



In the midst of a promenade, Robyn and Kirk Miller (right), move with Iris and Robert Raiman, fellow members of the Copy Cats Square Dancing Club.

## Square Dance Anyone?

*Here's a couple who made a long trip to square dancing...*

By John Addyman

Raised in Miami, blocks from one another.

Went on to different colleges and careers.

Found each other 30 years after high school.

Married in an ICU in Las Vegas.

Discovered square dancing in Penfield.

And on their 20th anniversary, were square dancing in Scotland in a never-to-be-forgotten evening.

Yep, these are special people.

Robyn and Kirk Miller, both 71, enjoyed vibrant careers.

Kirk is a retired administrative law judge who worked for the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles, ruled in traffic court in Rochester and handled non-criminal administrative law matters in New York City. He moved here from the city.

Robyn is a retired nonprofit manager and freelance grant writer. She moved here from Honolulu.

“I love it here,” Robyn said. “I love the change of seasons. I love it here a lot.”

“I ended up here because of her,” Kirk said, nodding at Robyn. “I like it up here, too.”

The two met when shared friends schemed to get them together and the first meeting bloomed into a long-distance friendship, then love.

“We grew up less than two miles away from each other but we never met,” Kirk said. “I met Robyn’s sister in 1972, but never Robyn. We went to separate high schools and I left to go to Florida State; Robyn left to go to the University of West Florida.

“I was living in New York City; she had just moved to Rochester from Honolulu. I was a widower and her friends and my friends decided they would fix us up. Eventually, I was flying back and forth to Rochester and we got married and I moved up here.”

“He proposed to me here in

Rochester,” Robyn added. “It was a Friday. We were supposed to go on Tuesday to see my parents: my father had just had a stroke. My mother and dad lived in Las Vegas. We were on our way there and Kirk said, ‘Your dad is not doing well. Do you want to get married while we we’re there?’ We ended up getting married in the intensive care unit inside Sunrise Hospital in Vegas. Both of my parents were there.” That was 2005.

Jump to last summer, when Kirk and Robyn were walking through the library at the Penfield Rec Center.

“She picked up a booklet about square dancing and told me, ‘Oh, we should try this,’” Kirk said.

“My mom and dad square-danced a lot when I was in my 20s and 30s,” Robyn added. “They were very into it. They went whole-hog: the outfits, the badges, the whole thing.”

“I told Kirk, ‘That looks like fun. Let’s do it.’ And he grumbled,



Dancing the night away, Robyn and Kirk Miller twirl on the floor at the Henrietta Fire Call No. 1, in a night organized by the Boobulls Squares Club.

‘Aaaarrghh. Grrr.’”

“Let’s just say that I was less than enthusiastic at first,” Kirk said. “But I thought, ‘Let’s give square dancing a try.’ And I did. And I liked it.”

There was another piece to the story: “We have an in-law who has a farm in Connecticut,” Robyn said. “Every year he has a party he calls ‘MelStock.’ His name is Mel. I had suggested square dancing and Kirk poo-pooed the idea, but when he went to MelStock one year he square-danced and told me he liked it. That was what did it.”

### Modern square dance

Last September, the Millers began taking square dance lessons through the Copy Cats Western Square Dancing Club in Penfield. To dance with an organized group, you need to understand what the caller is telling you do, which way to move and what to do with a partner. Otherwise, collisions can ensue. Learning the 17 basic steps normally takes several months, from fall into spring.

The Copy Cats have two free open houses, Sept. 17 and 24, where you can try out square dancing. Start-up classes are Oct. 1

and 8 and on Oct. 15, “Session I” classes for the full curriculum begin. Graduation from there is in April 2026.

What is offered varies by club. Some, like Clover Leaf, will have classes; others may not. You can verify what’s available and where at the Western New York Square Dance Federation website: [www.squaredancingrochester.org](http://www.squaredancingrochester.org)

The Copy Cats website encourages that “Modern Western Square Dancing is no longer your grandparents’ square dancing. Gone are the old twang songs; now squares are being called to all different types of music like rock ‘n roll, classic oldies and today’s country. You don’t need any previous dancing experience. We say, ‘If you know your right hand from your left hand, you can learn how to square dance.’ We start everyone out with the most basic calls, then work your way up the call list. What we teach is the basis for all square dancing and that is called the mainstream program. We guarantee that you will have fun. That is our number one rule.”

Copy Cats past president Bonnie Allen said the group now has 101 members and there are 16 square dancing clubs between Syracuse and Buffalo. Copy Cats dances are held at the Penfield Community Center on Wednesday nights, with two free open houses in September so newcomers can come dip their toes in some do-si-dos. To sign up to learn those 17 steps, you’ll need 17 sessions, but once you’ve mastered the steps and their calls, you can go anywhere.

“You can dance anywhere in the world,” Allen said. “The calls are always in English, the same calls we have here. The only difficulty is the accent.”

Last March, the Millers went on vacation to Scotland.

“An author I like has a place in Scotland,” Robyn said. “Kirk looked up square dancing online and found a square dance club. The only club in the whole country — in one of the places we were going to be on one of the nights we were going to be there — on our 20th anniversary. On our 20th anniversary, we went square dancing in Scotland. It was his idea. I couldn’t get over it; it was so cool.”

“The calls were in English,” Kirk added. “They were all the same, standardized worldwide, no matter where you go. We met some very nice people.”

And name of the Scottish dance club?

The Aberdeen Kilt-Kickers.



## Getting started

The Millers had the same learning curve everyone new to square dancing enjoys.

“It was like entering a new world,” Kirk admitted. “They have their own jargon and you are learning new moves.”

Robyn did not come easily to dance, she worried. “We had taken a ballroom-dancing class. I did not enjoy it. I felt very intimidated and clumsy. But I remember after a week or two of square dancing, I was thinking, ‘Oh, I can do this.’ It just felt more accessible. I was very intimidated when I did ballroom dancing because I’m clumsy...you know?”

Kirk said the class design provides all kinds of support: “You’re dancing in a group so there’s eight people working together while you’re dancing and the club has experienced square dancers in the square with you who are helping to guide you through the various moves.”

“Square dancing has a thinking component to it,” Robyn added. “I think that was helpful because I was able to think about, ‘OK, what

do I do next?’ You’re being guided by the caller and your partner. The women are guided by the men. It’s very parochial. You do get guided by the fella. I remember having the sense, at the first or second lesson, ‘Oh, I can do this.’ That was my epiphany.”

She also thought that beyond the exercise and socialization, square dancing offers an intellectually satisfying moment. And she laughed while she reasoned: “There’s a great sense of satisfaction when you do something correctly. You make your progress and you don’t stop the whole square (which sometimes you do). It’s very satisfying. It feels like you’ve accomplished something. They do two dances together. The total is about 10 minutes. So if you make it through that and you haven’t broken your square or fallen on the floor, there’s a great sense of satisfaction.”

“There’s also a sense of satisfaction when, if someone makes a mistake, you can finesse your way around it and end up where you’re supposed to be,” said Kirk.

“Like they say,” added Robyn,

Robyn and Kirk Miller.

“[Square dance] is cheaper than a movie and a lot more fun,” Kirk says.

“if you screw up, keep going.”

“You’re with a very nice group of people,” Kirk said. “They’re very friendly, very helpful. They welcome the beginners; they help you out.”

“People are so nice,” Robyn agreed. “I find that when I’m square dancing, I’m smiling. I just feel cheerful. There’s something cheery about it.”

Gary Bubel has been a square dance caller for 54 years and was doing his job on a night the Millers were on the floor. He said he came to some conclusions a long time ago.

“Square dancing is one of the best-kept secrets. It’s two hours of cheap entertainment and you won’t find better people than square dancers all over the world.”

“It’s cheaper than a movie and a lot more fun,” Kirk said.

“We dance three times a week,” Robyn added. “It’s something we can do together, though we tend to do a lot of things together. It’s a great activity for couples or singles. The clubs always make sure there are single people there, so you have someone to dance with. They make a point of making sure that somebody who comes by themselves isn’t just sitting there.

“And guys, you’re going to impress the ladies if you learn to dance,” she said with a knowing nod. “You will never run out of women to dance with.”

Interested in trying square dancing? Visit [www.copycatsdancing.wordpress.com](http://www.copycatsdancing.wordpress.com)