

# Solving the Rubik's Cube and Other Joys of Dancing...

By Lauren Shaffer

We're standing in the on-deck area milling about with five other couples. The on-deck captain begins to line us up. We've both done her job before. We don't envy her the hours she will spend "herding cats". Dancers have a mind of their own before they step on the competition floor. I see dancers pacing and bouncing on their toes. Another couple is doing deep squats to warm up their legs. One couple is having a costume emergency. Personally, I'm always in my head reviewing my "to do" list... posture, posture, posture, frame, relax shoulders, smile. I'm also wringing my hands trying to warm them up. Sure the ballroom is cold, but pre-competition jitters have made all the blood flow to support my vital organs, leaving my hands and feet to fend for themselves...maybe not the best physiological response for dancing. Suresh clasps my hands rubbing them to warm them up for me.



On the comp floor- Derby City

The music is ending. We're next. Suresh takes my hand and now we're striding across the floor and I'm pretty sure I'm holding my breath (note to self: add breathing to list). Suddenly there is music, then applause. Bow and repeat. I'm aware of judges as we fly past. I hope my smile hasn't faded to a nervous grimace. Bow and repeat. And then it's over. I feel exhilarated. We've just done something I wasn't sure I could do.... We've danced in front of a hundred people and half a dozen judges, who in mere seconds scored the months and years worth of work we've done to get to this point. Let's do it again!

This insanity started one Friday night in 2006 at a social dance party at Starlite Ballroom where Suresh and I met. I had been taking lessons with Scott Shook for a few months. When I asked a quiet guy sitting in a corner to dance, I thought I was doing a shy guy a favor. How was I to know he had already been dancing for 10 years? By that time Suresh had years worth of instruction from Kristiina Ilo, Rauno Ilo and Marie Roach. After that night, Suresh and I would run into each other every month at

Sterrett Center during USA Dance parties. Over time, it became clear that we were both committed to International

Standard and by early 2007, we began practicing together for competition and taking lessons from Kristiina Ilo. We competed together for the first time in May of 2007 in Chicago. From that point on, we were hooked on competing.

For us, competition is the goal that keeps us moving forward with our dancing. We are both introverted, science-nerds at heart. We really appreciate "technique" and the effort it takes to achieve it, but International Standard is not for everyone. It is challenging. Very challenging. Every time you step on the floor you are bound to another person through the five points of contact. The body mechanics are not unlike solving a Rubik's Cube and have to be considered as "his", "hers" and "ours". It's easy to get stuck squabbling at the "his" and "hers" stage of mechanics. But with perseverance, the Rubik's cube begins to solve itself and individual mechanics meld into the right couple mechanics. This is probably, the foremost reason we love International Standard. In the moment when it all is going right, we know we have created something greater through our connection than either of us could have achieved alone.

But dancing isn't only about technique and mechanics, it's also about relationships, which is why we enjoy social dancing and the opportunity to meet people. The relationships we've formed through dance have changed both our lives. Of course, we found each other through social dance! We were married in 2010. We've also made enduring friendships with our dance teachers and with dancers we've met through various dance organizations. We've had the opportunity to serve the Heartland Chapter of USA Dance on the Board and in various other capacities.

More recently, our "service" has been focused on performing at different venues, which we thoroughly enjoy. We enjoy the process of hunting for music and adding some show elements to our dance. Probably one of our favorite places to perform is The Indiana Roof Ballroom. The Roof is challenging because the space is large and circular – which takes mental exercise to keep track of your rectangular routine in a circular space – but the reward is enjoying the beautiful ballroom and the great audience.

The New Dance Year is already looking promising! We have been working with first-time dancer Cheryl Hardacre, Suresh's partner for Dancing Like the Stars, a fundraiser for the historic Paramount Theater in Anderson to be held on January 31<sup>st</sup>. We hope everyone will consider making a donation to the Paramount, which counts as votes for Cheryl and Suresh ( <http://www.gofundme.com/DLTS2015>). We look forward to more opportunities for social dancing, competing, and instruction. We currently receive coaching from Rauno and Kristiina Ilo at Starlite Ballroom and plan to continue competing in the Open Standard Divisions at regional events. Hope to see everyone on the dance floor!



Competing in tango at the Derby City



Dancing\_Waltz at the Greenfield  
Fundraiser for Homeless Shelter