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**Mary Wesley** Hey there – I'm Mary Wesley and this is From the Mic – a podcast about North American social dance calling.

## Wendy Intro

**Mary Wesley** Hi everybody - and happy spring! Today we are very lucky, because we get to spend some time with the amazing, the effervescent, Wendy Graham.

Wendy lives in Durango, Colorado and is a self-proclaimed “dance maniac.” Her passion for music, song and dance caught fire in 1991 on a Danish-American Exchange (DAE) youth dance tour to Denmark. Today, Wendy leads English and American community folk dances and teaches social couples dance across the country and around the world. She has proudly served on the Lloyd Shaw Foundation and Country Dance and Song Society (CDSS) boards, and the CDSS Lifetime Contribution Award committee. She loves building community and sharing the joy of music, song and dance with people of all ages and abilities.

In our zoom chat Wendy shared some powerful stories about the formative experiences that shaped her love and dedication to community dancing (and also explains how she got so many pen pals!) I'm also grateful that she offered some of her thoughts on the ever-shifting landscape of dance roles and calling terminology, including global positional calling, which we haven't really discussed on this podcast very much. I think you'll love getting to know Wendy!

**Mary** Well, good morning, Wendy Graham. Welcome to From the Mic.

**Wendy** Thank you for having me Mary Wesley, it is so nice to see you and talk to you again. It's been way too long.

**Mary** It has been so long. I was just thrilled when I recently saw you posting on Facebook that you're getting out there on the caller trail, visiting some different communities. It was a great prompt to reach out and see if you were up for chatting. Yeah so thanks so much for joining me. I'm excited to spend some time talking about your caller life and all the things that come with it. I usually start by just asking to hear a little bit about how you came to the dance world and how you found your way to the caller's mic.

**Wendy** This is my favorite story to tell and I'm happy to tell it over and over and over again because it's truly like the life changing moment, you know, what I would call, the keystone moment, where after that, everything else flowed. So if that hadn't happened I would be a very different person and have lived a very different life. But what happened is my mom was a physical education teacher and so part of that training, you had to do folk dance in the curriculum. My mom was also a dancer growing up, she was a ballet dancer and I think she even did some international dance in the Baltimore area and so kind of had that

in the background. But then, of course, she went to school and got her degrees and started working and had a family and all of that. And so when I was 13, she wanted to kind of reclaim her life. I was old enough, I was kind of flying on my own and she was ready to take back her life and do some of the things that she really loved. And folk dance was something that popped up for her and she said that she was reading the Smithsonian magazine and there was an article about Berea College and their folk dance program—back then there was no Internet, there was no World Wide Web to search for those kinds of things. And so she called the office and spoke with Joe Tarter who ran the program there and said, "I'm interested in doing folk dance in my area," which was the Washington, D.C. metro area, "Do you know anyone?" And he said, "Oh, well, there is a woman, Barbara Harding. She lives in Herndon, Virginia," which was just down the road from us in Virginia. And so that's how my mom initially got connected into the folk dance scene. And so she started going to Barbara's dances, Barbara had a child care center, and it was called Harding Hall, and it was built especially to have kids during the day and dances by night. So they purposely built this giant, beautiful wood floor and they would literally just push the tiny little toys and then the tiny little chairs around the side and we would just dance down the middle. It was really like a kind of a house party because it wasn't always a huge event. There might be one fiddler and sometimes maybe even just eight dancers and so and it was just a couple a bucks to give the musicians some gas money. So she started going, I think it was twice a week, she had like an English and an American dance. So my mom started going and Barbara asked her, "Do you have a daughter in high school?" And my mom said, "Well, she is in junior high. Why?" You know, what's up? Barbara said, "I'm taking a group to Denmark this summer and I need two more girls." This was in March, and we left in June. So, yeah, my mom said "Would you like to go to Denmark this summer?" And I was like, "Yeah, let's go!" And, "Okay, well, you just have to go to these folk dances," which was like pretty dorky to a 13-year-old and also intriguing because I was like a jazz, tap, and ballet dancer and I did like to dance. I had done square dancing in the fifth and sixth grade and had even been in the performance set of the square so there was a part of me that wanted to like that and there was another part of me that was ashamed to be public about that because being a teenager, you know.

And so my mom said, "Well, why don't you just go to the practice and see what you think and if you think that you could do it, then that would be a really great opportunity for you." So she took me to the practice and what I remember—and this is an important memory for me as a caller to always remember is—I had NO clue what was happening. I was completely disoriented. I mean, downright dizzy. I did not know what any of the moves were or who I was dancing with or what I was supposed to be doing, like at all, like zero, like a naturally, kind of competent dancer had no clue. So that is so important for me to remember. The other thing that I remember, that I always try to remember as a caller, is when my mom picked me up and I remember getting in the van and she said, "So how was it, would you go back?" And I said, "Yes." That's what I always tell people in my beginner lesson is, look around, I say, "Raise your hand if this is not your first time." And those people raise their hand and I say, "We all had such a good time that we came back and I know you will, too." That's what I say to the new people because that was my experience. I had no idea what's going on but I had a good time and I wanted to go back.

**Mary** Amazing.

**Wendy** And so fast forward, we had to make our costumes and buy our shoes and all of this and practice, practice, practice. A couple of months later, I had a passport for the first time and a big heavy suitcase. I went to Denmark for a month and I stayed with four host families and I was away from my parents. It was a really transformative experience for me

because I realized that, number one, I love to travel and I'm really into cultural connection. That was huge. So I loved that cultural exchange but also I love to dance and the music and everything. So that changed my life and that's how I started. When I got back, that group fell apart because it kind of just came together for the purpose of the exchange. It's through a program called the Danish American Exchange, which was kind of founded and and really held through Berea College. It isn't anymore, but still kind of based in Berea and then other like groups around the country. We do a Facebook group for anybody wants to find out what's up. I think there's still opportunities to take groups to Denmark and also to host Danish groups here in the States. It's expanded beyond dance. I think it includes gymnastics now, which is kind of a dance form of gymnastics, the Danish gymnastics. So anyway, that is how it started and really a keystone moment in my life so I'm so grateful for all those little things that just fell into place that made that happen. I mean, I guess I'll say the other thing that happened that was perfect timing because it's kind of like you either hook people in right at the right moment or you might lose them forever. And because I was 13, Barbara told my mom, you know, you (to my mom): "You should go to the Christmas Country Dance School in Berea, Kentucky." Barbara had been on staff there for many, many years. And so my mom told my dad, "Wendy and I are going to go to Kentucky for Christmas for a week and you can come if you want, but if you don't want to, we're still going to go without you."

**Mary** Go Mom!

**Wendy** My dad kind of hemmed and hawed and he wasn't super into it because he hadn't really got into the dancing as much, this was just about six months later. I was old enough—you have to be 13 to be in the program because it's an adult program—so it's just like the perfect age. I wanted to keep dancing, but there really wasn't anything for me in my area after that tour and so it kept me hooked in, like it just kept hooking me in, you know, these little things that just kept me going with it.

**Mary** Amazing. How did that start to weave itself into your life as you grew into adulthood? And right now you're speaking to me from Durango, Colorado. Is that right?

**Wendy** That's right. The wild, wild west.

**Mary** Yeehaw! Do you want to walk us through the next phases from like, having these really important sparks in your life that just kept you wanting more?

**Wendy** Yeah, I do. Well, you won't believe because this is, like I said, this is just so important. I think people need to hear about these things that could happen or you could make happen, even. I came home from the Christmas Country Dance school and of course, the best part of the story is we got in the car to go home and make the nine hour drive home and my dad turned to all of us and he said, "Who wants to go back next year?"

**Mary** Oh, my gosh, so he came!?

**Wendy** He came. He learned to waltz. We stepped all over each other's feet. So it ended up becoming my family holiday tradition, which we never had really anything that special, and we suddenly had something special to look forward to. I do have a sister, an older sister, but she was already out of the house and so she didn't really become part of this tradition, which is fine.

**Mary** Sad for her.

**Wendy** She's willing to be part of it on the peripheral, but she's not like, gung ho, like some of us got into it. So, that was pretty great and of course I got home and I was just completely depressed. I was so sad to miss all of my friends that I had made. And so, of course, we became pen pals, which was wonderful. But then the craziest thing happened, there was a youth folk dance team in Berea called, the "Festival Dancers" and, you know, the Berea dance groups, there's the college team, the high school team. I think there's even like a elementary team now and there's an alumni team. So if you dance in the college team, then there is all the alumni of that and they all still dance and they all travel and they tour and it's really cool. Well, this high school team got invited to perform at the 500th Christopher Columbus celebration in Washington, D.C. that spring. So all of these people, well some of the people that I had met and then lots more that I hadn't met yet, came to the D.C. area. And of course, that's where I was and so my mom was part of helping to host all of these young people. So then the connections grew even more and it was so exciting for me to see their dance performances and their costumes. They came and they performed at my elementary school that I had gone to and all of that, and just really excited me too, because I had never seen any of that before. So that was cool, and then I had more pen pals after that. Because of this Danish exchange, because it's kind of like every other year, basically maybe a team from the U.S. will go there then the next year, a team from Denmark will come here. So the Danes that I had just been in Denmark with were coming to the States and so then to extend my time with them, I even got to go to back to Berea that summer and spend a week with them there and then traveled back with them to D.C., which was their next stop, and then got a whole week with them there. So it was like this immersion of immense proportions. And again, just to be excited about the Scandinavian dance because theirs is so different and their costumes and their history and everything is so wonderful. So all of that just in one year, I had like all of these touches and then back to Christmas school, you know, in the fall so it was like really be a lot. Again, if all those things hadn't happened, I mean the hook, right? That getting somebody in and keeping them involved was so important and so over my high school time there were a variety of teams that I had met when I was in Denmark who came to the States. There was another folk dance group in Lawrence, Kansas, in Baker, Kansas and so there was a youth team there. They hosted a team, which was another group that I knew and so I went to Kansas and got to know the Kansas dancers and kind of the same thing, then flew back to D.C. and had like a week with them there. So having these really important connections and keeping the cross cultural exchange alive. More pen pals, because this is before the internet, so lots of letter writing...

**Mary** Lots of stamps!

**Wendy** Like, a lot of stamps! And so much learning about how to be in someone else's house, how to be a guest in someone else's house, and how to host someone so that they're comfortable in your house, so a lot of other skills besides dancing. And so then I will say...so that was high school and basically my dance life was contra dances at Glen Echo...you know, Friday night, maybe Sunday nights in Glen Echo because Sunday is a school night. But I could do the Friday nights and then some English dancing. I actually really started with English, there were a lot of English dances in the D.C. area. So Sligo Elementary School, I believe, was where we used to dance and kind of all around. So English and American dances, just in my area. And then once a year we would go for the week at Christmas School but that was it. We didn't go to Pinewoods or Buffalo Gap or any of the other weeks, which in hindsight we're all like, "Why did we not do that?" Because now people go to all these dance weekends and I think that wasn't as much...I think that local areas would kind of have their local weekend, but people didn't quite get around or

maybe they were, maybe it was just because I was in high school and so that wasn't really part of it for me.

**Mary** Right, that you had the Christmas break, the holiday break time, who knows?

**Wendy** And I would say, too, and I've sort of told this before, but just from that generation where there really frankly wasn't too many people my age. So there were more people younger than me maybe who were kind of born and grown up in that folk music and dance tradition. But when I tell you that I was literally the only person in high school at the Glen Echo contra dances, I'm not lying. There might have been like one kid there who was the sound person's kid or something and then maybe there were like maybe people in their 20s or 30s, but not appropriate for me as a high school student. There were no other people my age to be friends with.

But Glen Echo was a great dance space and I always think about this for other young people in towns where there aren't community spaces because when you're not 21 yet, like, where can you go? I was so grateful for that because there were also other things happening there, such an amazing dance facility. There was swing dance and there was all kinds of other partner dance happening and that was pretty exciting for high school people. We wanted to learn how to do that and actually my mom, she's amazing, she's such a connector and enabler. Just when I think about all the doors that she opened for me, I'm so grateful.

**Wendy** You know, one of the doors was, we all worked at this gym in my community and, you know, was kind of dead on the weekends and so my mom said, "Well, could we use the dance studio, like the aerobics studio for dance classes?" And they were like, "Yeah, that would be great." So she invited these teachers from Glen Echo to come out from D.C. to Virginia to teach. And to kind of make it worth their time they were teaching swing and two step and stuff like that for adults. My mom said, "Well, would any of your friends like to do that? We could just do like a teen class." So, you know, 20 of my friends, and it was like 17 girls and three guys, I think.

**Mary** Yup, sounds right.

**Wendy** And so we all learned how to dance the lead and the follow, like in that kind of gender roles and stuff. That was like not even existent for me in high school. So I think, fast-forward: that's something I'm pretty passionate about today and for me, I think it's just because I had this experience. Not just that, but my entire experience as a folk dancer, just dancing whatever role I'm standing there doing with whoever I'm dancing it with and really more importantly, dancing with people I felt comfortable with than the role itself. And seeing how important that was for me as a young person to even feel comfortable dancing, to be able to have that ability to dance either part and to dance with whoever I wanted to dance with. So important. So important in my comfort as a teenager, as a sensitive teenager, learning to be part of this folk world. So yeah, we learned to swing dance, and then we would go to the dances and so we had a place to go that didn't involve alcohol, drugs and all that other stuff. I mean, it was just like good, clean fun. Which is pretty cool because there is not much available, I think, to kids these days. So that was kind of high school and how involved I was. It was mostly centered around my local dance and all of that. And then how did I become a caller? Well, Christmas Country Dance school, the premise of it is it's a school. You are taking classes to learn new things. The whole premise of it was to teach teachers to take dance back to their communities and to develop. So that was really the focus of it, it was not just a fun dance week, it was to teach

teachers. That's always been the focus of Christmas school and you always get handouts in the classes and we used to have seven classes a day, it's like five now, but it was really intense.

Really you would be exhausted but it was great. And so, well there was a calling class, and our friend Bill Alkire was teaching it. He's one of the CDSS lifetime achievement award winners, I'm happy to say. He is from Ohio and he and his brother Dave were always often on the staff or part of the Christmas school and taught me so much. Dave taught me line dancing, country line dancing and how to do cha cha and stuff like that. Bill, he was a caller and a clogger and really a community builder and he was teaching the calling class. We were filling out our form to sign up for it in July or whatever for the school and my mom said, "You want to do the calling class with me?" Like, you know, "Yeah, what the heck, let's just try that." I mean, literally with zero plans to ever really use it again. That's so funny when you go in with that intention.

**Mary** Just try something!

**Wendy** She was like, "It's with Bill, it's going to be a good class." I'm like, "Okay yeah, that sounds fun." So we took Bill's class and got the handout and all of that and we were practicing stuff in class and there's always house parties at Christmas Dance school. And so in the evenings, after everything, there's always more. And so it was the famous party the eve before New Year's eve, or the eve before the eve before New Year's Eve or whatever, was at Al and Alice White's house and it was late, so a lot of people had gone home. But all the young people were still there and we still had Jim Morrison to play fiddle for us because he's going to be the last one to leave. So we still had a fiddler and we had dancers, but we did not have any callers and so somebody knew that I was in the calling class and kind of outed me. Someone else said...I was like "I don't know any dances," and they were like, "We can write one." So we wrote a dance by committee. Everybody just shouted out like different moves and somebody was like, "We need to write this down." And we're like, "We need a pen and paper," and so we went into the kitchen and next to the Chex Mix and the mulled cider were some paper plates. So we grabbed a paper plate and this began the paper plate contra and somehow we found a pen and on the back of the paper plate, we wrote this dance down. It was not a good dance. I mean, the hey went over from the A2 into the B1...but none of us knew that that really wasn't allowed and it was bad, poor form.

It doesn't matter. You know, it was just a fun thing to do together and then they said, "Wendy can call it!" I think I stood up on the stairs, over the dancers, and Jim played and we did this crazy dance and no one cared that it was a mess and that there was no room and that it was crowded and it was a badly written dance and that they couldn't even hear me. It was just this young energy that wanted to keep going and by god, we figured out a way to do it. And so then the next day, horror of horrors, when I think back to it, not actually for me at the time, Bill said, "Does anybody want to call?" And I'm like, "Yeah, we wrote a dance last night! And I called it! And I went to call it for our class." I got up and I called it and of course, I mean I don't even remember, but because the Christmas Country dance school is like, so supportive because it's a teaching program, they're just like... "Wohoo!" it doesn't even matter if it's terrible. So you get pumped up and it could have gone really badly in other communities but in that setting, it was perfect. You won't believe this, but the only year, and I've been going to Christmas Country Dance School since 1991, the only year that Gene Hubert was there, that I remember, since I've been going was that year. And he happened to be sitting there watching me do that.

**Mary** Did you know who he was at that time?

**Wendy** I mean, not to the extent that now I know. Anyway, he talked to me about it afterwards.

**Mary** Wow. And Gene Hubert, at this time, you know, just prolific, the Gene Hubert dances are just still some of the gems that we have.

**Wendy** I would say like one of the most prolific, well-known, well-respected dance writers of our modern era, hands down.

**Mary** And so he's like, "Wendy, so you wrote a dance?"

**Wendy** Yeah, and also unfortunately passed at a young age, so the fact that I got to have that interaction, I do feel he is like a dance angel in my life. I just see that moment as just like little angel wings coming down and holding me because he said, "Good job, you wrote a dance and you called it." And then he said "Study the classics." He said, "You need to know the classics and then you also need to keep writing the new stuff. Like, keep doing both. Isn't that great?"

**Mary** What great, supportive advice to someone.

**Wendy** I know! So that was, I was in my sophomore year of college. And what had happened, I'm just remembering now, is that when I was a freshman in college I would go to the aerobics classes because I was into that kind of thing. The girl who taught the aerobics classes was a senior and she needed to pass the baton and so she said, "If you can become a certified instructor, you can take over my classes." So during the summer between my freshman and sophomore year, I became an aerobics instructor. Well, why is this important? Because being an aerobics instructor is the skills you need to be a caller.

**Mary** Totally!

**Wendy** I mean, I guess I need to ask my mom again if she had any idea that those things were related and if that was why she suggested the class, maybe she had some ulterior motive. Again, when I think about the timing of things, it's like, what? To be able to prompt before something happens ahead of the music, rhythmically... I mean, so I had just spent my whole summer doing that.

**Mary** Yeah! So you were a natural?

**Wendy** Well, I mean, I don't want to toot my own horn, no. But I had already sort of busted through one of the really big barriers to becoming a caller, because it's like patting your head and rubbing your belly. So that was so amazing when I think about that. But it's not like I became a caller all of a sudden. No, the only time I called was at Christmas Country Dance School and then I would stop. I mean, that's just how it was, you know?

**Mary** Yeah, that's how you where you started, that was the setting. So when you're not in that setting...

**Wendy** And it was great! They were so, everybody was always so supportive. They had these late night dances at Christmas Country Dance school. They always have a calling program during the day, so you can take the class during the day and then at night there's

an open mic. So you have an opportunity to actually practice and you could practice every night of the week. And then, of course, those late night parties usually, again, people want a caller. I had a lot of opportunity for one week and I would take the classes and I would call and then I would just forget about it for a year. Until I graduated from college and I moved to New York City for my first job out of college. And of course, they had a dance scene there—and this is an important detail—I went and there was a creepy guy there, and I never went back. Yeah, for like the first year. And then we went to Christmas Country Dance School after September 11th, which was another kind of life changing moment for me because I genuinely thought I was going to die that day and I thought I was going to die without telling my parents that I loved them.

**Mary** Oh my gosh. Were you in Manhattan?

**Wendy** Yes I was in the fourth tallest building at the time. So the second tallest building after the two fell and our alarm, our fire alarm went off when the buildings collapsed because the ash cloud came into our building and set off the fire alarms.

**Mary** Oh, my God.

**Wendy** I was 22 years old and I was in a dark stairwell and the fire alarm was going off and we couldn't go out onto the street because it was like a big cloud, a swirling cloud of dust and we couldn't go back up. We were just stuck in the dark. It was very scary and there's no phones and yeah, it was terrifying. I mean, genuine PTSD. Genuinely, like did not know what was going to happen. I thought it was the beginning of World War Three. I mean, I was planning to be sheltered in place for days and luckily we were able to walk home a few hours later. But it was a hard time. It was basically like, I have no purpose in my life and none of this is meaningful and what the heck am I doing every day going to this office that smells like the burning epicenter? For months it was awful. I am kind of traumatized, like campfires even can bring it back for me. It's bad. It was bad for months. I think that's something a lot of people who weren't there, didn't experience it, don't realize. It wasn't just a one day event. It was months of being exposed to that scene and bringing it back up and over and over again. There's a happy ending to this story. So it was bad. I am a pretty positive person, but even for me, I was like a little depressed, you know what I mean? I would say, I don't know how many boxes of Cheez-its I ate, but I ate a lot. I put on weight and it was just not a good time.

**Mary** Understandably. Oh my gosh.

**Wendy** I ate a lot of comfort food, you know what I mean? I was all alone. I lived alone and there was like helicopters flying around and you just never knew and there was always these threats, more threats. You just never knew what was going to happen next, it was a really tentative time. My girlfriend had moved to the city, my girlfriend from college. We had studied abroad together and she was from Connecticut, moved to Brooklyn also and was working on the hotline, the Emotional Help hotline. So she was having a pretty traumatic experience having to talk with people every day. She, of course, had really important work but it's the kind of work that you kind of burn out on because it's so intense. It was just a couple of weeks before Christmas and I said, "You should come to Christmas School with me. You should come to Berea and let's just dance." She was a dancer, but she'd never done this kind of stuff so that was her first time. I phoned Joe Tarter again, poor Joe Tarter. "Hey, I know it's past the registration date, but I got a friend we got to get in. Like, it's urgent, you know?" So he found a space for her and she came, and we were both able to really turn over a new leaf after that, which was so great. I think that's what's so powerful



about dance. It's such a healing thing. The music, the people, the dance, the connection. You know, after three or four months of just...awful. So it's like, turn over a new leaf, new year. The happy news is a couple of things: one is Julie Fishman, who is my friend who came with me, she quit the hotline. She was like, I'm done with that, I can't do that. She applied and went on crew to Pinewoods that summer.

**Mary** Oh, my gosh. Wow.

**Wendy** Talk about jumping in deep. If somebody out there needs to know why dance music and song is important, why it deserves funding: it's because we can change lives. Like literally take someone out of depression, out of PTSD, turn a new leaf, try something new, change their life. I mean, this was a changing moment for her. And then she said, "Oh, that was so fun. Let's go dancing in New York." And I was like, "Umm..." Because I'd had a bad experience. By the way, this is not a slight on New York at all because this happens in lots of dance communities. It's something I'm really passionate about, because young people are kind of sensitive and I kind of had that experience a lot as a young person, and so I just share it because they did ask that person never to come back because this person was very, very offensive to lots of... It turned out I wasn't alone, they found out. So they did take care of that. He wasn't there when we came back, thank goodness, you know. I just say that to other organizers and callers and whatever, we've got to make sure that it's a safe dance space or we're going to lose these valuable people, lose these important people.

So we went to the dance, and so that's when I kind of got back into the dance community, like a local dance community. And then again, just like another door opened which was that an organizer there, Merle, she said, "We are always bringing in callers from everywhere else. We don't have very many local New York callers. Bob Isaacs is going to do a calling program and would you like to be part of it?" I don't know how she knew, but again, it was just another door. And so I said yes. I did a six month caller training program with Bob Isaacs with the intent that we would meet once a month on a Friday night, for a couple of hours. We'd all call, he'd do a lesson with the intent that after the six months we would all put on a dance and then we would start rotating into the schedule as guest callers and then eventually have our own half or full evening. So that's when it kind of went from just calling for fun and a dance week once a year to actually really using it like a regular evening dance.

[ *Clip of Wendy [calling the dance Courtesy Promenade](#) by Richard Wilson at the Glen Echo Spanish Ballroom in Maryland in 2014 with music by The Fabulous Glen Echo Open Band. ]*

**Mary** Yeah, and in a place where you lived and you were feeling part of a community in your day to day life instead of once a year infusion, which is also really amazing. It's like taking it out into the world.

**Wendy** Yeah! And so that was just such an important community. I mean, it's kind of like your pledge class or whatever. We are all, like, still so bonded. I just think of everybody that was in my group I'm still in touch with. And, you know, some people are still calling or writing, that was just like a springboard, really.

**Mary** So, so cool, and then so how did you get out west?

**Wendy** Yeah, so then it was like the record player, eeeeeeeck! So I had this great plan. I'm part of the program, I'm starting to call. I remember Nils Fredland came and I got to be the guest caller with Nils. He is someone that has become an important mentor for me. And so I got to do my guest call with Nils. And right around this time, it was a big year for me, actually, I had some more kind of hard stuff happen. My senior year of college my dad had been diagnosed with terminal cancer, so he was already stage four when they found it. But he lived for five years with it. I mean, crazy. So he was at the end of those five years. This is the fall of 2004 and my sister was still in the D.C. area, I was in New York. My parents had moved because he knew his time was limited. They had moved out two years earlier to Durango, Colorado to retire there just to have fun and ski and sun and all of that good stuff. And just to really kind of live it up while they could and while he was feeling good. And so my sister decided to move to Durango. Right around that time she found a place to live and she called me and said, "I found this place but it's huge, why don't you come and be my roommate?" And I had had some other pretty hard stuff happen that year. I had actually been violently mugged. Some people may or may not know that about me. So I had a pretty hard year. I love New York and I could never imagine leaving it, honestly. But at that moment, to be with my family and to kind of take a little time to heal seemed like the right thing to do. And so I decided to leave. After New York had spent all that time investing in me to become a local caller, I up and left them! The good news is the investment paid off because I moved to Durango. You know that salsa commercial for Pace salsa "New York City!" Well, that's what happened when I moved to Durango. They were like, "We have a caller from New York City!"

And I'd never even called half an evening before.

**Mary** But you were from "New York City!"

**Wendy** Let alone a whole evening! And so it's kind of like that game telephone when the message just keeps changing and no one really knows. So it's just, "We have a caller from New York City, let's get her going, let's get her on board." The community here had kind of been like up and down, up and down, and up and down, as communities do with volunteers and people moving and coming and going. They really needed kind of a shot in the arm of fresh energy for calling and dancing and dancers and musicians and stuff like that. So I jumped in the deep end and started out just being their caller. Then just very, very shortly after that, I started hiring bands from the four corners area and starting to really just take over programming. So kind of the whole kit and caboodle. Hosting bands, calling dances, and so it was a very quick ramp up for me and luckily everyone was very nice to me because surely I made a lot of mistakes.

**Mary** But you had the energy and the time to put in that effort so I'm sure it was appreciated. Tell us more about the Durango community because you stayed around.

**Wendy** Yeah, I did. I've been here 18 years, oh, my gosh. For the record, I did go back and call for New York quite a bit so they hopefully got their investment paid off. They were very gracious to have me back and it was great to still be involved in that community. But yeah, Durango, gosh, the very first dance was kind of a hilarious story. I had just come back from Christmas Country Dance school, my dad had just passed and I was living in boxes. I had just moved. It was a lot all at once, and they called me on Saturday of the dance at noon. I was planning to go as a dancer. They said "Our caller was supposed to come from Albuquerque, but there's a huge blizzard and he is not going to come because he doesn't have a car that'll make it, can you call the dance tonight?" I was like, "Okay!" And then I realized I'd left my dance cards in Kentucky at the New Year's Eve party at

Charlie Harvey's house! So I'm scrambling to find copies, photocopies of dance cards, like on the floor of my closet, because I'm literally living in boxes at this moment. I cobbled enough dances together to call that night, you know?

Our community was pretty vibrant. It was a monthly dance, so just the amount of effort put into a weekly dance was really impossible because we didn't really have local musicians. Not too many that could actually do it regularly like that. So we did have to bring in, and because we live in middle of our little corner of paradise, it's not on the way to too many places. But, in New Mexico, they have a really vibrant music scene there and lots of bands and so many bands that can't play, can't get enough play time at the New Mexico dances that they all were stoked to come up to Durango. So it was about a four, three and a half, four hour drive from Santa Fe or Albuquerque and so not too bad. And for bands they can road trip, a lot of them are birders, they have their binoculars along the way. They make it a weekend. We made it where it was a weekend. They came, we fed them dinner or fed them breakfast the next day, they stayed with us. It was a lot of fun for us too, for my mom and I to get to know all of these musicians and stuff. I could book bands like out for a year and then between me and there weren't really any other Durango callers that I can recall. There was some other callers that could maybe come in from other places. We had a pretty vibrant scene there. And I did that for eight years, I ran the dance. Every community has its struggles. Speaking as an organizer, you either have a beautiful dance hall and no band, or a beautiful, great band and no dance hall, or no callers, or you have lots of dancers and the space is too small. I mean, there's always just like one thing that doesn't quite work, you know? And so for us, we're always struggling with the hall. I'll try to find a hall or a sound guy and paying for sound and not having sound equipment and stuff like that and so working through all of those things was always kind of a challenge. But gosh, we had a pretty good group, anywhere from sometimes 40, 60 dancers to over 100 at a dance which for a town of 18,000 and a county of 50,000 isn't bad. It's not a big town, you know? So it's pretty fun, it was really fun. It's a different scene now, I'm going to say it's somewhat non-existent since the pandemic.

**Mary** Which is not uncommon. We're all in a new place and waiting to see where we are and see what can happen.

**Wendy** So I'm trying to get that going again and as an organizer and I know this is about callers but still I wear that hat a lot, is trying to navigate the mask thing and trying to do right by my community, which is older and wanting to really be sensitive to age and health, keeping everybody safe and healthy, happy. So that's kind of where I'm at right now is I have interest from local musicians that want to play. I think that there's interest in dancers to dance, but everybody has like a different vision of what it is. Personally, because of my roots with Barbara going to a house where there's eight people and a fiddler, I am fine with that. And if that's what it needs to be, a small community and we have kind of established boundaries that we feel good about, but we're dancing and we are in community, then that's what it needs to be. I don't mind it when it's 'round the house and mind the dresser.' I call it intimate squares, "an evening of intimate squares," because that's usually what fits inside of someone's living room or a contra line with eight people or whatever. You know what? There are a lot of great triplets out there and you just need six dancers and you can do triplets all night long and feel like you really had a good evening so I'm really just open to all of that in that format.

**Mary** Yeah. I mean, thinking where you started with just a small gathering and then where you've gone. I love it. So you call Contra, Square and English, is that right?

**Wendy** Yeah, and I like to lead couples dance too. Especially, like lindy hop and salsa, Latin dances. I want it all, Mary. I'm like, what do they say? I'm a Jill of all trades and a master of none. I just love it all. Variety is the spice of life for me, for sure. So I love learning something new, it makes me a better dancer. The more dance forms that I try, I get to draw in all the little things that I learn from each one to be a better dancer overall.

**Mary** I love it. In all of those different roles where you're leading a little couple dance over here or some squares over there, what is your approach? As a dance leader, how do you think about trying to get people moving on the dance floor and what are you hoping to create for them in that experience?

**Wendy** It's so simple and if I just always remember this one thing then everything else flows from there, and that is that my only job is to help people have fun. Fun, F-U-N, three letter word. That's it. So then this goes into the very controversial discussion, possibly controversial discussion, for some people around gender roles and stuff like that.

**Mary** Absolutely.

**Wendy** Okay, because at the end of the night, it's a success when people have had fun. Not did it right, did it perfect, had the best partner, you know, whatever, made no mistakes. No. No one, no one is going home with an Olympic medal. Fun means something different to everyone. It's personal to you. Because we all are genetically different, we've had different upbringings, we've had different life experiences, different educations, different work experiences, different things happen in our lives. We all have different talents that we bring in and as a result, the way we perceive things and view things is different. Right? That's what I mean by saying that this is where I come from for everything that I do now, because I don't know what your idea of fun is. I know it's different maybe than mine, or if we were to rank the different aspects of a dance, like the music, the people, my partner, the dance moves, the caller, the space, the ambiance, the snacks. I don't know, the break, the potluck beforehand, the diner afterwards, whatever. Everybody would rank those things in a different order. So I just need to provide...like the way I think about it is sort of like eliminate the barriers to fun. Barriers to fun include: "men," "women," roles. Because if I don't identify with that or I want to dance a different role or I want to swap roles, then that's a barrier to my fun. So that's why I've left those gendered roles behind, I don't know, about six years ago. Because I realized it was a barrier to fun.

In particular, I was at an intergenerational dance week called Cumberland Dance Week in Tennessee. There were some, like smaller kids dancing and I realized, "Well, they're not "gents" and they're not "ladies." It was two little boys. I'm going to say they were two little boys. I don't know what they thought of themselves, okay. They were two kids dancing with their buddy and two other kids dancing with their friend. And so, gents and ladies was completely a barrier to them. I even experimented with the cats and the dogs. Meow! Woof! Because I thought that was kind of playful. But you know what? Even that was a barrier because they didn't need those roles to have a good time. They were dancing with their buddy. They were dancing, period. They were having a good time. So that was an example of, okay, I need to like, really strip back all of these things that I've been taught as a caller, which is really hard because I can tell you how many times I've practiced these square dance patters and have them memorized in my the core of me, to have to use something else. But I realized that I'm not doing my job unless I do that.

So what are the impediments to fun? I want to take those away so that we can get moving, get dancing, that's what it's all about. When I go back to that very first dance I went to at

Barbara's house with the other teenagers, was completely disoriented. You know what it was? Someone said, "Look up and put out a hand!" You know what I mean? Because somebody is going to grab you—and hopefully not grab you, okay, I know—like they're going to gently connect with you. They're going to hold your hand. The person who knows what's going on is going to help you. So it's just that like...look up and smile and be ready. If we can peel back all this other stuff that's sort of been part of our tradition and it's not a judgment, it's just an evolution of where we are now. It's like at the end of the day let's just have some fun. So let's keep it simple. Let's keep it where everyone can participate on the level that they want to, in the way that they want to.

**Mary** I love it. One of the things that I am interested in and that I have loved to talk with different callers about is...because I just think, I say this in so many episodes, it's such a weird job. It's such a particular job, the role of the caller and you're talking about this big, I would say it's a debate in the dance community around dance roles. People are talking about it and communities are exploring different ways to navigate that question and that challenge, which I think is really great, that people are involved in talking it through and trying to figure it out together. But then when it comes down to it, it's the caller that has to say those words. Like, it comes down to the one person who's at the microphone. When it comes to representing those community decisions, do you feel a responsibility as the person at the mic to kind of take stock and sort of carry out the wishes of the people? You have your very clear stance on it, which really informs how you do your job, which is so important. But then what is it like, for you, the interplay of also kind of trying to understand this big community conversation and then sort of be willing to uphold your perspective, perspectives you're seeing out in the world, at the microphone?

**Wendy** I'm about to say something kind of controversial.

**Mary** All right. I'm here for you!

**Wendy** So is everyone seated? You know what? I'm the kind of person, like, I'm not an A like, alpha, but I love the calling role because I've been asked to be the leader. Okay? So then it feels good because it's not like I'm this pushy person who took the leadership role. No, they invited me in. So I get to kind of do it my way. So that's one piece is that previously maybe I didn't have such a strong conviction. But other callers have modeled things for me, like they asked, if I try to book them for our dance weekend, they would say, "Do you gender balance?" Well, no one had ever asked me that question before. I frankly didn't even know if our weekend gender-balanced or not. I was happy to report that this particular event did not and so we were able to hire that person. That person does not do events that are gender balanced. Maybe there still are events that are, I don't know. I'm not involved in that. But just that awareness, seeing someone else sort of have a conviction and stand up for it, looking back, now that you asked me this question, that's what came up to me kind of gave me the courage to do what I do now.

So where I'm at right now is, when possible, I don't like to use the terms "larks" and "robins" because that is also an impediment to fun. Because it's tricky for people to know, wait, I'm a lark, I'm a robin, what does that even mean? What it really relates to is that it's really hard for people to remember their left hand from the right hand. Lefts and rights are tricky, too, it's also an impediment. So the truth is that we just don't have a perfect system yet and certain dance forms, I will say English country dance, for example, lend themselves to gender role free in some ways easier, perhaps easier than American dance form but not always. It's not a rule. It's just, my experience was I did a whole week of gender role free English calling at Pinewoods at Campers Week and it actually was the

best English calling I've ever done because it simplified all the teaching notes and all the words. It was like why aren't we calling English like this all the time, you know what I mean? And so that was a big, powerful moment for me to see that, wow, gender-role-free calling actually made it easier for me as a caller, and it made it easier for them as dancers, which increased the fun. Yes, win! Now we're doing it.

**Mary** Would you consider what you were doing positional calling?

**Wendy** Yes. Sorry, I meant to say, I'm more in the "global positional calling" bucket whenever possible. In terms of roles I talk about "partners" and "neighbors" and "corners" in English especially. Because those are common terms that everybody knows and nobody has to relearn those. Unless you're a new dancer, then everything is new for you. right? Even before you've come to the dance world, you know your partner and you know your neighbor because if you live in a house and you have a neighbor, then you know who a neighbor is: they're person next to you or across from you, right across the street from you. So these are not terms that are like...but "lark" and "robin," that is not necessarily something like with innate knowledge, you know what I mean? That's like saying do a mad robin to a brand new group of dancers. Like it's not actually informing anything, right? So I've definitely been very influenced by the global positional callers out there who are teaching and teaching that method. And wow, it was so eye opening for me to move in that direction and also with my American calling. But just certain things take longer to adjust. Squares are a little trickier because again, I've had this patter, or how to identify people? In contrast, same way, outside of partner, neighbor, opposite corner and those kinds of things. And then trying not to use rights and lefts because actually rights and lefts are like just a barrier to fun. We can't avoid it, sometimes we have to use it, you know. So there's a little bit of teaching, a little bit of ramp up. Change always is hard. That is something I teach in my professional life is change management, like at corporations. What we say is that even change that you choose for yourself is hard. So even if it's a choice, you made it, you wanted to make this change, you're excited about it, it's still hard. So I think the thing we have to remember in our community in this discussion is that everyone is going through change and that's hard for everyone. So the people who for years used ladies and gents and that's what they know, they're having to learn something new. And then the people who for years were forced into those roles against their comfort, like me, a 13-year-old who just wanted to dance with my mom and I had to be a "gent," and I was told comments like, "You're the cutest gent in this line!" or, "Look at those muscles or "Where's your mustache?" Okay? So a 13-year-old who just wants to dance with their mom and is put into these roles, they have to learn something new, too. They actually get to learn how to be free and just dance the role that they want to dance. I mean, everyone is going through a change so if we can just remember that and be kind to each other, then we are going to make it through. We're just in that discomfort zone, but we're pushing through to comfort. But that's because we're all in this uphill climb, learning something new.

And even me as a caller, so back to being a caller, I am not perfect and I am human and I have learned to do something and I have been doing it now for many years, many years to where old habits die hard. And so even though my intentions are good, I still say the wrong things sometimes. Sometimes I don't say it that clearly, sometimes I say, "rights and lefts" and it's confusing to people. My friend Greg Potter he uses a Sharpie and he puts a big L on his left hand because he has a hard time with that. So I guess the point is for dancers to also be kind to us as callers and organizers and musicians, because we are all in this together. We're all navigating something new and literally I believe we genuinely have the same goal in mind, which is to have fun. Our goal is, at the end of the day, to have a good time. And we're all just navigating how to get there the best and easiest way, like by

removing those obstacles to fun, those impediments to fun. I guess the other obstacle that is really a real thing and I personally experienced it when I did a dance weekend in Kansas in December, is that we could all be called "Rusty" right now. That could be our name, we could all be called Rusty. It doesn't matter that I called a virtual dance every month for two years during this shutdown. Those dances are not the dances that I'm calling with real life humans. You know, just getting feedback from that Kansas group about how it went and thinking about my own performance because I'm very introspective and I'm probably my hardest critic, right? And thinking about how it went and it was like yeah, I'm just rusty and I'm just navigating the global the global positioning and the gender role free. I was like, on fire six months before the shutdown and then it shut down. So I haven't been able to fine tune it and develop it since then. I just started calling to live dancers about a year ago, last March in Moab, Utah, was the first dance that I called in a couple of years. Then it's been a couple of camps this summer and a couple of weekends. I mean, it just coming back online, like slowly. Actually now it's like going crazy, the stuff is coming back online. But our ability to kind of match the speed that it's coming back, we're all just our muscle memory, our body memory, it's our physical ness, our actual physical ability, our vocal chords. I mean, it's rusty. Those of us as callers, unlike musicians who've probably played more and possibly fine tuned their craft more, we didn't have the amount and the kind of experiences to keep our chops sharp.

**Mary** Totally. We can only do our job in public, it's very hard to practice.

**Wendy** Yeah!

[ *Clip of Wendy [calling a square dance](#) at the Albuquerque, NM contra dance in 2014 with music by The Thrifters* ]

**Wendy** So not only are we rusty, just with our basic skills. We're also all navigating gender role free calling, whatever that looks like. For the most part that is happening, I see that for me as a trend. And so you asked me earlier and I never answered it, and I'm going to answer it right now. So I am a gender-role-free caller. I prefer not to use larks and robins whenever possible. I try to use global positioning: so, "The people who have their back to the door that you came in," "The people who are near the clock wall, the fireplace, the mirror, the windows," whatever. That's what we mean by global orientation. So whenever possible that's the kind of way that I'm talking about a partner, neighbor, maybe a corner opposite or something. Here is how I feel about it: So, for example, and this is what might be a little controversial, actually, you know what? I'd love everyone's feedback if they're kind. I would love to engage in this conversation, but here is one perspective. Ok, Mary Wesley: let's say your dance is a larks and robins dance, and I don't use "larks" and "robins" and I don't use "gents" and "ladies," am I still complying with the policy of your dance?

**Mary** Good question.

**Wendy** I haven't said the words that you don't want me to use, but I haven't used the words that your dancers are used to using. But I have called an evening and people have had fun. And actually possibly removed some barriers to the fun by not using those terms that your community has decided on. That's a little controversial and I don't have a hard stance on this. So during the virtual dances, I used larks and robins because there was no global position other than the camera or away from the camera. But even then, some people are mirroring and some people aren't and some things is backwards and not, and what's up the hall and down the hall in virtual land. So that's my preference is to, whenever

possible, call without any role names other than, like I said, partner or neighbor or something. I prefer not to use gendered or even these substitute role names, that's my preference. And I have an opportunity to actually just talk to the organizers about it, either when they book me or even after the fact. Because a lot of these events are being rescheduled three years later and so all that stuff kind of was like not even a conversation. So I have an opportunity to just say, "Hey, are you willing to let me do it the way I'm doing it because I think this is the most fun for everybody?" It's the most inclusive for everybody and it removes the barriers and it allows everybody to participate the way they want to and so I think it makes more people happy and more fun on the dance floor, and I can say that to them. I have an opportunity just like that caller who asked me, 'Do you gender balance?' I have an opportunity to influence this discussion in a positive way. And Mary, this is an incredible weight. This is an incredible pressure because I'm human, I'm not perfect, I'm rusty. It's been a few years and I'm still learning how to do this best. I want to give everybody a really good time to go, oh, my gosh, Wendy never even used any of those terms and we had an awesome time and then spread the gospel around the world. I want that, but the truth is it's going to be kind of rough for me up on the stage right now, because I'm still navigating that. I still just don't have like the words like perfect to come out so that it's clean and crisp and clear. Like sometimes it's a little muddy for me even, right?

So it's an incredible weight but we have to try, we can't just not do it because it's not going to be perfect. So I think just saying that to the organizers like, "This is what I'm using, hey, it's I'm a little rusty right now. I'm still navigating," I would even just say I'm just still perfecting how this works best for me and for dancers. But a real life story that happened to me in 2019, before the pandemic was one of the last weekends that I did was Dance in the Desert. And I called the first evening and that night two people came up to me and they said, "I saw what you did, thank you." I didn't use larks and robins. I didn't use gents and ladies, I just used, you know, the fireplace, the door, whatever. And they're members of, you know, kind of the LGBTQ+ community and they said, "Thank you, we saw what you did." And my friend who is cisgendered, heterosexual male, was like, "What did you do? What did you do?"

**Mary** What'd you do Wendy!?

**Wendy** That was when I knew I had done it. I had done my job because there was no reaction. So what we're trying to do is eliminate the friction, the bad feelings on the dance floor. My friend, cisgendered heterosexual male, likes to dance the traditional gender role, the Lark role had no clue that the whole evening I had never used those terms, he was blown away.

**Mary** He just got to dance, everyone just got to dance.

**Wendy** So in that moment everyone had had fun because we eliminated the friction on the dance floor. The problem is I'm not perfect and I'm still learning this and there's still friction because I'm not always the best at explaining and saying, okay, you're that person on the right, you have a right hand free, you're going to pull across. It's a chain, it's not a lady's chain, it's not a right hand chain, it's just a chain. So sometimes there's a little friction because everybody's learning something new. It's just as we start to get into more complicated dances, it's a little harder. That's where I'm at of doing a weekend versus a whole week, I'm using a lot more of my repertoire and I have to learn how to call those dances in different ways. So I just ask the community to be kind and know that we're all coming back from something. And especially callers we haven't used our calling muscles



for a while, so please be kind to us. We all have the intention of just having a good time, that's what this community is all about.

**Mary** Yes. Oh my gosh, you've just given us so many beautiful stories and sentiments and I love hearing a little bit from the Durango Community. I usually close with three questions that are just short and sweet. It's fun to get kind of a survey of different callers. So the first one is that something I notice a lot that callers do is part of our job is to notate and kind of collect and curate dances, right? Because that's like our materials that we work with. So how do you notate and organize your dance repertoire?

**Wendy** Yes! First of all, the first dance I collected from another caller was Gaye Fifer and was called "Mars and Venus." That was my first index card, I'll say. That was my first recipe card that I collected. I was calling in England and I was carrying a backpack full of really heavy books back and forth for a week and I had a permanent strain for several weeks after that. I promised myself, because I was going to go back to England the next summer, I'm not going to do that. I have to go electronic. So I got an iPad and I got the Dancing Master app. It just happened that I went with that one. I know there's other ones out there because I happened to be doing an English ball with David Millstone out here in Santa Fe. I think I was like, "What are you using?" And he was like, "I'm using this," and I was like, cool. Because I knew I could put the English dances in and frankly, it works so well for me because I do have kind of an English and American repertoire. And so it's got all the features for my English dances that I kind of need like key, composition and all that extra stuff that I might not need for contra or square. And it does just fine for me for those American dances. So all of my dances, I think I lived in my bed for like a month and I just like, put things into a spreadsheet and then imported it and now everything just goes into my iPad. So that is how I live now, is paper free and it made a big difference in my ability to program and organize. So for those of you that are still on the cards, if you want to break away and you need some encouragement, this is your wake up call. Think about going electronic, it's a great way to organize.

**Mary** What is it that changed your programming? Because it's searchable, you can use categories? I'm still on the cards. I'm gonna out myself.

**Wendy** Ohhh! Lots and lots of people are. It's that it really helped me learn my repertoire and remember kind of like key figures because I can have everything sorted by figures. So like I want a dance with like a pass through to an ocean wave or whatever, and then I can search for that. If I'm looking for something special I can see sort of the bigger picture and I can move things around without the cards blowing off the stage, getting wet, having paper clips on the thing. So I like all of that. It also tracks when I call it. So for example, if you can't remember, like did I call that at the last dance and you're looking kind of for a variety or what was the last time or...it's nice because you have this history. And then of course there's other added features like if you are coordinating with a band, like especially with English, and you're going to send your program a couple weeks ahead of time and then it's really easy just to email the program to the band. So there's extra features there that you may not need as an American caller necessarily. So there's actually probably so many features that I'm not even really using. Another thing that's really good to have, if you are an English caller, is the Barnes, the electronic Barnes. I can't carry those around as a caller, I just got other stuff I'm carrying around, but it's nice to have that music electronically, and also I have the Portland Collection electronically. So as a caller, you may not think it's your responsibility to have music, but I'm saying that it's really, really helpful.

So I have the three Barnes and the three Portland Collections, and I have my dance cards all on my iPad and no more neck stain, you know because I have to carry enough other stuff around in my backpack, water bottles and shoes, heavy stuff. So I think maybe big picture, it's really nice to see when I plan for a week. You know that I can really look at the whole thing, but with the cards, it's a little trickier to see the big picture.

**Mary** Love it. Do you have any pre- or post- dance rituals? Like when you are getting ready to call or after you get off stage?

**Wendy** Pre-dance or during the dance, and if you want to watch me do this, you can watch the "Five Things" on YouTube. Because I did this on the "Five Things." If I teach an early morning class, so this is like calling at a dance weekend or week, I tell people to come early and we are going to do stretches, but the stretches are mind exercises. It's for our body too but we're doing what I call cross meridian. So anything that crosses the meridian with our hands, our feet, our legs, you know, and that just zaps us into the present moment. So when people are a little sleepy in the morning, that's a great pre-dance ritual but also at 10:00 at night, the clock strikes and people turn into dance zombies. That is a good time as a caller to have everybody stop what they're doing, cross their legs and bend down or whatever. Don't pull your hamstrings and just do eagle arms, do eagle legs or whatever. Do the old thing from gym class, stretch your hamstrings. Because it instantly gets people into the moment, it refreshes them, it wakes them up. So I think that's a great ritual that I would love to spread, let's spread that.

**Mary** Awesome. And how about when you wrap up? Everyone has had a wonderful evening like you step off stage, what do you need in that moment?

**Wendy** I need to be left alone because I've just been talking for 3 hours...

**Mary** That's so true.

**Wendy** ...Or for 6 hours a day for a week. So just remember that I need down and quiet time, too even though I'm an extrovert, I really need those opportunities to rest and recharge. But you know what? Hearing from people at the end of the evening, like nice things is great, but maybe wait for your criticisms for the next day or something.

**Mary** Awesome. And you just kind of answered my third question, which is whether you are an extrovert or an introvert? If you know?

**Wendy** Yeah, I do. I mean, this is my work. I do talent development and we use tools, scientifically validated tools to find out if people get their energy more from social settings or from more from internal, and we measure that. The interesting thing about it is that what we know about these tools is like a lot of people know, like Myers-Briggs and Strengths Finders, DiSC, there's a bunch out there. I use one called TMA Method, and I used to use one called Predictive Index, PI. What we know is that when you have something really traumatic you can change. And for me personally, I lost my husband suddenly and I did change. I did change a little bit. And on top of that, and this is for everyone, so that was for me personally, but I would argue that this pandemic has been a change for everyone. And I would argue that everybody I work with now, like who uses this tool that I coach, that it has been a dramatic change and that it has affected how we are. So the fact that our work, we don't go into work necessarily, the fact that I work at home now or the hybrid work experience, the fact that we all had to be isolated for so long. Maybe it made some introverts more extroverted and maybe it made some extroverts more introverted. And I

think we're all on a scale. One time I had my tarot cards read and the reader, she knew me well enough and she was laughing and she said, "I can't wait to do your reading," when she said, I think it's your life card, "Your life card is the hermit."

**Mary** My jaw just dropped.

**Wendy** She was like, "Oh, my God." But the cool thing about that was, first of all, The Hermit is such a cool card. I discovered after that, it's like a monk. He's all about internal learning and observation and he carries a lantern and that light is his example shining out for all. So even when we are internal and doing our work inside, we have a shadow that we cast. We have a light that we share. I thought that was so beautiful because what it is as a caller I always felt that as a caller I was this torch bearer of tradition. I just thought that was amazing because I always saw myself carrying the torch and then here was The Hermit, carrying his lantern and light shining out, leading by example. So as callers, we really have to lead by example. So I resonated with it, even though it was funny.

And the other thing that was so important about learning about that for myself was that I also need my quiet time and that even as an extroverted dance teacher, I was always out there so much that it was actually exhausting, right? Even though it gave me energy, it was exhausting. So finding that balance. And that's where everybody is on a scale. I hate to even put myself in a bucket but I respect my need for quiet and me time so much more now since I got that card as my life card. It was like permission to not go out on the weekend, to just stay home, to not make plans all the time. Because during the week I was always teaching classes and whatever else. Or to not go out during the week if I'm going to be out calling a dance on Saturday night or vice versa. So if you're that kind of person where you just feel the social pressure, you feel like naturally you're one way, that doesn't mean you have to be that way all the time, doesn't mean that we can't operate any other way. It means we just have to be aware of our energy levels and protecting ourselves and letting our loved ones around us know what's happening for us. So at dance camps, definitely know that sometimes the staff needs just like, quiet time. They're like ON all the time.

**Mary** I know. I think there can be such a misconception of like, oh, they're at the microphone, they just love it! It's always a balancing act.

**Wendy** I am not afraid to be on a mic, but it's not like I need the spotlight. It's just like that happened to be the role that I got.

**Mary** And that's the tool that you need. This is something David Millstone told me when I was first learning. He was one of my mentors and he said, "The dancers have elected you as the quickest way to get dancing, because they need someone to organize them and teach them and lead them. And you are in a sense, by committee, even as you were at Berea, writing your paper plate dance. Well, Wendy Graham, torch bearer, caller, wonderful, wonderful to spend this time with you. Thank you so much.

**Wendy** What a delight! Thank you for doing this and I can't wait to hear some of the other episodes that are going to be coming out in the future.

**Mary** Yes. All right. That's a wrap.

[ Clip of Wendy [calling the dance Another Nice Combination](#) by Tom Hinds at the 2017 Christmas Country Dance School in Berea, Kentucky with music by Nathan Wilson, Alice White, Mara Shea, Dave Crandall, and Sam Bartlett. ]

**Mary** Thank you so much Wendy, for talking with me. Check out the show notes at [podcasts.cdss.org](http://podcasts.cdss.org) to learn more.

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Happy dancing!

**Ben Williams** The views expressed in this podcast are of the individuals and do not necessarily reflect those of CDSS