

Wally Trabing's Mostly about People



Dance Ginger Dance

She gave me a kiss before we got down to the interview and I looked embarrassed and she said, "Don't be."

Well, if you were approached by a faded dove with wings that were either run over by a lawn mower, or caught in an aeroplane prop — affixed to a large Valentine shaped hat, underwhich was a hint of a face, hearted on one cheek with rouge, a cardboard heart pasted to the other; long heart-shaped earrings dangling hearts, brilliant red dress, do-dadded with a garland of plastic white roses, a white fox shoulder piece, red leotard stockings, a skirt covered with doilies to which were affixed varicolored carnations; hands encased in a white fox muff, silver ballet slippers toed with a red rose on each, great rings on almost every finger, and sleigh bells throughout which give off a general music box effect when she walks — I'll wager you, too, would, if not faint dead away, give a start.

But wait — this must be Ginger Johnson.

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It was, and this immediately changed the atmosphere, for under this walking tournament of roses walking float is an institution who has cheered many a heart and strengthened many a tilted temptation.

She is much liked and quite a bit loved by children, shut-ins, the sick, the lonely, the lost, the street people, and others who do not fit these categories.

She is noticed mostly dancing around the outdoor cafe at Cooper House on the Mall. She dances when Don McCaslin and Warmth plays. Never once has her tambourine matched time with the band. But no mind. It is part of her charm.

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I always took her for another character lending color to the noon activity on the Mall. Then I would see her at other functions, and then while at the drums with the Monterey Bay Classic Jass Band I saw her dance in at our regular Sunday afternoon concert at the Dream Inn — scarfs flying, a hat full of fruit bouncing bouncing, smiling and waving. Bit by bit I learned her background.

She is the daughter of an Oakland lawyer and has 25 years of married life to her credit. Her husband is a retired police lieutenant.

Her age is "between me and the Lord," but she's no spring chicken. She is an alcoholic, 12 years sober. She is religious every minute.

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I don't suppose anyone will know or will be able to measure the value of this woman.

The type of person who passes her off with a sneering snicker would not be the type who would take the trouble to visit the children ward of the local hospitals, or the endless list of rest homes for the aged, or the mentally retarded classes or the De Tox center for alcoholics, or the psychiatric ward of Dominican, or the senior citizen centers or the AA meetings or the convalescent homes, or the center for the handicapped, and heaven knows where else.

Dancing, dancing, always dancing, giving a kiss here and there, preaching a bit, counseling, encouraging.

Her outlandish costumes change by the seasons, on holidays, on impulse. "Sharing and caring," she calls her routine.

Always with her tambourine; sometimes a lot of them and other hand instruments and the while room may end up thrashing about having fun.

She's recognized, is Ginger. She jokes, "I've even said hello to squirrels and had them say I was more squirrely that they were."

But she also relishes the time she was taking a solo walk out on Alba Road for a bit of reflection and heard the call from above: "Hey, it's Ginger — Hi!"

It wasn't the Lord, yet. It was some PG&E linemen perched on a high pole.



Ginger Johnson . . .
Dancing, dancing, always dancing.

REFERENCE