

THE FOLLOWING IS A SLIGHTLY EDITED TRANSCRIPT OF A TAPE RECORDING MADE AT THE LARKSPUR INSTITUTE OF ED GILMORE, JUNE 8, 1952. THE EDITING CONSISTS OF SLIGHT REPHRASINGS, OMISSION OF REPEATED PHRASES, ETC., IN ORDER TO MAKE FOR GREATER WRITTEN CLARITY.

ED GILMORE'S CALLERS INSTITUTE
LARKSPUR, CALIFORNIA
JUNE 8, 1952

I THINK THE FIRST THING IN ORDER, IN ANY SORT OF AN INSTITUTE OR CLASS, IS TO QUALIFY THE INSTRUCTOR. THE QUALIFICATION OF THE INSTRUCTOR IS PROBABLY THE MOST IMPORTANT THING AS TO THE IMPORTANCE OR VALUE YOU WILL PLACE ON WHAT YOU HEAR FROM HERE ON OUT. LET ME QUALIFY MYSELF FIRST. I AM NOT AN AUTHORITY - NOT BY ANY STRETCH OF THE IMAGINATION. BY COMPARISON WITH MANY MEN IN THIS COUNTRY, I AM A BEGINNER IN THE SQUARE DANCE ACTIVITY, AND I'M SURE THAT SOME OF YOU HAVE HAD MORE EXPERIENCE THAN I HAVE HAD, AT LEAST IN YEARS. I AM AN AUTHORITY IN YUCAIPA, CALIFORNIA. I'M THE ONLY CALLER IN YUCAIPA, SO THERE I AM AN AUTHORITY. HERE I'M JUST ANOTHER CALLER - SO I'M IN THE FORTUNATE OR UNFORTUNATE POSITION OF HAVING BECOME AN AUTHORITY BY STARTING AND PROMOTING THE SQUARE DANCE ACTIVITY IN A GIVEN AREA AND THUS BECOMING AN AUTHORITY.

MY EXPERIENCE, THE MISTAKES THAT I HAVE MADE, AND THE GOOD FORTUNES THAT I HAVE HAD, ARE SOME OF THE THINGS THAT WE WILL TALK ABOUT THIS EVENING. ANY OPINIONS, ANYTHING THAT I SAY DURING THE EVENING, WILL YOU PLEASE REMEMBER, MUST NECESSARILY BE OPINIONATED. WE ALL HAVE OUR OPINIONS, YOU HAVE YOURS AND I HAVE MINE, AND WE'RE GOING TO DISAGREE ON SOME THINGS TONIGHT I AM SURE, BUT I RESPECT YOUR RIGHT TO YOUR OPINION AND I'M SURE THAT YOU'LL RESPECT MY RIGHT TO MINE. SO, IF I SAY SOMETHING YOU DON'T AGREE WITH, THAT YOU FEEL I'M WRONG ABOUT - PLEASE DON'T DISLIKE ME FOR IT - REMEMBER THAT IT MIGHT BE A CONTROVERSIAL POINT BUT IT WON'T BE ARGUMENTATIVE. I'M NOT ARGUING WITH YOU - I'M STATING MY OPINIONS.

I RECENTLY CONDUCTED A CALLERS INSTITUTE IN THE MIDDLEWEST, AND IN WRITING TO ME BEFOREHAND THEY SAID, "WE'RE NOT INTERESTED IN THEORY. WE WANT NEW DANCES, NEW TRICKS WITH OLD DANCES, MIXERS, THINGS THAT WE CAN USE AT OUR DANCES. WE'RE NOT INTERESTED IN THEORY". SO I WROTE THEM BACK AND TOLD THEM, "I'M SORRY, I CANNOT CONDUCT A CALLERS INSTITUTE WITHOUT DISCUSSING THEORY, BECAUSE THEORY IS HALF OF CALLING, AND GIVING YOU A FEW NEW DANCES, NEW TRICKS WITH OLD DANCES, MIXERS, ETC., WOULD BE NOTHING SHORT OF ROBBERY. I WOULD BE TAKING YOUR MONEY UNDER FALSE PRETENSES, BECAUSE YOU COULD BUY THAT IN A BOOK. THERE ARE DOZENS OF THEM PUBLISHED. YOU COULD BUY A BOOK FOR A DOLLAR, MIMEOGRAPH IT AND GIVE IT TO YOUR MEMBERS FOR ANOTHER COUPLE OR THREE BUCKS. SO WHY SHOULD YOU PAY ME, PAY MY EXPENSES TO COME TO YOUR CITY AND CONDUCT A CALLERS INSTITUTE, JUST TO GIVE YOU A FEW NEW CALLS?" I'D LIKE TO PUT IT THIS WAY - I COULD COME TO SAN FRANCISCO AS A POTTER. I'D SET UP MY POTTERS WHEEL, AND I'D MAKE SOME POTS FOR YOU AND I'D SELL THEM TO YOU. THEN SIX MONTHS FROM NOW I COULD COME BACK AND I COULD MAKE SOME MORE POTS FOR YOU AND SELL YOU SOME, AND I'D STAY IN BUSINESS. OR - I COULD COME IN AND SET UP MY POTTERS WHEEL AND SHOW YOU HOW TO MAKE POTS, AND MAYBE YOU COULD MAKE THEM BETTER THAN I CAN, BUT I'D SHOW YOU HOW I MAKE POTS, AND IF YOU LIKE MY POTS YOU COULD GO AHEAD AND MAKE THEM YOURSELVES. YOU SEE - I'D BE CUTTING OFF MY OWN NOSE TO SPITE MY FACE, BUT THAT'S THE WAY I PREFER TO CONDUCT A CALLERS CLASS. I WANT TO DISCUSS METHODS OF DOING THINGS -- NOT THINGS. DISCUSS HOW YOU DESIGN DANCES, NOT GIVE YOU DANCES; TO DISCUSS HOW YOU SELECT GOOD DANCES FROM BAD DANCES, NOT TO GIVE YOU THE ONES THAT I THINK ARE GOOD. IF I GAVE YOU THE ONES I THINK ARE GOOD I'D GIVE YOU MINE AND YOU MIGHT DISAGREE. WHEN YOU GET THRU AND ANALYZE THEM BY MY OWN METHODS YOU WILL PROBABLY FIND OUT THAT MY DANCES ARE NOT EVEN DANCEABLE AND YOU SHOULDN'T USE THEM AT ALL. IN FACT, I'LL GUARANTEE IT, BECAUSE I DON'T USE SOME OF THEM AT ALL - THEY ARE NOT DANCEABLE.

SO MUCH FOR EVALUATING THE CALLER. YOU PROBABLY WILL BE INTERESTED IN KNOWING WHAT MY EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN. FOR SEVERAL YEARS NOW I'VE BEEN CALLING. FOR THE LAST FOUR YEARS I'VE BEEN A FULL-TIME PROFESSIONAL, WHICH MEANS THAT I AM DEVOTING ABOUT 14-15 HOURS A DAY, 7 DAYS A WEEK, TO SQUARE DANCE CALLING AND SQUARE DANCE PROMOTION. IN THAT TIME AND THRU ALL THAT EXPERIENCE I HAVE PROBABLY HAD A GREAT DEAL MORE EXPERIENCE IN ACTUAL HOURS OF TIME PUT IN THE ACTIVITY THAN SOME CALLERS WHO HAVE CALLED FOR 25 YEARS, BECAUSE THEY ONLY CALL ONCE A MONTH AND THEN THEY ONLY CALL ONE TIP. ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE ARE CALLERS THAT HAVE PUT IN A GREAT DEAL MORE TIME THAN I HAVE AND STILL ARE NOT FULL-TIME CALLER-PROFESSIONALS. THEY DEVOTE EVERY SPARE MOMENT TO IT AND STILL HOLD DOWN A JOB AND EARN A LIVING. I TRIED THAT, AND I HAD A PAINT STORE UP IN YUCAIPA AND OPENED IT AT 7:30 IN THE MORNING AND CLOSED IT AT 6:00, CHANGED CLOTHES AND ATE (THE WIFE AND I TAKING TURNS BEFORE WE CLOSED THE STORE), THEN WE JUMPED IN THE CAR AND DASHED TO LOS ANGELES OR SOME PLACE TO CALL A SQUARE DANCE. I DON'T HAVE THE PHYSICAL STAMINA TO DO IT, ALTHOUGH I KNOW THAT SOME OF YOU FELLOWS ARE HOLDING DOWN A JOB AND CALLING ALMOST EVERY NIGHT IN THE WEEK - GOD BLESS YOU! I HOPE YOU CAN GET AWAY WITH IT - I COULDN'T! I HAD TO MAKE A CHOICE, SO I SOLD THE STORE. A RECREATION DIRECTOR IN REDLANDS TALKED ME INTO IT, AND EVEN THEN IT TOOK HIM TWO OR THREE MONTHS, BUT I MADE THE DECISION KNOWING FULL WELL THAT I WOULD NEVER MAKE AS MUCH MONEY OUT OF SQUARE DANCING AS I COULD IN MY PAINT BUSINESS - IN FACT IT WAS A PRETTY GOOD LITTLE BUSINESS AT THE TIME I SOLD IT. THE POINT THAT SOLD ME IN THE DIRECTOR'S ARGUMENTS WAS, "ED, YOU AND DRUSCILLA COULD SPEND THE REST OF YOUR LIFE IN THE PAINT BUSINESS AND YOU COULD PROBABLY MAKE A LOT OF MONEY. MAYBE YOU WOULDN'T, IT'S A GAMBLE ONE WAY OR THE OTHER. ANYWAY, YOU HAVE A GOOD CHANCE OF MAKING OUT, BUT YOU WOULDN'T BE HAPPY. YOU DON'T ENJOY THE BUSINESS. YOU MAY NOT MAKE ANY MONEY IN THE SQUARE DANCE BUSINESS, BUT I KNOW HOW YOU LOVE THE ACTIVITY, HOW YOU LOVE SQUARE DANCING, HOW YOU BELIEVE IN IT, AND I'VE WATCHED YOU WORKING AND I KNOW THAT YOU'RE COMPLETELY HAPPY WHEN YOU ARE WORKING, TEACHING AND CALLING SQUARE DANCES. THERE'S ONLY ABOUT ONE MAN IN EVERY TEN THOUSAND WHO HAS THE GOOD FORTUNE TO BE ABLE TO WORK AND EARN SOME SORT OF A LIVING IN SOMETHING YOU ENJOY THOROUGHLY". WELL, THAT WAS THE CLINCHER! WE WENT INTO IT WITH OUR EYES OPEN AND I CAN SAY THAT AFTER ALMOST FOUR YEARS WE HAVE NEVER REGRETTED IT. WE HAVE ENJOYED EVERY SINGLE MINUTE OF OUR SQUARE DANCE ACTIVITY, AND EVERY DANCE. I HAVE NEVER CALLED A DANCE AND NEVER TAUGHT A CLASS THAT I DIDN'T ENJOY, AND I PROMISED MYSELF WHEN I WENT INTO IT, THAT IF IT EVER GOT TO BE WORK, IF I EVER GOT TO THE POINT WHERE I HAD TO CONSIDER SQUARE DANCE CALLING WORK, THEN I WOULD QUIT AND GET INTO SOMETHING WHERE I COULD MAKE SOME MONEY. AND I STILL SAY THE SAME THING!

I STILL DON'T KNOW HOW LONG IT TAKES BEFORE YOU TIRE OF SOMETHING LIKE SQUARE DANCING. I HAVEN'T BEGUN TO YET, AND I FEEL THAT I NEVER WILL. HOWEVER, I'M NOT GOING TO SAY "NEVER". I'M GOING TO TRY IN THIS CLASS NOT TO SAY "NEVER" OR "ALWAYS", BECAUSE THOSE STATEMENTS ARE PRETTY FINAL, AND I'M NOT SURE OF ANYTHING. I'M NOT POSITIVE ABOUT ANYTHING. I MAY BE WRONG ABOUT A GREAT MANY THINGS AND BELIEFS ABOUT SQUARE DANCE ACTIVITIES.

SO MUCH FOR THE INSTRUCTOR - LET'S GO RIGHT INTO THE BUSINESS OF SQUARE DANCE CALLING. MOST PEOPLE WHO CONDUCT SQUARE DANCE CALLERS INSTITUTES AND CLASSES GIVE A LONG LIST OF QUALIFICATIONS FOR BEING A SUCCESSFUL SQUARE DANCE CALLER. THEY START BY LISTING THINGS LIKE "JUDGEMENT, CLARITY, RYTHYM, TALENT, PERSONALITY", AND SO FORTH. THEY LIST A WHOLE LOT OF QUALIFICATIONS FOR BEING A SUCCESSFUL CALLER! I LIST THREE! THREE QUALIFICATIONS FOR BEING A SUCCESSFUL SQUARE DANCE CALLER AND NUMBER ONE, THE TOP OF THE LIST IS: SINCERITY OF PURPOSE. WE WERE DISCUSSING EARLIER IN THE EVENING SOME CALLERS - CALLERS WHO APPARENTLY ARE WONDERFUL CALLERS IN TECHNICAL ABILITY - THE ABILITY TO GET UP AND CALL A SQUARE DANCE FOR THE GROUP, OR EVEN TO CONDUCT A DANCE FOR A FULL EVENING, CALL THE DANCES, CARRY THE PROGRAM ALONE - AND YET WE'VE SEEN THEM FAIL! WE'VE SEEN THESE SAME CALLERS AND THE FIRST THING YOU KNOW THEY HAVEN'T ANY GROUPS LEFT. ATTENDANCE DRIPS OFF AT THEIR DANCES, IT GOES DOWN AND DOWN. THEY LOSE ONE NIGHT A WEEK, AND THEN ANOTHER NIGHT, AND THEN PRETTY SOON THEY'VE GOT ONE NIGHT OR TWO NIGHTS A MONTH FOR CALLING, AND THEN PRETTY SOON THEY'RE CONVINCED THAT SQUARE DANCING IS A FAD, IT IS PASSEE, THEY QUIT! I'VE SEEN IT HAPPEN AND SOME OF YOU HAVE SEEN IT HAPPEN. WELL! CHANCES ARE TEN TO ONE THAT THE FAILURE, THE THING THAT MADE THE MAN A FAILURE, THAT PREVENTED HIM FROM BEING A SUCCESSFUL CALLER, WAS THAT HIS REASON FOR WANTING TO BE A CALLER WAS NOT RIGHT. HE NEEDED SINCERITY OF PURPOSE!

SINCERITY OF PURPOSE BRIEFLY STATED IS THIS: A SINCERE DESIRE TO SERVE THE SQUARE DANCE ACTIVITY AND THE PEOPLE IN IT, NOT YOURSELF. THE CALLER WHO STARTS OUT TO SERVE HIMSELF IS DEFEATED BEFORE HE BEGINS, BECAUSE YOU CANNOT FOOL THE PEOPLE. THE SQUARE DANCE ACTIVITY IS A PECULIAR ONE; THE PEOPLE DON'T WANT ANY PART OF THE PERSON WHO IS SERVING HIMSELF, BECAUSE THE VERY ESSENCE OF SQUARE DANCING IS UNSELFISHNESS. IF YOU ANALYZE THE ACTIVITY, IT IS COOPERATION, AS OPPOSED TO COMPETITION. SO IF THE CALLER SETS OUT TO SERVE HIMSELF, TO MAKE A BIG SHOT OF HIMSELF, TO BECOME FAMOUS, TO BE THE BIG NOISE, TO BE UP IN FRONT AND MAKE THE NOISE, TO BE NOTICED, TO MAKE MONEY, THE CHANCES ARE TEN TO ONE THAT HE'LL FAIL. NOW I SAY THAT WITH NO RESERVATIONS EXCEPT THIS - MOST OF US ARE EXTROVERTS AND WE START OUT FOR THAT REASON. MOST CALLERS ARE ATTRACTED TO SQUARE DANCE CALLING BECAUSE THEY ARE EXTROVERTS. THEY WANT TO BE THE BIG NOISE, THEY WANT TO BE UP IN FRONT, THEY HEAR THE CALLER UP THERE AND THEY SAY, "GEE, I'D LIKE TO DO THAT" - ~~MAYBE THEY DON'T KNOW IT THEMSELVES~~, MAYBE THEY DON'T KNOW THAT THEY ARE EXTROVERTS, MAYBE THEY DON'T KNOW WHY THEY ARE ATTRACTED TO CALLING, USUALLY THEY ARE EXTROVERTS. IF WE WEREN'T EXTROVERTS WE COULDN'T GET UP IN FRONT OF A CROWD AND SPOUT OUR HEADS OFF AND MAKE THE FIRST BLUNDERING ATTEMPT AT CALLING A SQUARE DANCE. WE WOULDN'T HAVE THE NERVE TO DO IT. INTROVERTS DON'T HAVE THE NERVE TO CALL UNLESS SOMEBODY MAKES THEM DO IT. PRACTICALLY NOBODY EVERY MAKES ANYBODY GET UP AND START CALLING. I CAME INTO CALLING UNWILLINGLY. I AGREED TO CALL FOR THE YUCAIPA SQUARE DANCE CLUB UNTIL THEY COULD GET A CALLER. THAT WAS FIVE YEARS AGO, AND THEY'RE STILL LOOKING FOR A CALLER. THERE AREN'T AND WEREN'T ANY CALLERS IN MY AREA, SO I CAN SAY THAT AND GET AWAY WITH IT. I CAN SAY THAT I REALLY DIDN'T WANT TO CALL WHEN I STARTED. NOBODY CAN PROVE THAT I DID - BUT LOOKING BACK ON IT I THINK PROBABLY THAT I DID WANT TO CALL, BECAUSE I USED TO GET UP AND ENTERTAIN AT CLUBS AND I USED TO GO AROUND AND TELL FUNNY STORIES AND GIVE READINGS. I WOULD DO ANYTHING THAT ANYBODY ASKED ME TO DO THAT WOULD HELP WITH THE PROGRAM. SO I WAS AN EXTROVERT! I COULD GET UP PLENTY OF NERVE TO DO SOMETHING, SO THAT WHEN THEY SAID SOMEBODY HAS TO CALL, I SAID, "ALL RIGHT, I'LL CALL", AND I GOT UP AND CALLED. SO THAT'S THE WAY I STARTED, AND I THINK MOST OTHER CALLERS START FOR THE SAME REASON. THAT IS, BECAUSE THEY WANT TO BE UP IN FRONT AND MAKE A NOISE, AND THEN IT OCCURS TO THEM THAT WHILE THEY'RE DOING IT THEY CAN PICK UP A FEW BUCKS ON THE SIDE (AND IF THEY'RE REAL HUSH-HUSH ABOUT IT MAYBE UNCLE SAM WON'T KNOW THEY GOT IT AND IT'LL BE ALL GRAVY). THEN THEY SAY, "GEE WHIZ, I GOT A DANCE TONIGHT, FIFTEEN BUCKS AND THESE PEOPLE THINK I'M WONDERFUL. NOW IF I CAN GET TWO MORE DANCES, THAT'S \$45 A WEEK, ADD THAT UP OVER A YEAR'S TIME AND IT IS QUITE A SUM. THEY ARE NOT DEDUCTING GASOLINE, P.A. SYSTEM, AND RECORDS AND SUCH, AT THIS POINT IN THE GAME. ANYWAY IT BECOMES MORE ATTRACTIVE, SO THEY GO HAMMER AND TONGS TO SERVE SELF. THEY GO HAMMER AND TONGS - USUALLY ABOUT A YEAR. IN MY OBSERVATION IT TAKES A CALLER ABOUT A YEAR OF BANGING HIS HEAD AGAINST A STONEWALL TO FIND OUT THAT HE'S SERVING THE WRONG PARTY WHEN HE'S SERVING SELF. IF HE WANTS TO SERVE SELF, HE'S GOT TO QUIT AND START SERVING PEOPLE, AND IF HE SERVES THE PEOPLE IN HIS PROGRAM AND THE PEOPLE IN HIS DANCE, THEY'LL TAKE CARE OF HIM. THAT IS THE ONLY WAY HE CAN SERVE HIMSELF. THE PEOPLE HAVE GOT TO KNOW THAT HE LIKES THEM, THAT HE'S PROMOTING A SQUARE DANCE ACTIVITY FOR THEM, BECAUSE HE BELIEVES IN IT AND BELIEVES IN THE VALUE OF THE ACTIVITY.

I'M NOT GOING INTO A LONG DISCOURSE THIS EVENING ON THE HISTORY OF THE DANCE, BECAUSE YOU PEOPLE IN THE SAN FRANCISCO AREA, AT LEAST A GREAT MANY OF YOU, HAVE FOLK DANCE BACKGROUNDS. YOU'VE STUDIED DANCING, YOU KNOW DANCE HISTORY, YOU KNOW THAT ALL FORMS OF DANCING FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE HISTORY OF MAN, HAVE BEEN A MEANS OF EXPRESSING EMOTION. SO IT FOLLOWS THAT SQUARE DANCING, IF IT IS DANCING, IS A MEANS OF EXPRESSING EMOTION. I BELIEVE THAT THE EMOTION THAT IT EXPRESSES, THAT SQUARE DANCING WAS INTENDED TO EXPRESS, IS THE EMOTION THAT MY GRANDFATHER AND GRANDMOTHER AND YOUR GRANDFATHER AND GRANDMOTHER FELT FOR EACH OTHER WHEN THEY INVENTED SQUARE DANCING. THEY TOOK BITS OF FOLK DANCES OF OTHER NATIONS AND PUT THEM TOGETHER, SORT OF HAPHAZARDLY AND UNCONSCIOUSLY INTO A FORM OF DANCING. THEY MADE THAT FORM OF DANCING EXPRESS WHAT THEY FELT FOR EACH OTHER, AND I KNOW WHAT THEY FELT FOR EACH OTHER, BECAUSE I'VE MADE IT MY BUSINESS TO FIND OUT. I'VE TALKED WITH MANY PEOPLE, FIRST-HAND, THE OLD-OLD-TIMERS. I WAS FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO HAVE A FEATURE STORY PUBLISHED IN A NEWSPAPER ABOUT ME IN THE SAN BERNARDINO AREA SEVERAL YEARS AGO, AND BOOM, I GOT LETTERS FROM ALL OVER - FROM OLD-TIME CALLERS. ONE OLD FELLOW WAS 86 YEARS OLD THEN - HE'S 90 IF HE'S STILL ALIVE. I'M AFRAID THAT THIS YEAR PROBABLY SAW THE END OF HIM AS HE WAS PRETTY FEEBLE. BUT HE WAS A PROFESSIONAL CALLER IN OHIO BETWEEN 1880 AND 1890. HE WAS A PROFESSIONAL CALLER BECAUSE HE GOT HIS NUMBERS FREE IN HIS CLUB. IN THOSE DAYS THE HALLS WERE NOT VERY BIG, AND THEY COULDN'T GET EVERYBODY IN THEM THAT WANTED TO DANCE, SO THEY GAVE THEM NUMBERS. FIRST COME, FIRST SERVED. YOU BOUGHT YOUR NUMBER, AND IF THE HALL HELD 20 COUPLES, THE FIRST 20 NUMBERS GOT TO GO. IF ONE OF THEM COULD NOT MAKE IT THEN NUMBER 21 GOT A CHANCE. THEREFORE HE WAS A PROFESSIONAL BECAUSE HE GOT HIS NUMBERS FREE.

SOME OF THIS OLD-TIMER'S PATTERN WAS VERY INTERESTING TOO, JUST AS A SIDE LIGHT HOW ABOUT THIS? "ELEPHANTS FOOT ON THE CORNER'S ALL". THIS WAS AN ALLEMANDE LEFT. "ELEPHANT'S FOOT ON THE CORNERS ALL" AND I'M WONDERING IF MAYBE THEY DIDN'T DO A JUMPING BALANCE ON AN ALLEMANDE LEFT BACK IN OHIO IN 1880-1890. "BIRDIE IN THE CAGE" WAS "DUCK IN THE MUD WITH A NOSE IN THE GROUND". "BIRDIE HOP OUT AND CROW HOP IN" INSTEAD OF THAT IT WAS "PIG IN THE PEN THREE RAILS ROUND". "DUCK IN THE MUD WITH A NOSE IN THE GROUND - PIG IN THE PEN WITH THREE RAILS AROUND". HE GAVE ME A WHOLE BUNCH OF INTERESTING ONES.

THE IMPORTANT THING I GOT FROM THE OLD-TIMER WAS THE ATTITUDE OF THE PEOPLE TOWARD EACH OTHER. WAS IT A DRUNKEN BRAWL? NO! IT WAS A FAMILY AFFAIR - IT WAS CLEAN, AND IT WAS WHOLESOME, AND IT WAS ONCE A MONTH. IT WAS THE