

QUICK, QUICK, SLOW

HOW I LEARNED TO DANCE BACKWARD AND FOLLOW DIRECTION...DANCING BALLROOM

BY KAREN SPENCER

My husband and I started studying ballroom dancing about six years ago; when *Dancing with the Stars* was just a twinkle in the producer's eye. It was John's idea, shortly after we started dating. I thought it was a great idea, was madly in love with John, and I was pretty happy to spend time with him doing just about anything.

FIRST STEPS

I am not a bad dancer, but I am not by any means someone who would ever be courted by a dance company. I had started studying ballet with the Joffrey Ballet after grad school, which was one of the most challenging undertakings I have ever attempted. It is entirely different from ballroom, but it was a great foundation for it.

The night John and I had our first lesson, we were nervous, naturally. We went to a local pub and had a light dinner and a cocktail or two to get our nerve up. Then we drove up to Fred Astaire Studios in Mamaroneck, New York, for our first lesson. A lovely woman named Liza was our instructor and she asked us what kind of dances we were interested in. (As though we knew!) She took us through a couple of the standard dances; the Fox Trot, Rumba, Waltz. She could do both the man's part *and* the woman's part and she made it fun, which relaxed us. It seemed all the dances were based on these simple words, "Quick, quick, slow." Or sometimes, "Slow, slow, quick."

John and I signed up for a series of 10 classes and we were hooked. This was also true back in my ballet days when I bought a dance card with a month's worth of classes. When you make the financial commitment, you have to keep coming back, and you get into it.

ONE STEP LEADS TO ANOTHER

Time went by and we made our dance classes into an evening out for ourselves. We would have class at 7:00 and then dinner afterwards in one of several nearby restaurants. About 10 months later, John proposed to me! Well, then we really paid attention. We decided to do a Fox Trot for our wedding. Our song was Nancy Wilson's *The Best is Yet to Come*. We practiced it for months, with a couple of real fancy steps—a grapevine, a single twinkle, and a dip. At our wedding, I tried so hard to do my dip right in front of the photographer. I had practiced many times looking into the

camera, but he couldn't follow us. (Maybe our photographer needed dance classes!)

MORE THAN DANCE LESSONS LEARNED

Because we practiced our Fox Trot so determinedly for the wedding, we still have a very confident Fox Trot almost four years later. I learned that attitude has a lot to do with it. This is a secret that anyone can use for dancing (or even "dancing" through life). In certain ballroom dances (especially the Fox Trot), if you just look over your partner's shoulder and appear as confident and as bored as possible (an "Oh, I do this every day, all day long" kind of look), you will look great. People will be focusing on your head and shoulders rather than your feet, so if you flub they likely won't notice.

Another thing John and I learned from ballroom dancing is that musicians will play *anything* you ask, if you get up and dance. They are so happy to have someone who actually cares about what they are playing. We've found that if we get started on a dance floor, or even make a dance floor where there is none, the musicians are thrilled, and will play every request. We've also discovered that everyone really does want to

get up and dance, but most are too shy. People need someone to go first, to lead the way. So when we get up and dance, usually others will soon join in.

We have been taking classes off and on for about six years now. We are not great dancers. John is a scientist and sometimes tells me that he doesn't need music to dance; he does it by geometry! On the other hand, I must have the music, and for a very long time, I did not know the steps to some of the dances...but, I had learned to follow. This was a very interesting lesson for me and a skill I had to develop, which I am proud to have learned. I am the older sister, and I have been in management positions since I was 25. So I am comfortable and accustomed to leading. In ballroom, the lady follows.

Having said that, I'll leave you with this...Someone once said, "Ginger Rogers did everything Fred Astaire did, but she did it backwards and in high heels." I'll dance to that!



Caption

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