

GINI DICKIE

I've always loved dancing for the sheer joy of it, so when I found myself teaching English in a girl's secondary school in Northern Nigeria in 1969, a traditional dance group had been formed and there were no staff willing to supervise it, I raised my hand.

Now, the girls taught each other the dances from their part of the country and I watched in amazement at the thrust and undulation of those bodies, while their bare feet beat the dry ground and their hips swayed to this hypnotic drumming.

I was fortunate to have a Nigerian housemate named Lari Aleu, and she offered to teach me the Hausa dances in the privacy of our home.

The big challenge for me was learning how to move my hips in ways I had never done before. After all, singer-songwriter Nancy White insisted Canadian babies are welded at the hips.

At the end-of-term assembly which was held outdoors because we didn't have an auditorium, all the traditional dance groups performed and one girl was absent from the Hausa group, so Lari pushed me to join them. I am sure that every girl in that school was doubled over in laughter, never having seen a foreign teacher attempt those dances. I'm also sure that the British headmistress, Ms. Muddle, was horrified, but I myself felt exhilarated. And when I returned to Canada and became involved in the Latin American refugee in the seventies, all those cumbias and merengues were a breeze. I had unwelded my hips.

Now, I don't know if all this hip movement is going to cause the need for a hip replacement, or prevent one. But until then, I'll just savour the joy of dancing.