

# Sore calves and all, dancing's a ball

My experience with ballroom dance began at the YMCA in July, when I stumbled upon a couple taking a private dance lesson there. The twist of their embrace, the angle of the man's body and the slow dragging of the woman's foot across the floor triggered a memory from my last days in college.

I remembered four feet moving as two across the hardwood floor in the athletic center as my partner and I danced two minutes of a self-choreographed Argentine tango to India.Arie's ballad "Ready for Love." The dance created an atmosphere so moving that at times our



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classmates were too enthralled to applaud. And yet, after the final, I put my dance shoes away for seven years.

Back at the YMCA, I learned that the instructor also teaches at Ballroom East, which happens to be close to my home and offers inexpensive group lessons. I was ready to don the dance shoes again.

I finally made it to the studio in August for beginner-level East

Coast Swing lessons. I had missed the first week, but I picked the moves up easily and, more important, I had a blast! When I returned home, I smiled uncontrollably, wondering why I ever stopped dancing as I lay on the floor stretching my well-worked muscles.

In September, the dance of the month was the waltz, a dance I had no real interest in learning. I was going to take a break, but I returned to dance lessons when Patrick Swayze died, and Baby being lifted out of the corner and over Johnny's head seemed like a viable fantasy again, even though I know there's no waltz in "Dirty Dancing."

In my last column, I mentioned how dance teaches you patience. On my first night of the waltz, I knew why. When my feet and the instructor's didn't fall into step the way they did in swing, I realized it was going to be a long hour.

Had a classmate not encouraged me to stick it out, I wouldn't have returned the following week. It was the right call. "I still hate the waltz," I wrote on Facebook after class, "but I faced my discomfort with the dance and fear of mistakes, let my partner lead, and actually had fun tonight dancing a dance I hate."

That was the night my calves cursed me for choosing an apartment on the third floor and the night the instructor said to the women, "Close your eyes and just follow your partner. If he messes up, you mess up right along with him."

The concept of the male lead — vital in ballroom dance — was a revelation for me. The man decides which step is next, and the woman waits as he decides.

"I'm a firm believer that the girl always has to follow the boy," the instructor said.

Before dancing with a strong lead one night, I asked what we would be doing. He told me not to worry, to just follow. I acquiesced, and found myself floating around the room, sometimes with my eyes closed, appreciating a few moments to be irresponsible for my next move and for any mistakes that went with it.

In October, I traded my ballroom heels for cross-trainers and headed to dance fitness at the downtown YMCA. I kicked to Michael Buble, smacked my behind to Flo Rida and did traditional aerobics to instrumental techno. I moved without a partner and was my own lead again. I left sweaty, breathless and once again content to have the experience of dance. ♣

*Mariam Williams is a Louisville native who writes about the random thoughts that hold her attention for two minutes or more.*