

## Come Dance with Me

By Jim and Audora Burg

What do dancing and marriage have in common? Among other things, partners are wise to avoid stepping on each other's toes, in both the literal and metaphorical sense.

Marriage education folks commonly use dance as a metaphor for marriage, and the toe-stepping is an obvious example to link the two.

However tired the clichéd metaphor is, it took on fresh significance for Audora last Saturday night, when she watched a couple couples dancing to live music at a local coffeehouse.

The pairs danced in different styles. One couple held each other tightly and did a tentative two-step while the other boxed-out a restrained waltz as befit the space available.

Such different steps and styles, but remarkably similar body language was on display. The affection and attachment of the couples was easy to see and beautiful to behold.

So as Audora sipped her coffee and wistfully wished that Jim could have been there to share the moment (but not the dance floor), she reflected that there are as many unique ways of doing marriage together as there are of dancing together, and both are a learned process.

The late Paul Pearsall, neuropsychologist and best-selling author of 18 books, noted "Marriage, families, all relationships are more a process of learning the dance rather than finding the right dancer."

Is it learning the dance, or making it up together as you go? Because what works for one couple spells disaster for another.

Consider conflict style. We've written before about our low threshold for intensity and conflict and how easily our emotional circuit breaker trips to temporarily shut off situations that threaten to escalate. We come back together to resolve the issue at hand, but in a manner that works for us.



We have long-married friends who would be utterly bored with this approach. What we find placid and safe they find distressingly dull.

These friends are all-around high-intensity. They play with gleeful intensity, they fight with raging intensity, they come together to make up with passionate intensity. What they find stimulating and rewarding we would find frightening and unsafe.

To venture into the culinary realm, it's like two chefs taking seasoning the same cut of steak, drawing on radically different flavor profiles. What pleases one palate, or relationship, would not appeal to another.

Individual tastes aside, there are some definite truisms common to healthy marriages. Marriage researcher John Gottman has extensively documented these specific behaviors, a few of which include accepting influence from each other, turning toward each other (instead of away), and soft starts (particularly by women) when discussing areas of conflict.

Couples craft their own relational dances. The healthiest couples build their patterns on the same foundational principles Gottman has observed.