

The first time I ever danced with a girl was during that awkward age when girls tower over boys. From movies, I knew that someone's hands went around someone's neck and someone's around the other's waist. I neglected to pay attention to who did what. Me and my date were at some house party and we moved to dance. Over her objections, I explained to her how I thought it was done. So we danced, most likely to Journey's "Open Arms", with my arms draped on her neck. I was then a master of absolute certainty combined with relative ignorance, usually shown by forming a complicated theory (the shorter person puts their arms around the taller one's neck) when memorizing a simple fact would have done better: males put their arms around waists.

I would not have gone lower or higher. My fundamentalist Baptist upbringing led me to believe that good guys didn't ask and good girls didn't do. I was so scared to pinch my sixth grade girlfriend's butt during some childish game that I faked the "score" marks on my hand. Within a few years, my bravery increased to the point where I would touch other areas. Naturally, at each step I would stop and ask, "does this bother you, does this bother you?" I'm glad we are still friends, but I am sometimes embarrassed that my high school girlfriend knows me as the guy who did that stuff.

I did worse. One starry night, my trailer park neighbor and I jumped the fence at Kennesaw Mountain and climbed to the overlook. While I marveled at the Atlanta skyline, she tugged me to go higher on the mountain. To my protests that we couldn't see anything there, she pulled me higher on the mountain and made out with me and removed her shirt. As you can guess, this was my first time seeing breasts. My response to this occasion: I froze. After an awkward walk down the mountain and quiet car ride home, we parted. I felt awful, and to express my remorse, the next day I bought her a white rose and gave it to her saying, "I still think you're pure." Not surprisingly, we aren't Facebook friends.

There are times I wonder what I would say to younger me and if he would like us. I don't know all that I would say, but I would say this: "Women are people; respect them but don't worship them. Turns out, they have sex drives. Talk with her, watch her cues. Stop when she says stop, but for god's sake stop asking permission for every damn thing. Treat women as people, and you'll do fine. Oh, and don't ever buy a woman a white rose."

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