

Guiding Lights Square Dance Club – Club History

Owing to the declining numbers at the 50/50 dances run at the Kooyong Association of the Blind during the early 70's another activity was needed.

Arthur Notthling, a totally blind acquaintance of Margaret & Colin Fox, approached Colin to run a Square Dance for the members of the Association. Colin was worried. These people wanting to dance. He was not a Caller, and didn't have records or equipment. But with Ron Whyte's encouragement, Colin took up the challenge.

The first couple of dances were at the Fox's house in Glen Waverley in April 1974. Four couples were invited to 'have ago' with four of the eight dancers being visually impaired.

Dances began at the Association's building in Kooyong and by the end of May fortnightly dances were being held on the first and third Saturday nights. From these beginnings the Guiding Light Square Dance Club was formed. The name is symbolic of the Association's emblem.

Over the years many of the club's voluntary drivers have taken up Square Dancing. We would like to thank all helpers for their patience and understanding. We have had lots and lots of fun together our calendar has been a busy one. We have had annual 'pie & sauce' nights, BBQ's, Picnics and our three course Claytons Christmas Cabaret, as well as the annual birthday and Christmas Nights.

Our first demonstration was at the 1975 Annual Fair for the Association for the Blind at Kooyong. We have not missed a Fair since. Outdoor demos are the most difficult. Grass is always uneven to dance on and the wind can change the direction of sound so quickly, disorientating a blind dancer. It all adds to the fun. Comments like "Didn't You See That Hole?" "Are You Blind?" are quite often heard while dancing.

In 1980 we ventured out into the Square dance world to other Clubs. We did a demo at Ron & Ella Whyte's Festival of Dance held that year at the McKinnon High School. Although people enjoyed the demo and congratulations were in more than ample supply, it took a lot of courage to dance with us. Ron & Ella paved the way by making us welcome at their regular Sunnyside Dances.

We have danced demos at quite a few National Square Dance Conventions, two in Adelaide, Perth, Canberra, Brisbane and Sydney. The second Adelaide Convention and the Sydney Dance was with a sister group, the Visionaries from Perth. For the Sydney Dance, poor Jeff Van Sam Beck did not know what he was letting himself into when he offered to do the choreography.

As it was the Bi-Centennial year, Margaret designed the period style costumes for the men and ladies in four colours, a colour for each set. Many letters went back and forth to W.A. until we had a visually pleasing and interesting movement of colour through the demo. Again 'Sunnyside' dancers were of great help. We relied on them for practices before arriving in Sydney.

We only had two rehearsals with our WA friends. Owing to one of our dancers becoming ill with food poisoning the afternoon of the demo, a Sunnysider stepped in and held her breath, not because of nerves but a dress that was at least a size too small throughout the demo.

What a year 1984 was!! We wondered how we ever did it? How did Colin put up with us? And how did Margaret sew all those dresses and petticoats whilst still working between Friday night demos at various shopping centres around Melbourne?

The demos were to raise money for banners, badges and give-aways for our big trip in September. There were three sets this time, navy blue, aqua and yellow. We enjoyed the company of the Sunnysiders Dancers to Canberra and back.

The next few months seemed to consist of Margaret's sandwiches for tea in a bus, going to another shopping centre.

While we went to practice, and from practice to demos, Margaret went on sewing and Colin was busy organising a trip that was to include a five week holiday and cover four

countries. There were fifteen of us who headed to America, Canada, Japan and Hong Kong, a multitude of petticoats and dresses and a "Kangaroo Suit"!!

We trekked across Canada and through numerous States in America, which included visits to two Square dance Clubs, Disney World and Epcot Centre, then on to Japan and another Club on a very hot Sunday afternoon in Tokyo. We wore our dresses and Petticoats on a commuter train to the Dance.

The year also included our 10th Birthday on Friday 13th April, 'A Black Cat Night' and was held at Ormond Hall, R.V.I.B. Prahara. Proceeds from this dance helped with our extra tour expenses.

1985 was a fun year, We visited a Club in Glenrowan and visited some wineries and rode a motor bike during a farm tour. Later on in the year we went to the National Convention in Perth just to dance and have fun. Again we had the company of Sunnyside Dancers, from Perth we toured Darwin and Alice Springs dancing with local Clubs in both places. There were nine Guiding Lighters, three sighted, three partially sighted and three totally blind, that climbed Ayers Rock.

Over the years we have attended various State and Nations Conventions just to dance. Margaret & Colin always hoped that our demos and attendance at these functions would help some other blind dancer to join a local club and find the pleasures that we have had.

It has been wonderful to have so many dancers come along over the years and help us celebrate our Birthday and Christmas Nights. .

In 1991 the Club was saddened by the death of Colin. We were urged on by Margaret's persistence to keep the Club running. Since, it has been our pleasure to welcome Virgil as part of the team. But because of dwindling numbers and lack of volunteers, we will have to discontinue our regular Club Nights. It is now with mixed emotions that the time has come to say Goodbye to Guiding Light Square dance Club on this our 21st Birthday on the 8th May 1995.

Our thanks to the Association for the Blind for the use of the premises and facilities since 1974 and to all the dancers we have had the pleasure of dancing with at various places.

A sincere thanks to Sharon Lacey who has helped out with the Calling over the past five years and to all the guest Callers that have attended and extended invitations to visit their Clubs.

Well done to Colin & Margaret.

[From June 1995 issue of "Squares Around Victoria"](#)