

Helena and Ken Robinson

A boy named Ken and a girl named Helena lived about 20 minutes from each other, but it would take more than 20 years before they met. Their tale begins as a traditional Jewish love story, and then becomes a moving chronicle of devotion.

Ken's parents were square dancers. At a Star Thru dance, his mother spotted a "nice single Jewish woman" and asked for her phone number to pass along to her son. Ken and Helena met on Christmas Eve 1977 and married in 1979.



Helena and Ken, Halloween 1979

Though Ken had tried square dancing once, he hated it. Helena loved it. Ken loved Helena. Ken took lessons at Rutgers Promenaders from Betsy Gotta. The Robinsons immediately assumed the post of refreshment hosts and later held many other leadership roles in the club such as secretary, *Grand Square* reporter, NNJSDA delegate, and president (a position Ken has held for 10 years). Ken is also the NNJSDA webmaster (www.nnjsda.org). Having first written the code, he now hosts the site. "A website is only as good as the information provided." Updates, corrections, and suggestions may be emailed to Ken: website.updates@nnjsda.org.

Ken's most memorable dancing experiences are the first dance Helena took him to after he finished Mainstream lessons (a full Plus dance!), his first National Convention in Memphis in 1980 with over 30,000 dancers, and their first National Challenge Convention in 1982 when they were halfway through C1 lessons.

The Robinsons eventually reached the C4 dance program, but they always considered themselves square dancers, not C4 dancers. Rutgers Promenaders, with Ken as president, has remained a Mainstream club so people who have dropped out of the activity can come back fairly easily and rejoin.

Helena and Ken were definitely supporting square dancing, and then it was square dancing's turn to support them. A few months after their marriage, Helena was (mis)diagnosed with a "rare benign growth." In 1981, it was correctly diagnosed as Adenoid Cystic Carcinoma and she underwent her first cancer surgery, followed by five weeks of full-brain radiation. She was indomitable, heading off to work in New York after the early morning radiation and continuing to square dance.

"Dancing was our life, and she wasn't going to let her illness get in the way," said Ken.

"The major adjustment she had to make was squaring up so she could hear, since she lost her right ear in the surgery. For Challenge dances she wore a badge on her back that said OUCH. This was because the surgeons used a section of her upper back to cover the area where the ear had been. The back stayed sensitive for years."

When the cancer reoccurred in 1991, Helena endured about one surgery per year, but she kept dancing until cancer claimed her life on July 25, 2005. Helena's courage and humor were an inspiration to everyone who had the joy of knowing her.

Professionally, Ken is an Open VMS System Manager (a "computer guy" to the rest of us). He enjoys cooking, baking (his "Supernatural Brownies" are incredible), wine tasting, and meteorology. He credits Toastmasters International with helping him conquer his fear of public speaking. He has traveled to Canada and about 75 percent of the 48 contiguous states, mostly for square dance events. Ken's birthday is June 1, 1951 ("I'm proud of my age"), and Helena was born on June 27, 1955.



Ken and Helena, 1992

Lise Greene