

# Challenge Accepted! Residents Bring the Jerusalema Dance Party to Villa Gardens

For three minutes and 41 seconds in March, the Villa Gardens parking lot and driveway in Pasadena was a daytime dance floor.

Two of the 36 dancers, a couple dressed like the others in blue jeans and white T-shirts, were total novices — even though the group activity, part of a worldwide social media challenge, was their idea.



*Villa Gardens residents Phil and Ann Graf*

Phil and Ann Graf have been residents of the Villa Gardens community since 2016. Married in 1964, they met while both were newbie teachers and “dorm parents” for American students in France at schools that served military dependents. After returning to the US they got married, continued teaching and raised three kids.

Did they dance? Not much. Not even at their wedding.

“I have two left feet,” Phil said. Ann, vigorously nodding in agreement with his self-assessment, said she had never even taken a ballet class.

But in February 2021, during a weekly virtual cocktail hour on Zoom with friends from their old neighborhood in Northern California, someone in the group sent them a link to a YouTube video of the “Jerusalema” Dance Challenge.

The Grafts were charmed, intrigued and, well, up for a challenge.

Thousands of people around the globe have been learning the “Jerusalema” Dance since 2020 and sharing their performances on social media, from nuns to police officers and construction workers. The dance is set to “Jerusalema,” a celebratory gospel song with a beat and Zulu lyrics by South African musician Master KG and singer Nomcebo Zikode.

“The music is very positive and gets in your mind so you can’t forget it,” Phil said.

"It's catchy," Ann said.

The dance itself is a fairly easy sequence of foot taps, shuffles, and walking sideways and forward; upper-body movement optional.

Charmed by the infectious music and steps that people of all ages could do, Phil and Ann showed the video to Kim Williams, Villa Gardens' fitness and aquatics director.

Kim, Phil said, gets "all the credit" for organizing the residents, teaching the dance steps, and getting staff members to participate.

Kim had never heard of the dance challenge and isn't a choreographer, but was game to try it. Previously, she'd only done chair dancing with the residents, a safe activity where participants sit in a chair and move their legs and arms.

"People love to dance, but I don't want a lot of risk with people falling," she said. For "Jerusalema," which involves hopping from foot to foot, she modified the footwork so it was more of a shuffle.

Kim didn't expect a big response after sending out a notice about the first rehearsal. But when she arrived, "seven people were already waiting for me," she said. Word spread to both residents and staff, who wanted to join as well.

They practiced from 2:45 to 3 p.m. on Tuesdays through Thursdays, from the end of February through March, before finally strutting their stuff to an audience of fellow residents and staff.

"We really relied on watching the staff to help us remember the moves," Ann said.

According to Ann, a dress rehearsal the day before was "a disaster," with nervous people turning the wrong way and running into each other. But all went smoothly on dance day.

"We kind of saw it as a reemergence," Kim said. "'Jerusalema' is a celebratory song, and it was a way for us to celebrate coming out of lockdown."

"It got people together whose paths wouldn't have crossed so often," Ann said.

The project "really encouraged group activity, especially during COVID" when residents were isolated and group fun was limited, Phil said.

Practices in the driveway and courtyard became a social time.

The Grafts, along with another couple, run the Villa Gardens library, but it was closed during the quarantine, and some activities like chorus and origami were canceled or moved to Zoom, so they were glad to help come up with an activity everyone could do outside.

"But the most wonderful thing is that the staff got involved," Phil said, because "we all got to know each other in a different way."

Kim said that "whenever we do something with staff and residents, it makes things much more meaningful. I think it fosters that comradeship we're all in this together. We are a family."

And with the YouTube video available for all to see, Phil said, that family is "'Jerusalem'-ing" all over the world.

"We looked good," he said. Again, Ann nodded vigorously.

*Watch the Villa Gardens community in all their "Jerusalem" dancing glory on YouTube.*

### **About Villa Gardens**

*Villa Gardens is a multi-level senior community right in the heart of Pasadena that offers small-town warmth, natural beauty and an unlimited array of cultural, social, intellectual, and physical activities. Rank among the top Pasadena senior communities, Villa Gardens is Pasadena Senior Living at its best!*