

Rose of Cimarron / Joan Cronk

The memory surfaces with the first few beats of the music. “The Rose of Cimarron” by the Eagles blasts out of the portable radio cassette player I haul around the yard with me as I garden. I had popped in the old cassette tape after finding it in a pile in my garage. Then I grabbed my favorite weeding tool, a putty knife kept in the side pocket of the yard tool bag, when the music began to play. I turn quickly, as if I had just run into an old friend, someone I had not seen in a long time. Sitting on the back steps, my gardening chores temporarily forgotten, I take a trip back to a place I would like to be again.

I am back in Milton in my old house, in the entryway in 1976, and I am dancing. I am dancing with my old boyfriend and my two children. Jeff is eight, and Jenny is four. They are jumping up and down with delight at seeing mom dance, their hands covering open mouths as they steal looks at each other, punching arms and laughing. Their heads are tossed back and they are obviously enchanted with this new sight. Mom doesn’t usually dance. She’s busy with other more important issues—working, paying bills, cleaning gutters, and keeping life running for the three of us. It’s a zippy dance, and he swings me wide, catching my hand just before I whirl out of sight, both of us laughing, our eyes full of love and excitement.

Today I rewind the tape and play the song over and over, willing myself back to that moment when life was sweet and young, hopeful and uncomplicated. He came into my life after my painful divorce, and his mere presence was a constant reminder that I was lovely and sweet, capable and smart. He was good at catching me before I fell. He could do it physically, like when we danced, and he could do it mentally as well. He worked with me like he was assembling a jigsaw puzzle, patiently picking

up the pieces, helping me to find a place for them. When I was confused and frustrated, his voice was the one of reason and common sense, quietly reminding me that we could find a comfortable spot for the parts of my life that were no longer working. Somewhere they would fit, and when the puzzle was completed, we would have the whole picture. A place where life would look differently than it did the day it fell apart, and I lacked any good options.

As the music blared today, I remembered all that. I could see that entryway, the tile floor of the room that used to be my kitchen. Now it is a useless room, housing only a closet, a window, and a front door. But that day it was a dance floor. That day my children loved seeing me in a new light. Usually I was all business, tending to the events of the day, school lunches, and homework, setting everything neatly by the back door for us to pick up to take with us for the day. They had their jobs, and I had mine. But that day we had only the music and the dancing, and it was a lovely, lovely day.

The thing about those memories is that I never stopped to appreciate them at the time. I didn't hold them in my hand, take a deep breath, and soak them in so that I could value every second. I didn't look heavenward and say a thankful prayer for all they contained of a moment in time for me to remember for the rest of my life. I just jumped into the moment, like the day we danced. I remember my boyfriend whispering directions to me as he twisted and turned, the way he smelled, and the way he looked at me with love. And I felt strong, and stable for my children, as well as lovely and alluring for him, the look in his eyes telling me how much he cared.

I didn't appreciate the moment then, but I appreciate it now. He would be 74 years old and my guess is he doesn't dance much any more. He has some physical limitations, and I'm reasonably sure he doesn't swing anyone wide today, catching them before they whirl out of sight. But I'll bet his wife feels the same comfort and sureness in his presence that I always did. He had a way about him, and today as the Eagles

blared out of my tape player, I sat on my back steps, and remembered the dancing, my kids watching and squealing with delight. It is just a memory, that's all, and I'm glad I have it.