

DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION

Marke Bieschke

Dear Teen Me,

You've just turned sixteen, and pretty soon, on a random Saturday night, you're going to roll your mom's car out of the garage, start it up down the street, and sneak off to a tiny downtown Detroit nightclub. That night is going to change your life. And no, it's not because on your way back you make an illegal left-hand turn into the police chief's personal car and get totally busted for taking the car without permission—although that certainly throws a monkey wrench into your summer plans.

But that night, with two misfit friends at your side, you discover an underground world where you're accepted for the fantastic little freak that you are—a world that expresses itself through music, fashion, and dance like you've never heard or seen before. It's full of outrageous and outspoken weirdos who love art and books as much as you do, and who want to hear what you actually think about things. This world is completely opposed to your everyday high school reality, where people beat you up because you dye your hair and listen to bands from England.

You'll end up sneaking out again and again, of course. You'll spend your days fantasizing about the next club night, figuring out what you're going to wear, what you're going to say, and how you're going to dance—not to mention how you're going to get there. You've finally found a place where you belong! (And where you're not the only one who's gay.) You treasure every second in this world, and eventually it won't just be your passion; it will be your career.

Looking back, however, you realize something else: Taking the car and getting caught were part of a pattern of behavior that was more or less directly tied to your father's alcoholism. You had no clue what was going on at the time—your mother's largely successful attempts to hide his disease will implode a year later, when your dad shocks you and your sister by bravely and successfully checking into rehab. He didn't beat you or anything, and you were always provided for. But he did shut you out in weird ways—ways that made you feel you had to struggle to be heard, and that amplified both your loneliness and your independence.

You knew *something* was going on, but what? By taking the car you were crying out for attention in a perfectly teenage way, but you were also escaping an incomprehensible situation, trying to break the silence about something you felt sure was there, but which was never discussed. You were looking for a family that could openly express itself.

In a way, the whole experience was a good thing. It all turned out okay—great, even. Your father has been alcohol-free for almost twenty-five years now, and the two of you have grown close. When you were struggling with your own chemical dependency issues, his recovery served as a model for your own. When some of the dear friends you met at the club that fateful night started getting sick with AIDS, you recognized the harmful effects of silence and started speaking out. You've learned to trust your instincts, and you know that friendship and success are there for you, as long as you have the courage to reach out for them.




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