

Ever since we were kids, Jerome called me Mousie, probably because I was always so nervous and active. But he thought it was funny to get everybody, even our parents to think of that as my given name. Even at the age of 17 everybody still called me, Mousie, except Mark. He respectfully called me Ethel. I met Mark in corrective PE during a Coed dance unit. He was there because of his asthma. I had it because of my heart murmur. We had the best time learning the Fox Trot, the Waltz, and my favorite, the Tango. We were good! We danced every chance we got, so it was only natural that when someone held a fundraiser for the troops by sponsoring a dance-a-thon at the Santa Paula Masonic Temple, Lodge 291, we signed up together. It was February 1942 and patriotic war efforts to support the troops were in full blast. Besides, they were offering a \$1000 cash prize to the marathon couple that won. Mark and I were beyond excited. But my parents had other plans.

My older brother, Jerome, wanted to go to Loyola Law School in Los Angeles and it was a lot of money. My parents thought it would be so much better if Jerome and I were dance partners, won the contest, and kept the whole \$1000 in the family. Mousie or not, I was having none of that. Mark was my partner and best friend and Jerome was a relentlessly bully who made it his life's mission to torment me. It was not a difficult decision to make! So Mark and I signed up for the 87 consecutive hour dance-a-thon. Jerome ended up entering with Patty Akins, a 28 year old spinster, 10 years his senior, who'd had her eye on him for over a year.

The marathon was to begin on Wednesday morning at 8:00 AM and they'd see who could last until 11:00 PM Saturday night. All of Santa Paula were excited. People even planned to skip listening to the popular Friday night fights on their home radios just to watch us dance.

When we got to the Masonic Temple at 6:45 in the morning, we elbowed our way through the line of church agitators protesting the unseemliness of what would be more like full-body hugging than dancing, signed up and got our couple numbers, 02, which we pinned on our backs.

At 8 AM sharp, a phonograph began the contest with a waltz. We struck our best dance postures and were off. For the first 2 hours we danced with flair and enthusiasm, as if we were being judged on our style, but as the hours wore on we gave into the barest minimum effort of merely keeping in motion, first, picking up one foot, then the other, 45 minutes around the clock with a 15 minute break each hour. They led us to separate gender, cot-filled, rest areas. Every time I would plop down and immediately pass out, I was startled awake by an airhorn 15 minutes later. Then I'd shuffle back to dance floor. When the girl next to me didn't respond to the airhorn, they shoved smelling salts under her nose and slapped her face. Mark told me the men were dumped into a tub of ice. Night time brought large audiences and a live band played replaced the phonograph.