

WHY DO I WRITE: one, Two ... one, Two ...

The setting was no different than other settings seen in living rooms and dens in cities, towns, boroughs, parishes, counties, around the country; grabbing and pulling one or both hands, ushering and propelling the body from one place to another – down the line, to the center of the room, in a circle – issuing demands, “stay on beat”, “like this”, “one, two ... one, two”. Saying, “no good”, delivering a well-aimed strike, the left arm muscle, across the head, each strike representing additional instructions expected to be followed, immediately. Instructing in code, older siblings’ code, as if DNA engrained, expected conduct, handed down by the gods, without any written or verbal instruction from living beings; shouting, scowling, demanding compliance, fealty from the younger sibling, while the count continues to vibrate, bounce and move from wall to wall, from one side of your skull to another, enhanced by the unexpected strikes – part pain, part pleasure – to the beat, “one, two”, “one two”. You remember don’t you, telling you they were going to teach you how to dance, practicing with you until it happens, they had the steps down, then discarding you, the younger sibling, much like hand-me downs, to the side, the corner of the closet, events which occurred after he called, she called. There was no sense of feeling used and discarded, knowing the dance lessons were not about you, not at all. You, I, we, knew we received something else in the exchange, a seed, the gift of dance.

The refrigerator handle, the door knob, the broom. Moving across the floor ... one, two... one, two ... sliding, turning ... keeping the beat, over time getting better, with each trip across the floor. Missing the beat, self-correcting, realizing no one was going strike, scream, push, or violently pull. Swinging wide, turning your own inverted, [Olive Oyl](#), if an inanimate object can be called a she; she moved in unison, me leading, she following, while we – literally

and figuratively - swept the floor clean ... on the one ... one the two ... now on the three. “Hit me!”

The room was pitch-black, even though the sun now shone her brightest. Word of the party moved around the community digitally quick – even though digital communication would be generations later. Onto the porch, looking around for adults before entering, to the left, to the right, across the street; moving along the side of the wall, refusing to ask the question whether the house party was authorized, never asking the question. Knowing you should be elsewhere, this knowledge coming in intermittent waves, interrupted by the beat, never a steady connection, fuzzy knowledge. Admitting, quieting, internally, *heck I don't even know the people throwing the party*. Then the beat again, throwing you off kilter again, locking both feet in place, preventing movement out and away from the party. Stuffed in like sardines, sweating, nervous, never noticing the heat, feeling the beat move up - then down - then up - hearing James Brown's guttural screams, seeing his sweating face through distorted vision; pushing away from the wall, like James, well a little like James - only a more restricted slide - to the center of the room, just before the room magically constricted, too many bodies in too little space. Each couple allotted no more than a twelve-inch square - to move – fast dance – slow dance – twelve inches square. Testing both the moves taught under duress, and with straw-headed Olive Oyl. Still practicing the way you practice when dragging Olive across the floor, pretending to clean, instead practicing new moves.

[“Can't pass the people, can't pass the, hit me.”](#)

Singing, touching, reaching in the dark - liking, liking, liking – earth bound discoveries, one of Hyades' earth-bound clusters, going in circles, while the Friends of Distinction said just that, [“You Got Me Going in Circles”](#). Loving their voices ... one, two, one, two, one, two;

loving more the song fit perfectly inside the twelve-inch square. Same steps, catching the down beat, the way your [Sugar Ray Robinson](#) oldest sibling instructed - mine, the eldest, Linda – before she was saved, before dancing was prohibited. Strange how she never mentioned Jesus when she took aim and struck. “Stay on beat, stay on beat” – indeed.

Shuffling, moving, influenced by others, far away from Harlem, eons from Los Angeles, southern influences, [Joe Tex](#), [Johnnie Taylor](#), [Millie Jackson](#), [Betty Wright](#), [Isaac Hayes](#), [Al Green](#), sons and daughters of the South - [dancing, dancing, dancing, like a dancing machine](#) - blocks away from the neighborhood’s prohibited beer joint, even though it was part of the [Chitlin’ Circuit](#). Pirouetting not like Baryshnikov, like Michael though; turning in place, once, twice, three times. Reaching and touching those couple next to you, making sure they saw you turned three times, keeping beat and guard over the twelve inch square. Not knowing the proverb term, [necessity is the mother of invention](#), remaining in the same space, never realizing the exercise could have served as the basis for a lesson in space and time, algebraic formulas, physics, if the educational institutions which were designed to fail us had noticed.

“[A-B-C, easy as 123, or simple as do re me](#)” – so it was – yes it was - before the party was broken up, and we were told to go home. Somebody told on us, somebody told.

No tap, ballet, modern dance classes, out the question. Couldn’t afford classes, “such nonsense,” is what would have been said, what was said with unspoken words, spoken eyes, shoulders, eye brows, moving in the same direction saying “no” clearly. For those who dared asked, the words spoken were just as clear, flowing out of mouths, none like the mouths of babes, instead with knowing intent, direct, honest, unbridled words of a parent. The no(s) mattered not to us, we persisted in seeking our on-line degrees in dance, before the invention of the internet, during a time on-line meant hanging clothes, or informing someone was waiting on

the telephone. Watching, imitating, standing in place in front of the black and white television sets of days of yore; every Saturday. Seeing others who looked like us dancing in a magical land, wondering how they could dance with so much space, with air conditioning without catching a cold. Seeing enough differences to make one's mind literally go in circles; some were better dancers, others not, not as fluid, not as light afoot, pirouetting twice instead of three times, dancing for the camera, not absorbed in the beat, appearing not captive to the music. The comics among us mimicked [Don Cornelius](#), unexpectedly standing up in class and announcing out of nowhere, "Love, Peace and Soul", shattering the tension before we flooded the hallway, sliding, moving, silently counting, one, two ... one, two, one two three.

Popping, whipping, we did, never realizing our movements was a study in history, paying respect to Mother Nature, the marking celebrations, the passage of time, reaching skyward; tributes, cultural rituals handed down across continents, across generations, keeping and telling stories through the time-honored art of dance.

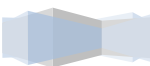
Recently (October 2017), while attending a family wedding, I bemoaned the fact no one was dancing. Looking around, noticing the D.J., finding myself internally complaining about other matters; the sound the speakers emitted, computer generated music; wondering whether my internal complaints were legitimate audiophile related complaints, or just another sign of the incremental creeping of the aging process; moving on its own undefined, to unpredictable beat, sneaking, changing course, before realizing there was a change. A line here, a line there; another death announcement, more funerals attendances than weddings, more deaths than births; expressing words of surprise too many times, catching words in mid-sentence, pretending to accept the changes, humbly being forced to accept the changes, inevitable movements in time. So it seems, so it seems.



Much like the mirrors designed to make one appear younger, thinner; conveying a different person, toned, darkened hair, no age lines, I bit. Fictional youth moving across invisible timelines, a magically transport across a small dance floor; not by hyper-looping, not by the transmittal of data through unseen radio waves; pretending a house party was about to start. Why not? Why not me? The music was playing and no was dancing, [it was my appointed duty](#). Grabbing a hand, ignoring doubtful eyes and minds, praying Father Time was not waiting on the dance floor to tell me, *fool you've been tricked*.

The two-step is what the name suggest, a dance based on a beat of two, generally movement taking place on the down beat when dancing to rhythm and blues. A building block, allowing the participant to move from sisters/brothers, brooms, door handles, to other forms of dance, dancing on the upbeat when Mexican two-stepping, reggae, or zydeco. Take a book. Enter a class. Confuse yourself. So I believe.

The instructions for products and their assembly are created by people who have no problems with putting objects together; writing in a dry, regimented manner, devoid of the life experiences and common fears, using antiseptic words, as if the writer's intent was the documentation of a scientific formula; ignoring that some of us are intimidated by the use of the common screwdriver. Dance is no different. Describing dance in terms which intimidate misses the mark. Dance is an art form constantly under evolution, a participatory act performed by those who fall in love with what it does for their bodies and minds, laughing internally at the first introduction to the art form, accompanied by well-timed sibling strikes. Read the instructions, set them to the side, stand up, place one foot in front of the other; one, two, one, two - one two three four.



Believing the mirror and the lies she told me, moving onto the floor, casting aside doubting eyes, noticing my grandchildren move onto the floor unsure of themselves about the music, movement, cultural exchange. Realizing we have failed somehow in transferring tradition, balling my fist, a reminder of the failure, remembering how I learned, promising too to strike them at the next chance.

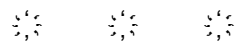
[“I’m so happy to see you and me back in stride again.”](#)

No, no, please don’t interpret what I write to mean we were - that any of us were icons of American tap ([Bill “Bojangles” Robinson](#), [Sammy Davis, Jr.](#), [Gregory Hines](#)), or American modern dance ([Josephine Baker](#), [Katherine Dunham](#), [Judith Jamison](#)), the endowed ones. My observations nary touches the professional dancers; they, like professionals in other fields, put the rest of us to shame; leaping, forging past pain, perfecting their art form on stages and forums around the world. Professionals are a different story. Because we can sing, doesn’t make us songstress/songster; we still sing, in one manner or the other. Miss a step, incorporate the missed step. Laugh at ones faults; much like mistakes and life’s missteps forces us to do. Working through shyness, the “you can’t(s)”, the doubters. Participating to learn more about yourself, your culture, the body; the more one moves, participates, and studies dance, dance moves the body and mind from one place to another, similar to writing.

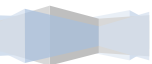
The food we produce in our kitchens, may not be professional grade, may never catch the eye of a television producer, and may never be blessed with a [James Beard Award](#). Even with this every day dose of reality, we still cook. It makes little sense to relegate the art of cooking to a bland, artless, soup-like existence because it will never be written about, show up on a cooking show with [Martha Stewart](#), or no one will ever recognize your talents. Living and life doesn’t work that way. The best foods I have ever eaten haven’t come out of five-star kitchens, instead

from the ovens, off the stove-tops of the non-celebratory cooks, most have now passed; without ever receiving one ounce of recognition. This does not mean their stories have not been told in other ways; secrets handed down over generations, elders who serve as guardians of the secrets and even by appearing in cookbooks – some written by non-cooks – without attribution, mere facsimiles of the original recipes.

Dancing, singing, cooking, and even writing are lifetime crafts, repeat, repeat, repeat; folding, blending, touching, smelling, acquiring secrets, over time, layered experiences, successes and mistakes. Enjoying the journey, without the fear of making mistakes, tasting the batter (an apt-analogy to life and living), comparing, noticing changes, differences, appreciating different ingredients provide differing results, experimenting, while remembering, reminding oneself every craft is based upon fundamental foundational steps - one, two. Honing the given craft, over, over, over again, seeking perfection, not afraid of imperfection, reaching for the sky, knowing one may never get there, realizing over time, pushing against the ceiling, no matter how protected, may ultimately be the point. Such is life.



Seeing words floating in space, trapped with the confines of the brain's lobes, lodged between lobes, wondering, *if this type of advice comes from friends, what on God's green earth are my enemies saying, thinking, advising.* "You need to get a job as a janitor. Now that you are no longer practicing law, lay low, show little income (not realizing the job mentioned would take care of the second point) and then ask the government for forbearance on any tax debts." Words spoken with a straight face, told within the confines and protective cover of a long-term friendship. Words of you can't do. Words layered and put in place to cover a baker's mistakes. However, this time I didn't see the frosting. I saw a crack running down the center of the cake;



dried from stirring too much, baked ten minutes too long at an improper temperature. Hers was a crafted line, setting our beliefs and prohibitions. Some of the words flowed in a communal manner; an, I am on your side manner; other scattered, as buckshot does, across an imaginary field, toward an unwanted intruder.

“We are not young anymore.”

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“Those are things you should have done in your twenties/thirties.

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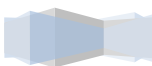
“Do you know how old you are?”

...

“Too late for that...”

Time-laden remarks, delivered as if she was writing, foreshadowing my impending death. Changing professions, looking in a glowing ball, with her head moving slowly, to the left, right; accompanied by non-words, undecipherable utterings conveying the same plight. Did I miss what I was seeing, what I was feeling? Perhaps she recently studied Life Expectancy Tables issued by the federal government. Surely she had seen over the years that I am black? I could have told her that black males are expected to die earlier than other groups identified in the Life Expectancy Tables, life conditions, imprisonment, death by violence, disease, accident, health; sooner, faster, predictably, sooner, faster than any other racial/gender group. Oh woe is me.

The words spoken were words of impossibilities, said presumably in good faith, advice which seemed in my mind’s eye distorted by race and history. During the conversation she never wished me good luck, never envisioned the possible, only the improbable. I thought I heard her chuckle. I know I heard her chuckle. A silly, silly you chuckle. None of it mattered



at that time. None of it matters now. The same experience when sitting in the wedding watching no one dancing. Invisible strictures moving about and around ... You can't dance ... because of time ... because of my age ... because of life's circumstances.

Silly, silly man, don't you know you're black. The same prohibitions I have heard all my life, during generations of practicing law, by my fellow lawyers, by those gracing the bench, by total strangers.

“Oh, I bet it is difficult being a black lawyer and winning in Texas.”

Never a question asked, always a statement. Said, over and over again, and if desiring to now control the future, begetting I never win a case, predicting doom because of race; said with a straight face, white-privilege advice, seemingly recommending that I find the nearest hole and crawl in, give up, realize it was impossible to win, and leave the privileges of lawyering to those of their kind, or even referring the case to their offices. “If you need help, give me a call,” was repeatedly stated. I wanted so many times to reply, “That is mighty white of you.” I didn't. I wouldn't nice, Southern culture nice. My mind screamed internally at the unwelcome observations on race and living in America. Remaining quiet, moving away, intent on making a liar out of their benign racism; wanting at the same time to tell them Georgia didn't raise tragically black children. I am sure with each failure the comforts of racism reassured them they were right in their assessment. This too mattered not, I learned as a small child, others' expectations is the uncontrollable, no matter how frustrating, debilitating, demoralizing.

Absolutely, there is something valid about this persistent and unwanted assessment. Any educated person, living, studying, engaging in the American experience, has observed our stories are generally not told by us and generally not valued either way. If the stories are told, they are



written from the outsider's perspective telling the story of the less-privileged. My assessment may seem cruel. It may be cruel. It is true.

Much like men preaching to women, telling women what it is like to be a woman; bequeathing to women wisdom of the diminished chances of accomplishing a mere sliver of their dreams, because they be of a different gender. Applying different standards, changing the rules of the game, secretly paying a different a divergent compensation rate, speaking in loaded terms, conveying an abject superiority, while conveying a greater message, they/the others are blessed by their Gods and she/you/those of a different gender don't stand a chance in hell of accomplishing the impossible.

When I removed my body from her car, I reminded myself to never allow another to use the yoke of friendship against me. Respecting her position, moving away, remembering an interview by [Carlos Santana](#) and his response when asked what type of music he played. With great timing and grace, he paused before answering, explaining that if we (musicians) were honest we would admit we were playing African music, in that Africa is the birthplace of mankind (on [Santana's website](#), he writes the same sentiments slightly different, while expressing the same thoughts, "All the music that I've ever played since the first time I played the guitar has African (influences) in it," he explained. "I play African music."). Without aplomb, never sneering, paying homage.

So I wished I would have said as much, mimicking Santana, dancing away, with a [fictional guitar](#) behind my head, telling her there are others who looked like me who have gone through more and still believed; quitting, moving forward, changing course, dreaming, believing when others would have never believed, failing, falling down, picking themselves up again, dealing with mental barriers along the path, through missed meals, missed bill payments, little

money, no money, watching wealth flee, moving closer and closer to the edge, homelessness, fighting to retain a belief system, noticing former friends flee, look askance when and after each additional shoe dropped. If we are honest, we live, we die, what we do in the middle counts most. So I believe, these are the reasons why I write.

