

I Hope You Dance

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I measure my life in terms of dance. I'm not a dancer in the traditional sense; my days of jazz shoes and tutus only lasted through my elementary school years. But even as an infant, I felt the need to dance. I was born with a shortened Achilles tendon, and as a result, I spent the first five years of my life walking around on my tiptoes like I had stolen a pair of teeny-tiny pointe shoes. My dad thought this was worrisome and signed me up for physical therapy. My mom thought it was prophetic and enrolled me in ballet class.

A few years of physical therapy and many pirouettes later, my tiptoe tendencies were eradicated, but my desire to dance had only grown stronger. It made me feel alive, and I quickly discovered that I most fully experience my body with my feet moving on the floor and my heartbeat drowning out the music.

I believe that each person has a soundtrack for their life: a hodge-podge collection of melodies, somber and sweet. Some songs will never fail to leave you smiling, while others will make you cry no matter how often you hear them. I believe that our bodies were made to dance, so we can't just sit and listen when the music of our lives begins.

This conviction has carried me through seasons of incredible joy and crushing sadness. I am designed for full, belly-laugh, two-step, take-off-your-shoes-and-don't-stop-until-you-are-sore kinda dancing. I am most vibrant when victory dancing, pulled-in-real-tight slow dancing, and shaking off the stress after a long day. I am the best version of myself when I'm jamming in the car, staying up all night with friends dancing to *High School Musical Three*, or swing dancing with my older brother at any and every family gathering. It's hard to paint a picture of who I am, but one thing that is always true is that I'll be dancing.

It seems like this tendency to groove is tucked somewhere in my family's DNA along with freckles and widow's peaks. I grew up in a house with four kids, hardwood floors, and lots of activity. At some point—between the sleepovers, nerf wars and countless games of hide-and-go-seek—our house became a haven for many of our friends. Our kitchen was the unofficial gathering spot of my brother's pre-game hockey rituals, Saturday morning pancake breakfasts, and group study sessions during finals. Although you never knew who you'd run into in my kitchen, there were two guarantees: we would have Oberweis chocolate milk and dance parties.

Some of my earliest memories include tangoing around the kitchen on my nanny's feet as she made dramatically sharp turns, sending me and my little sister into fits of laughter with each step. As we grew older, my siblings and I got closer, and dance parties became an almost daily ritual. No matter where you were in the house, if you heard the "Booty Werk" Pandora station blasting from the speakers in the kitchen, you knew it was your cue to jump in and bust a move. Washing the

dishes was never truly complete without jamming to Taylor Swift, and there was no better way to finish our chores than twirling around the kitchen, using the broom as a microphone. Growing up wouldn't have been half as much fun without my built-in dance partners, and I am thankful for the unspoken value we unanimously place on a quality jam session. I have learned some of my best moves from my family, but more importantly, they have taught me how to celebrate life especially when dancing seems like the hardest thing to do.

One of the most defining moments of my life was spent dancing in the cafeteria of my high school. It was a week after my dad had passed away, and we had just finished hosting his funeral reception in our school's historic dining hall. We had spent the day reminiscing through tears and laughter, and at this point in the afternoon, the hall slowly emptied until only my family and the friends who had known my dad best remained. The end of the night was drawing near, but no Flynn family gathering is ever complete without a dance party – my dad wouldn't have it any other way. So, in honor of Kevin Flynn, we blasted the very explicit ballads of Kanye West and Jay Z from the very Catholic speakers of my high school and danced our asses off. We climbed up on the pillars and boogied until we collapsed exhausted, laughing, and trying to catch our breath.

It was in that moment that I realized for the first time since hearing the news of my father's death that we were going to be ok. We were afraid, uncertain and devastated, but we danced and that was the bravest thing we could do. In that moment, I learned that even when I find myself paralyzed on a road marked by tragedy, my feet will always remember how to dance and that will be enough to carry me through.

If my twenty years of life have taught me anything, it's that I need to dance. Every floor is a dance floor if you are confident enough to bust a move, so just go for it. Dance like no one is watching, and give people a reason to join in the party. If you're in need of a partner, come find me.