

# Nancy Petrie: My Hero, 100 Years Young

by Susan Amessé

Nancy Petrie is an inspiration. She danced “Fandango” at her 95th birthday party. She continued to paint watercolor landscapes into her late 90s. She has been a member of the Ridgewood Unitarian Church in New Jersey for 60 years. I had the pleasure of meeting Nancy almost 20 years ago, when she was barely into her 80s, and I have known her, danced with her, and have drawn inspiration from her all these years, not only as a dancer, but also as a person who always remains calm and has empathy and good feelings for everyone around her.

Nancy Hartsuch Petrie was born on a cool, dry Saturday on April 27, 1918, in East Lansing, Michigan. As a young girl, she loved art and always knew she wanted to draw and paint. Nancy attended Oberlin College and majored in art, she then went to a commercial art school in Detroit, Michigan.

As the great depression was coming to an end, and second world war was nearing, Nancy moved to New York City to find a job in advertising. She worked briefly as elevator operator before landing a position at a publishing company. But her working days ended when she met Carl Petrie at a USO social dance in Fort Hamilton, Brooklyn. They were married for 65 years.

Nancy loved to dance, but she didn’t know about folk dancing of any kind until some of her fellow Unitarian Society members showed the congregation something very strange and wonderful called English Country dancing at a Sunday service. Margaret Ann Martin and Mary Cummins had attended a Recorder Society weekend. As part of the weekend, there was a demo of ECD. Mary and Margaret Ann thought they would do a similar demo at their church in New Jersey. Nancy laments that she did not find ECD until later in life, but she and Carl were hooked.

Nancy and Carl became regulars at the dance that was founded in Ridgewood, NJ, and danced every Friday. After a while, she and Carl “worked up the nerve,” to branch out and commute into Manhattan to dance at CD\*NY, and to White Plains for CDW dances. Nancy also remembers with great fondness their excursions to Pinewoods Camp in Massachusetts, and to Berea, Kentucky.



Nancy Petrie (photo by Susan Amesse)

Nancy has slowed down just a little bit now that her age is in triple digits. Her beloved husband passed at the age of 94, and Nancy had a mishap recently that caused her a broken hip. She now lives in The Share, an independent living home just across the street from the Unitarian Church where she still attends services every Sunday. And although she doesn’t dance any more, we still see her at the dance every other Sunday. Nancy said that dancing is her favorite avocation, even more so than painting. She feels very lucky that she can cross the street and watch the wonderful dancing and listen to the sublime and lovely music as often as she does.

The North Jersey English Country Dancers held a celebration dance for her 100th birthday in April. We had a wonderful group of about 60 dancers come out to celebrate with her, and a cavalcade of callers led by MC Tom Amesse guided us through the fun filled day with music by the Gotham Gals. I wrote a new dance in her honor to an original piece of music for the celebration.

I asked Nancy what her secret to a long life is. She said, “Well, I suppose it’s that I’m a late bloomer. So, I have to stick around to enjoy the dancing that I discovered later in life.”

*Susan Amessé loves English country dancing but it’s the people she’s met at dances at home and across the country that are her biggest treasures. Her other passion is writing books, stories, and plays for children.*

# Inspiration

## The Good Lady of Cottage Place

Tom Amessé

**A**

9

**B**

25

[Click here](#) or on the notation above for a downloadable PDF with instruction and tune.

Inspiration: Three Couple Circle Mixer by Susan Amessé

**Formation:** Three couples in a circle, 32 bar waltz

- A1 1-4 Circle Left  
5-8 Drop neighbor's hand, set, and change places with partner as follows: left hand dancer turn single moving right into partner's place, while right hand dancer cast right into partner's place
- A2 Repeat A1, partners ending in original places, facing away from center with partner, right hand in right hand
- B1 1-2 Lead away  
3-4 Right hand turn halfway  
5-6 Left hand halfway  
7-8 Lead back
- B2 1-2 Ladies form a right hand star and balance forward and back  
3-4 Ladies turn the star about 2/3, to original corner; release the star and give left hand to corner  
5-6 Balance forward and back  
7-8 Left hand turn to re-form the circle with new partners

Repeat two more times

The partner changing movements in A1 and A2 are from a Scottish Country Dance figure called "set and link."