

Hi everyone,

By now the Northwest Folklife Festival has come and gone. I hope those of you who attended had a wonderful time dancing, hearing and seeing old favorites and enjoying new discoveries. There are so many decision points. After a particular set is over, we need to decide whether to move on or stay for the next act. We can use our intuition to guide us in making this decision, just as we can follow our intuition in exposing ourselves to new learning.

I recently attended a five day class and have begun to learn a new skill and art. This brings to mind many of the lessons that beginners in any endeavor experience. It is an exercise of opening one's mind, becoming humble and open to new experiences, and utilizing a great deal of patience as one moves forward very slowly and incrementally in gaining new knowledge and a possible new direction. It is also fun to see one's progress, from being totally at sea to a slight dawning recognition to minor victories and ideally more. Of course, the path is not a linear one but has advances and retreats like ocean tides. This happens when you think you know something but discover that no, that wasn't exactly right. Let's try it again a little differently. It is also a process of learning when to ask a question, when to pay attention and see what unfolds, and whether your unasked question would be answered. Repetition of the material is a key element in all learning.

What I've found is this has some real parallels to learning something we as NFDI members are familiar with -- a new dance. This can include paying careful attention to the instructor, practicing the moves, watching those around me to see what they are doing, comparing notes, recognizing patterns and becoming familiar with certain parts and slowly (hopefully, and surely!) making progress. Maybe the next repetition will come more easily and we'll understand what is coming next and execute it with more grace and confidence and have more fun in the process. If not, we must keep trying if we hope to master it or at least move forward in our learning. We need to be mindful also of the fact that what we see may be a result rather than a cause. When dancing, the shoulders may seem to jiggle up and down but this may be due to the knees bending or bouncing at the ankles rather than intentionally moving the shoulders. Many things happen again and again, like a dance done weekly at a club until a majority of people have mastered it and people really begin to enjoy it and request it.

Learning something new is good for our brains and our lives and also can expose us to new people and new ways of thinking. Likewise, we can expose others to something new also, maybe by something as simple as sharing our copy of the Northwest Folkdancer or giving someone a gift subscription to NFDI or bringing them to your local dance club.

My hope for each of you is that this summer you'll try something new and enjoy learning from it.