

# Commentary: Dance me to your chicken

*Bill Hall/Lewiston Tribune*

"Dance me to your beauty," wrote the frisky poet Leonard Cohen, "with a burning violin."

"Take ballroom dancing lessons," said my determined little Mom, "or I'll never cook fried chicken for you again."

No dancing, no fried chicken. Those were the harsh terms. I was helpless in the face of that threat. If we are what we eat, I am chicken, a Rhode Island red, dredged in flour, fried to a golden brown and then steamed on low in a covered skillet, becoming tender, finger-licking morsels.

It wasn't that I didn't want to hold a woman in my arms, close to my body while twirling and dipping and dazzling her with my fast footwork. I did. Oh, how I did.

But I was the victim of a common teenage phobia - making a fool of myself. I was one of those teenage boys who are afraid to ask a girl out, not because I didn't desperately want to, but because I was certain she would say no. I was chicken.

I had seen myself in the mirror each morning, a scrawny, unremarkable kid. I wouldn't dare ask a date with a teenage girl, let alone expect her to dance with me.

If you are a teen with similar doubts, rest assured you are not an automatic reject. I have known dozens of teen males braver than I who believed no girl would ever go out with them, but they finally asked.

Sometimes the girl said yes. Sometimes she said no. And when she said no, they didn't sicken and die. They survived, a little bruised temporarily, but still intact and eventually successful in life and in love.

As a teen, I learned too late that it is truly better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. In my senior year of high school, I had a crush on a bright and charming girl much admired among the males of that student body. In fact, she was so popular that I dared not ask her out.

I finally did ask her to sign my senior annual on the last day of school. She wrote something somewhere inside the book, handed it back to me and went off down the hallway never to be seen by me again. As she walked out of my life, I frantically flipped through the annual, finally finding what she had written:

"I think we have something in common," she wrote. "I don't know what it is yet but maybe I'll find out someday. Until I do, don't get engaged."

Egad!

She really did seem to like me. But of course, chicken that I was, I didn't run after her. She was probably just being nice. That was so like her.

~~My timid reaction was part of the reason my mother ordered ballroom dancing lessons. She and my father had met at a rural barn dance in North Dakota. The marriage clicked and for half a century, they loved to dance with one another. They loved to hold each other tight and get physical to music.~~

So the next thing I knew I was at a dance studio run by a middle-aged man and wife. There weren't enough girls in the class for all the boys. So, to my horror, I and the other boys found ourselves occasionally dancing with the wife and sometimes even with the husband who danced the woman's part.

I've never been so mortified in my life, dancing with a man and dancing with a chubby mature woman whose belly bounced erotically against mine.

Years later, alone at mid-life, my chicken streak raised its ugly beak once again. A stunning young woman in a cocktail lounge appeared to be making eyes at me across a crowded room. I tried to ignore her for days. It was too good to be true, and I thought she was too young for me.

She began to think I was gay. But she was older than she looked, a year and a half younger than I.

I was not gay, though when dancing with her I became totally cheerful.

And now, after 30 years of enjoying life and chicken together, I still don't dance well. But in the immortal words of Leonard Cohen, "I still dance me to her beauty with a burning violin."

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