

By Brittney Achter

Returning home one Tuesday night, I was surprised to find everyone but my mom asleep. During the few weeks since I completed my first year of college, I felt almost guilty turning out my light and going to bed when I knew my sister Hailey was down the hall staying up until all hours of the night rushing to complete math assignments, term projects, and study for end-of-school tests. But tonight Hailey's light wasn't on.

I didn't think I'd gotten home late and asked my mom why everyone else was in bed. She said that the usually cheerful and conversational Hailey had returned

DANCE DISAPPOINTMENTS

home from her ninth grade dance an hour before, not said much more than "Goodnight," and gone to bed.

I decided to see how she was doing. I entered her bedroom, sat down on the floor, and asked, "So . . . how was it?"

A simple, "Fine," was all I got.

Not knowing if I should leave the room and go to bed myself or keep pressing, I filled up time by saying, "So . . ."

"And no, I didn't dance with anyone," she finished, thinking she would spare me the effort of asking the question she was sure would be next.

"Oh, Hailey, that's OK," I said. But I knew that inside her 15-year-old mind it wasn't.

I had been to those dances where my girl friends around me seemed to disappear like hot doughnuts anytime a slow



HOW COULD I LET
MY SISTER KNOW
EVERYTHING
WOULD BE OK?

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song began. As I would look around the room, I would notice two kinds of boys: those sitting on the side of the gym in chairs, oblivious to the fact that they were at a dance where the proper thing to do when a slow song began was to go ask a girl to dance, and those who had already found themselves a partner.

It was in these moments when I would wonder, “What’s wrong with me?” as my perception of my own self-worth seemed to tumble in around me. At those times I had longed to hear what I hadn’t learned yet but would as I progressed through my teenage years: that just because you sat out every song at a school dance doesn’t mean it will go on some kind of permanent record. And even if it did, no one would really care; they’d be much more worried about their own record, anyway.

I told her that believe it or not, several girls went home that night feeling the exact same way she did. And that there would likely be other dances when she’d feel like she’d danced the night away that would more than make up for the bad ones. And that most importantly, her worth as a beautiful 15-year-old young woman had not diminished in my eyes, or most especially in the eyes of her Heavenly Father.

So that she’d know I wasn’t just saying those things to be nice but that I was truly sincere, I reached back into my teenage past and dusted off experiences that I had hoped I would forget and had never planned on sharing with anyone.

Like the first dance of my eighth grade year. I was serving as the eighth-grade secretary. I was excited for the opportunity I had to have a voice in what went on at the school and for the chance I would have to reach out to other students around me. I was also sure that my new title would brighten my prospects at the school dances I so anxiously

awaited. In my mind I pictured the line of boys that would spend the entire dance waiting for the opportunity to dance with me. Looking back, I’m grateful for the experience of returning home that day after dancing with no one. It kept me humble, and gave Hailey and me a good laugh.

Or the time I attended an Especially for Youth conference. I had heard rumors of girls dancing every dance with boys from all over the country. Knowing there would be a dance at the beginning, middle, and end of the week, I was ready to have the time of my life! The fact that there were two or three girls for every boy at my session that year left my hopes shattered when I went home having only been asked to dance once the entire week.

By the time I’d uncovered all of my deep, dark dancing disappointments, Hailey and I were laughing hysterically, and I was grateful I could dispel some of her fears.

As I returned to my bedroom, I felt like I had gained the smallest understanding of our Savior’s empathy for us in our trials. Because I had experienced similar feelings and experiences as Hailey, I was better able to comfort her in her frustrations. I felt an overwhelming gratitude for my Savior, who took upon Himself our “infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he [might] know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:12).

Although I was grateful I could help that night, I won’t always be able to understand all of Hailey’s pain, fear, and disappointment, but her Savior will, as He understands all of our pains. And if we ask our Heavenly Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, I know that He knows how to make them light. **NE**

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