

Sally: A Chronology Poems I-V
By Tad Phippen-Wente

I.

When I was little
my dance teacher was the original
Miss Browni
who made everything up,
all the steps
all the time
all the steps
all the time.
Miss Browni said,
not those copycat records
not those kit routines always alike.
Original,
our own routines.
All the steps
all the time.
She made up everything herself.

II.

In the choreography of theater,
in the rehearsal
where he dropped me on my head,
in the performance
where we hated each other,
could not stand each other,
despised each other,
jealous rivals,
and pretended to be loving
in *Adam Loves Eve*,
where the Charleston
stole the show
our dancing toe to toe,
he proposed,
and the dancer
turned out
to be my husband.

III.

I danced 12 years in a studio,
then opened one and then another,
opened one in Philips,
one in Manitowoc that I
ran for 13 years
because dancing
isn't about
English class and Speech,
red schoolhouse red tape,
and this duty that duty,
hall, bus, and homecoming.

What kind of dancing can you do when you have to watch teens build a float?

I loved the children.

I loved teaching.

If only... If only...

So I quit that big school. Abandoned my license.

Kept the studio.

Wrote a book.

Became Story Lady at the local library,
choreographer of storytelling,
hatracks and artifacts,
a history for kids,
a ruckus
alive in their own
minds to imagine.

IV.

Creating something new
makes best memories for me.

Choreography.

A lesson.

Or best memories come
when I remember
children,
my lost babies
unseen,
untouched, but loved;

my daughters all grown up now,
teacher-dancers like me,
all music and movement.

My students,
dancing without mirrors,
without compare,
joy-filled sweethearts,
sons and daughters,
all poise and balance,
confidence and closeness,
the best kids.

V.

You can't just sit in a chair.
You have to get up and dance.

Dance through your 5-year-old feet not yet well-formed,
but curled into toe shoes to rise en pointe;
through your shy, shy, shy away from self-confidence
about that dance you just designed;
through learning
what you want to do with this life.

Dance through your lonely, dark tears for lost babes;
through other mothers beaming,
holding sweet babies crying;
through your own wonder,
your own child
at last;
through two grown girls moving away.

Dance through the age
of troubled gallbladder,
through arthritis,
joints,
this knee,
that knee;
and now
Parkinson's comes
stumbling through you like your body can't remember.
But it does.

You have to get up and dance.