



Pattie Whitehouse is a personal historian who is passionate about helping people save their life stories so their families and friends will know what filled their hearts with joy, and why. Contact Pattie at 250-478-3319 or [pattie@pacificcoast.net](mailto:pattie@pacificcoast.net), or visit [pattiewhitehouse.ca](http://pattiewhitehouse.ca)

# Highlands Gal

## A Passion For Dance by Pattie Whitehouse

*To live is to dance, to dance is to live — Snoopy*

Recently, I gave my last performance as a Scottish country dancer.

Scottish country dancing is the social dancing of Scotland, with patterns similar to those of other folk dance traditions like English country and square dancing — think Virginia Reel, only more vigorous and much more elegant.

It became my passion 30 years ago, when my mother took me to an introductory social. The music captivated me — the exuberance of the jigs, the Highland fire of the reels, the power and grace of the stately strathspeys. I knew immediately that this was something I had to do.

That was a troubled time in my life. I was in a bad relationship, had challenges in my work and was seriously overweight. I began weekly dance classes and discovered something wonderful — for the two hours I was dancing, all my cares evaporated. Instead of worry, my heart filled with joy; and the elation lasted long after class was over.

Dancing was an easy road to fitness. Dancers have so much fun they don't realize how hard they're working! Soon, my emotional fitness also improved. I gained the confidence to leave the bad relationship and, a while later, the courage to enter, cautiously, a new one with a kind man who was also a dancer.

As I gained experience, I became enthralled with the art of the dance. Scottish country is more formal than most social dancing. Detailed technique is prescribed for the steps and the way the formations are done. As in music, teamwork, phrasing and expression are important. Done well, Scottish country dancing is magical. The shapes of the dance form, break up and reform; moments of activity alternate with instants of stillness; the dancing becomes, as one well known Scottish country dance pianist put it, "music made visible."

My passion opened doors to adventure. I went to Scotland to celebrate the centenary of the co-founder of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society, attended workshops and balls here and in other communities, and danced with groups as far south as San Francisco.

Five years after I took my first class, I joined the demonstration team — the group that entertains at events like Burns Nights, the Highland Games and Folkfest — and learned that I loved to perform. Public speaking holds no fear for me; I danced for the Queen at the Commonwealth Games!

Now, 30 years of jumping around on my toes have caught up with me. My feet are giving out; worse, they are interfering with my ability to dance well. I cannot bear to dance poorly. So, with considerable regret and sadness, I have given up one of the grand passions of my life.

Is there a new passion waiting for me just over the horizon? Could be. That kind man I met dancing so many years ago? He and I are starting swing dance classes in the fall!



Photo courtesy of Kathryn Knowles

The Vancouver Island Scottish Country Dance Society offers classes for all levels of dancers. The Society is putting on a free introductory ceilidh (dance party) in August and an open house in September.

For more information, go to: <http://viscds.ca>

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