

Dance Autobiography –A Reflection

A report on the DTAA Professional Development provided by Denis Kelynack on April 5, 2003 at Dancehouse

Ben Assan

Ben, RPN, B.App.Sc.(Ns), Grad. Dip. Movt. and Dance, P.G. Dip, Family Therapy, trained and worked as a psychiatric nurse in the U.K and has been working in adolescent mental health for 15 years. At present he is a counsellor at the Adolescent Forensic Health Services, Youth Residential Centre in Parkville, a part of the Royal Children's Hospital.

Just go back in time. Go back to a time when you were young, your imagination running wild and your world your own. Now pick a moment, an experience and share this special moment with eight others. Some of these others you know others you may have just met. In return you receive your story back as a post card gift, a drawing depicting the reactions, impact and impressions of your story from each of your peers.

For one participant's special moment, it was the image of brightness, stars and sparklers and elements of gaiety and happiness. For another, I could only see colours, the green of regeneration and life, the brown solid earth and the blue expansive skies.

These were some of the gifts I returned for the privilege of hearing intimate moments about another.

As I write about the experience with my post card gifts in front of me, I begin to re-experience this wonderful but challenging professional development day lead by Dennis Kelynack. My admiration goes to Dennis for his ability to hold us together to allow such a challenging work to take place.

The second part of the day focused on working in dyads. With a partner we shared experiences or moments from three stages of our lives. This time your partner "moved" your story. Watching my partner "move" my stories was very confronting. Does this movement really capture my experience? Are these movements and dance about my partner or me? These were some of the dilemmas I was confronted with in spite of my efforts to suspend all judgments and go with the flow.

This was resolved for me in the third part of the session. This time I moved and danced my own story with my partner as a coach, taking elements of the movements of my partner to my stories and making them my own. I reclaimed my stories.

There were a number of learning experiences for me. The first is the continuing practice of suspending my judgment both as a therapist and a developing individual. The second is reminding myself of the privilege of people entrusting to me their stories and the importance of respecting that trust as a therapist

The whole day was an opportunity to reflect on the moments in my life that may continue to influence the present and the future. For me going back in time was an opportunity to look to the future. In my native Ghana we have a symbol called "Sankofa", literally meaning go back and fetch. The real message of the symbol is related to using the past to influence one's actions and goals today.

For those who were present I say thank you for holding and respecting the space to allow me this wonderful but challenging experience.

