

INVITATIONS
By
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I sit staring at two invitations. Each includes dinner and dancing. One is my friend's wedding and the other a fundraiser. They are the harbingers of this year's social events for which I have no escort.

My late husband was a wonderful dancer. Over the years, we learned each other's moves and when we danced, we danced as one. Without him, I was and am a wallflower. So, I always R.S.V.P. my regrets. If my presence is absolutely required, I never stay long and resolve to leave during desert, while the dinner music is playing.

However, if the music changes to Rock 'n Roll before desert, I'm hooked. My feet start tapping, my shoulders start shimmying and my hands start jiving. Unable to contain myself, I'm up and take my place among the "women dancers" -- the newest addition to the dancing women whose husbands couldn't, wouldn't or weren't. We move with joy and abandon, in loose groups or circles, encouraging the prepubescent children and awkward teens to join us and celebrate the music and life.

On the occasions when I sit out and watch, I think of ancient tribal rituals. Group dances for all kinds of celebrations, sexes separate or together, circling around and around, until exhaustion overcame them. Then it was the societal thing to do. It was meant to unify, to create a common bond and will.

I feel that unity, even today. I watch women throughout the room make made their choice: be a participant and do or be an observer and wish they were doing. As decisions are made, the dancing group expands. There is the safety in numbers. Fast, cultural and line dances are the best. Slow dances are the worst. Singles clear the floor for the couples. Fom our seats we watch, eyes open and focused inward on memories of partners from another time. Sometimes, it hurts so much I have to leave the room.

The invitations demand attention and I am in anticipatory depression: angry that I have to deal with it at all; that I have to decide whether or not to go; and if I do, whether or not to go alone. Furthermore, I can't leave it to the last minute. I must R.S.V.P. When I say, "Not without a date," people think I am kidding and don't take that for a "no." I am flattered by their support, but sobered by reality. Socially, couples rule.

As a young girl, I went to cotillions, the graduation perk for my ballroom dancing classes. I have seen pictures of me in my dresses, ready to take on all the eligible young men. I have to say, my mother was right -- I looked great. However, at the time, it didn't matter what the people who loved me thought, the young men of the day couldn't have cared less. I was rarely chosen to dance and left on my own to wonder why, feed my growing doubts and make-up new ones. To choose to dance is one thing, to be chosen to dance quite another.

Now, time has given me the opportunity to gain perspective, grow-up a little, reduce the importance of a mere five hours of my lifetime. And, from my high perch of understanding, I can say with the full weight of my experience, I'm not going to say yes to any invitation that includes dancing unless I have an escort. The exceptions would be for family and friends. And friends would be wise to include a huge Viennese desert table with lots of chocolate delicacies, access to lot of alcohol and a designated driver -- just in case.