

Jean's Story

by Andrea S. Pitkow, Chattanooga Traditional Dance Society



How would you celebrate your 101st birthday? We're delighted that Jean Blair Dolan celebrated hers by contra dancing with us in Chattanooga last November. During the break at our Saturday night dance, we surprised her with cake and candles and a chorus of "Happy Birthday!" After all, Jean is someone to celebrate!

That wasn't Jean's first time dancing with us. She and her friend, Linda Scudiere Pillow, had come a few times before. But it was Jean's idea to contra dance on her birthday.

Jean doesn't sit on the sidelines; she's right out there on the dance floor with a big smile. She says she likes how contra dancers spread their energy around the room.

"And there's always something to learn," Jean says. "It's relaxing, and you never get to where you stop learning."

Born on November 12, 1915, in Winthrop, Massachusetts, Jean learned early on to appreciate the beauty of nature and the importance of keeping fit and staying active. Her father took her hiking, which led to her lifelong love of the outdoors.

At age 10, she joined Girl Scouts, where she learned how to wield an ax, tie various knots and cook outdoors on an open fire. She also learned conflict resolution and discipline, life skills that served her well, and

which led her, in adulthood, to becoming a Girl Scout leader. "It was good to break people's barriers," she recalls. Last year, Girl Scouts (Appalachian Council) presented Jean with a Lifetime Achievement award for her 90 plus years of service and commitment in championing girls' self-sufficiency.

Jean graduated from high school in "the Depression Class of 1933," she says. She began square dancing and contra dancing in New England, where there was always, she reports, a "surplus of women because the men were gone," serving in WWII.

Jean met her match when she was introduced to Donald Dolan, a mountain-climbing instructor who, like Jean, loved being outdoors. They married in 1942, and had four children, brought up as nature lovers.

During their 64-year marriage, Jean and Don square danced some after their move to Atlanta (in 1964), but she says her husband never really enjoyed it. "He did the best he could," she laughs, "but it really wasn't his thing."

Jean is a trailblazer, literally and figuratively. Her passion for hiking led her to start a Friday morning hiking group 40 years ago on Signal Mountain where she lives. "We were mostly moms of teenage daughters who could understand each other's challenges," Jean explains. One of the entries in the

hiking journal she's kept through the years on her myriad excursions says: "The reward of a thing well done is to have done it."

The women—of various ages and backgrounds—still hike every week, though Jean's hikes nowadays are shorter. On birthdays, the women bring wine in addition to a sandwich or salad for lunch. There was a self-styled "pair of Jeans" celebrating milestone birthdays last fall (her friend, Jean Cook, turned 90). So the wine flowed!

Jean helped start a canoe club in Chattanooga, which celebrated its 50th anniversary, in part, by celebrating her. A few years ago, she and her daughter traveled to the English countryside. How did they spend their time? Hiking, of course!

We're not the least bit surprised that in addition to painting, hiking and dancing, Jean wrote a book recently—*Walking with Friends: Some Signal Mountain Walks* (available on Amazon.com), which includes 35 watercolor maps and paintings by Jean, along with aphorisms and recollections by fellow hiking buddies. In early July, Jean was front and center at a book signing gathering in her honor.

"I'm a little independent, you may have noticed," says Jean with a chuckle. "I don't know what all the fuss is about. I'm just a regular person who's lived a long time." She recently signed up for a course called "Embracing Aging," but, as far as we're concerned, Jean should be teaching it!

We hope Jean will join us again and again on the dance floor.

A Room That Spoke

by Gary Shapiro

A room spoke to me. Not just any room, but a ballroom. And not just any ballroom, but the Carrillo Ballroom in Santa Barbara, CA.

Here's what it said: "I am a ballroom, as in a room, for a ball. I can't remember the last time I had an actual ball upon my sprung floor and within these four walls. Please, help me fulfill my destiny and organize a ball."

Why me? Some time in the 90s, I learned to love English country dancing—you know, that stuff Jane Austen loved so much. I started teaching ECD in Santa Barbara and started attending balls in other cities.

Now, really, the only time to have a ball is on a Saturday night, especially if you want to attract folks from out of town. But when the Carrillo Ballroom started talking to me, the ballroom was booked every Saturday night for, get this, ballroom dancing. That's not a ball, just a regular weekly dance in a ballroom.

Several years later, attendance at the Saturday night ballroom dance had dwindled to the point that it was no longer every week. Sad for the ballroom dance participants, but good news for the ballroom.

So early in 2013, I convened a group of committed ECDers and we proceeded to organize an English Country Ball on February 15, 2014. On that night, we had a room full of smiling, appreciative dancers, with world-class musicians (Jacqueline Schwab, Shira Kammen, and Bonnie Insull) and a renowned Dance Master (Brad Foster) from Massachusetts. The ballroom, too, was so happy. It told me so.

The Ball was a success in every respect, so here we are having our fifth annual Winter Dreams English Country Ball on February 17, 2018, with Scott Higgs and some of the best Bay Area musicians. Learn more at <http://www.sbcde.org/wd>.

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