

During this unusual era, while many of us are much more isolated from others than might be customary, our minds turn to all sorts of things we might not think about very much in ordinary times. That happens to us a lot here on Coe Creek. Old happenings, long-gone neighbors, even favorite animals become subjects to which we turn our thoughts.

This morning, for a reason that is unclear to me, I began to think about dancing. I am not a dancer and have no expertise or desire to engage in that social activity that has been a favorite pastime for centuries.

My folks, though, liked to square dance. At certain periods during past decades square dances were both popular and easy to find. Township halls, school gyms, even homes—all could be venues for square dancing. In fact, when the farmhouse here on Coe Creek was built, my grandparents celebrated its completion by holding a square dance in the large unfurnished rooms that later became the dining room and the parlor.

By the time I remember the local dances, long after Einar and Frances courted by taking in the dances at Stone Ledge Lake and other town halls, the dance floors had changed and expanded. This was the era of the “street dance.” When local people were raising money to build the gym at the school in Tustin, the building that now houses senior citizen activities, some of the funds were generated by square dances held on the main street in the village. We would go with our parents to the Friday or Saturday night dances and spend the time watching the dancers or milling around together to see what was going on.

My mother made herself a special skirt to wear to the dances. I believe the material was what is called piqué—a textured cotton fabric that was well suited to the “swing your partner,” “do-sie-do,” and “allemand left” of the square dance callers. Frances had chosen a bright, bold print for her skirt. The background was white, and large, bright red, distinctive carnations were scattered over the material in a pattern that complemented my mother’s nearly black hair and dark eyes. The skirt was the wide, “full circle” kind that twirled and swung with my mother’s dancing. I admired that skirt and enjoyed watching Frances dance.

I am not sure just how much expertise Einar had in the execution of the dance steps. Following the caller would not have been an issue for him, but as far as dancing ability—that was something I can’t judge from a distance of decades. I do know he liked to square dance.

Other dances, such as waltz and two-step, were a mystery to him. I don’t recall that Frances did any of what was, in those days, called “round dancing,” either, but I am sure she could have been perfectly competent if she had chosen to participate. But, it was square dancing that they liked.

In the 1950s, local folks held several events to earn money for the Bristol baseball team. One evening, that involved a dance on the second floor of the Dover Township Hall. Whether or not the storekeeper who ran the general store on the first floor could keep canned goods on the shelves during the dancing upstairs is a good question. I have heard that he picked up groceries and replaced them all evening.

At one point in the baseball team fundraiser, the musicians began to play music for round dances. My mother was, I believe, visiting with some of the other neighbor women, and Dad was probably talking to someone, as well. For some reason, an old gentleman from the area decided that Einar should learn to round dance. He took it upon himself to act as a dance instructor. They went round and round the floor—I am not sure who was “leading,” —and the “teacher,” toes continually assaulted by Einar’s missteps, persisted until at last, face getting redder and sweatier by the minute, he just plain gave up. He stopped, looked critically at my father, and said, “I can go no further.” The dance lesson was over. I don’t recall that my dad ever tried round dancing again.