



Annie Hirsch: A Lifetime Devoted to Family, Friends and Dance

By Mark Scheuffele

Annie Hirsch, fondly known as "Little Annie" within the swing dance community, was born on a picturesque farm in Akron, Ohio. Growing up in a family of dancers, her parents' love for music and dance played a significant role in shaping her passion for movement and rhythm from an early age. Her father's skilled concertina playing and her parents' joyful dance routines, particularly the Italian Polka, became cherished memories that fueled her lifelong dedication to the art of dance.

Annie's passion for swing dance truly ignited when she was inspired by her talented brothers, Larry and Danny, who were both gifted dancers. However, it was Danny, the oldest brother, who took on the role of her dance mentor. Under Danny's patient and skillful guidance, Annie learned the intricacies of swing dancing and developed her signature style, characterized by extraordinary footwork and the skillful execution of syncopations. Tragically, she lost Danny to cancer, but his influence remained a guiding force in her life and dance journey.

As Annie's family moved to Stockton, California, during her school years, she continued to pursue her love for dance. The move provided new opportunities for her to immerse herself in the world of swing dancing, and she was eager to learn from other talented dancers. It was during this time that she had the chance to refine her skills further under the tutelage of the renowned dancer Bill Joslin, whose mentorship continued to shape her dance technique and style.

In the late 1950s, Annie Hirsch's life took a significant turn when, she, along with her husband Robert and their two sons David and Don, made the pivotal decision to relocate to Southern California. This move brought them to a region that not only shaped their family's future but also opened up a world of life-changing opportunities.

Later, in the mid-1960s, Annie's journey took another pivotal turn as she moved to Newport Beach and Orange County, an area with growing business opportunities but also a region known for its vibrant dance scene. To her delight, she discovered that swing dancing was very much alive and thriving in dedicated communities. With her friend Patti Demaio acting as her dance tour guide, they embarked on a journey to explore the swing dance venues of Southern California. Places like "Kontiki," "Ivanhoe," "Waterwheel II,"

"Staircase," and "Top of the West" became her favorite haunts. In these hallowed dance halls, she reveled in the mesmerizing performances of esteemed dancers like Pat Eggers, Darlene Greminger, Jackie and Jerry Cobb, Ron Andrews, Darlene Goree, Bonnie Hauser, and Sandee Bryant. These exceptionally talented dancers not only captivated her but also became her sources of inspiration.

Annie was an astute observer, and she diligently absorbed their moves and styles, skillfully integrating their grace and artistry into her own dance repertoire. These experiences weren't just about movement; they were moments of transformation, where Annie's dance style evolved, and her passion for swing

dancing flourished. These venues not only provided her with the opportunity to learn and grow but also became the backdrop for cherished memories and lasting friendships.

In this vibrant dance community, Annie found not only a platform for self-expression but also a community that shared her passion for swing dancing. The camaraderie and the sense of belonging were palpable, creating an environment where her passion could truly thrive. The mid-1960s marked a significant chapter in her dance journey, one where she would continue to evolve as a dancer and play an instrumental role in the preservation and promotion of swing dancing.

While she occasionally participated in dance competitions, Annie's true calling lay in being an observer and avid supporter of the dance community. Her infectious laughter, impeccable footwork, and radiant energy made her a beloved figure among her fellow dancers, earning her admiration and respect from all who crossed her path.

Annie's impact on the swing dance world extended beyond her remarkable dance skills. Recognizing the need for a unified platform to promote swing dancing and preserve its essence, Annie established the World Swing Dance Council (WSDC) in 1993, alongside Skippy Blair. Her visionary leadership and dedication to the art form led to the implementation of essential swing competition rules, guidelines, scoring systems, and the establishment of the Dancers Registry, ensuring the authenticity and integrity of swing competitions worldwide.

Beyond competitions, Annie dedicated her time and support to numerous dance events and conventions across the country. Her extensive travel for dance conventions enriched her life, broadening her circle of friends, and cementing lifelong connections with fellow dance enthusiasts.

As Annie's love for dance grew, so did her desire to share it with the world. In 1968, she had a hand in starting A'Maree's, a boutique shopping destination in Newport Beach, California. Over the years, A'Maree's became a retail institution, offering a curated selection of California-casual fashion to a diverse clientele.

Throughout her illustrious journey, Annie received numerous accolades and recognitions. From the "Queen of Swing" and "Legends of Swing" awards to her induction into the California Swing Dance Hall of Fame, and the World Swing Dance Council Hall of Fame. Annie's impact on the community has been widely acknowledged and celebrated.

Together with her partner, Jack Carey, they blended both of their unique and substantial styles of swing dancing into a unique rhythmic masterpiece of movement, elevating them to the status of icons within a community brimming with brilliant dancers. Their unparalleled style and exceptional skill set a new standard for the swing genre, eventually becoming synonymous with the emerging category known as West Coast Swing. Annie's passion for swing dance has consistently manifested through her dedication and advocacy.

Together, Annie and Jack established the Jack and Annie Scholarship Fund, a testament to their commitment to nurturing future generations of swing dancers by offering valuable opportunities and support to aspiring enthusiasts.

Annie's infectious laughter, unwavering support, and incredible footwork have made her a beloved figure in the swing dance family. Her legacy and influence will continue to inspire dancers for generations to

come. As her close friend, Patti Demaio, once said, "She is a strong, funny, kind spirit, always stunning and full of fire."

As Annie continues to navigate through the eternal dance of life, her memory remains etched in the hearts of dancers worldwide, forever guiding them on the rhythmic journey of swing. Her devotion to swing dance and the love she poured into the community will always be remembered and cherished. Annie Hirsch's life is a testament to the enduring power of dance and the profound impact one person can have on an entire community.

Favorite Memory of Annie Hirsch

By Kelly Casanova

"My favorite Annie story happened at Monterey SwingFest many years ago. Annie was the CJ and I was on staff and assisting her, so we were spending a lot of time together. Saturday night John Wheaton held a "Best Dressed" contest and asked all the women to come forward to participate. Although I don't like those types of events, since I was on staff I decided to join in to show support. As I walked out onto the floor with another young woman, John turned to us and said, "Sorry ladies, but you can't participate because you are wearing pants instead of a dress." For the record, we were both wearing very dressy outfits complete with the required amount of rhinestones and sequins for the era.

The young woman with me was mortified and slunk back to her chair. I immediately walked to the back of the ballroom where Annie was setting up clipboards for the next contest. When I told her what happened she immediately ran over to John and took the mic and challenged his decision to omit anyone wearing pants from the contest. Since she was also wearing a black chiffon tunic top over black chiffon pants she insisted she be allowed to "compete". John again refused her, so she said, "Can I participate if I'm wearing a dress?" And he said "Of course!". So she motioned to me to follow her to the stage where she got up on the stage and directed me to remove her pants..which I did. Her tunic top came to her mid thigh so basically she was wearing a mini skirt. I helped her off the stage and she joined the line of women competitors. When it came time for the audience to vote I jumped up on the stage and swung her pants over my head to get the crowd going, and of course the audience voted her the winner. Poor John never had a chance and sheepishly handed the 1st place award to Annie, who promptly gave it to the second place winner. As the competitors went back to their seats Annie and I went in the back kitchen area and restored her outfit to it's original condition.

The icing on the cake was learning that later someone had run up to the Sports Bar where Jack was enjoying his burger and approached him yelling, "JACK, JACK, Kelly is taking your wife's clothes off in the ballroom IN FRONT OF EVERYONE!" Jack's reply was, "That sounds about right", and he continued to eat his burger without ever taking his eyes off his game."