

Are you ever transported to some time in the past when you hear a song playing? I am. At times even just the first few notes of a song can send me deep into a memory.

If you ever see me sitting in my car in my driveway, this is usually what's happening.

*"There's no time to kill between the cradle and the grave
Father time still takes a toll on every minute that you save
Legal tenders never gonna change the number of your days
The highest cost of livin' is dying, that's one everybody pays
So have it spent, before you get the bill, there's no time to kill" (1)*

It was sometime between 1992 and 1995. I had graduated from college with my highly-sought-after BA in General Music, and had moved back in with my parents in my little-ish hometown. I was working several part-time jobs and enjoying a late-bloomer rebellious period, which consisted of going out on Friday or Saturday nights (or sometimes both) with a three friends, getting drunk at a local gay bar (because there was no pressure there to pick up, or be picked up by, a guy) and dancing like no one was watching. We weren't 'dogs', as the kids used to say, but neither were we part of the popular crowd with the latest designer jeans and whatever.

On this particular weekend, I was out with just one other girl from our group. Let's call her Marcia. Marcia was one of those impossibly beautiful girls who didn't have to work to be skinny or tan, unlike me who has always been one of the chubby, "you have such a pretty face" girls. But Marcia was also from a lower-middle class family that argued through the week, then sat in the church pews on Sunday morning like a perfect Presbyterian family. We'd grown up together, going to the same church, and the same schools on the wrong side of the tracks. Although we looked like Laurel & Hardy I'm sure, we were great friends.

So Marcia and I decided to hit a country bar on our own. She had plans to meet someone there, as I recall. I was along as the third wheel to provide her transportation, which isn't as bad as it might sound. If nothing else, I usually got a few free drinks from whoever she was meeting, presumably because they felt sorry for me. But free alcohol? I'll take it.

I've never been much of a country music fan. I do, though, have a highly-selective playlist titled "Country Music I Actually Like." Friday evening at a country bar watching tipsy couples two-step wouldn't have been my first choice, but again—free drinks. We settled in at our table, and Marcia's date eventually arrived. He was cowboy from his black cowboy hat to his shirt with mother-of-pearl snaps, to his Wranglers, finishing at his polished boots. They chatted quietly, occasionally got up to dance. He tried to make small talk with me, feigning interest.

I'm pretty sure it was at Marcia's urging that he asked me at one point to try a little two-stepping with him. Now, when I said earlier that my little friend circle danced like no one was watching, I meant solo, completely improvised movements that would in all likelihood alarm anyone who watched. This was not coordinated movement between two (or more) people. Two-stepping was a whole different ballgame, and not one that I was particularly interested in nor designed for. But I'd had a few tequila shots with Bud light chaser (my combination of choice in those days), and this guy was cute. It was one of those moments that rarely, if ever, happen for the token fat girl in the group. So why did I care if he was just being nice to me, to humor my friend, probably hoping to increase his chances of getting into her pants that evening? Fuck it, why not.

*"No time to kill, even I've said it, and probably always will
But I can look ahead and see that time ain't standin' still*

*No time to kill, but time to change the kind of hurry I've been in
And quit this work and worry looking back at where I've been
If you don't look ahead, nobody will, there's no time to kill"*

I'd never heard Clint Black before that night, before that two-step with the unknown cowboy. We stood facing each other on the dance floor, assuming the dancers' pose—my left hand on his shoulder, right arm extended with my hand in his, his other hand at my waist. He talked me through the steps the first time we made our orbit around the floor with the other dancing couples.

"Don't look at your feet. Let me lead," he'd remind me. All of this was foreign to me. I was honestly shocked that I didn't trip both of us and cause a two-step massacre on the dance floor. But... once around, twice around, third time around and a gear notched into place and I felt myself letting him lead, and suddenly it felt like magic. I felt fluid and graceful as we moved around the floor. The bar turned into the interior of an old barn hung with strings of lights. Instead of jeans and a t-shirt and sneakers I had on a dress that swayed and flowed as we made our way around the floor. I felt myself smiling, maybe even laughing a little.

*"If we had an hour glass to watch each one go by
Or a bell to mark each one to pass, we'd see just how they fly
Would we escalate the value to be worth its weight in gold
Or would we never know the fortunes that we had 'til we grow old
And do we just keep killin' time until there's no time to kill"*

For those four minutes, I had the attention of a handsome stranger who wasn't put off by putting his hands on me, even just for a dance. I was graceful. I was light. I was beautiful. No Time to Kill was the first song on my "Country Music I Actually Like" playlist, when playlists became a thing. I have no idea what ever became of the cowboy, and I'm sure my friend doesn't remember that night.

But I do.

(1) Black, Clint. "No Time to Kill." *No Time to Kill*, 1993