

Hello friends,

Communities unite. I saw this in last month's Northwest Folkdancer as a caption for a photo of dancers at the Northwest Folklife Festival. I like that sentiment, which can be taken at least two ways. One, that communities link people together. Or two, especially in today's political climate, "Communities, unite!"

Community is something most of us value and require, increasingly so in the isolating times in which we live. We find community in many contexts: family, religion, athletics, enjoying nature with others, playing in bands and orchestras, cultural events, and in dance most certainly.

The word community is often used in association with folkdancing. Many groups even include community in their name, like Veselo Community Folkdancers. Again, there are several meanings of community. One is that folkdance is generally open to the community, to the public. And two, of course, is the community of people attending the dance.

Folk dance is a celebration of community. With our dances, we honor many ethnicities and cultures. On a human level, we've all seen dance communities support their members in times of personal challenge, whether illness, injury, death of loved ones, and in joyful times, weddings, births, graduations, through changes of employment, and life changes.

Once I had a torn ligament and couldn't folk dance for seven long months. I still went to dancing since that was where the majority of my friends were. Because I wasn't rushing off to dance every dance (as had been my wont), I had the time and opportunity to sit and talk with people. I got to know my dancing friends in a deeper way. I learned who was a poet, who drove a bus, and what was important to them. People don't need an injury to get to know their fellow dancers, however. It was the power of the folkdance community that kept me going.

Back to 'communities unite': The Northwest Folklife festival May 26th through 29th is a meta-celebration of community. Folklife always highlights communities in its programming, and this year's theme of Festal Turns 20 does so in spades.

Seattle Center's Festal includes celebrations of 24 different cultures, many of which include folk dance. The celebrations in order of occurrence during the year include the Tet Festival, Irish Festival, Seattle's French Fest, Seattle Cherry Blossom and Japanese Cultural Festival, Asian-Pacific Islander, Spirit of Africa, A Glimpse of China, the Folklife Festival itself, Pagdiriwang Philippine Festival, Festival Sudiata, Spirit of

Indigenous People, Iranian Festival, Brasilfest, Tibet Fest, Live Aloha, Seattle Fiestas Patrias, the Italian Festival, Croatiafest, Turkfest, Diwali, Dia de Muertos, and Hmong New Year Celebration. These communities celebrate their heritage with food, music and dance, and fellowship.

This year Folklife's cultural theme, therefore, is broad. Come enjoy Folklife and give your support to this worthwhile organization and endeavor. You'll find an international dance workshop and an afternoon dance, as well as lots of other participatory dance opportunities and wonderful dance performances, not to mention concerts, sing-alongs, and much more. Check out <http://www.nwfolklife.org/festival/> to learn more.

Lastly, speaking of community, I have heard Folklife described as the "high holy days of our people."

Go forth and dance!