

## **JOBS ARE HARD TO COME BY**

**By Gus Dick Andros**

"You have ripped the tendon from the ankle and there is no way we can repair it without a very intricate procedure. I also can't guaranty it will be successful."

Sitting on the subway headed back to Greenwich Village, those words were going around and around in my head. My eyes were fixed straight ahead, seeing nothing. "You will be crippled for the rest of your life." I kept repeating the words over again, not believing this could be true. I could have been hearing a judge sentencing me to death.

"You mean to tell me that my foot is permanently crippled?" I even asked him a second time. I had to hear it again before I would believe it.

"If we are successful you will lose the flexibility of the ankle, and you will be in physical therapy at least a year. The other choice is to wear a metal brace." Before I left his office he had explained the brace to me.

The operation was not a choice for me. I didn't have insurance or money to cover this procedure. I couldn't write home for money because mother was now an invalid and her income went to pay her expenses.

I will never forget the day I had the brace fitted. I didn't know at the time that if I had one foot fitted then I had to have the other foot match it. I had to put both feet in a solution of plaster of Paris and let it harden. There was no pain while waiting for the plaster to dry, but my heart and brain saw a life of not being fit. This was hard to take for a man who had made his life as a physical being.

Wearing the braces every day was painful. Over time, I developed a callous that would stay with me for many years. The idea that I would never dance again was in my thoughts day and night. I tried to find something that would take the place of my dancing, but for years I had tunnel vision toward a dance career, I wasn't prepared for any other activity.

A few weeks before the accident, I had purchased a ticket on the Ile de France to dance in a ballet company in Spain. On crutches I went to see Madame Vera Nemtchinova at her studio; it was through her connections that I was to dance in Spain. When she saw me in that condition, she cried openly in front of her class. The cancellation of the trip put me into a deep depression, so much so that I wouldn't let anyone discuss dance in my presence.

"Last night I went to the ballet and saw Nora Kaye dance..." a friend said.

"I don't want to hear about it. I'm sure there is something else we can discuss." I answered angrily.

"Well excuse me for living."

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to be rude, but it hurts when I think about dancing."

Living in a dance studio in Greenwich Village, and hearing people dance in the next room made it even harder. The depression was getting worse and my friends didn't want to be around me. My studio was a meeting place for many living in the Village. I notice over a couple of weeks that fewer and fewer "friends" met at my studio.

I had no income and was worrying about how to pay the rent; I had to get a 9- to-5 job to live. I searched my past to find if I had a salable skill. When I got out of the service I had worked for awhile in the repair office for the Southern Pacific Railroad. Otherwise I hadn't worked outside of dance.

I began to read the "want ads," but there was nothing I could do. I would require a job that would allow me to sit. In desperation I went to an employment agency. They would have to get me a job or they would not make money.

"You know that employers won't hire you if you have been in the theater. They find theater people are too much of a risk," the young lady behind the desk said, looking grim.

"Look, I'm very smart and dependable. I'm never late and I have never had a sick day." I was begging. "Besides I don't understand what being in theater has to do with it."

"The business world assumes that if a theater job came along you'd take it."

"You don't seem to understand that can't happen with me, I have a crippled foot and will never dance again." I tried to hold back my desperation. "That's why I need the job so badly."

She thought for a minute, going through papers on her desk. She looked up at me like a mother, truly feeling sorry for me, "I'll tell you what I am going to do. I will get

you an interview with the manager at R.C. Allen Business Machine Company, but you must not tell them that you have been in the theater."

"What am I to tell them when they ask about my past experiences?"

"That will be up to you. Of course, I will deny that I knew you were in the theater."

She set up the interview, and I dressed in my best suit. I arrived at Mr. Henry's office early. Mr. Henry had white hair and looked like everybody's ideal grandfather. I lost my own grandfather when I was a child, so I knew I liked him from the start. His interest in what I was saying told me the feelings were mutual. After talking with me for about thirty minutes, he said that he would check my references and get back to me. All I knew was that I was applying to be a file clerk.

Getting my resume ready was difficult. Being a veteran helped take up some years and I told him I was the business manager of The Greenwich Village Studio of Dance for the past five years. I gave a fictitious name of the owner and the telephone number. I rushed home and waited by the phone for the call that I hoped would come.

Finally the phone rang and I answered immediately with, "Greenwich Village Studio of Dance, Mr. Smith speaking."

"My name is Mr. Henry and I'm calling for the R.C. Allen Business Machine Company in reference to an ex-employee of yours, a Mr. Andros."

"Yes ...what can I tell you about him? He has been in my employment for years. I hated letting him go because he did a wonderful job keeping my business going while I was working in Europe. Unfortunately, now that I'm back, there isn't enough work for both of us. Mr. Andros is one of the most honest people I have ever met." My heart was beating ninety miles an hour.

"You know that was the impression he made on me," he paused and added, "He left your number if I wanted to contact him. Would you be kind enough to have him call me on Monday?"

"I would be more than happy to pass on the message. Does he have your number?" I wanted the fictitious Mr. Smith to know nothing. Mr. Henry gave me the number and I added, "You won't be making a mistake."

"I am sure I won't. Thank you for your time." Mr. Henry hung up and I collapsed to the floor. I couldn't believe that I had pulled this off.

Mr. Henry wanted me to start to work immediately before the man I was to replace left. Robert was his name and as a teacher he left a lot to be desired. His main objective was to teach me how to "goof off." I couldn't understand how a person who had been with the company for years would cheat them out of time and money. I knew that I wouldn't do that. I worked much faster than he had, and they gave me more and more work to do. My work piled up so high that I had to take it home to keep ahead. One day I sensed someone standing behind me. I looked up, it was Mr. Henry, "You don't type very fast."

I smiled, "You asked me if I could type, you didn't ask how fast."

"Remind me the next time to ask the typing speed of a future employee." He walked away with a big grin, knowing I was doing a better job than my predecessor.

He spent so much time with me that it was obvious to everyone that he was training me to replace him when he retired, which would be in a few years.

My job put me in a position to see that the company was losing money. I began to keep records of this loss and in three months, I was ready to tell someone. Not only did I discover the loss but figured out a way to prevent it. I presented this information to my mentor, Mr. Henry. He checked and rechecked my figures and said, "You did this on your own? I can't believe that someone would take it on themselves to help the company." He looked at me as a proud parent, "I want you to get full credit for this work. I'll make an appointment for you with the Vice President and you can make the presentation yourself."

Mr. Henry made me feel so good and I could see a promotion in my future. I worked very hard to make the presentation professional, and waited for the opportunity to see the Vice President. I had only seen him as he came in late every day and left very early. I heard from others that he was on the golf course more than in the office.

As I entered his office, he started the conversation, "Mr. Andros isn't it? Mr. Henry tells me you have something to be called to my attention." He refused to make eye contact. I knew I was a better man than he.

"Yes sir, my job here is to keep records of all the repairs on the hundreds of machines we have in the marketplace."

"So?" he said as if bored out of his mind.

"Sir, here are the records that show we are losing at least a \$1,000 a month and if we would hire an extra repairman, we could stop the cancellations we're getting."

He studied the papers for a moment and then said, "Why don't you mind your own business." Then we made eye contact, "If you can't, maybe you should seek employment elsewhere."

I gasped, and my temper shot to the top of the thermometer, "Look! I was doing you a favor and if this is the way you say thanks, maybe you are right. I will give Mr. Henry my notice today."

Mr. Henry was very upset over my resignation, but understood when he heard the reason why.

In the next two weeks I let it be known I was a dancer before I came to this company. One woman working there said, "I knew I had seen you before; it was at the Amato Opera. I can still see you in *Figaro* -- you were really very good."

She was correct, and I was flattered that she had remembered me. It had been over a year since I danced with the opera.

I had been wearing the steel brace and it helped my foot get stronger and face front. I had even started giving myself barre. Dr. Ward, my regular practitioner said, "If you wear that brace too long your muscles will atrophy and we will eventually have to amputate it." That was all I had to hear. The brace came off the same day.

I let all of my friends know that I would soon be out of work. I got a call from Gayle Mayfair, an old dancing partner telling me that there was a White Plains studio looking for a ballet teacher "...and the job is yours if you want it." Which I did. At that

time in my career, I was not prepared to teach in a local school and I lasted one day. The students detected my inexperience and made mincemeat of me.

I thought that was the end of my teaching and I hadn't even had a real chance. Gayle came to my rescue again and got me a job teaching ballet in the Bronx, where I wasn't going to let some young child get the best of me. I stayed seven years in the Bronx. If the Vice President at R.C. Allen had accepted my proposal, I would now be an unemployed file clerk because the business went bankrupt. Instead I am now a "Ballet Teacher of Distinction." I feel there is someone watching out for me.