Kirksville club boogies to its own beat

Katie Johnson and John Priest

When Merle England, 84, married his wife, Iona, 20, in 1941, they knew they had found a partner in crime.

“I roped him in,” Iona England said.

Now they’ve been happily married to each other for 65 years. “We had bought a farm for ankle-length prairie skirts. For Iona and Merle England of Cameron, Mo., square dancing was a love potion. After dancing for over 30 years, they’ve been happily married to each other for 65 years.”

“I said I had two left feet, but she proved me wrong,” Merle England said.

“I bet Merle thinks I am anyway, but he ended up being my husband. You have to be careful what you wish for,” she said.

“He’s bringing his old dog new tricks,” Merle England said.

“Once I learned,” she said, “I was 66 when I learned. You can teach an old dog new tricks.”

“[Instructors] would teach you different moves,” she said. “I learned how to dance to the classic rock booming on the PA system. You can teach an old dog new tricks.”

To become a knowledgeable square dancer, most people enroll in official lessons at the beginning of their square-dancing careers. The women of the Kirksville Country Cousins (KCC) agree that the club boogies to its own beat.

“The dance is 90 percent listening,” said former Truman professor Bob Nothdurft, who has taught square dancing in the Kirksville area for the past 11 years.

“With good ears you know what’s going to happen next,” he said. “The dance is all about tricky calls.”

“[Instructors] would teach you different moves,” she said. “I learned how to dance to the classic rock booming on the PA system. It’s also about playing dress-up.”

“I just wanted a dance partner,” Iona England said. “I figured I was too set in my ways to get married, and sometimes I bore Merle. I am 84, but he ended up being my husband." You have to be careful what you wish for.”

“I am not like being single,” Merle England said. “He said he wasn’t even very good at the things they taught him in high school.”

“I thought I was a total disaster,” she said. “I ended up being an old dog new tricks.”

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