

The Wounded Dancer

“MISS JEANNINE” LACQUEMENT FINDS RESPITE FROM THE PAIN OF A DEBILITATING ILLNESS WHEN SHE TEACHES THE CHILDREN OF FAIRFAX, VIRGINIA, TO WORSHIP THE LORD THROUGH DANCE.

A group of 4- and 5-year-old children stand on the platform moving gently to the music and doing graceful sign language with their hands. They are watching their teacher, Miss Jeannine, who is leading them from the floor.

As they dance, their faces are lit by an inner light that speaks of a deep intimacy with Jesus. This is liturgical dance at its best—children dancing as an integral part of the service.

“It is their opportunity to minister to others,” says Jeannine Lacquement, director of the dance program at Church of the Apostles, a charismatic Episcopal church in Fairfax, Virginia. Jeannine teaches 3-year-olds, who often lose their way, as well as highly trained high school girls dressed in flowing white skirts and colorful tunics who do interpretive modern dance to contemporary Christian music.

Either way, the children “know that they are dancing to draw people to Jesus,” says Jeannine. But there is a powerful story behind this dance program that few know.

THE MIRACLE THAT LAUNCHED A MINISTRY

In March of 1991 Jeannine, a trained dancer and dance instructor, fell and severely injured her back. The pain was incapacitating, the prognosis anything but hopeful.

As the weeks stretched into months Jeannine became anorexic and depressed. “I couldn’t take care of myself and was so suicidal that I couldn’t be left alone,” she recalls.

Jeannine was bedridden and in so much pain that she could

barely move. Then one day in June she heard God say, "Dance!"

"I said, 'Come on God! You've got to be kidding. I can't even lift my arm up, it hurts so much.'

"Finally, I said, 'Thy will be done.' I put on some music and walked around the room."

After that Jeannine continued to "dance" before the Lord by walking slowly to music. A month later, "I stopped crying out for God to heal me," she recalls.

Even though her broken body was still racked with pain, Jeannine decided, "I'm going to do the best I can with the body God has given me." At that point, she began to respond to therapy for the first time.

"I began to get stronger. I was able to be alone again. I was eating again. My sense of humor came back, and my creativity came back."

Then in January 1992 Jeannine had a life-changing dream. In it she was playing the piano and singing with a room full of children when suddenly, Satan appeared.

"We were terrified, screaming and running in every direction." Then just as suddenly, "a light zapped into the room," dispelling the darkness. In the dream, Jeannine saw Jesus, who told her, "Teach the children to dance."

Two days after the dream a woman in the church called and asked Jeannine, "Can you teach my daughters to worship dance?" Jeannine said she would try, but she still wasn't very strong.

Other families heard of her "class," and soon she was teaching preschoolers—ages 3 to 5—to dance for Jesus. Now she has 77 students, ages 3 to 18, from 13 different churches.

The students dance at Sunday services, youth conferences and revival services at home. But they also travel to locations as

far away as Georgia, Ohio and Colorado.

Each year, the dance troupe participates in the Washington, D.C., March for Jesus and in the Fairfax City Independence Day Parade where they regularly win awards in the Youth Marching Division. "The children tell me, 'I felt God while I was dancing,'" says Jeannine, her face glowing.

Amazingly, Jeannine feels no pain when she dances or when she is teaching children to dance. She says, "When you are worshiping the Lord and you are in His presence, how can there be pain?"

BROKENNESS AND BEAUTY

When she is not dancing, Jeannine still struggles with illness. Doctors say she has fibromyalgia, a chronic disease marked by debilitating fatigue and widespread muscular pain.

But in spite of her challenges, Jeannine's ministry took another turn last January when she traveled to Honduras to teach dance to a group of 60 girls living in an orphanage run by the Episcopal church. Our Little Roses provides housing for girls who were removed from their homes by the Honduran government due to severe abuse.

For some time, Jeannine had wanted to make the trip. On several occasions she had tried to organize a tour for a small dance troupe, but the dancers' parents were unwilling to let their daughters go. Since Hurricane Mitch hit Honduras in 1998, the country has been overrun with crime.

Jeannine knew that the long plane ride would be difficult. But despite the obstacles, she was determined to go.

As she and her husband, Don, prayed about the trip, they sensed God giving them a word for the girls: "God is good."

"When God told us that word," says Jeannine, "we said, 'Yes! That's it!' We were so excited, we lit up!

"We knew that the girls had been abused so badly. We wanted to tell them, 'No matter what happens to you, God is good, and you can trust Him. He will bring good out of all the heartache you have experienced.'"

A 9-year-old girl in Jeannine's dance troupe felt called to Honduras and miraculously, her parents consented. They told Jeannine, "Carleigh belongs to the Lord more than she belongs to us."

In mid-January, Jeannine, Don and Carleigh left for Honduras. When they arrived at Our Little Roses, the girls welcomed them by singing.

"The singing was lovely," Jeannine says, "but it seemed lifeless. The girls all looked so sad." Their somber faces made her all the more determined to see them experience joy through the dance.

"We wanted them to experience a new freedom. We wanted to give them a way to know the presence of God through worship."

As the girls learned to dance, Jeannine saw them change. "Every day they changed more and more," she says. "They were more willing to receive the Word and enjoy dancing about God's goodness."

Near the end of the trip, Jeannine had the older girls dance for the staff and the younger children. "These girls were broken and abused," she says.

"They felt they didn't have anything to offer, but through dance, they were able to give back to the people who had given to them. They were so excited. For them it was Broadway."

As soon as the performance was over, one of the girls ran up to Jeannine and asked, "Will we dance again tomorrow?" "They had tasted the goodness of God and they wanted more," Jeannine says.

“We are going back,” she declares boldly. Does she worry about the dangers and the pain? “God is good,” Jeannine says smiling. “We are going back the week after Christmas.”

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