



**Name:** John and Maria Byland

**What year did you dance?** 2009

**What was your style of dance and why did you choose that one?** We initially thought we would combine a Jive with a Viennese Waltz, as they were both dances we thought we were familiar with; we were wrong. After our first session with our coaches we left dejected and overwhelmed. At our second session we decided to simplify things and settled on performing an American style Viennese Waltz. We also wanted to incorporate lifts into the dance. Our coaches, Sharon and Barry were amazing and also helped select the music. Dianne Pratt helped with the lifts in our routine.

**How did you first learn about Swinging with the Stars?** We first heard of SWTS from Jim Wannop who was an elementary and high school acquaintance. COHA was looking for participants in the first SWTS and Jim thought that we were a good fit because of our involvement in the community. The idea intrigued us and after some consideration we agreed to participate.

**What was your connection to COHA at that time?** While we did not have any connection with COHA at the time we saw the need for such a great service in our community. Our experience with SWTS has made us more aware of COHA and the value it provides to families experiencing impending loss. We saw this first-hand when Katie Byland (John's mom) spent her last dying days at Hospice. COHA allows people to be able to die with love and dignity.

**What is your favourite memory from your performance?** After working hard on our routine and practicing our brains out it was time for the performance. What really stuck with us was how much time and preparation goes into organizing this event. The dress rehearsal provided our first idea of what to expect and how the following night would unfold. You feel like a bit of a celebrity as you anxiously wait for your performance.

While there are many great memories from our performance, we feel that getting through routine without any major screw-ups, was the best. We also remember being super nervous as we waited for our performance time. We were also gratified that our hard work both fundraising and practice earned us the trophy in both categories.

**Are you still dancing today?** We are still dancing today and prior to COVID were taking dance lessons and would quite often dance at the Parkinson's Centre on Friday nights. We do not focus on one specific dance but rather do a bit of everything including Samba, Tango, Cha-cha, Rumba, Night Club Two, Jive, Waltz, Foxtrot and Quickstep. Another high point for us was where we performed a Samba at a Ball Room Showcase a few years ago.

**Is there anything else you'd like to share?** We discovered that we really enjoyed dancing which is why we have continued to dance. We always take our dance shoes with us whenever we travel in case we come across a venue. Our SWTS experience really challenged us and we both feel we grew as a couple and improved our confidence in undertaking challenges. Dancing like gardening is physically good for the heart, wonderful for the soul and is one of the best activities to keep your mind and body youthful.