

DANCE AS HEALING

By Kathleen Morrow

In May, 2008, after a seven month battle with cancer, my husband passed away. We had been married and had built a deep friendship for twenty seven years. How easy it is to take for granted all the little ways humans support each other in long relationships.

Suddenly, I, who had always had plenty of confidence, was scared almost witless.

The first fear that was obvious was that of basic survival.

Could I live on my own? Financially? Physically?

Could I do everything that needed to be done?

Sleep was difficult for quite a few months after he left . . . panic attacks in the middle of the night. Over time I noticed that they were always at the same time . . . right around 3am.

After doing some research through books and friends in the health field, I discovered that 3am is the time for the Chinese meridian, Triple Warmer, which is primarily adrenals . . . the Fight or Flight Nervous System!

A nutritionist suggested taking protein like yogurt at regular 2-hour intervals, and slowly the panic attacks subsided, though sleep was still difficult.

Then, I became aware of another deep fear . . . MEN!

After a few months I had taken off my wedding ring. When married I had always rather enjoyed it, if a man looked at me with appreciation (as long as they were not too intense about it). I felt safe . . . protected by my relationship as symbolized by the ring.

All of a sudden I felt naked . . . unsafe . . . unprotected . . . and extremely vulnerable.

I could hardly go out of my small town, because there I could scream if anything happened, and someone who knew me would come running.

After several months of shaking heart and hands, my friend, Julia, insisted I go to something called CommuniDance with her. She had mentioned it before.

She would tell me. "You'll love it! You used to be a dancer!"

Finally I went.

First, I was impressed with the location where it was held . . . a tastefully decorated dance studio called; "Two Left Feet".

One end of the dance floor was completely floor to ceiling windows looking across a park to a line of mountains, a setting sun, and beautifully changing clouds. Pigeons live up under the rafters there and danced through the air as they came and went . . . almost in time to the music.

The music is played in what is called a "wave" . . . starting slow, building to wild frenzy, and easing down to a slow ending.

The rules are simple:

1. No talking for the hour of movement
2. Stay aware; don't knock over any children or other dancers
3. Be respectful; only dance with another if there is clear acceptance

And so I began to move that first night . . . at first falling into dance moves and patterns I knew . . . then deeper into myself. The movement came as an expression of something I couldn't put words to . . . sometimes wild whirling or flying around the room . . . sometimes trying to express clouds or pigeons . . . sometimes a rolling ball of anguish or searching on the floor.

When I left I felt different inside.

My eyes felt more open. My hands and heart were steady and I wasn't afraid for awhile.



Those first few times I stuck to myself . . . avoided eye contact. And then, I started to catch the smiles and eye flashes as I passed other dancers, until a wonderful night when two or three dancers were slowly moving together . . . balancing against each other's bodies and . . . I joined them. Other men and women joined us and we became a beautiful moving mass . . . finally ending with the music, laughing, in a pile on the floor. I left exhilarated that night . . . reveling in the warmth and physical support of other humans.

After this I cautiously opened to movement with others . . . exploring the sense of support, balance, and teamwork to form shapes that a single dancer cannot make . . . exploring the sense of human to human connection that opens the heart to possibility beyond what one human is capable of. The men were extremely sensitive and respectful . . . ready to play if I was open . . . ready to move away if I wasn't there.

I always felt different on my way home . . . relaxed, clear.

I kept going to CommuniDance. It began to seep into the rest of my life. I found I was no longer scared of men, and I was sleeping through the night.

Then came the night almost a year and a half after my husband's death, when Barbara announced she was going to play "Kathleen's Music". She had made a wave out of two CD's I had given her several months before.

A close friend in Mexico had made these CD's and presented them to my husband and I just before he died to remind us of how we had always loved to dance together.

I had not been able to listen to them, so, gave them to Barbara, and now it was to be our music for the evening.

I felt myself go cold with fear, and I looked down to hide the tears.

A beautiful, slow piece started and I began to walk around the room . . . head down. The music built and built and I danced for my husband, and danced for what we had had, and I danced for me . . . and, finally, I danced for a new life of joy and acceptance!

Amy gave me a skirt with tons of ruffles and I felt like such "a girl" at 66 years of age. I was a Flamenco dancer. I was a Belly Dancer. I was a Ballerina. I was a child . . . an adult.

I could be anything I wanted!

I laughed into the eyes of others and they laughed back.

And I knew my heart was healed. I knew I would be OK.

When the music ended I was on the floor, buried in the skirt, with tears of joy falling freely.

The other dancers allowed me to share the experience in our ending circle, and, human to human.

I felt other hearts open with mine. The whole experience was one of being deeply "held".



Thank you, CommuniDancers!

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For more information about therapies and classes, go to the School's website:

www.schoolofinnerhealth.org or call 719-685-4805