

Do we just talk about friendliness, or practice it?

By an Anonymous New Dancer in "Squares 'Round The Bay", February 2009, P. 3

As a newer dancer, I had so much fun dancing at the NCSDA Anniversary Dance on January 4, 2009 in Benicia. Even though I haven't completed the plus-level classes yet, other dancers in every square were very helpful and understanding. We had lots of fun!

The meal that followed the dance had to be paid in advance and I did so unaware that others from our club were not staying for the meal. In hindsight, I will never do that again. In brief, I'll describe what happened.

After the dance, we were all asked to grab a chair and take it to the tables in the back of the hall to eat, I chose a table and asked if the folks were saving the entire table or if I could join them. I told them I was a single and could sit anywhere if they needed the whole table. They said no and invited me to sit down. I sat as they arranged their chairs around me and across from me. The meal line was announced and formed, so I joined the line as my tablemates were still putting their things in order. When I returned to my chair, the others around me had moved away and left me sitting alone in the middle of a table. Even the chair across from me had been moved!

Once everyone was seated again, the group to my right included a club caller and that group was scrunched around the end of the table rather than spreading out near me. The group to my left proceeded to loudly discuss square dance groups that welcome singles. All other conversation was muted so I couldn't hear much else they talked about - just that there are clubs that do welcome singles. Not one of these people spoke to me even though I tried to swallow my hurt and chat with both ends of the table. They would barely even make eye contact!

All I could think of was how fast I could eat and leave. While I didn't say anything to my tablemates, I was so tempted to tell them I'm not single by choice - my husband died. I was also tempted to let them know that not all singles are "window shopping" for a lover/spouse. Some of us are just trying to get our lives back on track after a horrible tragedy and learn to laugh again. In order to do that, we must put ourselves in uncomfortable situations all the time if we want to have fun and continue to live our lives.

To those at my table: someday you, too, will find yourself in my position and I want you to remember how you've treated the single square dancers like myself. When your day of being single arrives, know that I will be the most understanding friend you could ever have. I will not judge any single dancer the way you sadly did me at my first - and hopefully not my last - big hoedown. You put a real damper on a truly fun dance!

The worst part of your actions is that now the seed of doubt has been planted: do all square dance couples feel that same way about singles coming into their clubs? This letter will remain unsigned to protect the guilty and me, the innocent.

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Editor's note - The most embarrassing part of this is that I was there and I didn't notice this situation or do anything to make it right. I'm sure that everyone reading this is saying to themselves, "Those dancers should have been friendlier!" Well, what if you were "those dancers"? What if you unwittingly ignored this dancer who joined us because she believed our claims that "Square Dancing is friendliness set to music." Being friendly and kind is not a job we can leave to someone else. Each and every one of us must follow through - not just acting like a friend, but being one.

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