

“Breaking Barriers One Dance Step At A Time”

by

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“I was going to hate it.”

That was Cyndi Gerhold's reaction when she reluctantly agreed to participate in partnership dancing lessons with Elizabeth Crow, her partner of forty years. For better or worse, they had done almost everything together since they began breaking traditional barriers in the 1970's.

Elizabeth and Cyndi met during their individual services in the United States Navy. They became a couple in 1975 and expanded their family with the addition of a son in 1983. By 2010 their son was grown and their own physical ailments prompted them to try something new. They needed something to help them repair in a physical sense while they grew as partners. That may be why Cyndi agreed to the first lesson, albeit with reservations.

Reservations disappeared after the first lesson. Cyndi and Elizabeth enjoyed the new connection between one another and with staff at the Oceanside, California FADS. They also felt an immediate difference physically. There was just one barrier, but it was one the couple knew well.

“We're not a traditional couple,” Cyndi proclaimed. “Will that be a

problem?”

“No, it's not a problem,” replied Kage Hart, owner of the Oceanside studio.

“Elizabeth and Cyndi are not special because they're different,” Kage is fond of saying. “They are special because of who they are. They're family.”

“They make you feel it's OK,” Elizabeth said, explaining the connection they have with their FADS family. “It's comfortable. Feel at home. Have a good time.”

During lessons and group classes, Elizabeth and Cyndi discovered an unexpected strength: They segued smoothly between roles of leader and follower.

“OK. I'm leading now,” Elizabeth said, remembering the first performance when she transitioned from a follower to a leader.

“Now you can get an idea what it's like from the other end.” Cyndi smiled at her partner.

What would these two ground-breaking, non-traditional Navy veterans do next? Kage Hart answered the question when he asked them to participate in WCDC 2017.

As the first competition on the West Coast to open its doors to non-traditional couples, WCDC 2017 allowed Elizabeth and Cyndi to grow as dancers and break a few barriers along the way. They competed in four rumba heats, joining the ranks of three other Oceanside FADS students who dared to

try open-gender competition for the first time. With encouraging cries and applause from a receptive audience, Cyndi and Elizabeth laughed at their nervous twitters and gained confidence with every dance step.

What thoughts crossed Cyndi's and Elizabeth's minds as they finished their final heat?

“Our first thought was about Kage Hart, that this opportunity was all because of his vision. Bring open gender to WCDC. The respect he has for all his dance family. It was exhilarating.”

“Kage and the rest of the dance family are the heroes here,” Cyndi has said on more than one occasion. “The more we break the barriers the more it will not be an issue.”