

## Hoolyeh memories -- Jane McCauley Thomas

I started dancing in 1959, when I was eight and in the third grade. It wasn't "Hoolyeh" then... it was simply Saturday morning dancing in the Garfield school cafeteria. We danced for two hours every week, and often there were more than sixty children, first grade through sixth.

Irene Butts expected the boys to ask the girls, and they did so graciously -- "May I have this dance?" There were usually three or four boys who could dance well, and sometimes some smaller ones. Mike Onstad, who went on to dance with the Utah ballet, had a silver tooth and a shock of black curly hair when all the other boys wore crewcuts. Of course all the girls were in love with him. After the boys had chosen, the girls paired up, with the tallest or best dancers taking the boys' parts.

The first year I was dancing, we demonstrated "Shiboleth Basadeh" at the Corvallis festival in the old Roosevelt School. By fifth grade I was one of the "old timers", which meant I was allowed to dance all the dances. We did easy ones like "Glow-worm" and "Gustav's Skol", and more complicated ones like "Man in the Hay". The old timers took turns leading the line dances, so it was a privilege to lead "Sjetna" or "Miserlou". "Makedonka" was always led by Howdy Booster.

The morning always ended with "Clap and Turn Polka," for old timers only. If an unwary newcomer made the mistake of joining in, Mrs. Butts would shout, "Get off the floor, you're going to be killed!" And after that last dance, breathless, we'd head for home.

Once a year Mrs. Butts would load her car with folk dancers for the Eugene festival. We'd do the dances we recognized on the program, and Mrs. Butts would tell us which others were safe to try. Once a snowy-haired gentleman asked me if I knew the Hambo. Of course, I said, remembering a Swedish midsummer dance with my grandfather. When my partner discovered I didn't really know the steps, he took me out in the hall and taught me the right ones.

By junior high I was officially too old for the children's group, but there was no where else to dance. Some of us were still dancing with the six-year-olds when we were fourteen.

In 1965, however, a new group started. This new group was for junior high and high school students, and it met on Thursday nights in the Garfield School gymnasium, with its echoing wooden floor. The new group was directed by Hildred Rice, with help from Mike Onstad and some of the other old time dancers. The group was called Hoolyeh.

We were a diverse mix of dancers, and many of us had come up through the children's group. Mike and a few others were in high school, Terri Bennett and I were in ninth grade, Howdy, Karin MacDonald, Barb Schemm and several others in eighth, Glenn Weber, Jeanette Leach, Kathy Bucy, Debbie and Pam Hanus, and a few more in seventh.

Hildred did some of the teaching, but much of the teaching and programming was done by the dancers themselves, and right from the beginning we attended out-of-town workshops and festivals. Many of us also danced with the college group on Friday nights; in the summer that group met on the deck of the MU, and the line dances snaked in and out the arches. A few of the college students came to the high school group, too, and Hildred often invited the foreign students to join us.

By the next year there was a new crop of seventh graders, including my sister Mary, who'd also danced with the children's group. Throughout the time I danced with Hoolyeh, the group varied from just a few dancers to several squares' worth on a Thursday night. A few years later, however, when I'd gone on to Reed College (with an active dance group of its own), Corvallis High School had a week of "experimental" classes. The folk dancing class was so successful that the group became much bigger, and



many of the dancers who started at that time went on to form the Sobranie demonstration group, led by Dave Bucy.

We've been away from Corvallis for many years, but now that we're back in town, our daughter Rhiannon dances with the "Junior Hoolyeh" performing group, and Emily should be old enough soon. Sometimes I dance with the adult Hoolyeh group, and sometimes I don't... but when I do, my feet always remember those "old timer" dances.

Corvallis, Oregon, December 26, 1990

**Debbie Hanus Jackson:** I started folk dancing 24 years ago, in about 1966, with the teen Hoolyeh's. I was Hildred's dance assistant for a time. It was just her and me and 75 children. I danced and performed with them at the BARC concerts and then with three or four other performing groups. For the last four years, I've danced in musicals: Kiss me Kate, Fiddler on the Roof, Carnival, Anything Goes, Camelot, Mame. I'll be in George M. at the Albany Civic Theatre (ACT) in February/March [1991]. My latest craze is Hungarian dancing with Pistu Papp in Eugene. I also dance Sunday nights at Veselo. I've always been heavily into costumes and now am the costume manager for ACT. Professionally, I worked for the IRS for 14 years. Now I'm a CPA with Warner, Price and Kunst in Albany.

**Pam Hanus Taylor:** Debbie said that her sister Pam also started dancing in 1966. She danced regularly for about 5 years and occasionally since then. She comes back for parties. She lives in Albany. Her daughter Jeny is a freshman. She's a personnel management specialist in EPA, Corvallis. She's also very active in theatre and dances in musicals and helps with theatre mailings.

**Ross Jackson:** Debbie said Ross started folk dancing in 1976-77. He danced with Sobranie in about 1982, then hurt his knee and turned to the technical side. He had been making tapes for Hoolyeh's in high school. Then went into theatre technology. Now he does lights and sound as well as singing in musicals. He also plays dramatic leads, such as Twelfth Night, and dances in musicals. Professionally, he is now the program coordinator for the CALL accounting system for the State System of Higher ed., a telephone billing system for 8-9 state schools; coordinated billing. He is also on Board of Directors, serving as publicity coordinator of ACT.

Phone interview, Albany, Oregon, December 7, 1990

**Les and Linda Berg.** Les, Director of the Veselo Community Folk Dancers, reported that he started folk dancing about 20 years ago [1970?]. "I heard about the dancing in Corvallis while dancing at the Eugene Folk Dance club on Tuesday nights. I've only missed one Hoolyeh Festival one year when I was home ill. My wife Linda has made all 20. What I remember the most are the fantastic afterparties at the Mary's River Grange. We'd sleep in our camper in the parking lot after dancing until 4-5 a.m. The kids would crash in the camper earlier. We were beginners, so we sat out a lot of dances. Got to know people. Annabelle Ching. Dave Bucy, a single man then. I remember big, smiley Richard Boehnke, who died a few years ago. He was a very special person. Spoke several languages, played instruments, at 16. Steve and Julie Reed. I'd watch Steve and Dave as mentors, wanting to dance like them one day. That's pretty much the "days of old."

I can remember when Yves Moreau taught Silistrenska Tropanka to me the first time. I can still feel the high energy of dancing in the Corvallis High School with wall to wall people. The energy in that room was enough to elevate you off the floor. Especially, when we did Highlife. He met Kathy Dark at the U. of O. She has now returned to teach dance at OSU.

Phone interview, Eugene, Oregon, December 6, 1990



## SOME MEMORIES ABOUT HOOLYEHS

I first started becoming interested in folkdancing in 1970 at Corvallis High, when I watched it happening during lunch periods. I soon got hooked ("bit by the folkdance bug"), dropped my other Thursday night activity, and devoured every dance I could. When the call went out for auditions for a performing group, I eagerly awaited my name to be called. The rest, they say, is history. Mrs. Rice continued to cart us to every festival around to dance and learn, but now we performed in addition. (I must say my parents did not know what to think of all this - folkdancing, festivals, leaving town on a bus with a lot of people they did not know, overnight trips, folkdance camps, etc.).

A particularly proud memory (among many) was the premier of our Russian suite at a Seattle festival. As usual, several of the dancers were madly stitching on the bus ride to finish a costume piece. We were so nervous. The time came and Glenn Weber led us out in Timonia. We were beaming. The Seattle audience was so enthralled they started clapping before we had even finished entering the room. We probably did Polyanka and Koroboshka, though I don't remember; we ended with Hopak. Our guys did some great stunts, and dancing the last half minute in the background, tears of joy rolled down my cheeks. I wasn't the only one crying. The best part of all was that Mrs. Rice had made all this possible, with her unending hours of fund-raising, time at rehearsals, etc. We owe a lot to that great lady.

And now, because of all my excellent grounding in Hoolyehs, festivals, first hand learning from source teachers, etc., I have had the opportunity in Seattle to dance with the Radost Folk Ensemble for 9-1/2 years, where I am now the senior woman dancer and Assistant Women's Director. My costume experience in Hoolyehs was an excellent grounding to my being the costume director for Radost for three years, a position to which I am currently advisor. It also stimulated my love for costumes and handwork from the Eastern European countries.

Lastly, another group I am so proud to be a part of is Večerinka, a women's Balkan choir of 12. Me - a chicken to do solos, duets or trio singing from the word go, and in our upcoming radio show, I have two of those parts! The group has a depth of singing experience that collectively amounts to hundreds of years. I am very proud to be a part of such a talented and special group.

Kathy Sandstrom