

# Hive Mind—Celebrating Milestones

a crowd-sourced column

*Every group is eager for fresh ideas for particular challenges. The Hive Mind is a new column with readers sharing insights about different subjects (see next page for the Fall topic and deadline). Our thanks to caller Scott Higgs for coordinating the column, and thanks to this issue's participants.*

*In this issue: People celebrate birthdays, weddings, memorials, anniversaries, and more with music and dance. Please share your story of such a celebration. What elements made it special and memorable? Were there any lasting effects for the community?*

## **Dorcas Hand, Houston, TX**

The First Friday dance in Austin—they would gather in a big circle at the start of the break to sing to all birthdays for the month, and anniversaries. And then there would be cake. Simple and charming. Sadly, the building that hosted the dance was sold, so that dance is no longer.

In Houston, we have managed random celebrations advertised by email: Hawaiian Shirt Night, Ice Cream Social, Wear Green—just amusements to make the dance special.

And we have remembered an original dancer in the group by dancing the Levi Jackson Rag with his wife. She is now 90, so not always dancing, but we all think of Bill whenever we do that dance.

## **Mike Franch, Baltimore, MD**

Eileen and I have held dances to commemorate milestone birthdays, not in honor of us but in celebration of and in gratitude to the communities of dance and music that have enriched our lives. In April, we held an English country dance for our 75th birthdays, which are only a few months apart. Eileen's band, The Geud Band of Baltimore (a rehearsed open band) played, and caller friends called a dance or two.

In addition to our friends in the Baltimore-Washington area, we invited our Pinewoods Campers' Week community. We knew that most could not come such a long distance for an evening's dancing, but the invitation was our way of telling them how important they are to us, and how they are with us even if they aren't there physically. This seemed especially important this year, as we lost one of the youngest members of the community, Angelia Ricker, and one of the oldest, Gerda Conant. It's not hard, at this point in life, to think of this community without me. All the more reason to cherish it, and to dance, sing and make music with joy.

## **David Roodman, Washington, DC**

Early on Saturday, September 25, 1999, my wife Mai Pham gave birth to our first child. We had warned my dad, Gary Roodman, that this might happen. To celebrate, he had written a tune and dance. I think he provisionally entitled it "Little P-R," for little Pham-Roodman, because we refused to tell him the name beforehand. My dad debuted the dance that day in Philadelphia, and revealed its permanent name: Benjamin's Birth Day. Then he and my stepmother Rowena drove down to the hospital in Baltimore to meet the new guy.

Time passed.

Last fall, Mai and fellow Timber Ridge Camp mom Michal Warshow organized a Sweet Sixteen contra dance for our two boys, in the Eastern Market building on Capitol Hill. (Except really Steven was 17.) Dance friends came, along with school friends who had never contra'd before. Partway through the second half, caller Janine Smith handed the mic to Benjamin's little brother, Alexander, who taught a new dance. After the walkthrough, he revealed its name: Benjamin's Birth Day 2.0. The surprised birthday boy came to Alexander and gave him a big hug.

I didn't dance then because I was recording video. Friends say the dance has good flow—which runs in the family.

## **Pat Petersen, Durham, NC**

After our wedding ceremony and the mummers play that followed (note: don't let the Wizard throw the best man in the lake), we danced English all afternoon. Our balloon of euphoria was punctured when we were told that we weren't really married yet! We had taken our license out in a different county from where the ceremony was held. We hopped in our minister's car with a couple of witnesses, waved to people arriving for our evening contra dance, crossed

the county line, and repeated our vows, returning to eat, drink and dance the night away with friends from many singing and dancing traditions. Insight: check local regulations!

*Here are additional comments inspired by our last topic: Attracting New Participants:*

**Dorcas Hand, Houston, TX**

Our trick to encourage new dancers to come back is to charge them full price on the first visit, but to give them a business card that gives them three more dances at the member price. We also raised the non-member price to \$10, \$4 more than members pay—that makes membership more appealing, which keeps the coffers full enough to support insurance, dances that don't break even, and basic supplies. Remarkably, that change (\$10/\$4) improved our membership numbers substantially. Oh, and there is the coupon for a free dance *if* you re-up in the first month of our fiscal year.

**Rosemarie Swanson, Bryan, TX**

One of our members set up a Meetup group for us, and over the last ten months our average attendance has increased from about 18 to about 24 people, and we seem to reach new faces.

*Our next Hive Mind topic is COLLABORATION. With limited time and resources, it's tempting for volunteer organizers to focus solely on our own groups. Often, though, cultivating connections with related groups reaps great benefits, with modest effort—whether it's sharing sound systems, mailing lists or booking cooperatively to attract distant talent. CDSS Board members are frequently dazzled by the creative and successful collaboration of local groups when the traveling Executive Committee visits an area.*

*What stories can you share on the theme of collaboration? Here's an example: just this April, dancers and musicians from the English, contra and Scottish groups in Philadelphia came together for an ESCapade event, inspired by ESC week at Pinewoods. Workshops on all three-styles of music and dance attracted a wide range of participants, who then enjoyed a three styles dance party.*

*Your story can tell of a single event, or a series. What motivated the collaboration? How did things play out? Were there lasting effects? Please take a few minutes to share your story at <http://www.cdss.org/hive>. (200 word limit per story)*