

DANCING

My son George heard of a heartwarming incident that took place here in Drum Hill Senior Living Community recently and sent me an email about it. "Do you think that this might be a story to send to the family?" he asked. "And might it be an essay?" Shortly thereafter I wrote about the incident on my email device and sent it to almost everybody in my address book. I called the story "Dancing," and it was well received by family and friends.

Then I found on my computer an article I had written about dancing two years ago, while still in our house in Yorktown Heights, NY. I made a copy of that story, deleted some of it, added a section, wrote a new ending and soon had a new essay called "Dancing." Thank you, George, for the gentle prodding that accomplished your goals!

Early in my childhood I was given a children's book of poetry, with each poem illustrated by a photograph. One of the poems was about tap dancing and the picture showed a 1930s little girl, with a big bow in her curly hair, beautifully dressed and posed, ready to begin dancing. Oh, how I wanted to join her! I looked at that picture so often during my girlhood that the image was burned into my mind where I can enjoy it any time I want, though the book is long gone.

But all my desire to dance was just wishful thinking, because my family belonged to a church that considered dancing to be sinful. In Annville, PA at that time there were no dances until seventh grade and, since none of my friends were taking dancing lessons, I didn't feel deprived during my elementary school days. Junior high school was different. The first dance was around Halloween. In those days the teachers told you what to do, and the students obeyed. I was assigned to the refreshment committee; hence I told my parents that I had to go to that dance. "But don't worry," I assured them. "I will not dance. I'll only serve refreshments." And that is what I did – until the dance was nearly over. Then an eighth grade boy asked me if I wanted to dance, and I said yes. I never told my parents about it, but I felt guilty for a long time. And I never went to another dance until I was in college.

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I don't know why some people think dancing is an ungodly activity. There are those who forbid only what they call social dancing, that is, dancing with a partner of the opposite sex. The motive, of course, is to prevent lust from developing. But others forbid any type of dance, even in children's games. The last two Psalms begin and end with "Praise the Lord." Both give suggestions as to how to do that. Listen:

Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the people of Zion be glad in their King. Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp. For the Lord takes delight in his people (Psalm 149:2-4).

Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals (Psalm 150:3-5).

There certainly is a connection between music and dance, and both can be activities that bring delight to God. Two instances in the Bible come immediately to mind. The first is recorded in Exodus 15:20,21. It took place just after the Israelites had safely passed through the Red Sea and their enemies had been destroyed. The Bible says: *Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them: "Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea."* I can imagine God taking delight in that performance!

The second, recorded in 2 Samuel 6, occurred when King David had the Ark of the Covenant brought to Jerusalem. He was so happy! The Bible says: *David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the Lord with all his might, while he and all the house Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouts and the sound of trumpets.* David's wife Michal saw him leaping and dancing before the Lord and she hated the sight. When they were face to face, she severely criticized David for his undignified behavior. Interestingly, God made it clear that it was Michal's behavior he disapproved, not David's.

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In college I discovered the joys of square dancing. I liked the rhythm, the patterns, the energy of this kind of dance, which was more of a sport or a game, I rationalized, than a dance. Something wonderful happened at this point: I had a true conversion experience and soon found out that church rules and God's rules are not necessarily the same. God was not the one forbidding dancing! Now that I was free to dance without guilt, the opportunity never really came up and I forgot about it in the rush of new activities.

In 1980 my friend Diane asked me if I would like to sign up with her for some aerobic dance classes. "It's good exercise," she said. I did aerobic dancing for several years and enjoyed it. One dance was extra special for me: on the recorded music people were tap dancing and our own steps were mimicking the sounds we heard. All of a sudden the picture of the little girl from my childhood book flashed into my mind and I thought: "Oh, my goodness! I'm tap dancing!" I felt God's smile, as if God were saying, "I remember your early desire to dance. I'm the one who gave you rhythm. Have a good time." And I did.

Several times I joined folk dancing classes after that, mainly for exercise, but also for fun. Occasionally my husband and I would join in a slow dance at a wedding or even in our house if we felt like it, and that was the extent of my dancing – until April, 1993 ...

In the 1980s I taught seminars that gave an overview of the Bible. Two of my students were Yvonne and Robert Rayow, who owned and operated a dance studio and were dancers themselves. Wanting to give me a gift for my sixtieth birthday in 1993, Robert suggested that he would be happy to give me a few tap dancing lessons. I was delighted! And so, at 60, I was in a dance studio, learning tap from a master teacher! Who would have guessed? Robert found out quickly that I did have an inborn rhythm, the part that is hard to teach, so I could concentrate on learning the steps. Robert put taps on a pair of shoes that I bought. How I loved the sound that they made! We both had so much fun that the lessons went on for about a year and a half. That was so satisfying! And then it ended, but the happy memories linger on ...

In November, 2003 Glory Dharmaraj, wife of our church's pastor, came to me with a request. She was to be a speaker at the national leadership conference for the church's women and she wanted me to write a song to go with her speech. She planned to use the story of the mythical killeyloo birds to illustrate her point that mission is best accomplished if there is knowledge of what has happened in mission in the past. Killeyloo birds always went backwards to see where they had been before they flew forward. Glory gave me many words and phrases to consider for the verses of the hymn and asked that my tune be upbeat. She wanted the song to be modern, meaningful and catchy, all for the glory of God. I had only a week and a half to produce the song, but it was completed in time for the music committee to learn it before the conference.

After returning from St. Louis, Glory reported that the new song was received enthusiastically by the conference attendees. "In the back of the auditorium, women were tap dancing to the refrain!" Glory exclaimed. She predicted that this song will travel all over the United States. She also suggested that I write more music that would invite dancing.

I felt like I had come full circle, from a little girl who could only dream of dancing, to actually dancing, to writing music so others can dance! And the dance goes on ... even here at Drum Hill!

The incident I have in mind took place on Saturday October 1, 2005. Drum Hill had an Octoberfest that afternoon from 1:00 to 4:00. Hired as entertainers was a group called Alpine Squeeze, consisting of a man who played the accordion (so well!) and another man who played both the tuba and the trumpet. I arrived shortly after 1:00, not knowing how long I would stay. Turned out I stayed the entire time, letting the beautiful music nourish my soul while enjoying the company of my Drum Hill friends.

Near the end, Mary Suran, one of our residents, came to where I had parked my power chair and said, "I want to dance with you." Mary is 95 years old and regularly attends our Friday evening worship service. She is known for her friendly, contagious smile.

I had no idea what Mary meant. Then she took both of my hands in hers and waved my arms while she stepped in time to the music next to my chair. The funny thing is, I really did feel like I was dancing! I loved it! A man came over and asked Mary if she would dance with him. She replied, "No, I'm dancing with Verna." And she did – all the way to the end of the song.

Last week I received a card from my friend Eileen concerning dance. On the front was a bird in a dance pose and wearing a tutu and a hair bow. The printed text says "Wait patiently on the Lord ... But, when He strikes up the band (and He will) ... dance!" Underneath "(and He will)" Eileen wrote "one day." I liked that! One day all our limitations will be gone. The Psalmist speaks of eternal pleasures at God's right hand. I have no problem thinking of dancing as one of them. When that time comes, I'll be ready! Let's dance!

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