

## The Dating Game

Over the generations the “dating game” changes. The primary purpose of the dating game, of course, is to bring a boy and a girl or a man and a woman together under the bond of holy matrimony to form a family unit. This varies from country to country and from generation to generation. Dancing customs also change and the dances themselves change.

Many of us learned the “old dances”. That is, the minuet, the waltz, the fox trot, the Polka, etc. In my mother’s generation the waltz and the fox trot were frowned on because it put the participants too close together. The young people would sneak away to the barns to do their waltzing. In my day we did a shuffle variation on the fox trot and jitter-bugging was beginning to come into vogue, but did not hit its zenith until my children’s generation. The waltz, the fox trot and some of the Spanish forms of dancing have survived the ages and are considered standard forms of ballroom dancing competitions. I have noticed, however, that some of the professional versions are hard to identify—although very beautifully rendered. Folk dancing forms are the ones that change the least over time.

The music we dance to also changes. My generation, of course, had the very best music—Jazz. Ours was the era of the big bands. We felt our generation’s music was the best but our parents did not think so. Likewise, we did not think much of the music of our children’s generation, although I have to admit that some of it became classic.

The church has always tried to bring couples together in wholesome ways. But instinct is powerful and in every generation there are some girls who get into trouble. By some boy or man, of course. But in my generation, couples did not simply shack up and maybe decide down the line to get married. I had not even heard the word “homosexual” before I was married. Maybe I was naïve. But there certainly were not debates about whether homosexuals could serve as Boy Scout leaders.

The schools started holding dances for children as early as the sixth grade. I can distinctly remembering hassling a poor young boy until he agreed to take me to the dance. I cannot even remember his name—the poor thing.

In my generation girls would go with boys they did not consider the top of the heap, if you know what I mean, because you knew you would be dancing with many boys, and maybe—just maybe, one of them would ask you out later on. At each dance each fellow (or girls if it was girl’s choice dance) would have a program listing the numbers of the dances, the intermission time and the ending time. To simplify things, the band would have a stand and they would post the number of the dance when it came up.

The girls would expect to dance the first and last dance with her partner and maybe one in between, but if her partner was up to snuff he would have almost all the dances traded with other partners. Of course this served the boy the way it served the girl. It gave them both a marvelous way to meet a number of new people. You can also be sure that the best dancers were very popular. I am prejudiced, but I think there were more good dancers who were girls than who were boys.

In contrast, in my children’s generation, “going steady” was the vogue. They danced all night with the same boy they went to the dance with. This could be boring, especially if either of the participants were a poor dancer, and if the two had been going together for a long time, the practice was apt to lead to intimacies. To prevent this among

my own children we laid down the rule that they could go out with the same boy (or girl) two times in a row and then they would have to date someone else before they could date the former boy again. Of course the interested boy would arrange for his friends to alternate, but this could get tiring. In forming any lasting relationship, it's nice to have chosen from a wide list.

It was a rare boy who had a car in my generation. Sometimes a boy could borrow his father's car and then would invite a couple or two to share the car with them. After the dance, often the whole group of friends would meet at the home of one member of the party. But sometimes there was no car available, so the couple would go in public transportation--taxies or even the bus. The boy would send a corsage, if he was knowledgeable about the proper thing to do, but the corsages were modestly priced and sometimes were furnished for the girls by the school or by the sponsors of the dance.

My husband and I dated during the depression and we did not go to an expensive restaurant after the prom and the young men were not expected to rent expensive tuxedos. We wore the best dresses of the clothes we wore to school to the frequent casual dances, and were satisfied if our mothers sewed our formal dresses for special occasions. We did not mind wearing the same formal many times.

Because money was so hard to come by, gifts were inexpensive. However, a nice girl would never let a man or boy buy her personal clothing—not even a sweater or blouse. At twenty-five cents an hour, it took a long time for a young man to buy a diamond for a wedding ring. The most expensive gift my husband bought me while we were dating was an amethyst ring for my birthday. Amethyst is the birthstone for February. It was very extravagant of him. A year or so later, he gave me a diamond.

Each generation thinks their generation had it the best and that the present generation is surely going to the dogs, so to speak, or they think the present generation never had it as tough as they had it when they were growing up.

One thing each generation will concede. Their children are the smartest generation. Of course! They're their's!