

Hard Times Require Furious Dancing by Alice Walker

I am the youngest of eight siblings. Five of us have died. I share losses, health concerns, and other challenges common to the human condition, especially in these times of war, poverty, environmental devastation, and greed that are quite beyond the most creative imagination. Sometimes it all feels a bit too much to bear. Once a person of periodic deep depressions, a sign of mental suffering in my family that affected each sibling differently, I have matured into someone I never dreamed I would become: an unbridled optimist who sees the glass as always full of something. It may be half full of water, precious in itself, but in the other half there's a rainbow that could exist only in the vacant space.

I have learned to dance.

It isn't that I didn't know how to dance before; everyone in my community knew how to dance, even those with several left feet. I just didn't know how basic it is for maintaining balance. That Africans are always dancing (in their ceremonies and rituals) shows an awareness of this. It struck me one day, while dancing, that the marvelous moves African Americans are famous for on the dance floor came about because the dancers, especially in the old days, were contorting away various knots of stress. Some of the lower-back movements handed down to us that have seemed merely sensual were no doubt created after a day's work bending over a plow or hoe on a slave driver's plantation.

Wishing to honor the role of dance in the healing of families, communities, and nations, I hired a local hall and a local band and invited friends and family from near and far to come together, on Thanksgiving, to dance our sorrows away, or at least to integrate them more smoothly into our daily existence. The next generation of my family, mourning the recent death of a mother, my sister-in-law, created a spirited line dance that assured me that, though we have all encountered our share of grief and troubles, we can still hold the line of beauty, form, and beat — no small accomplishment in a world as challenging as this one.

Hard times require furious dancing. Each of us is the proof.