

**CALLER-COACH CORNER**  
**NO! B-51 IS NOT A BOMBER**  
**Basic As An Entry Level**  
**By Daryl Clendenin**

I think if you look over your club's classes for the last few years, you'll find that quite a few new people have at least begun square dance lessons. Which is to say that we're not doing that bad a job of recruiting, but where are those people today?

Has your club had square dance lessons each of the past three years? If so, how many of the graduates of those lessons actually joined the club and are still dancing? Let's take it a bit further: how many of them actually survived through the full set of lessons to graduate and are dancing in a Mainstream club? I'd be willing to bet the percentage of survivors is less than 25 percent. The club insurance files reflect our dancer population over the past 5 years.

According to insurance information, Oregon Federation membership numbers since 2009 are:

2009: 3,064 -  
2010: 2,835 (-129)  
2011: 2,698 (-137)  
2012: 2,458 (-240)  
2013: 2,264 (-194)

These numbers don't just take into account the folks that have dropped out of dancing, but also includes those that have started. "That's a very linear progression and will take us to **ZERO** by the year 2024!"

***What can clubs do?***

Keep getting more people into the classes, and once they are there, **KEEP THEM!** I'll once more go out on a limb and say, "If we could just keep the dancers that we lose after they complete beginner's lessons, we'd be in great shape." *It has always been hard to get new people interested in devoting the time necessary to get to club level.* It seems a real shame that some of us aren't doing a very good job of keeping the ones that are recruited. As I travel around the Country, I hear stories of clubs that have graduated as high as four squares of new dancers. Unfortunately, these same clubs are crying because very few of the new graduates remained with the activity. Why is this? Why is it that someone, who has spent the time and money to learn how to dance and seems to enjoy it, doesn't continue after graduation? Folks, we need to look at this problem really hard. Though recruiting is very important, I submit that if we were to just keep those that we graduate, most of our problems would be over. *We have met the enemy and it's us!*

*We continue to cater to a smaller, more select group of people.* The program levels are so well established that callers are no longer attempting to create new moves. They are finding new and interesting ways to use the existing moves within each level (DBD). Our existing dancers would say that this is a good thing. Well, maybe so. But, if our current dancer population is accustomed to a huge variety in the application of the movements, it makes it even more difficult for new dancers to join their ranks. We can't continue to make the mountains higher and expect very many new climbers to meet us at the top. These days we seem to insist that the new dancer comes up to meet our level of dancing, rather than us dropping to meet theirs. Can you imagine the pressure this puts on new folks who are already lacking confidence?

***Why B-51?***

*When square dancing ceased being a "social recreation" and became a "hobby", our problems began.* The difference between recreation and hobby is the difference between just going bowling, or being part of a tournament league. The first requires little, the second requires a lot. *The idea of B-51 is to recreate a social program of dancing.*

It has been said, "Most of us callers call material that is far too difficult for the recreational dancer." Today's dancers are survivors. It is evident that the recreational dancer has not been intrigued with the challenge and has left the activity. Movements 1-51 on the list make up the Basic 1 and 2 Programs of square dancing. Notice that B-51 is only 17 movements fewer than the 68 that make up Mainstream.

### ***How can the clubs and callers help?***

My opinion (along with many other caller leaders) is: *we need to get a quicker, easier entry level established and accepted.* I'm not suggesting that we change the dance level at our clubs to B-51, but our area could benefit from local dances at an easier level of difficulty. Keep the club level at Mainstream and when the students reach the 51 Basic level, have some real dances for them to attend while they finish their Mainstream lessons and hopefully join the club.

For the dancers whom we are losing, those who are slower to learn, the ones who need to angel the next two sets of lessons, the ones who make it through ten lessons and never get any further and mainly those that we are losing because it's too much too quick, it creates a program where they can survive until they can make it at the Mainstream level. You know to whom I refer.

Here's something you might consider. Think about last year's students who made it through the full set of lessons but aren't dancing. You can just about consider them a total loss. Let them know about this more relaxed dance program. Without the pressure of anything beyond a ten lesson level knowledge, they can comfortably dance. That's right, ten lessons as an *entry level* for real dancing. As they get comfortable at B-51, they'll be looking for a good Mainstream club to vary their dance experience. Everyone wins—the dancer and the club.

If extended applications of the Basic moves were saved for workshop tips at the B-51 dance, ten lessons could be within reason for an entry level and ten lessons would be a considerably more marketable.