

"Dance is the hidden language of the soul."

Martha Graham

THE GIRL WHO WANTED TO DANCE

When I was a little girl, our family moved from Wilmington Delaware to Everett Washington. The year was 1979. I was a shy, scrawny eight year old kid without a clue as to what my future would hold. Despite the inadequacy of my size and the sparseness of my strength, I had some grandiose plans. This is my story, the tale of a little girl with big dreams.

We trekked from the Atlantic to the Pacific in an old green army surplus van with bean bag chairs for seats in the back. My sister Tina and I slid from one side of the van to the other as we rounded corners on the road to our new life. When we slid our way into Everett, we initially took up residence in a motel. We were there _ months while the construction of our brand new house was being finished. The moment I saw our new house, I was in awe. It was beautiful, new and so clean. At just over 2,200 square feet I thought it enormous!

One of my favorite parts of our new home was the living room. It had a high arched ceiling with a great big exposed wooden beam running the length of it. There were three windows facing the front of the house so tall that it took my mother years to find coverings long enough to fit. Eventually she forked out the money to buy custom-made blinds. I never liked those blinds. I loved the large, uncovered windows that gave an open view to our cul-de-sac. Even more, I loved those windows at night when they would magically turn into magnificent mirrors as the warm interior lights reflected off the glass with the inky night sky behind.

I remember sneaking downstairs late at night after everyone else was fast asleep behind closed doors. The living room transformed into a mirrored dance studio and I metamorphosed from a skinny, waif like kid into a beautiful ballerina.

Yes, my childhood dream, like so many other little girls, was to be a world famous ballerina. I had been mesmerized by a movie I'd seen depicting the wonders and woes of a professional dancer. I don't remember the name of the film. I remember though that it ended tragically, not before succeeding in showing the noble character of the prima ballerina. She was strong yet graceful, tough as nails yet beautiful. She was my idea of everything a woman should be. Truth be told, she was everything I was not.

So in that living room turned dance studio this dreamer turned dancer swirled to the music in her head. I would leap and turn, point my toes and swish my

arms about gracefully. I was abandoned to a force greater than myself. Dance was a cause I was willing to suffer for like the lovely leading lady in the black and white film. In those stolen moments of solitude, alone in my fantasy I found a sense of freedom from the dullness of myself. In dance I experience abandon, liberation. I was something more than what the world could see. I was beautiful. I was strong. I was a dancer.

I began to check out library books from school. I learned terms like pirouette and Plié. I practiced the five positions. And I dreamed.

I don't remember if I ever asked permission to take a dance class. I think I may have mentioned it once. But I knew my family would not have the money for such luxury. I contented myself with absorbing new knowledge from my ballet books in my room during the day and delighting in my nocturnal dance recitals each night I managed to stay awake.

I never did take a dance class. My life would unfold in a very different direction. But the dance would forever remain a part of my soul, an expression of my brand of freedom, a connection to something in the air around me that I had yet to define. And while I remain untrained, something of that idealized ballerina has begun to rise to the surface. There is a strength and determination that I have been, until recently, unaware of having. I am learning that I am made of tougher stuff than a first glance would suggest. I am finding inner beauty and grace. I am polishing off the tarnished image I once held of myself and discovering something of my childhood heroine inside. In a way, I am a dancer. I dance through life in its highs and I am learning to dance in its lows.