

Advice to Newcomers

By Alys Katharine (Elise Fleming)

Tournaments Illuminated, Issue #95, Summer A.S. XXV, Page 22

No matter whether a long time SCA member brought you to your first meeting or you came by yourself, there's always a period of adjustment to this very different world. How can you get yourself oriented to all the new things and begin to have some fun?

Introduce yourself. Go up to someone and say, "Hi, I am So and So and I'm new. Can you tell me what's going on?" Introduce yourself to someone each time you come to a meeting. If you hide at the edges of the room, most people will respect what they think is your desire to be left alone. Unless a group of people is having an obviously private conversation, stand near them and, when appropriate, introduce yourself. SCA members are often involved in catching up on what happened since they last saw each other and may not notice a new face until you walk up to them.

Ask questions. You have probably heard at least one person say, "If you have any questions, just ask." The person means well but may not remember that a newcomer often doesn't know enough to ask. Try replying, "Tell me about . . . the crafts done here, the fighting, the garb he/she/you are wearing, how I can learn about . . . how to make . . ." and so on. These questions avoid a yes/no answer and you might hear something that will prompt a second question from you.

Come to at least four meetings. You will have a broader perspective of the varied things that people do and work on. You will also be seen as a new person who is truly interested. Often, experienced members talk for a long time with new people only never to see them again. Experienced members will sometimes avoid this frustration by waiting until they have seen new people at several meetings. Attending several meetings will let you hear about guild or special interest meetings. Ask for more information on the groups, even if you are only slightly interested; you will learn more about the scope of the local SCA group.

Go to newcomer orientation sessions. Not all groups provide a formalized introduction to the SCA. If your group does offer some form of introduction, you will more quickly learn some of the basic rules of conduct, how to participate more fully, and how not to stick out like a sore thumb - something many newcomers dread!

Get one piece of basic medieval clothing. Ask someone how to make a simple tunic. If you can't sew, ask for ideas about putting together a reasonable approximation of medieval clothing out of modern clothes. Ask if there is a "Gold Key" or loaner clothing available until you can get your own.

Expect to be responsible for your own things. While not everyone has made all of their clothing, jewelry, armor, weapons and so forth, most people have at least made an attempt at making some things. Sometimes newcomers expect experienced members to provide everything. You will find that people are quite willing to teach you to do something "from scratch," but they are not willing to do extensive handholding or do your work for you. Except for children, each person is expected to be an adult and to take adult responsibilities. It can be scary to learn that you are expected to provide for

yourself, but almost everyone who is wearing fancy clothing or armor started where you are now.

Join the SCA financially. You will get your kingdom's newsletter and will learn about area news and events. If finances allow, purchase the SCA newcomers' guide, "Forward Into the Past," and the **Known World Handbook** from the SCA Stock Clerk. Subscribe to your local group's newsletter.

Participate to the extent you feel comfortable. The SCA is a participatory organization. Where are your interests and abilities? Keep your eyes and ears open to what people are doing. Give yourself a year to develop your interests. You needn't rush into things the first few months. If you can choose a name, fine. If you are interested in a particular time period of the Middle Ages, fine. There is so much to do and so many avenues to explore that it is permissible to take your time and proceed at your own pace. Experienced members are generally more than willing to point out resources and steer you to library references. You get out of the SCA what you put into it!

Go to events outside your local group. Here's where you get to play with others who share similar interests. At first you won't know anyone there except members of your local group who may be attending. Leave them for a while. Make new friends from other groups. Introduce yourself and ask questions. Participate in the planned activities. Keep your eyes and ears open. And, some day, someone will come up and say, "Hi, I'm So and So and I'm new. Can you tell me what's: going on?"

For more information:

<http://www.sca.org> World wide Society for Creative Anachronism