

Still Dancing with Barbara

Lucy Dubois



Lucy, is a MA, MSSW, RDMT and a Certified Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analyst. In the photo Lucy is proud to dance with WINGS, a company of teenagers with intellectual disabilities in Austin, Texas. She is seen with them in this photo. Michele Owens, MEd, has led this group for 19 years and Lucy has been assisting her for the last 4 years. Lucy is in awe of Australia and its people. “Thanks to all of you for inspiring my dance since being there in 2010.”

Years ago, in mid-late 80’s, I attended one of Barbara Mettler’s Winter Intensives. Unfortunately, for me, I could only stay for the first week of the two week long workshop. A few days after I left Tucson and returned home to Austin, I got a call from Rosemary Clough, a dance sister who was participating in two full weeks of the workshop. She called, she said, to tell me about an extraordinary experience in the workshop. I was struck by the intensity of her voice as she told me this story about Barbara:

Barbara came into the studio on the first day of the second week and told the students about a disturbing and terrifying experience she had the night before. She said she was lying in her bed and she could not get up. She said she was frightened, terrified. She struggled, she writhed and turned and twisted...but she was not able to sit up. Finally, however, she persisted and she did manage to sit. Now, though, she could not stand. After much effort and struggle, pushing and

reaching, she brought herself to standing. Once up, she said she felt off-balance and she feared she might fall. After some time of continuing to try to move about, she did eventually succeed.

Barbara went on that day to encourage the students to explore these same ideas—moving from an almost paralyzed state of lying to sitting to standing to moving about. This is how I remember the story—each person who was

there and all who were told about it probably have somewhat different versions. I was very touched by this account and, even though I was not there in the studio when Barbara taught this particular lesson, I began to work with these ideas in my dance practice. For a long time I had used Barbara’s books and writings as an extension of her teaching. Being in the studio with her was ideal, yet I loved going home from studying with her, re-reading my copious notes and then imagining her voice as I explored the studies.

For several years I occasionally practiced this specific work. Sometimes I felt afraid, imagining the horror of not being able to sit up, stand up or move freely. Often I surprised myself with the many different movements I made to mobilize myself. I liked the different dynamics and interplay of force, time and space as I explored these ideas in my studio. This work challenged my kinesthetic sense—I seemed to learn something new each time I explored the study. It became much more than just a physical experience as the transformative qualities of the art of dance were set into play. One of Barbara’s most important beliefs, for me, was her emphasis on the power of the dance to influence and improve our everyday life.

Years passed. I had not thought about this dance study in a long time until recently, when I found myself going through, as we all do from time to time, an unusually “rough patch” of life. A very

dear and funny friend says, “Yes, when one door closes, another door opens, but the hallway is hell.” This was my time in the “hallway”. Here I was, feeling unable to move, filled with fear. Once again I began to explore this study of struggling from lying to sitting to standing and moving, finding it still fresh with creative potential. This work continues to support my discovering a deeper sensitivity to my dancing, moving self—in activities of daily life as well as my professional work as a dance educator/dance therapist. Referring to dance as a basic human need, Barbara said, in her book, *The Nature of Dance as a Creative Art Activity*, “It can further integration of body, emotions and mind; action, feeling and thought; individual and group; human beings and their environment.”

Photographs:

p. 25, Lucy dancing with WINGS, a company of teenagers with intellectual disabilities in Austin, Texas.

Photos this page: received from Lucy, dancing, indeed ‘kything’ with nature in the Australian bush. Lucy fell in love with the bush when she was here in 2012. She remembers it as being an inspiration to her and impetus for continuation of her dance journey. Lucy sent these images some time ago following her visit to Australia.

