



Over and under

"I am so over you," says Briana Watts, 15, of West Augusta.

Holding her ribbon up high, the young maiden allows her 11-year-old sister, Ayiana Watts, to slip underneath with her own ribbon.

The young ladies are just two of the large group dancing around the maypole at the Stone Tower Glenn Renaissance Faire at Natural Chimneys.

"It looks fine," Briana says to the other dancers. "Let's try not to break it."

She refers to the maypole.

Moving in a circle around the pole, the dancers weave their ribbons together by going over and under one another in the simple rhythmic pattern of the dance.

"You go under me, dearie," Briana says to a 10-year-old knight.

Ducking under her ribbon, Seth

Ralston wears the knight's helmet and clothing he received sometime before as a birthday present.

"Hardest part was figuring out which number you were and if you had to go over or under," he says later.

In the center of the circle, the pull of the ribbons causes the pole to lean to one side.

Ayiana releases her ribbon. She navigates around those of the others in order to reach the pole.

Standing at the heart of the dance, the young maiden keeps the pole upright as the others continue the dance.

"We've had it snap before," she explains later.

From her place in the center, she continues to duck lower and lower to avoid being caught in the web of ribbons.

Although now performed for fun and entertainment, centuries ago dancing around the maypole was often performed for another reason — one believed to help bring about the birth of a child some nine months later.

"Normally, it was for fertility where the young lady in the middle would get wrapped around the pole," explains Briana. "If all went well, they believed it would be easy for her to get pregnant."

Although the purpose has changed, the fun remains the same.

"It's utterly confusing and people like that," Briana says.

"I don't think the fun part is getting it right," she continues, "but in the going around in circles."

— Mike Tripp, photojournalist

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