

My Greatest Teacher

By: Gus Dick Andros

As a teacher of dance for over forty-five years, I can look back and be thankful for the many fine teachers who have touched my life. In elementary school there was Mrs. Rower, who took a personal interest in me until she died. High school gave me teachers whose influence I feel to this day. As a dancer I have had the best ballet teachers in the world, but the greatest teacher of all was my brother Demosthenes -- "Dee."

Dee was a big baby, weighing 14 pounds at birth, and he continues to be a big person today, but I don't mean in size. He has a rough exterior, but a kind and understanding soul. He is only 16 months older than I, but in our formative years he was eons older. His ability to teach was innate, and I have adopted his technique in my own teaching. His idea was to show and then leave you on your own. For example, he would hold the back of my bicycle until he knew I had the feel of it and suddenly I was riding--without him!

When Dee felt it was time for me to learn to swim, he took me to the shallow water of the pool, and while he held me, I learned to use my arms and legs. One day I was standing by the pool watching the older boys swim in the deep water, when someone pushed me in. It was Dee and he simply walked away leaving me to swim or drown. At first I panicked and began to swallow water and then remembered what Dee had taught me. I began to use my arms and legs and swam to the edge of the pool.

Dee was not only my teacher but my protector, often without my knowing it. He had made it clear to the older boys in school that no one was to cause me trouble, and everyone knew that he could back up his threats. It wasn't until my senior year of high school, when I could take care of myself, that the older guys told me of Dee's ultimatum.

Being more adventuresome than I, Dee had gone many times to "The Talk of the Town," the most dangerous bar in Oklahoma. This bar attracted cowboys and truck drivers, men who had been incarcerated and the ladies that enjoyed their company. Dee was, of course, underage. One night, Dee decided to take me with him. My eyes were as wide as ping pong balls and my mouth hung open, and yet I was thrilled to be in this den of iniquity.

It was my luck that the police decided to raid this bar on my first visit. Police were coming in every door, front and back. Dee got in front of me, maneuvering us out of the place by staying close to the wall, and as the last policeman entered, Dee had us out the door. I was scared because I had never been involved with the police before, and I knew mother would be furious with me; fortunately she never found out I was there. You see, Dee could get by with murder and mother would say, "Boys will be boys." Once outside, I learned something else from Dee, how to stay on top of a situation.

As I grew out of bicycles and swimming, there was just one other thing I had to learn and that was to drive a car. Dee was born behind the wheel of an automobile. He was not big enough to see over the steering wheel when he released the brakes of Daddy's car and propelled it down a hill until it slammed into another car.

In Oklahoma in those days you could get a driver's license at the age of fifteen. Dee had Daddy and Plato, our older brother, to teach him. I am sure Daddy did it with great care but who knows what Plato did? Yet Dee was an excellent driver and as far as I can remember he never had a traffic violation.

On Sundays, Dee would borrow our cousin's old Peerless and take me into the country to teach me to drive; he also brought all of his football buddies. Because of my interest in the arts, I was already somewhat of a freak to them, so I was heckled from the minute I put the key in the ignition. The noise in the back seat was deafening, but I got the car from one place to another. I remember Daddy let me park his Packard and I scratched the side, needless to say, I was not allowed to drive the Packard anymore. As time went on, Daddy died and World War II started. Plato went into the service, leaving Dee with a car of his own. In fact he talked Mother into a new Packard. As the war intensified Dee enlisted the day he was old enough to go. He said his good-byes at home, and I went with him to the train station. As the train was ready to pull out of the station, Dee took me in his arms to say good-bye and, at the same time, handed me the keys to the car and told me to get it home.

I had never driven this car, nor had I ever driven alone in any car. I wasn't even sure where to put the key. The train station was on the other side of town and the only way to get home was to drive through the heart of the city. I had never driven except on a dirt road in the country, where you could drive for hours and never see another car. I really had to put my ingenuity to work as I sat in the car ready to cry. I didn't have a license and I was only fifteen. I decided to drive around the city, and I mean around the entire city, to get home. By the time I pulled into the driveway, I was a confident driver. Again it was all due to Dee's teaching. Mother had a friend go with me to get my license, and that night I drove my frightened mother to work and the car was mine.

Dee went on to be a football coach at a number of universities and at Oregon State and was given the name "The Great Pumpkin." Because of his size and the orange parka he wore, it was said he looked like a pumpkin when he led his team into the stadium. With Dee as the coach Oregon State played the Rose Bowl, and he was later nominated "Coach of the Year." Dee retired from coaching to become Athletic Director at Oregon State. I think of Dee as my greatest teacher and I would like to think I was his best student.