

## HIGH SCHOOL OF PERFORMING ARTS

By Gus Dick Andros

"Mr. Andros, Julie is such a nice dancer, you should be very proud of her," Chiquita said as we left the studio at Ballet Academy East.

"Believe me, I am." I answered.

"How long has she been your student? She seems to know what you are going to give before you get it out of your mouth."

"Would you believe 18 years?" I said, hating to give Julie's age away.

"She looks so young. How old was she when she started?"

"She was a sophomore at Performing Arts."

"I didn't know you taught at PA."

"It was many years ago, but it was a very important time in my life."

"You know I teach in high school, how did you get in PA?"

"It's a long story. If you have the time, I'll tell you."

"I've got the time. Shoot."

"When I first starting teaching, I made a wish list of what I wanted to accomplish before I retired. Teaching at the High School of Performing Arts was on my list, and while I had my school in Brooklyn I had sent them my resume. I got a reply from Dr. Yocom, chairperson of the dance department, and she invited me to teach an audition class.

Dr. Yocom and I had met many times at dance performances. In fact I had used some of the school's students in shows that I had choreographed. I didn't know at the time that students were not allowed to do these shows, but Dr Yocom said that it was their fault for not telling me. In secret I knew that she was glad that the students had a chance to do professional work.

At the time I did the audition class, Dr. Yocom was being promoted to principal and Lydia Joel was taking her place as chairperson of the dance department. The class I taught was for modern dance majors; and although they were good dancers, they were not cooperative with a substitute teacher. I managed to get them interested and by the end of the class they were on my side. Those watching were pleased with the way I handled the situation.

I had a meeting with all concerned. I thought I had the job. Dr. Yocom and the board left me alone with Lydia Joel to work out the detail. A couple of weeks went by, and when I hadn't heard from Lydia, I assumed that I didn't have the job. No one ever explained why to me.

A few years later I sold my Brooklyn school and went to Israel as assistant director of the Bat Dor Dance Company. After my contract was over and I had decided not to renew it, I returned to the States and got a teaching position at the New York School of Ballet.

I was very successful at NYSB, and the word got around that a new teacher was taking New York by storm. Teaching at the New York School of Ballet had also been on my wish list.

That summer Lydia Joel phoned the studio, "This is Lydia Joel, and I would like to speak with Mr Andros."

A scholarship student said, "Mr. Andros, pick up the phone in the office, Lady Joel wants to talk to you."

"Lady Joel? Since when is she a lady?"

"Well, maybe it wasn't Lady, but I am sure she said her last name was Joel," she answered.

I picked up the phone in the office and identified myself.

"Dick, this is Lydia Joel." I thought that she was rather familiar, so I decided I would be just as familiar and I answered, "Hello, Lydia, How are you?"

"I'm fine. But I am calling you about an opening for a ballet teacher at PA. I wonder if you would like to do an audition class for us."

"How nice of you to remember me, but I don't do audition classes anymore; but you are welcome to come and watch me teach my advance class."

Taken aback, she said, "Could we have lunch after the class?"

"No problem, it will be nice to see you again." We settled on the date and time.

I thought that bitch wants me now that I'm doing so well. I had to admit, however, that I really wanted to teach at PA, and if lunch with Lydia was part of the deal, I could endure it.

After my class, with people like Cynthia Gregory and Ivan Nagy in the front row, Lydia was looking at me differently than she had a few years before, impressed, more by who

was in my class than my teaching. Lydia and I went to the Greek restaurant down the street from the studio. We sat in a booth so we could have some privacy. Everyone knew me because I ate there every day. Before lunch was over I knew I had the job on my terms, and I wouldn't have to give up my classes at New York School of Ballet. But there were other problems to overcome before I could teach in the public school system: I had to prove that I had been a performer for more than nine years.

When I was trying to get the job at PA earlier, I had made-up a notebook of my past performing experiences. I had over thirty years of programs, and I had cataloged them in chronological order. When I presented my credentials to Mr. Parnes at the Board, he was impressed and told me, "I have never had anyone ever present me such a neat and clear resume."

"Thank you, I know that I need nine years but I have thirty. Which ones do you want to see?"

"Pick any years you want and I will go over it."

"Here." I randomly picked ten years and handed him the book.

"As I go over this you must take a physical. Take this form to the third floor and when they finish with you come back," he said without looking up from my book.

The physical was no problem and after an hour I was back in Mr. Parnes' office. We talked for some time and I realized that I was taking some kind of oral test. "I am very pleased, but there is one more test that you must take and then it is all over," Mr. Parnes said.

"I hope it is as easy as the physical."

"You must write a paper of about two pages long on the subject of teaching. You will be graded on your spelling and punctuation."

I wished that he had taken a gun and shot me. I hadn't taken a written test since I left school. I wasn't sure I could spell "cat," let alone know where to put a period. I decided to write as simply as I could and use words that I was sure I could spell correctly.

After I finished my paper and gave it to Mr. Parnes, we shook hands and I left. I was sweating as if I had run the four minute mile.

Two days later Lydia called and told me I had failed the written test. As I put the phone down my stomach felt as if I might throw-up. I thought that was my last chance to teach at PA. Of course I was disappointed but knowing my writing skills, I wasn't surprised. I hardly had time to let the news sink in, when the phone rang again; this time it was Mr. Parnes. "Mr Andros, I'm sorry to tell you that your written test didn't pass the board."

"I'm sorry that I couldn't do better, but it has been too long since I was in school."

"Can you take the test again?"

"I could, but the results would be the same. I can't remember all the things that I learned thirty years ago."

"Do me a favor and come to my office and let's talk."

"I'll be more than happy to talk to you, but I can't see how it will change things."

The morning of our meeting I dressed in a suit and a tie. I wanted to make the best impression I could. At Mr. Parnes' office I was introduced to five gentlemen all looking very official. They sat in a semi circle and I in the center. I was asked questions about drugs, sex, child abuse, and education. We didn't have a conversation, but rather a question and answer session. It was an inquisition. I could look all of them in the eyes and answer what I wanted. After all, what did I have to lose?

I don't know how much time went by, but they finally got up from their seats, and as they walked out of the room a young man walked in, "We want him to pass." The young man wrote a paper using my original paper as text. My subject was on teacher's and student's relationships. After he finished his corrections, I copied it and I handed it to Mr. Parnes.

"I feel terrible about this. I couldn't even cheat in school," I confessed

"I'm glad you feel that way, but you don't talk like you write, and you're not going to teach English, and I'm sure you're a great teacher of ballet."

We shook hands, and I was gone with my license assured.

"That is the first time I ever heard of the Board using its head. I bet they wouldn't do that today." Chiquita said, knowing more about the Board of Education than I did."

PS

I remember it very well because that evening I taught my class at the NYSB and when I got home I was mugged in the lobby of my apartment building. The fact that I was dressed in a suit and a tie saved my life because when my throat was cut, the knife was impeded by my collar and tie. A coincidence, I wonder. Any way that's another story."