



Name: Loyal Wooldridge & Ian Roth

Tell us about yourself: Loyal Wooldridge & Ian Roth were the first LGBTQ2+ couple to grace the Swinging with the Stars dancefloor and fused a classic waltz with a modern pop number to Lady Gaga's 'Born this Way'. Loyal is a Kelowna City Councillor, Entrepreneur and Community Encourager and Ian is a Professional Engineer with Urban Systems and community Volunteer with the Downtown YMCA. Both are extremely passionate about giving back to their community because they truly believe giving, goes full circle.

What year did you dance? 2014

What was your style of dance and why did you choose that one? As a same sex couple the waltz was chosen as a challenge to fuse dancing roles. As often there is a feminine and masculine role to play, Ian and Loyal wanted to bend the lines of conformity and push the limits. Lady Gaga was chosen for the inspiring message of acceptance and hope.

How did you first learn about Swinging with the Stars? When Loyal volunteered to support Toby Tannas in the previous dancing year.

What was your connection to COHA at that time? There was no real connection to COHA at the time although both Ian and Loyal recognize the amazing work that the organization does to support people in their most vulnerable time. Of course, the journey of death is one that all will face in a life time and the support that COHA provides to the community is invaluable.

Loyal's mother, Adele, was in attendance the night of the dance. She had never heard of the organization before and was simply excited to watch her sons perform. Two years later, Adele was diagnosed with a rare auto-immune disease and the situation became very grave.

Loyal sat beside with her and reached out to COHA for a hospital visit Reiki session prior to her passing. The COHA volunteer provided insight and care while Adele was unconscious and allowed Loyal and his sister Bonnie to advocate for their mother to die with dignity following the session.

Although not knowing it at the time of dancing, the services offered allowed great peace in a time that truly ripped the hearts out of the family. If Ian and Loyal's contribution to the organization meant anything, it was to be supported in their most vulnerable hours in losing their mom.

What is your favourite memory from your performance? The comradery of the fellow dancers and the connections made. Performing in front of friends and community members is one of the most vulnerable times in your life. By sharing in this experience and overcoming the fear was a wonderful way to create connection and to grow together.

Are you still dancing today? In their living room absolutely!



What backstage moments stand out to you today? The time spent in rehearsal with Melodie Sharma from Kelowna Dance and having a once, twice or three time a week dance date to bring each other together. In learning something new and sharing in vulnerability it allowed Ian and Loyal to become even closer prior to their wedding in 2015.

Has this experience inspired you to do other life changing things? Life is lived on the other side of your comfort zone and the chatter in your mind is really only creating conspiracy theories about yourself. Experiences like Swinging with the Stars pushed the limits of comfort and allowed Ian and Loyal to be playful, contribute and overcome.

Is there anything else you'd like to share? The importance of embracing this very worthy cause. Before the passing of Adele it was never known the deep level of support that is needed at the time of death of a loved one. COHA create equity in the playing field of loss and brings the human connection factor to the forefront. While no one wants to talk about death, there is healing in sharing this experience.

Dancing, in itself is a healing experience and if it can also be the catalyst to raise not only funds, but awareness then it is multi-faceted in positive affect. It's important to extenuate that even though a social agency doesn't touch your life right now, it doesn't mean it won't in the future. I'd encourage anyone to participate with COHA either as a dancer, fundraiser or volunteer to expand the human side of our city.