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When I was in 8th grade I went to my first school dance. I grew up in a house where music played a big, big part. My mother would blast the sounds of Motown and 50's soul first thing every Saturday morning! If I happened to be one of the 2% of African-Americans born without rhythm, she made sure that it was programmed in me by the time I reached adolescence.

So there I was at Regina Middle School sporting my brown slacks that were too tight with the flare bottoms and a very crisp white button down shirt with a fresh orange kool-aid stain near my collar. As I was standing there staring at the .99 cent cookie tray and pink colored punch concoction, a true classic came over the loud speakers; 'Play Another Slow Jam' by Atlantic Star!

My heart jumped and I started snapping my fingers and humming the tune. I immediately began to look for a girl to dance with. Since Regina was an all girls school, all the boys were on one side of the gym and all the girls were on the other, so in order for me to ask a girl to dance I had to walk ALL the way across the gym floor to the other side, step into a sea of young ladies and then muster up the courage to ask one of them to dance. Now my heart is REALLY pumping fast and I can begin to feel the beads of sweat rolling down my back turning my newly ironed shirt into a skin sticking sweat soaker upper, but the song was way more powerful than any feelings of inadequacy I may have been feeling.

I started the long walk across the floor. My stride was awkward because I was completely self conscious of the fact that everybody was looking at me. The boys were watching in awe as I was the first one to cross over into what could have been hostile territory and the girls were watching to see if I was decent looking enough to give the time of day to. Now the fact that I was at that stage of development where pimples and plumpness have their way, I was undeterred, because my song was playing and I HAD to dance. You see it was more important for me to dance to my music than it was to entertain any of my flaws or all that could go wrong in those next moments.

I approached the first girl within striking distance and asked with as much confidence as I could muster, "do you wanna dance?" I waited for what seemed an hour for her response, as I could feel the weight of the eyes from behind eagerly awaiting something to laugh at and the eyes in front trying to decide if I was indeed human with my clumsy gate and barely audible request. "No" she said. Not "no thank you," "I'd like to but, my legs are tired" or "I

would if I could, but I'm married." She just said "NO."

At that moment I had a choice to make. I could turn around dejected and defeated and walk ALL the way back to the other side of the dance floor or I could keep moving to the beat of my song until I found someone to dance with. You see the song was bigger than my circumstance so I took that hit and went to the next girl. "Do you wanna dance?" "No." I went to the next girl, "Do you wanna dance?" "No." And after the third "no," I'm starting to pick up my pace because the song is in me. I start moving my feet and swinging my head from side to side, I'm ALIVE, I'm enjoying my song and I'm going to dance with SOMEBODY even if that somebody is ME!

In a flash something happened. All of the sudden I didn't care about the "no's." I didn't take it personally. I had a swagger that said "if you don't dance with me you'll be missing out until you do!" I set out to dance down the entire line of girls until I got a "yes" or until my song was finished. Well by the time I reached the 5th girl I had picked up my pace even more! I was moving with energy and enthusiasm! "Do you wanna dance?" was coming out rapid fire with passion and excitement and by the time I reached the 8th girl she HAD to say "yes" just to find out where all of this great energy was going to take her!

We made it to the dance floor with just a few bars left of the song and I relished in the moment of my first slow dance.

I learned a valuable lesson that day. If I had spent more time focusing on the power of my song and less time worrying about what other people thought, I would have gotten on the dance floor a lot sooner!

The dance floor is where it happens ladies and gentlemen. Life is short and unpredictable! Get on out there and dance. Don't waste time worrying about what other people think, they already think! Move to YOUR music and share it with love and enthusiasm so that when your time comes, you will be able to say "I did not hold my gifts hostage. I did not live from fear or small thinking. And I did not live up to the low expectations of others. I lived all out, out loud and all in!"