

## **After the attack**

I learned from the doctors that because I was dressed in a suit and tie, my life was saved. When my throat was cut, the knife was impeded by my starched shirt and tie.

A question asked a lot that I hate to answer and I never volunteer is "It was those blacks wasn't it?" My brother, Dee, wrote me the sweetest letter telling me, "You can't condemn a whole race for the actions of a few."

After the initial, "How horrible!" the following remark would be, "What did you do to make them knife you?"

My answer was, "I walked into my lobby."

It was impossible for people to comprehend that it was possible to be at the wrong place at the wrong time.

For the first two or three months people would glare at my neck and say things like, "They really did damage to you." It was not possible for me to get through a day without someone making a comment about my neck. Although, I didn't like to talk about it. Most people didn't know some one who had been cut, so they would want the sorted details.

One of the saddest stories was Eddie Shellman, now principle dancer of Dance Theater of Harlem, but at the time a teenager said, "Who cut you?" As if he was asking about the weather. Where he lived to him it seemed common place.

When I moved into Manhattan some student would walk me home every night and the elevator man would walk me to my door and wait for me to enter. If I saw two black men walking toward me, my heart would palpate.

When I was telling Dustin Hoffmann's wife Annie Byrns the reason I couldn't see his movie *The Clockwork Orange* she wanted more details, and I tried to oblige. I went to teach class and had a panic attack. I didn't know what it was, but I thought I would die.

After reading about a knifing in the newspaper at lunch, when I was teaching at Performing Arts, I couldn't finish my eating. During my afternoon class I had chest pains so bad that I couldn't continue to teach. I was rushed to Lenox Hill for a heart attack. While I was at the High School I was sent to the Hospital twice. At that time no one put the knifing and these attacks together. A panic disorder had yet to be recognize by the medical community.

To this day, 23 years later, I still have to have movies seen by some friend, who will check it for violence, before I can see it.

About four years later, I began to had these attacks on a regular bases. It got so bad that I couldn't teach. I had already left the High School of the Performing Arts. I always tried to

have a friend like Shirley Bassatt or Nansi Clement in class to take over when I couldn't continue.

My cousin, Evelyn, in Oklahoma, would call me daily and I would bust into tears.

Finally my friend Marvin ask me to call Dr. Ward, the doctor who had removed the stitches. Dr. Ward had retired to Long Island. He was an angel from heaven because he knew what I was going through and it had a name and a treatment. He started me on Elivil at 25mg, increasing the dose about every two days until I was taking 400mg a day. He also suggested I see a therapist. Helen Gallagher, who played Maeve Ryan on *Ryan's Hope*, recommended her therapist who was excellent and I spent four years with him.

It took three weeks for the Elivil to work, and I have never had another panic attack. It took me about two years to come off the drug; cutting 25mg at a time. It finally got to 25mg every other day, to every two days and finally three times a week. When Dr. Ward thought I could go cold turkey he put me on Valium to this day.

I have little or no respect for the police, for when I told them if I saw the men I could identify them. I was never allowed to look at pictures.

## GUS JR. AS A WRITER

By Gus Dick Andros

Computers! Computers! Computers! I felt if I heard the word "computer" one more time I would go insane. At that time I thought those who had personal computers were being pretentious. But I finally gave in and decided to join the masses by investing in this mysterious machine.

After buying a computer, I asked myself, "What are you going to do with it?" I gave it a lot of thought and decided to write a history of ballet. I knew that many dancers didn't have a clue about when ballet started and how it had grown over the years. So December 1, 1987, I handed my students the first copy of the Dick Andros Newsletter.

I will be honest. In the beginning, I didn't have any idea how to write this history, but after thirty-six issues the concept came to me, and I decided I would write ballet history in detail in a chronological order. So from volume 3, issue 10 I started all over again. I enjoyed the research and, most of all, I was happy to pass on what I was learning, hoping that my students would be interested.

I can't remember when I first wanted to write, but when my Aunt Oma came to New York to see a production I had written that was being performed at Brooklyn College, she reminded me of a childhood activity. When I was very young, during summer vacation from grade school. I would write plays and get the neighborhood kids to perform in my productions. Not only did I write, but I also built the sets, made the costumes and acted the lead. We would charge our parents and others two cents apiece. The money was divided and maybe each of us would receive a dime.

When I was in high school and had to write a term paper, I spent hours at the Carnegie Library in Oklahoma City doing research. I wrote the paper on *Fashion Through the Ages*. My teacher, Ms. Taylor, said it was the best term paper she had received in her twenty years of teaching. I was sure I would receive an "A," but to my surprise I only got a "B." I was upset with the grade and confronted her.

"It was the best researched and written paper, but there were many misspelled words and your punctuation left a lot to be desired," she said.

At Oklahoma University, again I had to write a paper every week for English class, and every week the teacher would read my paper to the class but then give me a "C." From the first day the teacher and I had a conflict because I dated his daughter and didn't get her home by her curfew. But I was apparently lucky for there was a rumor that he had chased one of his daughter's dates with a baseball bat. He would read my paper to the class and then give me a "C," when I approached him on this contradiction, he told me he was sure I hadn't written the papers. However he was pleased with the way the stories were told and developed. To prove to him that I had written the story, I insisted he let me sit alone with him in his classroom and write. He agreed that I had done the writing, and said in a superior manner, "You may have written the papers, but the grammar is terrible," and walked out. I was beginning to think I wasn't bright enough to write.

I had a similar experience in an art history class. I wrote my report on the early Italian painters, using members of our class visiting an Art Museum as my frame. The teacher not only liked the novel approach, but the research as well. Again I got a "B" because of the spelling and grammar. No one ever suggested that I had a talent for writing and should go back and learn grammar and spelling.

I know I should have learned these things in school, but in the first grade I missed half a semester because of illness. The next year I contracted scarlet fever and was quarantined for over six weeks, missing more school. When phonics were being taught, I missed all the instructions. After my return to school I was promoted to a higher level by a teacher who knew my family, and thought she was doing me a favor, but I was always at the lowest level of this class. I remained there until I was in high school. I don't ever remember a class where grammar was taught. My teachers would mark my papers, but never explain what was wrong. I guess they thought I was not bright enough to waste their time.

After my bout with scarlet fever I was left with a hearing defect and because of this hearing problem, which no one would discuss, my ability to speak suffered. Mother noticed this more than others and sent me for elocution lessons. I also had severe headaches after school, and it was common for me to go to bed immediately after school. My reading suffered because I had to focus on each individual word to see it. At that time the teachers never interfered with what they thought parents should tend to. In keeping with my father's wishes, glasses were not an option. Mother told me because of my father's ego; he didn't want anyone to think that his children were anything but perfect. My mother finally gave in, but I was not allowed to wear my glasses at home and my father died never knowing I wore them. Putting all these factors together, I am sure, had a lot to do with my limited facility with grammar and spelling. In subjects that didn't require writing I would excel.

When I was in Israel as the Assistant Director of the Bat Dor Dance Company, I wrote letters home, that were very descriptive. My cousins encouraged me to write a book and they saved every letter. They did not focus on the mistakes but the content. I also wrote my friend Marvin regularly, and he also saved the letters. But writing a book was still out of my mental reach.

Even more discouraging was when I had to write a paper as part of my test to teach for the New York Board of Education. Mr. Parmes, the examiner, told me that I would be graded on grammar and spelling, so I wrote a paper with simple sentences and words I knew that I could spell. "You know you don't write like you talk," he said, and to get me the job he had someone else write the paper for me.

Needless to say, I was being presumptuous to think I could write a newsletter about ballet. That was twelve years ago. In the beginning I would have someone check it for mistakes -- I still do.

As a teacher of ballet, I usually get friendly with many of my students and learn much about them. Normally it takes a little time to get close enough to them to know what they do outside of class.

My friend Shirley Bassat, also a teacher at the school, would send many of her students to me when they had achieved a more advanced level. Such was her student who reminded me of a 1920's movie vamp, her black hair was cut with bangs and an off-the-shoulder-length bob. One day I remember that she was irritated with me and the class, and as I walked out of class I saw her sit down and immediately start to correct my latest Newsletter. I took that as a personal affront, and thought that she was being rude. Seeing this also brought back all my insecurities. I asked the lady behind the desk who this student was and what gave her the right to edit my work. I was told it was Dr. Terry

Spitler, a writing teacher at St. John's University. I guess that gave her the right, even though I thought it was rude. Although Dr. Spitler has a different view of this incident, after years in therapy, I learned it is not what happens, but how you perceive it. About two days later she apologized to me and suggested that I should study writing. I told her that I didn't have the energy to get to St. Johns. Then she said, "We would do the work one-on-one." I couldn't believe this very pretty lady was offering me her time. How could I say no to her when I really wanted her help? For the first time someone implied I had a talent for writing. She bought me the books and wouldn't let me pay for them.

I don't normally learn by reading, but by seeing. The one thing I liked about what she said was that I should write and not worry about spelling or grammar. Telling me that was like hearing a voice from heaven. Of course having the computer made all this easier. A typo could be easily corrected with the click of a key.

The textbook would give an example of the lesson and I would write my own rendition using the textbook as my guide. I was very excited that I could write. The first draft was never good enough; I did many more rewrites than Dr. Spitler knew. There would come a time when I thought I couldn't improve on what I had written, but she proved me wrong. Her comments written on the back became my guide, but I still had many misspelled words and the grammar was still a problem. I even went to an adult class at City College to work on basic grammar. I hate to admit it, but at seventy I found it hard to retain what I was learning. I made an "A" in the class, but two months later I couldn't remember what I was taught (short-term memory is the first to go.) I would have continued going to class, but because of my arthritis I couldn't make the subway stairs without intense pain.

One of the lessons that was given to me by Dr. Spitler was to create an argument and to defend it. I wrote an article *Ballet Versus Track and Field*. It seemed to me when I looked back that I rewrote it a hundred times. What I was saying in the article was that technique had taken over, leaving art out of the equation. When I thought I had done the best I could I let my cousins in Hollywood (both actors and directors) read my paper. They agreed, thinking the same thing was happening in acting, and encouraged me to get it published. Easier said than done. To get others to read the article I decided to attach it to my newsletter. To my surprise the art critic for the Christian Science Monitor called and said, "If you would substitute "painting" for the word ballet it would say how I feel about today's painters."

Unbeknownst to me, a fellow dancer took a copy to the publisher of *Dance Pages* (a dance magazine, later called *Dance and the Arts*). The publisher called me and took me to dinner, and wanted to print it in their next issue, with the new title *Has Ballet Become Track and Field*. I liked the new name and I would love to say "and the rest is history." Not so -- the editor was very demanding and wanted to make changes. So again I had to rewrite it.

I gave the publisher copies of all my newsletters. After reading them he asked if I would write a column for his magazine. He wanted the column to be called *Ballet Beat: What You Have Always Wanted to Know About Ballet But Were Afraid to Ask*. I took on this project not knowing anything about publishing. I suddenly began getting letters from all over the world -- some questioning what I wrote. When I got such a letter, I would

write back giving them my sources. The Royal Academy of Dance, in London, were more flattering and said they were using my column as a reference.

Unfortunately my teaching schedule, the newsletter and *The Dance and the Arts* column prevented me from continuing with my own writing. Dr. Spitler had me make a list showing the important incidents in my life to write about, and I wrote many vignettes. I enjoyed putting it on paper. I missed this activity. When I was told that the magazine was going out of business, I wasn't as disappointed as many thought I should have been. I would say I was on my way to being recognized has a dance historian, but my ego could forgo it.

Since then I have gone back to what I really liked to write. I have put all my writings into a collection of vignettes, naming it *Gus Jr. Wants To Talk To You*. This book is my gift to my friends and others who may feel insecure, and want to achieve a goal. I hope by reading this book they will see that by plodding along, the desired results will accrue. It's not whether you make it, but that you tried. The cover page says, "No One Does it Alone" followed by what I wanted my readers to get from this endeavor. "You thrust your right foot forward and put weight on it, then you take your left and thrust it forward and put weight on it. You continue this action until you get to where you want to go."

Dr. Spitler has given me a future and a goal that will see me through when teaching dancing is no longer possible. So thanks to her and the computer, I intend to continue my writing, using the mysterious machine.