

Dancing Queen

LOCAL OCTOGENARIAN BETTY WATERHOUSE SWEEPS THE EMERALD BALL BALLROOM DANCING COMPETITION by Rachael Carnes

This year, Betty Waterhouse decided it was time to give competitive ballroom dancing a whirl. After a mere month and a half of training, she sashayed through the Emerald Ball, a competition held each May in Los Angeles that attracts over 15,000 participants, earning seven first-place titles in her age division.

"It's almost unheard of that someone could prepare that quickly," says Linda Staver of StaverDanceSport, Waterhouse's studio. "We didn't anticipate that she would go that soon to a competition, but her comment was 'The sooner the better, because you never know how long I'll be able to do this!'" Then 85 years old, recovering from hip replacement surgery, Waterhouse recalls her goal: "I wanted to get better, to improve my technique and also my balance."

Born in 1927 — "Tell them my age, or you won't have much of a story," she says — in El Paso, Texas, Waterhouse's personality spills over with energy. Growing up on a ranch, Waterhouse married at 18, and she and her husband Charles (everyone called him Jack) "lived a life of adventure," Waterhouse says, that included sailing, motorcycling and dancing. "But never at the nightclubs. We danced at home or on our boat. And we always had music on, big bands, jazz." Waterhouse and Jack were married for 65 years, until his death in 2010. Waterhouse has always loved travel and encourages her "four kids, 12 grands and 10 great-grands" to pursue their passions, especially if it means learning new things. She is the perfect role model: "The more structured dancing I'm doing now is harder for me," she says. "I'm used to rock 'n' roll."

But training for competition was fun, Waterhouse says, "Because I simply love to dance. And I wanted to learn the steps properly." With little time before the Emerald Ball, dancing partner Edward Staver coached Waterhouse through the Holy Trinity of ballroom rhythms — the rumba, waltz, foxtrot — and as her mastery of the steps grew, so did Waterhouse's confidence. "Once I took all those private lessons, and I knew how good Ed was and I knew the category I would be in, ages 82 to 100, I knew we could hold our own."

Then the world around her caught 'Betty Fever.' Her family and friends made plans to accompany Waterhouse to L.A. Her son-in-law, in jest, gave Waterhouse a stage name: Bettina Wataskaya. Neighbors began referring to her as "The Bettina."

Waterhouse credits ballroom dance with developing her physical and mental strength.

When asked what's next, Waterhouse says, "I would like to see if my body, and my head, can do another competition."

In a photo album she shares, full of memories from her glory days on the dance floor at the Emerald Ball, there's a handwritten quote: "I do not want to die with a dance left in my body." And it's signed Bettina Wataskaya. ■



PHOTO BY TODD COOPER



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Fall Registration & Open House: August 26, 5-7pm
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Fall Schedule 2013: (Beginning September 9th)

Monday	
Hip Hop Tots (Ages 3-5)	3:15p-4:00p
Dance Fusion 2 (Ages 6+)	4:00p-5:00p
Intermediate Contemporary	5:00p-6:00p
Beginning/Intermediate Modern (Ages 13+)	6:00p-7:00p
Tuesday	
Intermediate/Advanced Jazz Funk	7:30p-8:30p
R & B Hip Hop (Ages 16+)	8:30p-9:30p
Wednesday	
Beginning Kids Hip Hop (Ages 5-8)	3:30p-4:30p
Jazz 2 (Placement Required)	4:30p-5:30p
Thursday	
Pre Ballet (Ages 5+)	3:00p-4:00p
Beginning/Intermediate Leaps & Turns (Ages 9+)	4:00p-5:00p
Beginning Contemporary (Ages 10+)	5:00p-6:00p
Conditioning/Technique (Ages 16+)	7:30p-8:30p
Advanced Contemporary	8:30p-9:30p
Friday	
Dance Fusion 3 (Ages 7+)	3:30p-4:30p
Intermediate Kids Hip Hop (Ages 9+)	4:30p-5:30p
Jazz 1 (Ages 9+)	5:30p-6:30p
Teen Hip Hop (Ages 12+)	6:30p-7:30p
Saturday	
Fairytale Ballet (Ages 3+)	9:15a-10:00a
Dance Fusion 1 (Ages 4+)	10:00a-11:00a
Dance Tricks/Tumbling (Ages 9+)	11:00a-12:00p
Dance Tricks/Tumbling (Ages 14+)	12:00p-1:00p
Sunday	
Beginning Adult Hip Hop	4:00p-5:00p



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