



I Should Have Danced All Night

A couple of weeks ago, Sadako and I were invited to a party being held by one of my print collectors. This lady thought we would be interested in meeting some of her friends and business acquaintances, and also wanted to introduce me to them. We felt a little bit uncomfortable when we arrived, as we knew nobody there, but it wasn't such a formal event, and we were able to have something to eat and drink while we watched the activities.

Each person - or in some cases, group of people - came forward in turn and presented some kind of entertainment. The presentations were of two types: some people did magic tricks, and some danced. It soon became apparent that all these people were well acquainted with each other. From some of the comments the presenters made - "This should be better than the one I showed you last year ..." - or the things that the audience called out - "You're much improved!" - we realized that this party was an annual event for which everybody had been preparing for some time.

At first, it was with very mixed feelings that I watched the entertainment. Because of the influence of TV, we are all able to see top class professional entertainers anytime we wish, so our standards have become very high; magicians and dancers must dazzle us with their skills! But the first magician here fumbled his handkerchief, dropped something on the floor, and nearly knocked over his table trying to retrieve it. The next one did his trick with his hands shaking so much we were afraid he too would drop something! A dance group came on, and it was very clear which one was the 'sensei' - the one with the smooth and sensuous gestures.

Now I am sure at this point many of you are thinking to yourselves, "Dave, don't be so serious! It was just a bunch of friends having a party and enjoying themselves!" And yes of course, as the evening progressed and I came to understand what was going on, I too, relaxed and enjoyed watching them entertain us. And when a group came on to do a traditional folk dance, I could simply smile at the ones in the back row struggling to 'follow the leader', while at the same time marveling at the energy and skill of one of the women in the front row, one who wouldn't have been out of place on a TV dance program! We applauded them all together ...

The presentation that had the most impact on me though, was a very simple one. A couple came out, and with a bit of old-fashioned music playing on the background tape, gave us a few minutes of ballroom dancing, the woman doing most of the dipping and twirling, with the man providing a kind of 'base' around which she danced. As Sadako and I stood there watching, I thought I could feel her unspoken thoughts hanging in the air between us, "Oh, why can't David ..."

I'm really not sure how to answer her. I'm 55 - middle baby boomer - a generation that came along just at the end of the ballroom dancing era. When I was a high school student, one of the school dances each year was set aside to be for ballroom dancing (the others were of course rock music), and in the weeks leading up to the event, training sessions were held so that we could learn some basics of those dance styles. But I was far too shy to attend these, nor did I go to any of the school dances at all. So here I stand, unable to even put one foot in front of the next, let alone elegantly guide my partner across the floor in time to music. And even though I would love to be able to enjoy an activity like that together with Sadako, to start now just seems so ridiculously embarrassing ...

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But truthfully, none of the people performing for us at the party were the slightest bit embarrassed about their lack of professional skills. They were all just having fun together. But now that we have been introduced to this group, I'm a bit worried about what to do if my friend invites us back again next year ... what on earth could Sadako and I do as our contribution?

I've got it! Sadako can of course dance for them - she has been enjoying dance exercise classes for many years now, and has some very sensuous moves. As for me ... I'll do a magic trick; I'll step forward to the stage, call for the light man to quickly turn off all the lights when I clap my hands, then I'll suddenly ... disappear!

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