

## **Dancing & Dates: Mothers Know Best**

Was it in the fifth grade? Memory fades over time, but the memory of the occasion remains. It was time, according to mothers who know, that young boys and girls learn how to dance. Whether or not one considers it a conspiracy or not is not important, I just remember that it was time.

It must have been tradition, but all of the mothers of those I knew chose to send their children to Mrs. Moots Dance Studio. It was a typical single story wooden building, perhaps once a home, in which one large room dominated the structure. I was driven there by my mother. I trudged up the steps and went inside. I don't remember if the parents watched this painful ordeal or not; just that I had to go. The boys lined one side of the room and the girls on the other. All of us were seated watching Mrs. Moots and awaiting the moment of truth. The time came when we actually had to stand up, walk to the center of the room, and dance with the girl matching our place in the line-up from across the room. It was dreadful. The fox-trot and the waltz were mandatory leaning experiences. Stiffly we danced, trying not to watch our feet. The Victrola spun the record around with the steel needled arm picking up the scratchy music and sending it into the room. Mrs. Moots seemed pleased. I was not.

No matter how strong my objections, I was assured that it was the thing to do and that when it came time for young boys to dance with young girls at a party or a school dance, I would be prepared. My well meaning sister, Marilyn, insisted that I practice with her on the occasion of my birthday party which she had arranged. I did not really want a party, especially one that included girls too, but it was to be. I ignored the record player and was more interested in the food. On another occasion I went to a party where there were both boys and girls. The clever mother had taken playing cards, cut them in two, and issued them to the arriving guests. It was to let everyone know with whom they were to dance. I never did bother to find my "partner." It was only later when the sad faced young lady's plight was recognized that I was sought out.

To avoid the dating thing at Punahou School in the seventh and eighth grades, class dances were held. There were of course those couples who would spend every dance together on the dance floor, but most of my friends did not fit that category. Enter the well meaning mothers who were chaperoning the dance. They had brooms that errant boys were to dance with until they could be traded off to some other hapless boy as we cut in and exchanged the broom for his real live partner. It only meant part of one dance number, and the broom was taken care of and the dancing obligation was over. The girl? She was not a date. Let someone else ask her. The three or four hour affair was over with most of time spent talking with male friends in close range of the punch bowl.

When the Army Engineers returned the Punahou campus back to the school late in the war years, the basement of Alexander Hall was used as a teen club or hangout of sorts. Dancing was one of the options of

course, but mainly I saw it as just a place to hang out, as that is where my friends would be.

As time wore on, dances were dating affairs. It was the eighth grade, and I was more interested in the date than the dance. I was in the school band and the band leader's rather attractive blond daughter played the flute. Joyce Tiefenthal was her name. I knew she had gone out with Howard Figeroa, the rather talented first clarinet player, but a dance was coming up. I went down to our family room so as not to be heard and actually managed to call her to ask her out. She had already been asked by Howard. That was to be the last time I ever asked a girl out until after I was in college.

There were a number of factors that influenced that decision. The December of my entry into the 10<sup>th</sup> grade in 1946, our family moved bag and baggage to California. With my limited social experience and rather blasé towards academics or school clubs or most activities, I reverted to the familiar. I joined the school band and the local Boy Scout troop. Consequently I did not really get to know any girls very well. My close friends did not date, although we had some rather fanciful and explicit fantasies!

One hears about the wonderful junior and senior proms, with all of the anticipation, celebration, and memories. I don't have any of those particular memories, although I have a lot of memories of high school. I must have felt somewhat detached after moving from Hawaii, however. My South Pasadena year book has no signatures or greetings written in it at all.

While going to John Muir Junior College in Pasadena, Bill Edmondson a long time friend from both Scouting and the band arranged for a double date. He was going to Cal Tech. at the time. The date was made to go to a movie, but at the last minute, he could not go. Panic! Gentleman that I was (am?) and keeper of obligations, it was destined that I go it alone with Marcia "Mickey" Searles. It was my first year in college and I had managed to actually ask someone out. Mickey and I never went to a dance however. We continued to date without any serious thoughts about what now might be called commitment. Bill had dated Jeannie McNair and the four of us had gone out for movies and burgers at "Bob's Big Boys" any number of times. In fact I had dated Jeannie myself on a couple of occasions. Dating slowed considerably in 1951. The Korean War was in full swing and the military draft was in effect. I countered by joining the Navy in January of that year right in the middle of the semester. I was anxious to do something else besides going to school, so left without officially withdrawing from classes.

After completing boot camp in San Diego, I was stationed at Miramar Naval Air Station just north of San Diego near Escondido. Being in the security division and then later the aircraft crash fire and rescue team gave me three day week ends every other week. I was able to get back to South Pasadena and spend time with my friends and family.

Enter Bill Edmondson again. Mickey and I went to a Cal-Tech party at Bill's invitation. The festivities included beer crew races- a chug-a-lug relay race. There was an event where a jigger of booze was lighted in a darkened room, the contestant consumed the contents and then held up the jigger to see if there was still a flicker of flame, yet no evidence of remaining alcohol.

Bill's friend Dean Smith brought a date named Patricia Haas. I spent most of the evening talking with her and neglecting my own date. Everyone was chatting in small groups, so it was not a big deal. Later I called Pat to ask her out. The year was 1952. It wasn't until I got out of the Navy in 1954, finished up at Pasadena City College, and entered Occidental College that I actually went to a school dance... with Mrs. Patricia Haas Craig.

It was a long haul, Mrs. Moots and Mom, where ever you are. I have danced on rare occasions since, but I still must trudge up those same steps and dance rather stiffly. However, I have learned not to watch my feet for the most part!