

## HOOLYEH & FRIENDS REUNION!!

By Kathy (Armstrong) Sandstrom

At Betty McCauley's 80th birthday party last year, some long-time Hoolyeh dancers were reunited. It was so much fun to visit, dance and catch up on 20+ years of "life" that we didn't want to wait another quarter century! The last time we had a "formal" Hoolyeh reunion was 22 years ago!! We think it is time for another one. It will be April 26, 2008 at the Senior Citizens Center, 2601 NW Tyler Avenue, Corvallis, Oregon, starting at 7 PM. Let us know your choice of an "oldie moldie" to do and we'll try to dig up the music. Only \$5 admission, and \$1 off if you are in costume. Spectators are free as usual. Bring fingerfood to share.

Hoolyeh is an Israeli word loosely translated to "let's get together and have fun" – and that's just what we did! I started dancing in 1970 when I saw some folks dancing during lunch and free time at Corvallis High School. There was teen dancing on Thursday nights (we had 140 high school students dancing together on Thursday nights in the early '70s!), adults on Friday nights, and kids on Saturday morning – all sponsored by Corvallis Park and Recreation. It was all run by Hildred Rice at that time, with Glenn Weber assisting her, along with others doing guest teaching as well (I blame Bekki Levenspiel for teaching me my first dance!). Mrs. Rice's sister, Pearl Atkinson, ran the dancing at Reed College for years and years.

In the winter of 1971, there was a week of non-traditional classes at CHS (anyone remember "OCCE" week?). You could sign up for anything you wanted and I signed up for both the folkdancing class and jewelry class which were held at the same time. I went back and forth until I was so hooked on the dancing, that I stopped going to the jewelry class! Once you get bit by the folkdance bug....well, that was the beginning of a very long and continuing passion with cultures from around the world. Garfield School was our home on Thursday nights.

A month or so later was my first excursion to Seattle for the big folkdance festival held up here. My mom wasn't so sure about me going up to the big city with a bunch of other kids on a bus!! I assured my mom that we were all going to the festival and doing nothing else. We were staying at the YWCA and Mrs. Rice would be there with us. So away we went! We met dancers from the Polish performance group Polonie - many of them are still my good friends today.

Less than a year after I started folk dancing, it was decided a teen Hoolyeh performing group would be organized. I had really taken to folkdancing and really really really wanted to be in this group! So I auditioned with many others and happily made it in. Mrs. Rice sold placemats and other things to help raise money for costumes. The city supported us as well. Our first costumes were Israeli ones – red linen dresses for the girls and blue shirts/white pants for the guys. Our next costume was the beautiful Greek one that Mary McCauley researched. My first costume experience was researching and finding fabric with Mrs. Rice for our Polish Lowicz costume. Later we added Ukrainian, Romanian, Austrian, and others as well.

Less than one year later, the Hoolyeh performing group went to the Seattle Festival. It was pretty darn exciting to be going up, learning dances, attending a festival, and *performing!!* One year, we were madly finishing our Russian costumes on the bus. I don't remember how we schlepped all our costumes down University Avenue and through campus to the HUB! We were

so excited to be performing. We entered the UW Hub Ballroom in a long diagonal line doing Timonia and everyone applauded as we entered. We were sky high with excitement, so much so that by the time we got to Hopak, several of us were dancing and crying, with tears of joy streaming down our faces. This folkdancing stuff was really great!!

The Enumclaw festival was in August. The infamous Seattle folkdance friend Alice Nugent kind of “adopted” our bus of teenagers and arranged for us to have a potluck supper at Enid and Neville Pooley’s house, and go back again in the morning for breakfast! Pretty cool. A favorite highlight of this festival was the watermelon feed at the end on Sunday -- we *never* left before stuffing our faces! And who can forget the watermelon seed spitting contest!

We put on annual concerts for several years. As we did not have a lot of costumes to choose from at first, we would do several dances in one costume before changing. So this meant we sometimes did a Bulgarian dance in our Israeli costume, and a Croatian one in our Greek costume! Oh well!! When we started, we mostly did the dance from beginning to end. Eventually we started doing a little choreographing and segued into different dances. We only had taped music so we were somewhat limited in our “arrangements.” A few folks did have original costumes and we used these when possible. We even had some live music by some of the dancers, and sang some songs too (like *Sinoc mije lane moje* from Croatia).

We also went to local festivals and workshops in Salem, Eugene, Portland (including ones at OSU, U of O, and Reed), and wherever else Mrs. Rice would take us on the bus. Bekki and Barney Levenspiel arranged some workshops and folkdance parties at the coast. We danced many times in Betty and Jim McCauley’s carport. We helped teach at a festival at Evergreen State College in Olympia in its early years (when there was no landscaping yet!). When going to Washington festivals, we always stopped in Woodland at the Oak Tree Restaurant to eat (and that is *still* my stopping point on all my trips home today!). Whether there was an event in Corvallis, Eugene, Albany, Salem, Portland, Seattle or Enumclaw – we all went to each other’s events, our circle of friends widened quickly, and we were a strong presence in the Northwest.

Besides taking us to festivals and workshops and hosting many as well, Mrs. Rice awarded scholarships to 11th grade students to help pay for tuition to a folkdance camp in Stockton, California (which celebrated its 60th camp last year with a good showing of Pacific Northwesters attending). For years, Corvallis had a strong presence at Stockton, often with 7-12 attendees. Later dancers were supported at camps through the Jim McCauley Scholarship Fund.

Our local festival was always the last weekend of April. That also used to be when we would “spring forward.” We would start decorating the evening before the festival and keep going until we were done. One time we finished in the wee hours of the morning and decided to go get some hot chocolate. I got home around 4 AM or so and did I ever get in trouble for not having called home to say where I was!

Some of our wonderful guest teachers for workshops and festivals included Glenn Bannerman (who brought clogging to us), Atanas Kolarovski (Macedonian), Madame Judetz (Romanian), the infamous Dick Crum and Yves Moreau (Balkan), Johnny and Paula Pappas (Greek), Bora Gajicki (Serbian), Billy Burke (Balkan), Larry Weiner (Balkan), and many more.

I am so lucky to have had my roots with the Corvallis Hoolyehs – so many excellent dancers during my time with them, and there were many before and after. Because of these excellent roots, I went on to perform in many groups in the Seattle area in the Balkan arts as a dancer, singer, musician, and costumer. Kudos to Mrs. Rice and all the teachers who continued teaching and supporting the Hoolyeh dancers - we have tried to list them all on the website. They have all contributed to our strong folkdance history and identity in Corvallis. Dana Poling is currently running Hoolyeh, and thanks to Karen Emry at Corvallis Park & Recreation for the department's continuing support as well. Big thanks to our parents for their support too.

Jane McCauley Thomas is writing up the earlier Hoolyeh history and part of her article is also in this NFDI issue. The full write-up will be posted on the blog that Bekki (Levenspiel) Levien created ([www.hoolyeh.com](http://www.hoolyeh.com)), plus lots of photos and more memories. Whether you are a Hoolyeh or danced with us, you are invited to add your stories, memories and comments to the blog. I am so grateful to have a whole world of life-long friends and contacts from this fabulous "hobby."