

*How did you get into Scottish country dancing?*

At the start of 2016 a friend had seen that there were Scottish country dancing beginners' classes being held at the Tawa Club and I was persuaded to go along. I came away from that first night both elated, because it had been a lot of fun, and exhausted because it had been a lot of exercise.

*When did you start dancing with Johnsonville Scottish Country Dance Club?*

After four weeks of beginners' classes I was hooked and keen to continue, so I joined the Tawa Club and carried on. After that first year I wanted to continue but was very conscious of my complete lack of skill. I thought that if I could dance twice a week it would help me to get the hang of it. That led me to join the Johnsonville Club as a beginner in February 2017.

*What challenges did you face?*

Taking up what Rod often calls a 'team sport' at age 67 came with quite a few challenges. The first was that I had never played sport in any serious way, compulsory sport at school in England had completely turned me off any kind of sporting activity. I was perfectly happy with the idea of exercise, I could muck out a cowshed with a fork and a wheelbarrow but I had never had to think about the placing of my feet and body in the precise ways required in dancing.

The closest thing was military training but even that only required being able to tell your left foot from your right and not to drop your rifle (even now, if you were to hand me a Lee-Enfield I could probably stand to attention and present arms without having to think about it). When I was learning soldiering at school it was the repetition that helped to memorise the movements which is why I thought dancing twice a week might help.

*What do you most enjoy about SCD?*

I really enjoy dancing at two clubs and it's not just the repetition, although that has certainly been good. Different teachers have different ways of explaining things and that often helps to make things clearer.

There are so many things I enjoy about Scottish country dancing. There are the obvious things like the wonderful music, the patterns of the dances and the heightened emotions of dancing - the joy you feel when you get through a dance well and the corresponding despair when you mess it up.

Then there are many less tangible aspects that make it so good. I really like its cooperative and non-competitive nature, there are no winners or losers. You are all in the set together, any gender, old and young, skilled and beginner, and you help each other through the dance. Sometimes it goes right and sometimes it goes wrong but nobody shouts at you if you make a mistake. My experience has been that dancers are very supportive and that is a big part of the attraction.

*What keeps you coming back?*

I really enjoy the fact that you continue to learn as you dance, it is never perfect – well, definitely not in my case. There's a lot to deal with when you start, There are the steps, the

formations, the dances and the progressions. And none of them are straightforward. Even if you feel that you can manage a travelling step as you go up and down the hall under a tutor's watchful eye, it all feels completely different when you have to hold hands and dance the same step in a circle. Even balancing and being on the correct foot at the right moment is not easy.

At the start I found it impossible to remember even the basic formations. At the start of a dance I'd be standing there trying to remember what we had walked earlier and the tutor would say "The dance begins with four hands across..." and I'd be thinking "Is that like a wheel or is it a circle" and would have missed hearing the next three figures of the dance. As you become more familiar with the different formations you try to do them better, to improve the placing of your feet or to arrive at exactly the right place at exactly the right moment in the music and that's all quite satisfying.

There's been a lot of talk about mindfulness in recent years, which means being 'in the moment'. It seems to me that SCD is a perfect example. You have to be focused on the dance, on what you are going to do and when you are going to do it, if you let your mind wander, you are lost. In those few minutes of the dance you are there and nowhere else.

In conclusion I can say that since taking up dancing in 'old age' I have become a lot fitter and my arthritis has disappeared. My short-term memory has improved, as has my balance. My dream is that one day I will even get the hang of pas-de-Basque.