

PERSPECTIVE
THE BEST ‘DANCE LESSON’ EVER
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I hadn't talked to Alice in about eight years. That was the way I wanted it after an unnerving experience living together as roommates. Conflicts and arguments dominated our relationship. The memories of her hot temper pierced my delicate, protected feelings. But it was I who was the truly unforgivable; so much of my life being weak from debilitating migraines, my self-hate for not being able to overcome them. Alice had reminded me too much of that part of my life. Truthfully, she reminded me of my mother when I was growing up—critical and angry.

Two words and I took in a slow, deep breath of sweet magic. Pure, direct. No holds barred. Straight from Disney. "I'm sorry."

It was the way she said it—that puppy-eyed gaze. Stunningly sincere. Words from her heart, coursing through my pores with new life, caressing away the debris of anger and judgment that had comfortably lodged in the buried compartments of my being.

My universe had expanded.

It was about four years ago when I was chanting at a meeting in West Hollywood. After an hour and a half of connecting with my Buddhahood and focusing on goals and dreams, my empty stomach along with the aroma of coffee and freshly baked muffins seduced me to the kitchen, devotedly transfixed in front of the mini smorgasbord. In walked Alice. The inner debate between delicious and too much sugar and flour was resolved.

"Just coffee," I told myself. I flashed Alice a weak smile and cordial nod, pretending I had important business elsewhere.

But Alice wouldn't have it. Alice never allowed herself to be made invisible.

"I'm sorry. Really. For what happened."

The part of her I had always loved confronted me. The past angst and feelings of betrayal melted. I forgave Alice. I was jelly.

Thank you, Alice. She had gotten beyond our rocky-road friendship. Her genuineness at that moment was stronger than my memory of any past conflicts we had experienced.

Each time I gave her a ride to or from a meeting became an opportunity to discuss our thoughts and feelings. One time after a meeting, we went to get groceries. Inside my car in the grocery store's parking lot, I poured out my frustration over some issue I no longer remember. "I really understand. I don't blame you. I'd feel the same way, too," she admitted.

My burden was suddenly lifted. I was full. I was connected. I was happy. I didn't feel so alone any more. She triggered the switch from doubt to self-appreciation. In resolving our relationship, I felt I was resolving the distant relationship between myself and my mother.

Alice had a gift for helping others feel better about themselves. That's why she was so loved. Hundreds showed up at her memorial service to honor how wonderful she was as a friend and as a human being.

It was Alice who stayed with me the time I had to go to the emergency room, and Alice who stayed overnight at my place and prayed for my recovery after I had been released from the hospital, drugged to unconsciousness.

But Alice was so much more than a devoted friend and warm, encouraging mother. She could be a pouting, irascible child, a spitfire crusader, an angry princess, and most of all,

a sexy Latin dancer—because that’s when she radiated her utmost passion and joy.

The art of calmly expressing her emotions was one of her biggest challenges, and though she may have severed relationships with her fiery temper, it also was her charm. She was always completely true to how she was feeling.

When Alice was lying on the hospital bed, weak from the radiation the doctor had prescribed for her suddenly found throat cancer, she asked me to bring her Gohonzon to the hospital—confirmation of our deep bond and how the challenge of our relationship had enriched my life.

Thank you, Alice. Dear sweet Alice. “Sexy Salsa Siren.”

Whenever I feel that demon of self-doubt, I think of you, Alice, seductively synchronizing your hips and feet to an exhilarating Latin beat, daring the world with your goddess-like bravado. Because now I also want to dare life and bring joy by creating my own brave new inner world.

“Will you shut up and start dancing!”

“Huh, what, oh...yah, Alice. Just make some room for me. I’m coming on stage with you. I don’t want to miss all the fun.”

Alice’s life blatantly taught me that I can forgive and accept myself for all my imperfections. They are the things that make me unique, that makes me human.