

More home ideas inside to create the space you deserve. Plus get the skinny on the local real estate in the area transactions.

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■ Home tip

A telltale sign of a leak is a stained ceiling. Note where these stains are, and then go outside and examine the corresponding areas of your roof. Even if you notice stains in the middle of winter, it's best to wait till after the winter to inspect this problem. Going up on a roof in bad weather is asking for trouble.

Let's face the music and dance

Author explores the meaning of movement on the dance floor and in life



By **Jill Butler**

Special to the Times

Dance Life's Dance: get up, get going, get dancing. What took me so long to get back to dancing? The simple answer, I wasn't ready.

My cottage is forever my nest and sanctuary. I go out into the world and I return to this safe haven. This is no longer my cave or hiding place. I've had to make the distinction for myself. It's so easy to hang out with the TV or computer. Of late I've been wanting to move; specifically, to dance. For inspiration, I rented every dance movie I could find: Strictly Ballroom, Saturday Night Fever, Dirty Dancing, and more. This was a warm-up.

I let the Universe know as well as those around me I was ready to go out into the world in a new way. I was introduced to contra dancing over the summer. Contra dancing, or contra, is similar but different to square dancing. A caller calls the dance. The dance is danced to a live band. Contra dancing migrated from Scottish Country, to England, France, and to America over 200 years ago. As the dance moved West, it became square dancing. The contra dancing version is a bit different from square dancing but not so different that anyone's grade school or camp experience of square dancing wouldn't feel familiar.

The dinner-dancing dining room. How hilarious. This dining room has served as many things: an art studio, project staging area, sewing room and even occasionally as a dining moment - tete a tete, dinner for two, or more. Dancing has waltzed into my life. I need to move! Last summer swimming came back into my life and for the winter I've taken to dancing. Dance appeals both for the movement and the social contact, having spent the last five years seriously underground. So, who hasn't cranked up the music and danced around the house? We just don't mention it. Movement, dancing solo, or in partnership, is liberating. I strongly recommend it, particularly, in times of stress. I've graduated from my closet dancing, like singing in the shower, to dancing out in the world.

As kids we danced. Mom enrolled us, brother York and I, for ballroom dancing classes at the downtown Kalamazoo (Mich.) YWCA. We were instructed to wear white gloves so are sweaty, nervous hands wouldn't fling our partner across the floor. York and I loved the swing, the rest I don't remember. We danced together at early teen dances. We navigated high school dances together until the good dancer boy friend (best friend of brother) became far more interesting. I would love to dance one last dance with this high school sweetheart, we did it well. As for the last dance with my brother, we missed that opportunity.

What brought me to this story? A local barn dance was offered as a gift to the community and what a gift. The barn doors were flung open; bales of hay lined the dance floor as rest stations. Some folks sat out, not just one dance, but all of the dances. They rested a lot! Some ventured out onto the floor - once - felt foolish, never to try again. Is this what we do? Try once and give up? I can relate. Do I need to be an immediate expert? As adults, it's difficult not to know, to not be perfect right off the

bat. I can think of a million reasons why I wouldn't get up, get going to go dancing. I had to decide! I mostly go dancing by myself; many of us do, that's a cool thing about these dances. I don't know many people and I'm still learning the dances. This is not my native "tribe", and on and on it goes. And yet, I want to be moving. I want to greet the world in new ways. In fact this is low risk, it doesn't hurt, or even cost much, (\$ 8 -12 admission). The most costly are my anticipated feelings of discomfort of not knowing it all beforehand.

Leading or following takes us to another idea. How are my following skills?

Every contra dance evening winds down with a waltz; another dance I don't know well. Here comes an "opportunity" to follow, yet another challenge. I dislike guided tours for this reason; following blindly is not my game. I like having a say about things. Once I'm on a tour bus I go numb. I am not comforted by someone else either deciding my destiny or deciding what "should" interest me. I'm bored. I go to sleep and wish for this "adventure" to be over. When our male partner is not leading with a firm hand and decisive step, we women want to take over. Can we

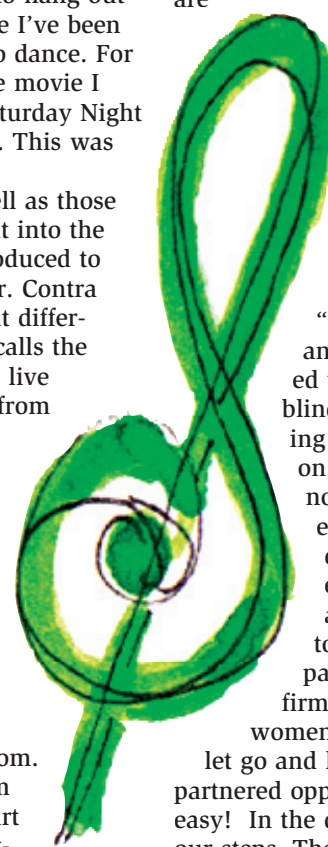
let go and let our partner lead? This is a partnered opportunity, a collaboration. Not easy! In the dance, we both need to know our steps. The leader guides the sequence of steps, the partner indicates her preferences and if all goes well, together we dance.

A favorite contra call is the "Balance and Swing". This idea and movement just about sums up what I love about this dance. "Balance" equals getting centered with myself and my partner and "Swing" is an invitation to let it rip. It makes me smile every time it's called. It's become a metaphor for my life. Every Saturday I get to choose; stay home, or get in the car - and go! In the end, every dance evening is different and

every evening is a great time. Particularly in times of stress, movement beats out sitting around drinking cocktails and talking about the lousy economy, or watching the news which we can do little to change. What I can change is my energy, outlook, intention to keep moving no matter what, and to keep creating anew while enjoying the opportunity to "Balance" and let it rip into one fast moving step after another.

Editor's note: For more information about contra dancing go to: www.CTContra.com or e-mail JillButler@JillButler.com.

Jill's recently published book, "Create the Space You Deserve," is a different kind of dance. Here she describes and illustrates in this irresistible book her ideas for all of us about transitioning into a new life while reinventing our personal spaces and places.



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Illustrations by Jill Butler.