

JULIE'S STORY-GLIMPSES OF GOD IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Square Dance



SCRIPTURE STUDY

Leviticus 19:18

WE NEED A LITTLE GRACE

Gawky awkwardness can trip us up-in love and in life.

The Tacker girls (my sister Kathy and I) were never fleet of foot. Our Mom spent her mad money attempting to morph her ugly ducklings into swans. We were subjected to “charm” lessons against our will. We paraded around the living room perimeter of Mrs. Nestor’s house with phone books perched upon our heads. We were taught to suck in our stomachs and smile at the same time as if we were not about to explode. We learned to raise our pinkies when drinking tea. Alas, such attempts at poise and charm were to no avail!

Mom’s next stab at making us graceful was to enroll us in the “Happy Feet” dance studio. Day after day we stumbled, pirouetted, bounced and promptly fell on our behinds. It was not a pretty sight. But we were not alone. Most of the clumsy girls in our class were similarly uncoordinated.

The gym program in the public schools also tried to address the social awkwardness of its prepubescent pupils. It was another exercise in futility. Take Coach Hill’s Friday square dance class. I don’t know what possessed him to think that eleven-year-old boys and girls would forget that the opposite sex had “cooties” and that he could magically convince them to peacefully coexist. The music itself was annoying. Even at the tender age of eleven, a foray into redneck country and western tunes offended my classical music sensibilities.

Sixth grade boys were no prize. They seldom bathed or brushed their teeth, they frequently smelled like sweat and they spent most of their waking hours burping the alphabet or trying to make farting sounds with their armpits. We girls weren’t much better. Most of us wore glasses and braces, sprouted our first pimples, and still carried some of our baby fat.

PRAYER FOCUS

Dear Jesus,
 Help me to love even those who hurt me. Give me the grace to accept others the way you accept me.
 In Jesus’ Name,
 Amen

Friday gym classes only made matters worse. Why couldn't we just relieve our pent-up hostility by lobbing dodge balls at each other? But Coach Hill never wavered. Friday would, amid great protest, still remain square dance day. He would play the same four country songs on his squeaky record player: "Honey Don't Come Home Drinking with Loving on Your Mind," "Ring of Fire," "Buffalo Gal, Won't You Come Out Tonight" and "Turkey in the Straw." The coach would turn the volume up, don his straw hat and proceed to assume the role of "square dance caller." He would bark complex dance steps like "promenade," "allemande left" and "swing your partner."

Our classmates attempted to head in the right direction, but as soon as we had to clasp clammy palms with a creepy partner, things started to get ugly. By the first do-si-do, you could hear name-calling under our breaths. Soon we began squeezing each others hands so hard our cereal-box mood rings would turn purple. Hand-squeezing would escalate to foot-stomping.

One cloudy Friday morning in particular, the natives were restless. Our squares kept morphing into trapezoids and parallelograms. Coach Hill was also on edge-probably because it was "fish-stick Friday" and he could not stomach the idea of downing a lukewarm lump of breaded fish guts. Our class was scheduled just before lunch.

Coach called us to attention with his whistle and the ancient tribal ritual ensued. My partner Steve Parish was a freckled, tow-headed boy with hair the texture of a Brillo pad and feet the size of swim fins. As soon as we started our promenade, Steve would step on my foot. I naturally assumed this was a random act of klutziness. But then the foot-stomping was harder and more deliberate. I quivered at every allemande right. I could feel the tears well up, and I limped over to the bleachers at the side of the gym. My toes were already turning a sickly shade of blue. The coach witnessed the atrocity and quickly banished Steve Parish to Principal Moffett's office.

I racked my brain wondering why Steve had been so cruel? Why was I the object of his hostility and pent-up aggression? I didn't know the answer until after lunch. Coach Hill summoned me to his little glass office. His lips were quivering as he seemed to hold back a giggle. "You see, Julie," he stuttered, "this young man has a crush on you-and the only way he knows to express his adoration is to tease you by obliterating your arches." "It won't happen again."

Coach shuffled the squares the next week, and Steve never looked me in the eye again. I was stuck with George McCaleb and he didn't care if I lived or died. When I looked over at Steve, something within me softened. I realize how easily we can hurt the ones we love. We may not be foot-stompers, but too often people are like porcupines. The closer they get, the more they prickle and wound each other. Many summer afternoons I'd pedal my Schwinn up the alley and look longingly at Steve's bedroom window. Unrequited love is so bittersweet.

I later learned Steve became a wealthy orthopedic surgeon-a foot doctor. Go figure!

"I am the LORD, and I command you to love others as much as you love yourself." Leviticus 19:18

"Love must be sincere. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality." Romans 12:9-13

"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." Ephesians 4:2-4

- If God commands us to love others as we love ourselves, what would loving ourselves look like? Does it mean that we are vain and selfish? Does it mean that we are aware of God's grace and giftings in our lives? If we receive His love, wouldn't it be easier to love someone else?
- Paul teaches several key principles about relating to others in Romans 12:9-13. What does devotion mean? How would you impart honor to someone else? Paul says that there are tangible ways we can love others by sharing our possessions and practicing hospitality. Ask God to lead you to someone this week who needs to receive practical help like money, housing or food.
- What are some ways you can be a peacemaker at home or at work? Do you make it your passion to heal conflict in strife in relationships?