

I Hope You Dance

By Breanne Slade

“*And when you get the choice, to sit it out or dance, I hope you dance.*” This notion, derived from the lyrics of a popular Lee Ann Womack song, is a powerful concept, revolving around the hope for another to take a chance. While this is a beautiful thing to wish upon someone else, too many of us fail to reach the challenge ourselves. Another thought that connects this beautifully, is a quote taken from the movie *Practical Magic*: “Fall in love every chance you get.” These two impressions gravitate around a simple ultimatum: Experience a risk, or risk never experiencing anything.

While all easily urged and recommended, one concept lies between accomplishing this goal and becoming a wallflower. Fear, vacillation, and vulnerability all play a role in evolving our insecurities into decisions. Once our combined demons gain control, confidence has a hard time coming back to light. So just how do we overcome these hesitations and learn to embrace the dance? Circling back to Miss Womack, “Loving might be a mistake, but it’s worth making.” Put simply, learning to seize opportunities is not something given, it is something slowly acquired. We must learn to face this apprehension and confront it for what it truly is: Only *fear*. Mistakes will be made, but some are worth enjoying.

Fear

Upon his deathbed, Greek philosopher, François Rabelais stated, “I go to seek a Great Perhaps.” This alluring representation of life after death can be manipulated into a statement relating to this world. Why have we not *all* gone to seek our Great Perhaps in this lifetime? Too many in society are able to slip into the shadows, our biggest adventures never allowed to be born.

The greatest fallacy in society today, relates to that of protecting ourselves from shame or other types of failure. While building personal barriers and walls can guard from some negativity, this also closes the door to other experiences and connections. In her novel, *The Gifts of Imperfection*, Brene Brown discusses one of these mental barriers, “Perfectionism is the belief that if we live perfect, look perfect, and act perfect, we can minimize or avoid the pain of blame, judgement, and shame. It’s a shield. It’s a twenty-ton shield that we lug around thinking it will protect us when, in fact, it’s the thing that’s really preventing us from flight.” This metaphorical “twenty-ton shield” is what many in society today use as a means of shelter. While blocking

fear, anxiety, and vulnerability, it can also filter out the adventure and mistakes critical in finding joy.

Later in the novel, Brown was additionally found stating, “To practice courage, compassion, and connection, is to look at life and the people around us, and say, “I’m all in.””

So just what exactly does practicing courage look like? I pondered this question for multiple days before finally concluding a logical answer: I had to find my own twenty-ton shield and accept letting go. In my own introverted life, I found myself withdrawing from friends and family. While activities came and went, I’d become more and more comfortable staying behind. Once a realization of this pattern came to mind, I learned to say “Yes!” more often, instead of the “Sounds fun, but maybe next time” instinct that I’d grown used to. I’ve learned the more I push my comfort zone, the bigger it becomes.

Two excerpts from John Green novels caught my attention as their contrasting viewpoints represented either living life open or in the background. First, the classic *Looking for Alaska* statement, “And if people were rain, I was a drizzle and she was a hurricane.” Following this, I correlated a passage from *Paper Towns*, “I’m in love with cities I’ve never been to and people I’ve never met.” These differing attitudes really put into perspective just how it feels to embrace life open heartedly, or, per say, live as a drizzle in a hurricane.

Relating this back to love and fear, the angst of failure becomes our shield, blocking out love and the embraceable pieces of life. “To begin by always thinking of love as an action rather than a feeling is one way in which anyone using the word in this manner automatically assumes accountability and responsibility” -Bell Hooks. Why not transform love into an action word? Think of experiences and attitudes where love has enriched a situation or enhanced an adventure. When we are able to put our whole heart into practice, falling in love becomes that much easier.

Self Love

“We accept the love we think we deserve” -The Perks of Being a Wallflower. This may possibly be the biggest undetected casuistry in society. While overly practiced and repeated, this statement has nothing to do with what is actually true about the nature of love and deserving. We must learn to love and accept ourselves before we can ever truly love with our entire hearts. “If we want to fully experience love and belonging, we must believe that we are worthy of love and belonging” -Brene Brown.

I'd like to circle this back to fear and the vulnerability in which it is born. Once again quoting from the novel, *The Gifts of Imperfection*, Brown discusses the nature of love and its relevance to fear, "As much as we need and want love, we don't spend much time talking about what it means. Think about it. You might say 'I love you' every day, but when's the last time you had a serious conversation with someone about the meaning of love? In this way, love is the mirror image of shame. We desperately don't want to experience shame, and we're not willing to talk about it. Yet the only way to resolve shame is to talk about it. Maybe we're afraid of topics like love and shame. Most of us like safety, certainty, and clarity. Shame and love are grounded in vulnerability and tenderness."

Put simply, love *is* scary. It is frightening, the action of putting your whole self into something, not knowing the outcome or the course. Along with this, self love becomes a forgotten object, lost in the fear of unworthiness. Before we can love with our full hearts, we must overcome the angst of accepting ourselves. It is as simple and frightening as that. One thing to remember: I *am* worthy. I am worthy now, I was worthy yesterday, and I will be worthy tomorrow. Just how do we turn that love from what we "think" we deserve, into what we actually deserve? It is rooted in self love. When we love ourselves, we are able to love others and experiences in a way that reflects that self acceptance. We can only fall in love as deeply as we love ourselves.

Confidence plays a large role in this concept. Self image and the way we portray ourselves is a key window into how we experience and open up to life. If we even slightly hold back from an insecurity or hesitancy with ourselves, we may lose out on our biggest life adventures. Withdrawing from lack of confidence or self assurance doesn't just affect the way we see ourselves, it mirrors the way others will see us as well. Think of withdrawing as slowly becoming an alcoholic, not only does it hurt us personally, but it can also wound those around us and destroy the relationships we once had. Remember, smoking doesn't choose its victims solely on who's holding the cigarette. Second hand smoke is just as deadly.

"While moments, events, and days only come around to happen once, love can happen everyday and choices and chances to love come as often as we allow" -Unknown. Put simply, life is what we make it. Why not fall in love with every chance that comes along? As humans, we have the right to choose our attitude and expectations for any situation. Opening up full heartedly and looking for optimism is the first step in utterly

enjoying life. “Better to be the one who smiled, than the one who didn’t smile back” -Anonymous.

In my own life, I *want* to be remembered as the one who smiled back, the one who was kind, and the one who opened to every opportunity she could. It *is* scary, but I can think of nothing scarier than missing out on a love I could have adored, simply because I was afraid of the fall. Retracing back to the words of Lee Ann Womack, “I hope you never fear those mountains in the distance. Never settle for the path of least resistance. Living might mean taking chances, but they’re worth taking.” In conclusion, I can think of nothing more beautiful than the simple urge to embrace that sense of wonder. Fall in love every chance you get, regret less, and when you get the choice to sit it out or dance, promise me that you’ll dance.