

Music & Dance

On the bulletin board in my office, I post photos of myself and my friends from years ago. My goal is to show my students that I, too, was once young and have had a life outside of FAMU. I've got photos of me and my six housemates in Vermont back in the early '80s. I had a long brown Afro at the time, and there was a lot less of me to love, if you get my drift. There's a photo with my best friend, Meg; images from ACE conferences; and several photos of my husband and son, Michael (the latter in his high school baseball uniform). Oh, and there's the photo of Michael as a toddler, wearing a T-shirt from Mixed Company, an a cappella rock 'n' roll group with whom I used to sing. (One of my favorite memories is performing on a Burlington street corner one night when I was about eight months pregnant. Just as I was about to sing the line "I'll never forget him, The Leader of the Pack," I reflexively rubbed my pregnant belly. That got a big laugh.)



Mixed Company: Craig, Terry, Deb, LaRae (in red), Hank and April, ~1985

Members of Mixed Company met when we were all members of the Green Mountain Volunteers folkdance troupe, housed in Burlington. I had sung and danced with that group for years, traveling twice to Europe for folkdance festivals. One year crooner Andy Williams came to town to film his annual Christmas TV musical. GMV auditioned and were an integral part of the show. I was even selected to be Andy's dance partner (probably because I am shorter than he). I got to rehearse with him, but he was a quick study. So I was bumped by his costar Dorothy Hamill. Oh, well. I DID get to dance in other scenes and to sing "New England Hills" with most of the soon-to-be members of Mixed Company.

Mixed Company performed mostly in Burlington, Vt., and the group made two CDs after I moved to Idaho with my family. A few years later when I was visiting Burlington for an ACE conference, I was invited to sub during a show when their new alto was out of town. I was thrilled! Yes, you CAN go home again ... and have a ball.

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LaRae and George, Green Mountain Volunteers in Jaca, Spain, 1983



GMV: LaRae dancing with Aaron

When I lived and worked in Wales in 1980-81, I joined Gwerinwyr Gwent, a Welsh folkdance team. At the time, my name was LaRae Wales, so I was "Miss Wales," which was especially fun. Welsh folkdancing is done in threes – three pairs of dancers on the left side facing three pairs of dancers on the right. The other women in the group tended to learn dances from only one location (e.g., right-center or left-front). As the newbie in the group, I was willing to dance in any position, which allowed me to get my share of performance time. I even made my own plaid wool dance costume by hand, thanks to help from my friend Dwynwen Berry.

In summer 1983, I traveled with the Green Mountain Volunteers to a folk festival in Jaca, Spain; Gwerinwyr Gwent was there, too. During a parade of the dance troupes, my director told me I could leave our group to watch GG perform. I was spotted (wearing my doughty, old, real turn-of-the-last-century American dress) and invited to join GG in a dance. I stood out like the proverbial sore thumb among the brightly costumed Welsh dancers. Fortunately, my dance partner guided me through the motions so that I didn't make a complete fool of myself. I so loved the folk music scene!

I also performed in community theater. While playing one of the wives in "Little Abner" at the ripe old age of 42, my claim to fame was doing a back flip over my partner stage center. This was in Vermont. When we moved to Idaho, I was one of the ladies in "Camelot." I even did the choreography. My background in performing has prepared me for the teaching in the classroom!