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It's not quite dancing with the stars, but it sure is fun

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Monday nights in the fall are usually dedicated to my favorite TV show "Dancing With the Stars." (James goes to another room to watch football, unless, of course, Jerry Rice, Warren Sapp or EmmittSmith is dancing.)

For the past two years I have lamented how I would love to dance like that, but never knew how. So one day last July, James called me at work and asked "how would you like to take ballroom dance classes this fall?"

I was stunned. At first I thought he was joking. Then, when I realized he wasn't, I asked where in the world would we take dance classes. He told me that Calhoun College had a class Thursday nights in the fall semester. It would be a perfect way for us to work out, lose some weight and have some fun.

Tingly at the idea

Now I don't know about how other ladies might feel, but I thought James asking me to take ballroom dance lessons was just about the sexiest thing he had ever done. It even beat out the other best sexy thing he did once - wash the dishes. I got all tingly at the very thought that this was his idea.

So, off we went to our first class. Our teacher was the beautiful and talented Lorie Hewlet, who holds a bachelor's degree from BYU in, of all things, ballroom dancing! (Who knew one could get a degree in ballroom dancing?)

James and I were nervous at first about how we would look in front of other people, especially since it was a social dancing class and we would be changing partners. But, in no time the whole class was having fun and becoming great friends. We were scheduled to learn the waltz, the swing, and the mambo by the end of the semester.

Lorie asked Ricky Calle, her pro-am (professional-amateur) partner, to come to our class to help. As the class stood looking - well, more like gaping - Lori and Ricky demonstrated the mambo.

They did things with their hips that are not humanly possible. I had never seen hips work that way - had no idea they could. We all just stood there with an intimidation that can only be described as kindergartners who were invited to participate in a varsity basketball game. Yet, Lorie said we would all be dancing like that before the end of the semester. Yeah, right.

It turns out that Lorie teaches at the Madison Ballroom Dance Studio on Madison Boulevard. In addition to teaching classes, the Ballroom has dance parties on Saturday nights. These are wonderful little soirees where people can go and dance with their partners and/or with others in a wholesome and relaxed atmosphere.

We went a few times and found out that ballroom dancing is a good way to exercise and have a "date" at the same time. The big plus for my husband - Mr. Tightwad - is that it is very economical.

Lori was not a pushover teacher, however. She believes in the students getting their money's worth. "Rest," "sit down" and "give up" are terms not used in her class. But, she is a very good teacher with lots of patience. She had to have patience to have us as students. We are not easily instructed.

Cutting a rug

We did complete the semester and learned all the dances. Mind you, we are not pros by any means, but my non-rhythmical husband can now cut a rug with just about any amateur at any dance event. I am very proud of him.

The surprise bonus in the end for him was that Lori taught him that dancing is the one place where the man gets to tell the woman what to do. He must lead. I must follow. What a motivational tool for guys!

As for the weight, James and I have lost a combined 25 pounds. Look out Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers - here come the Phillipses!

Nah, I don't think Fred and Ginger have anything to worry about.

Paula Phillips is one of The Times' community columnists for 2009.

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