

Jim's Perspective...

Valentine's Day Dancing

It has been a very long, cold winter here in Lincoln as Janie and I hunker down at home, and fervently wish that this stupid virus would go away. The 15 inches of snow that fell in Lincoln a few weeks ago plus the snow from last weekend hasn't made things any better! As Valentine's Day approaches, the two of us sat down together in the living room one evening this week over cocktails, looking out at the snow, and reminisced about some of our social activities from back in the old days that were never interrupted by a pandemic. A social activity that we often participated in on Valentine's Day, was to go out for dinner and dancing with friends. On a Valentine's Day in Lincoln in the late sixties or early seventies, the two of us might spend the evening with friends at Little Bohemia (affectionately referred to as Little Bo's) which was a bar/dance hall/night club on the northwest corner of North 27th Street and Cornhusker Highway (there is a grocery store there now). It had a nice stage and all sorts of entertainment in addition to rock and roll bands. One especially funny entertainer was a guy who was a hypnotist. Volunteers from the audience would sit in a chair on the stage with the hypnotist standing near the volunteer, and soon enough the volunteer was indeed hypnotized. The hypnotized person might become a cartoon figure such as Mickey Mouse, or he/she might be a bird flying around the room. It was very funny. The hypnotist would then snap his fingers and the volunteer would snap out of it, but have no idea what he or she had done. We never volunteered!

Another fun rock and roll dance forum in Lincoln was The Royal Grove located on Cornhusker Highway out by the airport. People who frequented this dance venue were referred to as "Grovites." Another dancing venue that involved both rock bands and big band music was the Pla Mor Ballroom on West 'O' Street. We had a lot of formal dinner/dances out there and some took place on the Valentine's Day weekend. There were dances we attended at the University Club atop the Stuart Building (it closed long ago) and we danced away also at The Nebraska Club which recently closed. The Zoo Bar and the Diamond Bar and Grill (called the "DB&G"), both near the southeast corner of 14th and 'P' Street, were fun places to dance to serious rock and roll music. We went to formal high school dances at the old Cornhusker Hotel and at the Lincoln Hotel at 9th and 'P' Street. I worked at the Lincoln Hotel as an elevator operator. There was a long lever on the side of the wall inside the elevator that I moved to run the elevator. The job had its ups and downs, but I learned how to stop the elevator with the lever so that the floor of the elevator was even with the hotel floor! It was fun to have a formal dance there because I knew many of the full-time staff at the hotel and could laugh and visit with them during an evening formal dance there. I think they liked seeing me with my girlfriend and watching us dance. They were all nice people.

Besides dancing at commercial establishments, we had "sock hops" in the basketball gym at Pius X High School. We also had dances in the basement of the school in the school lunch room area. The basement dance usually involved a disc jockey. There was no stage down there, and it wasn't a very big room. No social distancing down there! A rock band usually played in the gym and occupied a stage which was situated at one end of the gym. The school dances always had an element of suspense from our point of view because the priests and nuns were the

chaperons. They were comfortable with traditional ballroom dancing, but were confused, critical of, and disapproving of rock and roll dance moves. They tried not to interfere with what the students were doing on the dance floor, but it wasn't easy. They didn't mind The Twist, The Watusi, or The Shimmy, but occasionally they interfered when a boy and girl were slow-dancing doing the "double clutch." The "double clutch" involved no particular dance skill. What it involved was the boy wrapping both arms around the girl and the girl doing the same thing to the boy. They held each other tight! They swayed a bit, side to side, but there was no particular dance step – just being very close to each other. Sometimes a priest or nun would separate this dance couple kind of like a referee separates two boxers who end up grabbing each other and holding on to each other so that no one can box.

In college, we also went to small towns to polka dance. "Roll out the barrel, we'll have a barrel of fun!" We might be in Wilbur for the Czech Festival. We might go to Emerald, Goehner, Bee or Dwight. Goehner was the home of Ma Bartlett's Red Barn. Halloween was special there because owner Jody Bartlett dressed in a Halloween costume. The small-town dance venues also often had country western bands. We always liked to do the country western line dance! But of course there were also plenty of country western bands playing in Lincoln.

In Ashland, on the south side of highway 6 which runs through the south part of town, there was a restaurant and dance hall where we met Janie's parents who, at that time, lived on their farm near Elmwood. The four of us, on a weekend night, had dinner and then danced the night away in Ashland! We also went to dinner/dance events with our parents at the Elks Club and the Legion Club. When we were with our parents dancing, I did not attempt the "double clutch!" Ha Ha!

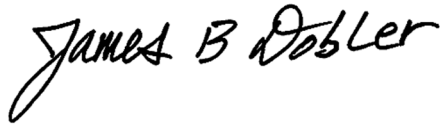
The city of Lincoln ran two social dance activities for junior high and high school students. One of the dance programs was called Nine High which was for junior high students and the other was called Keen Time which was for high school students. I think both were held at Auld Pavillion in Antelope Park. Janie always went to these dances and always "danced away!" I went only once with some of my buddies just to see what Keen Time was all about. I did not dance. I went there as a sophomore in high school before I started dating Janie.

I don't want to leave you with the wrong impression. It's not like we were bar rats and spent all of our time dancing and drinking. We spent many hours in the library! We always did our homework! We both had part-time jobs while in school! Janie worked at the Miller & Paine Department Store and was a Hi-Visor Teen Fashion Board member, while I ran the Lincoln Hotel elevator and was a Holmes Lake Golf Course greenskeeper during the summer. But I am sure you can all appreciate, however, that all work and no play is not a healthy life style! Ha Ha!

I conclude with one of our favorite dance songs. It is *Louie Louie* by the Kingsmen. Whenever this song was played by a local rock band at a dance, the phrase "Louie Louie" was always shouted out by everyone out on the dance floor. Very funny. Below is a YouTube version of this song and it is incredibly funny but also a very good rendition of a sixties rock band (love the white sport coats!) and young people dancing to music. Janie received this version of the song from one of our high school friends, Cynthia.

Wait a minute! . . . I think I even spotted Janie and me dancing in this YouTube rock and roll spectacle! She is wearing a dress and I am wearing a dark coat and tie. Ha Ha!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EqzTiDc-1k>



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