

# A Day In the Life of A Dance Therapist

*Susan Kierr*



*We saved an email response from Susan, to a query from someone unsure about their future career directions - but wanting dance to be a part of it. The email was sent to the American Dance Therapy Association's (ADTA) listserv last year. The reply is quite special and reflects how many of us feel about being dance movement therapists. The email was put aside waiting for the right opportunity to print it.*

Susan Kierr (Wise), ADTR, NCC, is an experienced dance movement therapist, author of 'The Overeaters', together with Jonathan Wise, MD, 1985, of 'Treating Anxiety; Four Case Examples' a chapter in Fran Levy's 1995 book, 'When Words Are Not Enough', and a chapter on her work with chronic illness on nursing units in 'Creating Connections Between Nursing Care and The Creative Arts Therapies: Expanding the Concept of Holistic Care', edited by Carole Lynne Le Navenec and Laurel Bridges, 2005. In addition to publishing other articles, Susan has served on the Board of the ADTA, and on the ADTA Credentialing Committee.

More recently, living and working in New Orleans, Susan established the use of DMT in schools and hospitals, had a private practice and conducted groups at Tulane University's mental health hospital, and ran school aftercare programs. Her article 'Sit Down, Be Quiet - A Study of the Effectiveness of Dance/Movement Therapy', about the after-school program appeared recently in 'Moving On', Vol. 4, No. 2, p.2.

More recently still, Susan's life following the wake of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, has changed - disrupted by the devastating events. She said in an email to the DTAA that "Things have changed: I have closed my practice in New Orleans, the hospital is also closed so that part of my work is also

over. I am in a community further north, one that has many survivors and evacuees from Katrina and Rita. I am establishing a connection with a wellness center to do stress management work. My spirits are high but physical energy seems to run out earlier each day, perhaps an effect of the level of toxins left behind by two floods. The environment is not as beautiful and graceful as it was: magnificent trees have been snapped down, everything is brown and gray. Nevertheless, I have found ways to use my DMT skills to help myself and others, and that is an abiding gratification."

Susan's email - A Day In the Life of A Dance Therapist - in response to the person seeking advice on a career involving dance reads:

"Many of us feel that way - we have danced all our lives, some better than others, some more than others, and we dance with patients, and we dance with one another. However, let it be a warning to you, we don't always know what to do with our lives. Every day I am happy that I have credentials that allow me to be in the helping services, no matter what my title is (and I have had many, from 'pre school creative movement consultant' to 'geriatric activity therapist' and a variety in-between). Every day I get to wear comfortable clothes and carry around my favorite music and make a little bit of money in a room with people who usually feel better when they leave. I have had days when I went to work worried about my own kids or frustrated with my own parents, and in the hours of team meetings, paper work, and swaying to James Taylor, I have remembered that I am most fortunate to have found a professional sphere that feels important, unique, and creative.

When I became a dance therapist, about 30 years ago, I did not know what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. I just wanted it to include dance/movement therapy in some way, and it has included dance/movement therapy in many ways - in schools for a few years, hospitals for a while, some hospitals with people who have physical illnesses and other hospitals where people have mental illnesses. Some of these people are anxious or depressed. Others don't know what day or year it is but they are certain Russians have wired the room. Yesterday I asked a patient how he was feeling and he told me he was sad, really missing the days when he was King of England. I have worked in a home for abused women, a nursing home for HIV patients, the "Y", the JCC, and summer camps.

I can't actually say what I want to do with the rest of my life. However, so far I have really enjoyed

figuring out ways to keep dance/movement therapy a part of what I do”.

Despite the terrible events, the traumas and disruption to her life, it seems that Susan is still finding ways to use dance therapy. We are pleased to know that her spirits are high and hope that her physical energy is returning. It is wonderful that she

has found ways to use her DMT skills to help herself and those in need around her and keep on keeping it as part of her life.

**Thank you Susan for allowing us to print this email.**

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