

To Be Someone

by Kathy Petrakis

Like most little girls, I wanted to be a film star or a prima ballerina or a great singer like Whitney Houston (the one from the 80's). I wanted the world to notice me. I wanted to be loved by thousands. I knew then that I would be important. I would be someone. I decided to focus on ballet. So I trained hard and went to every class my parents could afford. I practiced every day to get through my exams. I never ate anything but low fat protein and vegetables. I never had a late night. In fact, I spent so much time working on my dream, that friends became less important. Family events were second rate – I was doing something important so every waking moment had to be spent on that. I went through high school, barely remembering anything but classes and rehearsals. When I excelled through another grade or won another lead, I was congratulated by many, resented by some. This was what it was all about. Success, recognition., right? I had to make the sacrifices. There was no other way. Unless I was on stage receiving applause, I was nothing.

But something was missing. I spent so much time dancing, I felt like a robot, moving through the steps to perfection. And I wasn't feeling as special as I thought I would. I wasn't invited to parties. No one apart from my parents, remembered me on my birthday. I didn't have any close friends – there wasn't time for those from school and my fellow dancers were rivals. There was no hope of a boyfriend. I never even had birthday cake and I missed my sister's first recital. My whole life was passing me by. But that's the sacrifice one must make to be special.

Then, I was almost there. I was about to audition for the School of American Ballet. The ultimate dream! But suddenly I couldn't leap like I used to and I kept falling out of my turns. I thought it was nerves. I started to panic. What was happening to me? By the time of my audition, I had regressed. It was like my body refused to dance to my demands anymore. On the day of my audition, I couldn't get out of my bed. I yelled for my mother and begged her to help me but the best we could do was drag me to the bathroom. I barely had energy to cry as I saw my dreams shattered across the floor- I had missed my audition. I was devastated and yet I was relieved.

I spent three days in bed. The doctor couldn't diagnose me. No one came to visit. But I knew. I was done. I had nothing of my heart left – I had long ago sealed it away beneath my tutu. I didn't have room for emotions – not happiness, not joy, not anything but success and failure. However, that meant neither did my dance. I spent so much time desperate to be important, that I became the loneliest,

emptiest person in the world. My body knew before I did that a life without heart, can't function. I didn't dance for 6 months. I spent time with my family and caught up with friends I hadn't seen in years. I was thankful that they would even speak to me.

By chance, one of my friends danced contemporary. I'd known her since middle school and yet I never this. She invited me to a class. I thought it was time. My body craved movement, so I took her up on her offer. That day something changed. We did a lyrical piece to one of my favourite songs. With no pressure, no exams and a heart-wrenching song, I found myself letting go. I was dancing with the music, letting my body sing the lyrics. It was exhilarating. I had discovered a new world. Suddenly, I realized all that I had been missing. Without allowing myself to be a person, to love and share with others, I had become soulless both in my life and in my dance. But it didn't have to be like that. As I found strength through my new relationships, my desire to dance grew - not for awards or fame, but for passion and self-expression. I had discovered what I needed all along – love. Love through my relationships and love in my dance. It was a hard lesson to learn. Now, it didn't matter where I went next – as long as I had my friends and family and as long as I could express myself through dance, I had it all – I was someone.