Honor Your Partner ~
Poems of Courtesy for Contradancers

from the Asheville Dance Community

In June 2002, the Monday night contra dance in Asheville, North Carolina did something unusual — they had a Courtesy Poem Contest as a way of addressing some typical dance community problems, and they published the twenty-six entries in a booklet. Eight of the poems are below.

"Contradancers love courtesy," Jeff Baker wrote in the booklet's notes. "Many people come to the dance for many reasons — joy, exercise, social, solace, sadness, perhaps a need for compassion or just support. They may be slightly injured, they may not want to or be able to swing fast or raise their arms for a twirl. So, let's be mindful: honor your partner, in the full sense of the word."

1. May I Have This Dance?
by Diane Lindsay Baker

A dancing we will go
    Me with Mama and Papa
    So little, so pretty, so sweet
Although each that I greet —
    I am lifted off my feet

A dancing we will go
    Me and my friend
    So beautiful, so strong
My body has developed and
    All men wish to envelop

A dancing I will go
    Although my body has changed
    I am still the same
My hair has turned gray
    and my hips still sway
I sit and I wait.
    I wish to hear
May I have this dance
    my dear.

2. Keep Your Breath Fresh
by Anonymous

Keep your breath fresh
Keep your hands clean
Don't try too hard to be a spinning machine
Make sure you smile, keep the beat
Enjoy the music
Don't step on my feet

3. Dancing with Your Partner
by Hank Morris

Dancing with your partner
    Is the finest thing to do

When you're dancing with your partner
And she's dancing with you.

Pay attention to the subtleties
Body language, smiles
And use your ways to fit her dance
Combining both your styles.

If you try to force your style
To just use her like a tool
The dancing doesn't really work
And you'll just be a fool.

Because dancing with your partner
Is the finest thing to do
When you're dancing with your partner
And she's dancing with you.

If she doesn't want to flirt
And you try to sleaze the girl
You'll only ruin the fun for her
And make her want to hurl.

But pay attention to her joys
What really give a thrill
And next that you ask to dance
I guarantee she will.

For dancing with your partner
Is the finest thing to do
When you're dancing with your partner
And she's dancing with you.

4. There Was a Young Man at the Dance
by Barbara Groh

There was a young man at the dance
Who liked to twirl, leap and prance
But his timing was bad
And his partners so sad
They no longer will give him a chance.

5. There Was a Young Man from Chakeego
by Anonymous

There was a young man from Chakeego
Whose swing was as big as his ego
He spun little Jill, who took quite a spill
Now he only sings sapreeno.

6. There Was a Young Lady from Asheville
by M. Bear

There was a young lady from Asheville
Who danced with a fellow quite rude
And though she was surely not bashful

By the time he finished spinning her
Thirty-four times as fast as humanly
possible and leaving her facing in
the wrong direction
She was not only late, she was nude.

7. For Dancing's Sake
by Michael Morgan

When you meet someone new in the line,
It may be that dancer's first time.
Don't snicker or sneer,
But smile with good cheer,
'Cause we've all worn "new" shoes at one time.

When you meet them to balance and swing,
You can help them do the right thing.
With a lead that is STRONG,
GENTLY lead them along,
And they'll learn without saying a thing.

So always remember, it's only for fun.
And be careful not to hurt ANYONE.
And the joy you receive,
Will outweigh what you give,
When the dancing has begun.

8. The Loss of Innocence
(Or, She Comes to the Dance No More)
by Anonymous

Lovely, pretty — with an innocent air
She learned to twirl — her golden hair
She learned to look into the eyes
And enjoyed the truth — that they belie
She felt the freedom and the chance
To use her new found confidence
She loved the new friendships and the unity
And she loved this gift of "community"
But innocence is a precious pose
It is both fragile and exposed
So it was when a man her father's age
Wanted to dance too close an engage
There was a different sense to the swing
And it was not an innocent thing
He may or may not have wanted action
And she, not aware of men's attraction
But now she was shocked, the trust had shattered
She wanted AWAY, that's all that mattered
So the dance goes on and he does not know
That his indiscretion drove her out the door
And he dances today 'til his feet are sore
And she — she comes to the dance no more.

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