

## Frankie's Legacy How He's Touched Our Lives

*I've wanted to write a book about Frankie since the early '90s, when it struck me that here was this amazing guy that far too few people outside the Lindy world knew anything about, yet almost everyone you meet knows what the word Jitterbug means, and what the dance looks like.*

*So, in honor of his 95<sup>th</sup> birthday, Emily Belt and I decided to see if we could pull together a booklet of stories to present to him in New York.*

*Now he's in the hospital, in Intensive Care with pneumonia. His girlfriend Judy says he loves to hear people's stories, and she would like to read to him what we've got.*

*Here's what we've received so far, which we've sent to Judy in New York via Cynthia Millman. If you would like to add to these, anything after my story will be new, and will hopefully reach him and support him as he makes his final transition, whenever that may be.*

*- Deborah Huisken*

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I met Frankie a year or so after I started learning Lindy Hop with Ryan Francois in London. I never really had a chance to study with Frankie at that time but I was impressed by his amazing manner and kindness. When we organized the Swing Masters Jam, I got to know Frankie better, especially through his amazing stories! It was so hard to imagine this humble man was the creator of such important historical events.

Through the last 18 years, my friendship with Frankie has grown and I was so excited to introduce him to Singapore in 1998.

The thought of Frankie keeps me humble.

And as a dancer, Frankie still out-dances every one in the room. But beyond being such a great dancer, Frankie is a great human being. The ultimate gentleman, Frankie would insist not only that he carry his own bag, but mine too. It was a game we would play, how to maneuver it so that we could carry his bag without him knowing. He opens my door, pulls out my seat and gets pretty annoyed if I try to do so for him.



The picture is from 1992, taken at Jitterbugs in London.

Frankie inspired me to be a better dancer and now he inspires me to be a better person.

What an amazing guy.

Sing Lim  
Singapore

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Dear Frankie.

I would like to share how much you inspire me, and how often you touched my life with your sparkling enthusiasm.

Born in Germany, I first met you in Germany in Munich, when Markus Koch brought you into the Boogie-Baren Boogie-Woogie camp, when you were ONLY 79 years old and could not dance, because of your hip. You were telling stories about the times in the '30s and how Lindy-hop came into life. It was an eye-opening experience for me to just listen to you and how much dance meant in the old days. It was a lifestyle, not only a hobby, and many, many people have followed you in your footsteps in the following decades and almost a century now.... For me, I first found out, that there is a lot more to swing dance than just Boogie-Woogie.... In any case, I was so inspired by your life all involving dance and your come-back, after you had your hip surgery, as a dance teacher, a performer, a raw model of happy living and most of all as the man, who can be in love with his dance partner for 2 minutes on the floor. It's all about making your dance partner feel good. That is your message all along. Your sparkling eyes and your encouraging smile, while dancing with you, say more than any steps I could ever learn.



When I moved to the United States, I instantly experienced having a family – a dance family – everywhere I went. I was never a stranger and all this is only because YOU started it. Thank you so much for the dance love that infected the world and made me feel home, wherever I was. I had the pleasure to be one of the 87 women you danced with in Boston at your 87th birthday party and I also enjoyed dancing with you in many camps and workshops over the years.

Just remembering "The HOP the Millennium" in Mexico in 2000 (which is where the photo is from) for the turn of the millennium was one of those experiences, that only happened, because you were the inspiration to make a whole world dance. Pretty much all of us danced for about 25 days non-stop in a row and still did not want to stop.

Though, the most memorable (and embarrassing) memory I have dancing with you, was at Swingout Northwest for another turn of another year. At the end of the camp, there was a teacher's jam and it happened to happen that you picked me for your partner in this jam. Off course, I was very nervous to be with the most loved man in swing dance in the spotlight and must not have paid enough attention to your lead... as it happened, I fell on my butt while you were pulling me in for a swing-out... well, I will never forget this moment and I am sure it is on video somewhere in the archives. But, I am proud that I can say, I danced with you and today I really laugh about this incident. All I remember are your sparkling eyes, when you enter the dance floor. I call it dance passion infecting everyone in the room like a virus.

You started – almost a century ago – to spread this virus in the world and it is a good virus and we all will spread it further, until all generations will know how dance can be a life full of joy and happiness.

Today I live in the United States and have a 2 year old son. He is already doing the Charleston steps with me. I will make sure that he also will experience the wonders of swing dance, when time comes in his life. So, keep on inspiring us, Frankie...and thank you for your gift to the world, it's truly unique.

Happy Birthday to your 95th year of swing dancing.

with Lindy-Love

Isgard  
(one of your long-term German-American admirers from San Diego)

Isgard Hueck  
San Diego,



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*[note – written by me based on conversations and an email from Emily, because she was unavailable at the time I sent this. – Deborah Huisken]*

Frankie, it's nice to hear that you are now in the Dance Hall of Fame in Saratoga Springs, NY. Years ago, I visited there and thought how you were missing.

You have been so very important to me – both personally as well as in helping me develop my dancing. Kind of like a grandfather, but much more so, because you're so young at heart! I have so many stories of the ways you've touched me deeply...

Love,

Emily Belt  
San Diego

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I remember Frankie when he was in San Diego at Champion Ballroom. I was taking dancing lessons from Liz O'Grady and Frankie inspired me to work a little harder. He was 94 and I was a kid of 87. I thought, "Yep I can do that if I practice."

I'm not as good as Frankie, but then, I only started doing the lindy about 15 years ago.

I am still 87 years old, and the last time I danced was last Sunday with my friend and teacher Liz O'Grady and Emily Belt who will be both going to New York for your 95<sup>th</sup> birthday party.

Irv Refkin  
San Diego

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In 1998, I was recently divorced with two young children who were now spending time every other weekend with their father. Finally I had space and time to rediscover my self and my passions. Dancing was always one of them. From beginning to walk on my tippy toes to professional training as a ballet, modern, and jazz dancer, movement was an essential part of my life and self-expression.

Growing up in the 50s I had always watched movies and television shows, like American Bandstand, portraying teens swiftly swing dancing in what was known to me as 'Lindy' and 'Jitterbug'. I couldn't wait to grow up and have so much fun with a partner. Most of my training was dancing solo or in groups with little contact and improvisational play. I also was surrounded by jazz, swing music, and blues. My mother played Duke Ellington, Billy Holiday, Benny Goodman, Gene Krupa and Tommy Dorsey on our stereo. By the

time I became a teen, it was the 60's. Rock and Motown were in. And although we could groove quite erotically and whimsically around each other or in funky line dances, coordinated partner dancing was out. Jazz went 'out' too, interesting, but difficult to dance to.

So now it was about 30 years later, and I hear that Frankie Manning was coming to Northampton, MA to teach a weekend of workshops and do a presentation of the origins of Lindy Hop. I knew little about Frankie, but I knew I was dying to dance, and finally learn 'real' lindy hop. I wished to perfect my social connection skills both in dance and dating.

Memories of the weekend are still stamped with great clarity in my brain. Frankie was inspiring, a joy, an older man with such verve, vitality, and sensuality I could have no excuse for letting mine go while just in my 40s.

Since then Frankie and I have had numerous opportunities to connect. I attended his 85th birthday at Roseland Dance hall, celebrating with folks from around the world, back in the city I was born in. I was one of the lucky ladies to dance with him then, although I'm sure he could not remember (nor barely keep count).



I've been able to listen to Frankie's stories at dance camps such as Beantown, workshops in Boston, ALHC, and in our beloved Pioneer Valley in Massachusetts. It has always been a treat when I have been chosen to demonstrate as his partner.

In 2003, I introduced my young daughter Mariel Adams, then 13, to the world of swing. That summer, at Swing Out New Hampshire, she became so enthralled that it has become a life passion for her too. Luckily she has had the opportunity to meet, learn from, dance, and hang with Frankie (Dawn and Norma too) and most of the top international Lindy instructors and dancers. Our shared love of dance and Lindy Hop has helped to keep us close throughout her teen years and offer a healthy fun way to spend leisure time.



In October of 2004, back in my hometown of N.Y, we were sure to make the historical Count Basie Centennial event. I have photos of young Mariel- one of the newest on the scene with Frankie, Norma, Dawn, and Steven Mitchell, one of her first mentors.

Now in high school Mariel was eager to share her knowledge and passion. We began a club the –The Hurricane Swingers - to educate interested students, and invited Bill Borgida to spark it off. And when the Amherst Regional High chose Urinetown for its yearly musical, Mariel and dancers were ready to choreograph and perform some Lindy and Charleston routines for the shows.



Then in May 2005 we wrote a grant to bring Frankie to Amherst High school for an assembly and workshops. We wished to introduce the students and community to the now 92-year old dance ambassador and the Lindy. Frankie's ability to represent a generation and shed a personal perspective on the history of the times was inspiring, and we were able to get

some of those 'mostly-hip-hop-exposed' teens to dance and engage with each other. As Frankie spoke and showed some of his favorite clips the students and teachers were intently focused and responded with appropriate sounds of appreciation and applause. Mariel, and dancers from her club, joined with Pioneer Valley Performing Arts students, led by Tricia Lea, in Lindy Chorus and Big Apple routines to honor Frankie.

Though Frankie has experienced many of these exciting and engaging moments in his travels and teaching, this certainly was a significant event for both me, my daughter Mari, and the community. Afterwards I invited Frankie to my home and he shared tea and more stories of his unexpected stay in Argentina when the war broke out, before I drove him to the train station to head back to New York.

Mari and I also got to celebrate Mother's Day together with Frankie, and honor his birthday, at the Lindy League of Western MA community organized workshops that were scheduled to coincide with Frankie's trip to lead the assembly.

And when Frankie came for a book signing of **Happy Feet** at Michelson's Gallery in Northampton, we were there to shim sham along with others in his honor.



Of course in thinking of the impact Frankie has had on our lives, we also need to think and thank all the teachers and event organizers, Judy Pritchett, and Cynthia Millman who brought Frankie to various

venues and recorded and documented his life and work. They also helped us learn and compile materials and reference from web sites to share with others.

So what now? Frankie's 95th. It has been a decade since I began to learn and enjoy Lindy more 'seriously'. It has brought lots of joy, music, and community into my and my

daughter's life. Now Mariel is off at college, organizing clubs and teaching to pass on her love and the love we all share for this dance. We plan to be back in NYC to celebrate in May. We are ever so grateful. We love you Frankie!

The spirit moves us on.

Alison Ozer March 2009  
Amherst, MA

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I do not have that much to add about Frankie, but I did have a number of lovely dances with his wife when I was in college in the late 70's and went down into the city someplace for a day of classes and an evening of dancing. She gave me a great piece of advice that I have always remembered thru my 35 years of swing dancing, She told me to just treat a partner like a flower, hold her firmly but gently and tell her she is pretty and that she smells nice and you will do just fine.

Cleve Gardner  
Connecticut

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When I began writing my children's book Happy Feet, (Harcourt, 2005) about the Savoy Ballroom, I needed to choose a hero for the child in my story (nicknamed "Happy Feet" because he was born on March 12, 1926, on the same day that the Savoy opened).



I don't dance, and I was not a part of the Lindy Hop movement, but I was drawn to pictures I'd seen of Frankie Manning, and I somehow guessed that he would be the sort of man a kid would and should look up to. Still, I had no idea what a perfect choice I had stumbled upon. I was drawn to the subject of the Savoy, because many of my books are concerned with racial issues, and I was drawn to a place where, as Happy Feet's daddy tells him, "Ain't nobody better than nobody! Salt and pepper- -

equals! Cats and chicks—equal! Everybody just coming to dance."

Artist E. B. Lewis painted the pictures for the book, and came to the reception to meet Frankie.

When Frankie agreed to meet me at a diner in Brooklyn, I was amazed at his love of life, and animated spirit. I invited him to be a guest of honor at the book publication party, and he "stole the show." We have never had such a fun, exciting opening reception. He turned the somewhat staid R. Michelson Galleries into a dance hall and had everyone on the floor in no time.

I'd booked Frankie a hotel room in Northampton MA, and when I and my staff were tired and ready to go to sleep Frankie was just getting started. He ended up driving the 3 hours back to Brooklyn. His night was still young!



One of the happiest days of my life was when the National Museum of Dance in Saratoga Springs asked me to introduce Frankie on the day he was inducted into the Hall of Fame. I have written many books, but none led me so unexpectedly into a world I had thought I was only to imagine. Like my main character, I continue to look up to and love Frankie Musclehead Manning.

Rich Michelson  
Northampton, MA

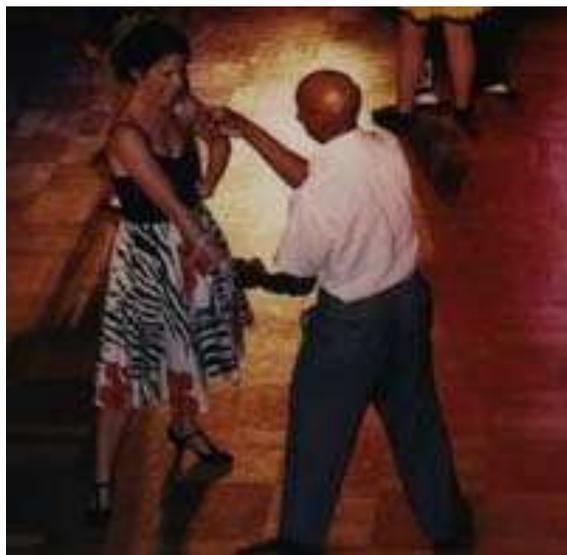
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Ah, Frankie. You've had such a powerful impact on so many people's lives - the above is just a tiny sampling. And all just by being who you are and doing what you love. That's what struck me about you the first time I ever saw you, tho I didn't understand it at the time. How unassuming you were, yet how gentle with one of newbie dancers (me!) that you selected from the crowded dance class and brought up to demonstrate a step with. You showed the class what you wanted them to learn, then took a minute to reconnect with me, who you didn't know/had never met, to make sure I was ok, before sending me back into the class. A powerful lesson for one who's shy in front of crowds and therefore apt to do something awkward - you showed me with that simple moment the value and importance of taking care of the person right next to you as well as the big group surrounding you, and how little time it takes to do it.

I've gotten to know you better over the years since (that was in 1989), had the pleasure of spending a few extended bits of time with you driving you here or there on your travels, or dancing in New York when you were home for a brief window, and I always knew that I got the best job, being your chauffeur, because it meant I got to spend that bit of time getting to know you a bit better.

You know how it is as we start to get older - our bodies change, they don't do what they used to be able to do so easily nor so well, or so we think. And it's tempting to slow down, take it easy, leave it to others to do. Whenever I've been tempted to do that, I've thought of you, and when I've heard others around me talk of giving up, I've told them about you, about my friend Frankie who travels the world in his 80s and 90s, teaching a dance he'd given up for many years, because kids found him and pulled him out of his dance retirement and said "we want you to show us what you know". And how generously you've shared that, with so many young people! In Phoenix this past

February (2009) I don't know if you heard the current World Lindy Hop Champion, Max from France, comment how much of an impact you've had on his life, what an inspiration you've been. He's in his 20s.

The world - my world - is a much better place for you having been in it, Frankie. Wherever and whenever this next piece of your journey takes you, go well, knowing that you have shared and created a lot of love around you, and opened more than a few minds, lightened more than a few burdened hearts, and lit far more than a few smiles.



I'm including my favorite picture of all time, taken in Oslo, Norway at the First World Lindy Hop Championships. I didn't compete - would never consider myself good enough to. And I remember feeling a bit out of sorts that night, a bit on the sidelines when I wanted to be center stage but didn't know how. Then you asked me to dance, during a quiet moment in the proceedings. And damned if you didn't make me feel like the most special person in the room. You were all the audience I needed, because you so effortlessly gave appreciation in full measure. Such a gift you have, and you've always given it so freely.

The second photo is of you and Mickey Davidson and one of her troupe in New York at the Savoy Anniversary in 2006 - that's you, laughing and welcoming people, always making the circle of love ever wider...

with love and a more open heart for having known you,

Deb Huisken  
Tucson, Montague, and London

