

## IN THE LONG RUN

By Corben Geis

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I've gotten emails from a lot of energetic people who love square dancing and really are on a quest and a mission for saving our activity from becoming extinct. Don't worry. I don't think that will happen any time soon. The emails urge and encourage dancers and callers to shorten our teaching programs, consolidate the lists and calls, do away with the western duds and use modern music. Do you really think that will get more people into square dancing?

A few years ago there were a lot of people on a crusade to change the name of our activity, but as soon as new dancers were trying out Diamond Dancing or CDP, they realized, "hey, this is square dancing". I would personally like to say I like all the ideas. We do need to change, some things, with the times to keep square dancing alive and fresh. I agree.

I've even thought that the approach to instructing in the colleges by teaching the tougher stuff first is a great concept. Each of these concepts are wonderful, just for the fact that people are thinking outside the box, and are trying to save something they love dearly.

Here's some food for thought. A couple of us callers have tried this in our neck of the woods, and though a majority of our local dancers think it's a waste of time, we believe that down the road, this will eventually pay off. Please realize that I understand this is not a marketing strategy that will gain or attract a lot of new dancers immediately, but hopefully in the long run.

The main targets seem to be the Baby Boomers and the Empty Nesters, but far too many of them seem to recall 'horror stories of square dancing in high school'. Not all of them, but a vast majority. I have always blamed the stereotypical gym teachers for our demise. (Ironically, my parents both taught physical education.)

The problem was and still is, these health instructors DO NOT know the basic set up, rules, etiquette, calls, numbering, body flow, directions and formations of square dancing. To me, when someone is trying to teach something, that they are not fully aware of themselves, is setting many people up for failure. Even though I love square dancing very much, it was a disaster back in school. (By the way, my parents were never my P.E. teachers, they actually knew what they were doing)

Setting up for failure means 'horror stories' such as the students constantly breaking down the squares and the teacher losing their patience by trying to resolve the maps and diagrams on the backs of the old LP records. So now you have a class that looks like a scene out from the Muppet Show. Chaos and confusion.

And, what do the students remember and relate all of this too? Square Dancing.

In our area, the kids who we've taught square dancing too for over the past 10 years, see me and the other caller out and about and they stop us and say, "We had a blast in your square dancing class. That was so much fun. When I'm done with college I'm going to join a club". Fun, fun, fun. And 99% of the ASD readers I hope will agree with me that it's much more interesting with a LIVE caller, than with instructional cds. (Although there are now really good DVDs that are an excellent teacher's aide for square dancing in the schools) Visual aides are a very good helper.

Now, I'm talking to the callers, please get yourselves and your square dance programs into the school systems. Here's a few tips that we have done, and they worked for us. Contact CALLERLAB and research Teaching Callers to Call in the Classroom, or inquire about the Education Committee's Handbook for teaching in schools. Write letters of introduction about square dancing and you the caller to send to the schools. Send 3 to each school, one for the principal, one for the gym teacher and one to the music teacher. Heck, I even have sent letters to the Math and History Teachers as well. Someone is bound to like the idea.

Present a program that uses a mixture of music from classic to contemporary, country to hip hop and learn 3 different ways to teach a call. Remember, we all learn in different ways. Give them a diversified lesson about square dancing, by means of the subjects I mentioned in the previous paragraph. Here's a big one. I dress like the rest of the staff, and I do go in by myself. Sometimes, I get the luxury of teaching the teachers and faculty before meeting the students. What a plus.

The only time I may dress in square wear, and take in a square of angels with me is when I am teaching to the wee ones. Kindergarten, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> graders love the dress up and colorful stuff. Demos are always after, and not before the lesson.

Your main reason for going into the schools is NOT to enroll new square dancers for your autumn classes. You are merely 'planting the seed' and putting great memories of square dancing into the young minds of these potential and possible future dancers. Set everyone up for SUCCESS, and they'll remember it in the long run.

About Corben:

Cory was Vice Chairman of Callerlab's Education Committee along with Gerry Hardy of New York for about 5 years and stepped down to give someone else a turn. He wrote a monthly column for the American Square Dance Magazine throughout the year 2000 called CORY-OGRAPHY IN THE CLASSROOM. These articles were written to show and tell callers how to go into the school systems and promote this great American past time in a positive way to the youths of our country. Cory has recently been accepted as the first Vice Chairman of the new Calling in the Schools Committee with Callerlab, under the direction of Mike Callahan from New York. This article was recently published in The American Square Dance Magazine.