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Six degrees of Kevin Bacon

by Dale Bridges

I am not Kevin Bacon. I want to make that perfectly clear. I do not look like Kevin Bacon. I do not sound like Kevin Bacon. I have absolutely no Kevin Bacon-like qualities. I suppose, in the grand scheme of things, I have more in common with Kevin Bacon than I do with, say, Oprah, but that is more a commentary on my un-Oprah-ness than it is on my Kevin Bacon-ness. In case you missed it, the bottom line here is that I am not Kevin Bacon.

HOWEVER, people are constantly comparing me to Kevin Bacon (or, to be more accurate, people are constantly comparing me to Ren McCormack, the precocious teenage dance-ophile in the movie *Footloose*, who is played by Kevin Bacon). This is because I grew up in a small town in rural America, and my father was a fundamentalist Christian preacher. As a teenager, I was not allowed to watch movies, listen to secular music, consume alcoholic beverages stronger than NyQuil or dance.

No, we were not Mormons; we were just really obnoxious Protestants.

Now, I know my childhood seems freaky and quasi-cultish to mainstream, liberal Americans, but that's mostly a matter of perspective. When I was a kid, I thought all hippies were freaky and quasi-cultish. One man's patchouli is another man's oh-my-god-that's-a-horrible-smell. I wouldn't say that I enjoyed my childhood, but it's not as though I've been irreparably damaged by it, either. My parents didn't lock me in a closet and beat me with the King James Bible or anything like that. They just wouldn't let me listen to Wham! (and, in retrospect, I should probably thank them for that).

When I went to college and tried to explain my upbringing to my peers, they inevitably drew comparisons between my life and the plot of *Footloose*. Of course, since I was not allowed to watch movies, I'd never actually seen *Footloose*. Therefore, I decided to watch it. And watch it. And watch it. According to my calculations, I have now seen *Footloose* at least 200 times. Some people say they don't understand my obsession with this movie, but it's really not that difficult to comprehend. Imagine this: Every time you meet someone from your own generation, they tell you that your life story reminds them of the television show *Charles in Charge*. Every goddamn time! Eventually, Scott Baio is probably going to become an extremely fascinating person to you.

For those who haven't seen *Footloose*, here is the entire plot of the movie: Kevin Bacon moves to a small town (Bomont) from a big city (Chicago). He is immediately considered a rebel and an outcast. We know this because he wears a leather jacket. He discovers that dancing has been outlawed by uptight, hyper-conservative Christians and proceeds to organize a prom. He falls for the preacher's daughter/town slut/suicidal nutcase, and, consequently, pisses off her boyfriend. They settle the dispute by playing chicken with tractors. Someone tries to sell Kevin Bacon drugs. He responds by dancing angrily in an empty flour mill. Blah blah blah. The Christians burn library books. Blah blah. Everyone rocks out to Kenny Loggins. The end.

Of course, this is a fairly ludicrous narrative, but no more so than other melodramatic, teen-focused movies of the 1980s. The only difference is that *Footloose* has somehow come to represent the mainstream view of small town conservatives. This is a problem because it alienates a large segment of the population. Here is what I mean by that: In the last presidential election, democrats across the country were shocked that a majority of the population voted for George W. Bush a second time despite the fact that he is an incompetent leader who has the mental capacity of a brain-damaged chimpanzee. Most liberals seem to believe that Bush won the election because red-state voters are all racist, homophobic rednecks who spend their days watching Jerry Springer reruns and plotting to overthrow the country. This is simply not true. People who live in small towns are really no different from people who live in big cities. Some are smart, some are as dumb as bricks, some are kind, some are assholes. However, if you treat them all like dumb assholes, then you shouldn't be surprised when they don't want to vote for your presidential candidate.

The fact that everyone I meet basically thinks that *Footloose* is a plausible musical documentary about small town life is a depressing commentary on our culture. It would be the equivalent to watching an episode of *Mork & Mindy* and then expecting all Boulderites to be spastic, hairy aliens that make bad puns. For a long time, conservatives and liberals have been reducing each other to useful stereotypes in order to gain the upper hand in our two-sided, black-our-white political system. However, if there is going to be any hope for the future at all, everyone needs to recognize this one, irrefutable fact: I am not Kevin Bacon!

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