

# Prom: A Peek at the Most Iconic High School Dance in America

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Rented suits. Sparkling dresses. Fancy dinners. Shining limos. Pictures. Dancing. Corsages.

May in the U.S. is a big month for high school juniors and seniors. It is the last month of the school year host to the biggest dance of the year, prom. It's the season for high school students to spend weeks worrying and working up the courage to finally ask the person they like to be their date. And hope desperately that their potential date accepts.

In recent years, American high schools have seen the rise of the “prom-posal,” or “prom proposal,” a grand gesture that accompanies a student's question, “will you go to prom with me?” 100 candles on a driveway that spell “P-R-O-M.” Big signs held high in the middle of a school hallway. Musical numbers followed by a (potentially) surprise question.

The extravagance of prom and promposals is sometimes criticized as being too like weddings. Boys wear suits. Girls buy a special dress and spend all day getting hair and make-up done. Couples and friends get pictures taken, sometimes professionally. An expensive ticket, fancy food, dancing, and a late night alone with your significant other all lend themselves to a rather extravagant, wedding-like feel to what is ultimately just a school dance.

But it is such an iconic aspect of American high school culture.

And though highly romanticized, prom is not only for the couples. Many—if not most—students attend the dance in large groups of friends. Some will snag a single friend for a platonic date.

My senior year of high school, I teamed up with my only good friend who had a car. We got our hair done by my hairdresser and went back to my house to get dressed. Her dad gave her a corsage and my dad surprised me with one as well. We didn't leave early to take pictures because there would be a professional photographer at the dance, but that didn't keep our parents from snapping a few before we drove off.



Our group of roughly 20 juniors and seniors met at an Italian restaurant close to the studio where the dance would be held. We were seated in the back at a long table. The meal was spent bemoaning upcoming tests, cooing over other girls' dresses, and chatting about summer plans as adrenaline crept up our spines and settled in our chests.

The dance itself took place at a small dance studio in the country. As everyone was leaving dinner to head to the party, my dear absentminded friend realized she had never bought gas for the night. So the two of us (plus the dance photographer)—in dazzling dresses, done-up hair, and the most make-up I had worn outside theatre—rolled up to a gas station to fill up. It was embarrassing, hilarious, and exactly something the two of us would do. And since the photographer had tagged along, we got a great picture out of it.

My school was small; only 35 students attended the dance, and only five were boys. We spent the first hour of the night being taught ballroom line dances, waltzing, cha-cha-ing, and salsa-ing sideways and in circles across each other's toes. It was great fun.

The rest of the night was freeform, popular pop and dance songs rocking a beat while people freestyled with abandon or escaped the dance floor to munch on sweets or take ridiculous prop-aided pictures with friends.

After the dance wrapped up near midnight, my friend decided to trust the directions of her directionally challenged GPS rather than my years of geographical familiarity and it took an hour to cross the roughly 12 miles between the well-decorated dance studio and home.

Six years have passed and not much has changed. Except my little brother, 17, is now somehow old enough to have gone to prom last Friday. He spoke loudly against attending the dance until his not-quite-girlfriend (it's complicated) surprised him by asking him to his own prom. He got a suit and dress shoes—from where I couldn't fathom—and gave her a corsage. They took pictures around town before joining friends for dinner and the dance. They danced together. They probably held hands. They did not kiss. Or if they did, he hasn't told me. But I don't think I could handle that.

Between the two of us, we checked most of the obligatory prom boxes, from fancy photo albums uploaded to Facebook, to nice attire we may never wear again. Oh, and corsages. You can't forget those corsages.