

## **John and Andrea Vandewater Dancing To the Heart of Texas and Back Again**

by  
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John and Andrea Vandewater met on the dance floor. Both avid ballroom dancers, they were introduced by a mutual friend at Winnipeg's Ted Motyka's Dance Studio in October of 1997. They were married eight months later and after a two week honeymoon in Hawaii and two weeks back in Winnipeg, they were off to Dallas, Texas for the next 14 years.

Both John and Andrea are born and raised Winnipeggers, John from River Heights and Andrea from Tuxedo and, although both had done their share of travelling with their respective families, John had taken world travelling to a new level. After he graduated with a Bachelor of Commerce from the University of Manitoba, John says, "I went to Japan from 1991 to 1993 to teach English, then I was in France from 1993 to 1994 taking an MBA."

Andrea had also attended the Commerce Faculty at U of M, but changed her mind about completing her degree and moved to Vancouver, where she worked in the food industry for a short time in 1996. She says, "Many days were spent going to the Library and researching 'whole' food recipes and cooking in a tiny and cute basement apartment in my spare time."

In 1997, she returned to Winnipeg to pursue another of her passions, Graphic Design. She enrolled in the Desktop Publishing course at South Winnipeg Technical Centre and says, "That is where I found my true niche and passion."

Then she met John and her life took another turn.

When he and Andrea met, John was working for Broadband Networks Inc. (BNI) which was just bought out by Nortel Networks. John and Andrea were attracted at first sight but, since Nortel was transferring John to Dallas, they knew they didn't have time for a lengthy courtship. A quick decision needed to be made.

From Andrea's point of view, the decision was simple: "I was just following my heart," she says. "I just knew he was the one for me."

For John, relocating to Texas was no big deal. “Texas for me was just down the street compared to living in Japan or France,” he states. “It was just a hop, skip and a jump.”

From the very beginning of their relationship, things seemed to come together naturally. Since they both lived in the same area of Winnipeg, many of their friends and their parents’ friends overlapped, so bringing them together was a comfortable experience. Even meeting the parents came easy, Andrea says; “When I met John’s parents it felt like home to me.”

Their common interests include nature, being active, healthy eating, a strong sense of family and faith and, of course, ballroom dancing. For John and Andrea, dancing was what brought them together. Andrea says, “It was immediate. We did a quickstep and the rest was history,”

John recalls, “For our wedding dance we did a Viennese (Waltz) and everybody loved it and called for an encore. Then our instructor played a quickstep.”

They continued their dancing in Dallas and Andrea says, “We had fabulous coaching there.”

Two years after their marriage, their daughter Jasmine (age 15) was born. When Jasmine was six months old, Nortel sent John and his family to Tokyo, Japan for a six month expat to help with some clients, since he was familiar with the customs and the language.

Of course they made regular trips home for Christmas and family visits, and as a result, Jasmine quickly became quite a world traveller, John says, “She had been on 16 planes before she was a year old.”

Their daughter Katrina (age 13) was born a few months after returning to Dallas. Andrea says, “We returned to Dallas in April, 2001 and immediately celebrated Jasmine’s Birthday. Katrina was born in October.”

Their son, Richard (age 11) was born 23 months later.

The family made regular trips back to Winnipeg for visits and proved that their teamwork extended beyond the dance floor by developing quite a travel routine. John handled the passports and paperwork and Andrea made sure that the bags and children’s things were ready. Andrea says, “When we would go through airports, John would take the lead and I would follow behind the children. To others we would have looked like the Von Trapp family.”

Then things started to change at Nortel. John says, “In 2001 after the Twin Towers went down, work became unstable.”

The decline continued over the next 10 years. Andrea says, “We estimate that John avoided 21 layoffs.”

So after 14 years in Texas, even though they made wonderful friends, had world class ballroom dance coaching, and excellent schooling for the children, it was time to return home. It wasn't just the instability of John's work. Andrea says, “We wanted the kids to be raised with their grandparents close by.”

When they returned to Winnipeg, John worked at Boeing Canada for a couple of years and now works as CFO for a company out of Tennessee. Andrea is still a full-time Mom and works part time as Marketing Manager with her family's business. She is also the Sunday School Superintendent at their church and volunteers at Laidlaw School. She says, “Running a household keeps me pretty busy. I wear many hats.”

Andrea would like to pursue a career writing children's books in the future, but is not sure when yet. She says, “My husband is fantastic at encouraging me to pursue it.”

Moving into Tuxedo was an obvious decision for them for them for a number of reasons. First and foremost was the closeness of family. Andrea's parents are within a couple of blocks and John's are close by. John's sister and Andrea's brother also live nearby.

Another important reason was schooling. Both John and Andrea were familiar with and liked the schools in and around Tuxedo. Transportation to school was important to Andrea. She says, “We wanted the children to be able to take their bikes or walk to school.”

Their three children have a very active lifestyle. Jasmine is a figure skater and does some dancing; Katrina plays clarinet and loves dancing: tap, jazz, lyrical and ballet; Richard is mainly focused on soccer, but also does some jazz dancing.

The family loves to get involved in city activities like the Red River Ex, Rainbow Stage, etc. Of course they also enjoy walking and biking in the neighbourhood, checking out the bike paths and parks, especially Assiniboine Park.

For the most part, dance tends to be John and Andrea's only couple activity. John says, “The odd time we go out to a movie. The odd time.”

Now they are part of Westview Dance Club in St. James Assiniboia. Andrea says, “What I love about Westview is that it is a couple’s environment. It is a time where we can reconnect. It is also an opportunity for us to socialize with people with similar interests.”

Although they competed in Dallas before having children, they enjoy the fact that Westview Dance Club is non-competitive and has a variety of skill levels. John says, “For us, Westview is maintenance while learning some new steps, keep the knees and ankles oiled and the brain going.”

Andrea’s parents, Sig and Leona Hackbart, are also part of John and Andrea’s dance class, an arrangement that has given John the opportunity to do something which would intimidate many men; ballroom dancing with his mother-in-law. John just shrugs it off. He says, “She follows my lead very well.”

So after dancing their way into the heart of Texas and all the way to Japan and back, John and Andrea are home in Tuxedo with their family and happily enjoying their children, family life, involvement with their church, their neighbourhood and their time at Westview Dance Club.

To potential ballroom dancers, their advice is, “If you have ever thought about ballroom dancing, just do it. It’s great fun and no worries about intimidation because we have all started from the beginning.”

To their neighbours, John and Andrea proved how well they work as a team by echoing each other in saying, “The door is always open. If you need anything, just drop by.”

The only exception would be when they are at one of their children’s events or, of course, at Westview Dance Club.