, and friends. I think he took great pleasure in creating a space for folks to share their talents. Do you want to use a chain saw or build a deck? Teach, lead, or follow dances? Tell your latest joke or sing a new song around the campfire? Share your favorite potluck dish? Bring it! Bring your friends! And tell them to bring their friends!

Cliff was a master at keeping people connected. He phoned his pals on a regular basis, and made sure we were all invited to Ten Fu (a Chinese restaurant in

Menlo Park) at 6 pm on New Year's Eve, before Marcel's annual dance parties. Going to a restaurant with Cliff was particularly fun. He invariably met the servers and fellow diners, learned their names, and invited them to The Land. He loved to celebrate new friends (and old) with The Birthday Song (whether

they wanted it or not). He made it a point to remember, with deep sorrow, each of his flock who departed before him.

Thank you, Cliff, for making so much fun available to so many; for being so generous, inclusive, irreverent, and deeply caring; for being an artist whose medium is people.

Myra Joy remembers:

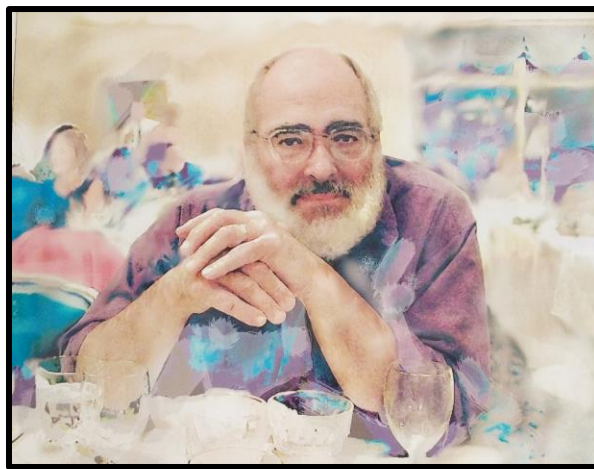
Cliff and the community of dancers/music he created were undoubtedly responsible for my love of world music and dancing,

choice to pursue music, and many of the friendships I have had. It's really impossible to imagine who I would have been without his influence on my family.

Lisa Bell remembers:

I moved from Los Angeles to Sunnyvale in 1983, two weeks after graduation. It was the Friday of Memorial Day weekend. Yagil told me to leave my unpacked boxes where they were because we were going to a Folk Dance Weekend in the woods at his friend Cliff's land. Really? Yes, really. Okay, why not? Pure magic.

People from various walks of life creating a Brigadoon-like community. Everyone shared their love of various forms of international folk dance and music, and their hunger for community, for a deeper connection. And there in the middle of it all, our jubilant host, a lightning rod for joy, celebration and abandon, Cliff Jenkins.



A photograph of a portrait painted by June Nokes that she gave to Cliff for his 80th birthday. *Photo by B. Moore.*

Cliff was larger than life – a boisterous, womanizing, hard-drinking, pot-smoking, ranting nut case. And we all loved him in spite of ourselves. He taught me to open my eyes and my heart to friends and strangers alike, to question my judgmental tendencies, to look deeply for what makes each person uniquely special and cherish what they have to offer. Most importantly, Cliff showed us all that dancing together with enthusiasm, passion, and chutzpah is so much more important than the steps themselves.

I am so grateful that the Monday before Cliff's passing, we had the opportunity for one more post-Folk Dance Weekend dinner. Once more, with love, friendship, music, jokes, great food and good cheer, we surrounded our jubilant host, our lightning rod for joy, celebration and abandon. We will miss you, Cliff. But the community you built carries on. And each time we dance, you will be dancing with us.

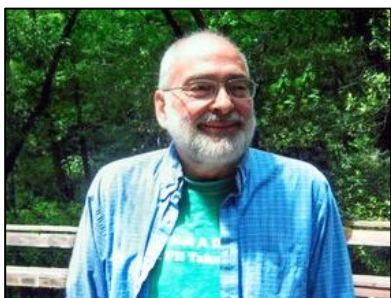
John Nicoara remembers:

In the early 1980s, Cliff Jenkins built a folk dance deck on property he owned in the Santa Cruz Mountains. He began holding free 3-day events on Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends each year thereafter and I became the Balkan teacher at each of these events for the next 20 years. There were other teachers too: Israeli, Irish, Morris, and Contra, as well as musicians and singing groups such as a local one called Born to Drone (Bulgarian/Macedonian songs).

Elaine Johnson remembers:

Why dance a boring figure when you could dance a fun one? That was the thinking behind "The Palo Alto Option," an optional, last-minute figure-change that Cliff and a few other rabblers liked to shout out in our Scottish Country Dancing class. The Palo Alto Option was a good metaphor for the way Cliff liked to live his life, too.

I first met Cliff about 35 years ago in the Palo Alto Scottish class and was immediately charmed, and a bit frightened, by his uber-friendliness. "Who is this guy who is whooping and hollering all the time, and why is he constantly hugging everyone?" I remember



whispering to my friend Becky. Before I knew it I was hooked on the renegade class (not standard issue in the formal, sometimes prim Bay Area RSCDS scene), completely charmed by this nuts-o new friend, and swept up in his community of dancers, musicians, and campers at The Land.

Fast-forward over decades of live music and whooping on the deck; scores of kids brought up with creek walks, goofy circle dances, and no cell reception; and quiet waltzes under the stars. Could we have squeezed any more fun into our weekends in the woods with Cliff? I don't think so.

Tom Williard remembers:

Truly influential people bring you to their level. Cliff brought us all to his level with love. He greeted life with a joy that was beyond infectious. His joy was honest, roughhewn, authentic.

Cliff modeled what a person might be, could be, and often should be. Cliff held everyone – everyone – with esteem. He taught me that the greatest morality was love expressed as respect, honesty, openness. Cliff was a hero. Like all compelling heroes, Cliff was far from flawless. To me, the flaws brought the nature of his being and what he had to teach me into more vivid relief.

More than anyone I know, Cliff relished and revered life – his own and that of everyone around him. If Rumi had known Cliff, he might have said it this way:

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a deck. I'll meet you there.

Karin Gold remembers:

Cliffy was my grandfather. Not by blood, but by choice. Like so many of us, Cliff chose to be my family; to bring my father, brother, and me into a community we would not have otherwise had. Cliff came to our school plays, helped us move into college, called every year on our birthdays (sometimes twice), and supported us when things got rough. He was there through the difficult moments, made mistakes and cracked jokes alongside us.

Through it all, his faith in humanity, love, and compassion never wavered. I choose to spend each day channeling a little more Cliff in my life; seeing the good, connecting with people, and being in community. Cliff's absence will be noticed, his presence never forgotten, and his love will continue to be felt each and every time we dance. I miss you so much already, Pal. Give 'em hell up there.