

Yahweh Ballet

Learning to Dance by Faith



Sandy Arena

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Photo by Scott Gargana



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Yahweh Ballet: Learning to Dance by Faith
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Dedication

I dedicate this book to my husband, Sam, and our children, Alexis, Caleb, and Annaliese. You are the notes in my songs, the heroes in my dreams, and the leaps in my dances. I thank God every day for the incredible family He has given me. I love you all so very much.



Amanda Rose Belmont

This book is also dedicated to the Belmont family and their daughter, Amanda Rose, after whom our ballet school was named. Her legacy and namesake has inspired me in ways I cannot explain. In remembering the life of Amanda Rose, may we treat one another with a spirit of love and gentleness that is only of the Lord and with kid gloves.

My final dedication is to my dear friend, MaryAnn Weed, who God sent as a friend and a cheerleader. She is the embodiment of the joy of the Lord. May all of God's people be so blessed to have such a friend.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to all the pastors, intercessors, and ministry leaders who devoted their time and gave godly counsel to the Amanda Rose Belmont Dance for Joy Studio, the Yahweh Ballet, and to our family over the years.

Thank you to the hundreds of families and their precious children who danced with all their heart and soul before the Lord at our school. It has given us much joy and pleasure over the years to see them use their gifts for Him.

Thank you to our gifted photographers, Sean Baker, Lora Ann Benson, Debbie Davila, Jim Delmege, Scott Gargana, and Alice S. Morrow Rowan for their generosity and visual gifts and abilities to capture beauty in motion for the Lord.

Thank you to the many new and old friends and prayer warriors around the world who have stood beside us along the way. There are too many to mention. *“A friend is always loyal...” (Proverbs 17:17).*

Thank you to my dear Betsy and her wonderful husband, Dave Shoppy, for showing me the way back to Jesus. May we all “Be a Betsy” and purpose to show the love of Jesus in real and practical ways to the hurting of this world.

Thank you to Michelle Legg and her administrative genius, who helped me organize my thoughts for this book. May the words of God that are hidden deep in your heart and soul always remain, and may you find the way, the truth, and the light in your call as a wife, a mother, and as a friend.

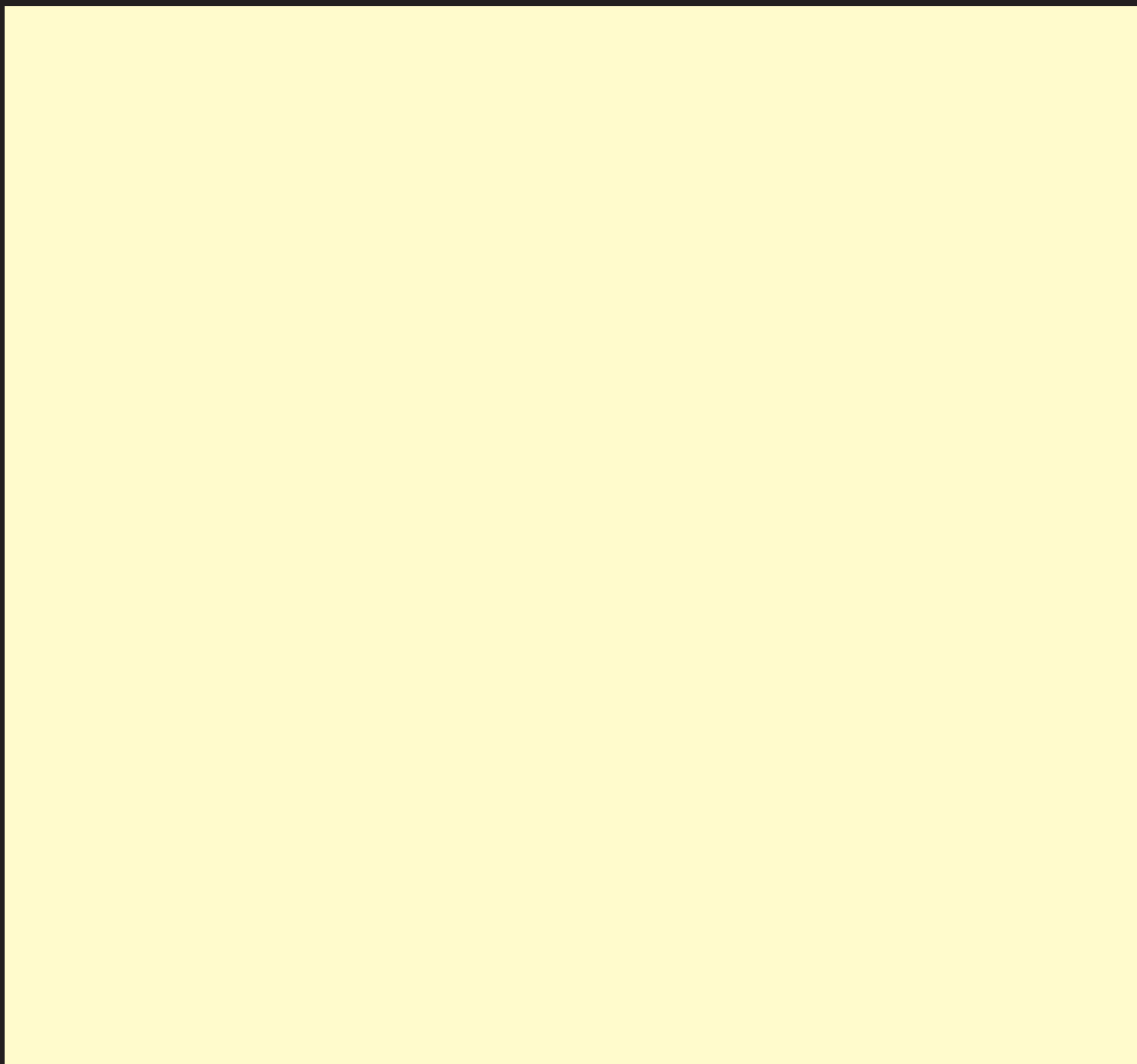
Endorsements

“It has been a pleasure to co-labor with Sandy Arena as she pursues God’s destiny for her life. Her total dependence on direction from the Lord has been refreshing in an era of self-reliance. As God directed, she followed—doing things she could only do with His help. Enjoy the journey as you read of a mother sold out to Jesus and pioneering a new path for her children and ours. May the testimony of Yahweh Ballet and Sandy Arena strengthen your faith to believe that with God nothing is impossible!” –Vonnie Askins, Living Faith Ministries, Inc.

“Sandy Arena is an example of how, with the power and direction of the Holy Spirit, any person can co-labor to see a God-given vision become a reality. Through many difficult situations she pressed through to see that the next generation would have the ability and avenue to have a voice in a world that is looking for answers to some of the most pressing moral issues of our day. The birth of Yahweh Ballet has given the next generation both the ability to minister and work to restore the art of dance to the body of Christ. At the same time, it brings the message of LIFE to a world that is refusing to look at the horrible issue of death in the womb that we as a society allow. You will be encouraged and challenged as you read this amazing story of a mother with vision!” –Dr. Joseph D. Askins, Living Faith Ministries, Inc.

CONTENTS

Introduction	7
Chapter One: A Lighted Path	11
Chapter Two: Big Ideas; Small Beginnings	14
Chapter Three: Faith, Hope, and Perseverance	18
Chapter Four: Hearing the Voice of God	28
Chapter Five: No More People Pleasing	37
Chapter Six: Expect a Battle	41
Chapter Seven: The Call Refined	46
About the Author	53



Introduction



Photo Credit: Lora Ann Benson from Yahweh Ballet's "Savior"

*"How great are his signs, how powerful his wonders! His kingdom will last forever, his rule through all generations."
Daniel 4:3*

We serve a mighty God, and to think He would choose us to partner with Him in building His kingdom is mind boggling. This book is the culmination of my family's experiences over the past six years in partnering with God to open a Christian ballet school and company called the Amanda Rose Belmont Dance for Joy Studio, and the Yahweh Ballet in response to a heartfelt request from our daughter, Alexis, who was age thirteen at the time.

Although I am passionate about music and have always had a love for health as a former fitness instructor and current fitness enthusiast, I am not a trained dancer. It is even more mind boggling to me why God would choose me to do such a thing. It does not make much sense in the natural. Why wouldn't the Lord have just asked a trained ballet dancer to fulfill this assignment? In the supernatural, I think Jesus explains it best in Matthew 19:26 when He said, "Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible."

At the time of this call, I was just an ordinary stay-at-home mom caring for our children, Alexis, Caleb and Annaliese (who at the time were ages thirteen, four, and two). My days consisted of arranging play dates, cleaning the house, changing diapers, cooking, shopping, chaperoning field trips, and carpooling kids. I was (and still am) just a mom seeking to fulfill her duties as a helper suitable for her husband and family, while trying to become the woman I know God wants me to be.

I had been a Christian for only five years when we were called to ballet, and God was still healing me of many wounds from my past. In retrospect, I see now in the Lord's indescribable love for us that this call had as much to do with God's plan to heal my own brokenness, as it did to birth this ministry! I know God would have loved us either way had we said yes or had we said no to this call, but the opportunity to work for Him certainly expedited a tremendous amount of spiritual growth and maturity in our walk with Him. And what is more important than that? It's not about the ballet ministry, it's about our relationship with Him. We are called to seek Him first and then everything else will fall into place. Embarking on an adventure like this required us to seek Him with all our heart and soul.



Photo Credit: Jim Delmege from Yahweh Ballet's "Amanda Rose"

"He heals the brokenhearted and bandages their wounds." Psalm 147:3

I had been sexually abused as a child by a relative. I came from a broken home. Many people I interacted with on a daily basis struggled with depression, rage, and addictions. Although I was raised to know Jesus Christ as a young child, I never went to church ever again after the age of fifteen when my parents divorced. I acted out in such an extreme manner—willfully trading in my cheerleading pompoms and an aptitude for leadership as president of my high school class for a lifestyle of cigarettes, drugs, alcohol, and living my life to party. They are chapters in my life I wish I could rewrite. Turning your back on God leads to negative consequences, and for me these included two abortions, a divorce, and a seemingly never-ending string of hurtful relationships resulting from me looking for love in the wrong places. I know this is a familiar story for so many people, and in baring my soul I can only believe my story will give others hope that Jesus saves and that He truly has a plan for our lives; one that will not harm us, but one that will prosper us (Jeremiah 29:11).

When I was thirty-five years old, I married my wonderful husband, Sam, and moved to Upstate New York, away from everything and everyone I knew. It was a turning point for me in the right direction and I rededicated my life to Jesus Christ and embarked on the greatest love story of my life—not only with Sam, but more importantly with Jesus Christ. I chose to love Jesus because He first loved me (1 John 4:19), and I became like the woman in the Bible who showed Jesus an overload of love, raining tears of affection and gratefulness on His feet in an intimate act of gratitude for His forgiveness of the many sins she had committed (Luke 7:47). This knowledge is so exciting to me that in spite of all of the mistakes we may make, God never turns His back on us and that He is truly “El Roi,” the God who sees us (Genesis 16:13) and all of our potential. He is the God who allows us to serve Him and partake of His glory regardless of the fact that we all have sinned and fall short of His glory (Romans 3:23).



Photo Credit: Debbie Davila from Yahweh Ballet's "Creation"

“For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.” Romans 3:23

I had just turned forty when Alexis asked us to open a ballet school for her. It surprises me how we said yes and with little hesitation! I had *no* idea what I was signing up for! Although I know now in retrospect, God had been preparing us. I had just run a marathon in honor of my fortieth birthday. The overall theme in running this marathon was *not* to quit, no matter how difficult it was, with Jesus Christ as the source of my mental, physical, and spiritual strength. I wore running pants on which I ironed on the words “Jesus is My Strength.” Forty is a number of completion in the Bible (Noah spent forty days in the Ark, Jesus fasted and was tempted by Satan in the desert for forty days before being called to His public ministry, the gestation period for a human being is approximately forty weeks). The race number assigned to me for this marathon was “thirty-nine” and I do believe this was *not* an accident. In birthing and establishing the Yahweh Ballet ministry, I greatly drew upon the lessons of that marathon; and at the heart of it was that no matter how difficult the circumstances appeared to be in the natural, or how painful it was to keep moving forward, quitting was not an option.

My dual-fold hope in writing this book is that you will have the courage and faith to say yes to God when He asks you to do something that seems to be impossible, and that you will run your race with His grace, strength, endurance, and perseverance.

I am a very visual person. To me, ballet is a beautiful art form. I personally never grow weary of looking at photographs of ballet dancers—especially ones whose heart and art points towards God. I find the photographs of the Yahweh Ballet dancers shown here to visually exemplify God’s Holy Word. Our prayer for you is that you will find hope and encouragement in these photos and stories as you pursue God’s destiny for your life. May you boldly approach His throne of grace and heed to the call on your life.

Chapter One: A Lighted Path



Photo Credit: Debbie Davila from Yahweh Ballet's "Creation"

"I will lead blind Israel down a new path, guiding them along an unfamiliar way. I will brighten the darkness before them and smooth out the road ahead of them. Yes, I will indeed do these things; I will not forsake them." Isaiah 42:16

My son Caleb once said to me while looking at a photograph of a maze, "Look Mommy, if I am looking down on the maze—just like God looks down on us—I can see how to get out of the maze because I can see the whole picture. But if I were inside the maze, I would only be able to see what was right in front of me." In his little mind, he understood that since God sees the entire maze and the path to the end, He can accurately light our paths. We only need to follow Him with childlike faith and trust the perfect plan He has for our lives.

I believe if we had seen the *entire* picture of the journey our family was about to embark upon when our daughter, Alexis, first asked us to open a Christian ballet school and ballet company for her we probably would have responded with a big hearty *no!* But in the Lord's infinite wisdom, He knew we may have been overwhelmed—to the point of saying no—by what was ahead for our family. Through each ministry phase the Lord only reveals the very next step in assignments, and since it is His plan and not ours, we trust He knows best.

At the very beginning, when we first opened the ballet ministry, we only knew that we were supposed to hold a vision-casting event. When we hosted this event, which was attended by about three hundred people, we didn't have any students or dance teachers! We didn't have a bank account established nor did we have a business set up—and we did not have any money to embark on such an adventure. We didn't have ballet barres, flooring, or mirrors. We certainly did not have an

understanding of how to run a dance school! By the world's standards, we had nothing! But in God's economy, we had *everything!* We had Him as our guide.



Photo Credit: Alice S. Morrow Rowan from Yahweh Ballet's "The Life Ballet"

"But Jesus said, 'Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are like these children.'" Matthew 19:14

Six years later, I can only reflect on how I may have felt if God worked differently. What if He had spelled out His long-term plans for us? I laugh as I imagine how I may have reacted if my heavenly Father sat me down and told me that on year six—which is where we are today—we would be traveling nationally and internationally with a pro-life ballet (one that I had written no less!) and that I would be testifying about my abortions in order to help others receive true healing in Jesus Christ after their abortions. Back then, I think that I, like Jonah, would have run from the call of God! I was still filled with so much guilt and shame from my past, and I know that would have scared me. The Lord knew that. He is a good Father and He leads His children with a gentle hand.



Photo Credit: Lora Ann Benson from "Savior"

"Mary responded, 'I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true.'" Luke 1:38

I wonder if Mary would have said yes to the Lord if He told her upon accepting the assignment to birth the Messiah that in this call she, as the dear mother of Jesus, would be required to watch her son be falsely accused, mocked, brutally beaten, and nailed to a cross to die a horrific death. I cry at the thought of how Mary must have felt as our Savior was crucified for our sins. But each step of the way, God only gave her the next place. I am thankful for His wisdom and I am thankful to Mary that she said yes to God. Because of her willingness to trust God's plan and to persevere through so many earthly trials and struggles, we now have Jesus as our Savior.

Chapter Two: Big Ideas; Small Beginnings



Photo Credit: Debbie Davila from Yahweh Ballet's "Creation"

"Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin." Zechariah 4:10

I love beautiful clothing and costumes and I think many girls and women do too. "The bride, a princess, looks glorious in her golden gown" (Psalm 45:13). This, by far, is one of my favorite Bible verses. When I read it, I can imagine our heavenly Father delighting in the beauty of His daughters. I have the honor of seeing this verse in action quite a bit when we are doing ballet performances. There is an overload of joy in the eyes and smiles of young dancers when dressed in their lovely headpieces, ballet shoes, and costumes. I can only imagine the Lord smiling down upon them with tender love and adoration when He sees His precious daughters enjoying the fruit of His provision.

Early on, we did not have the sewing abilities, resources, or knowledge to have our dancers wear such finery. Costume advancements came over a long period of time as we learned the ins and outs of wholesale costuming and sewing. In fact, during our very first year, all of our dancers wore black gaucho pants and black leotards that we accessorized with colorful, handmade sashes or ribbons.

Likewise, pertaining to our physical ballet studio, we too experienced a humble beginning in this department. The Lord had graciously given me a dream showing me an exquisite and heavenly ballet room. It was white and shimmery, and the walls were lined with mirrors. There were ballet barres in this studio, but unlike the wooden or metal, horizontal ballet barres that line most dance studios, these were vertical from floor to ceiling and featured intricately beveled columns made of crystal. Each dancer had his or her own personal crystal column to use for balancing during barre exercises. Since these barres were made of crystal, the dancer could still see themselves in the mirrors for proper body positioning.

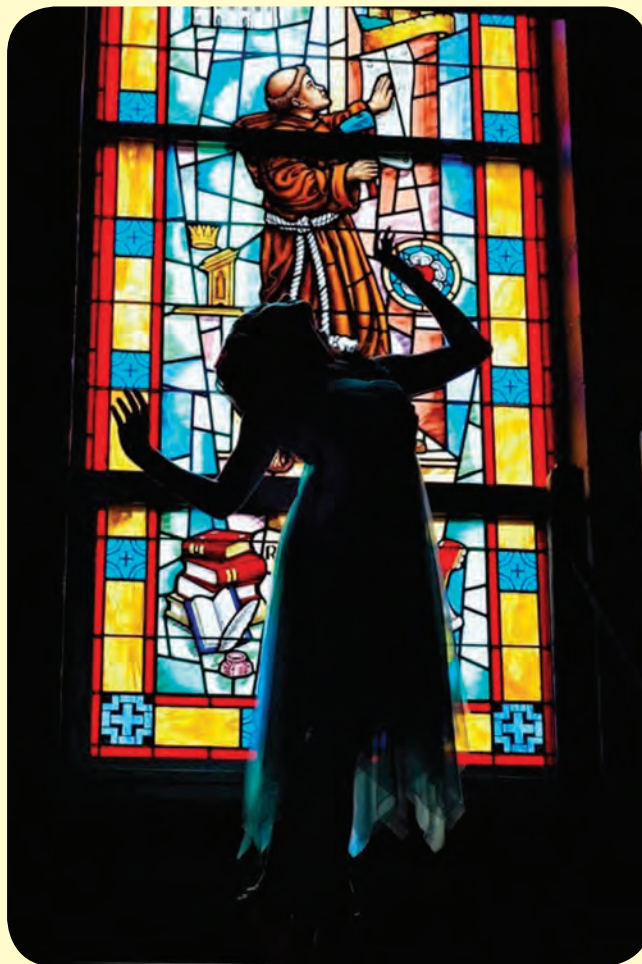


Photo Credit: Lora Ann Benson from Yahweh Ballet's "Savior"

"Then the angel showed me a river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb." Revelation 22:1

I was thankful for this dream as it provided a visual for what the Lord had planned for our ministry. I interpreted this dream at the time to mean ours would be a beautiful and unique ballet ministry. The crystal columns represented the Holy Spirit we would so desperately need to hold onto for teaching, balance, and alignment. “But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you” (John 14:26).

Our first dance class was held in a space that was a far cry from the vision described above, but we didn’t care! Holding onto the vision, we could see the potential. We were located sub-ground, in the lower level of a Christian school in our region. The school was going through a period of transition so there were desks, chairs, boxes, and old filing cabinets piled along the hallway. We were using a room that had broken, dusty mini blinds and rug-covered floors (a big “no no” for dancers as rugs are not an ideal floor surface for ballet). There were broken tiles, piles of unwanted furniture, and debris strewn about in there. But to us it was heaven! What a gift from God this space was to us.

As eager stewards of this vision, we pushed aside the debris to make room for our first ballet class. We dragged out one of the old desks in the hallway to serve as a makeshift reception desk for our new students and parents who would be arriving. That precious room was given to us from the former president of this school, Mike Belmont and his wife Tracy, the parents of Amanda Rose Belmont after whom we would one day name our school. In return for using the room rent free, we were asked to renovate the room into a ballet studio that we would leave behind for the school to use when we moved out. With a lot of hard work and elbow grease, eventually the broken shades came down and the clutter was removed.



Photo Credit: Jim Delmege from Yahweh Ballet’s “Amanda Rose”

“Unless the LORD builds a house, the work of the builders is wasted.” Psalm 127:1

As time went on, the Lord provided affordable sprung flooring and eventually beautiful mirrors and barres, but not without a lot of work and labor. I remember my hands being calloused, red, and filled with splinters after unloading 6 x 6 foot panels of plywood for the school. My husband and I were there until midnight unloading that wood with a friend. Another time, we sold food to pay for a portion of the mirrors. The night the food was delivered to our studio to distribute, we lost the key to the school's walk-in refrigerator and had to figure out a way to keep the food from spoiling! Although they were hard times, they are special memories as with each challenge and moment to overcome we could see the hand of God and His provision in all situations.



Photo Credit: Jim Delmege from "The Life Ballet" and "Amanda Rose"

"Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, 'I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life.'" John 8:12

We are now just moving into our fourth space, and with each move we are closer in a physical and spiritual sense to the heavenly ballet studio God showed me in the dream many years ago. It is still a lot of work and there are still numerous challenges that can't be avoided, but it has become the new "normal" for our family. Through each location move, I am reminded to never despise the small and humble beginnings of our ministry. They are some of the most heartwarming and endearing memories in this journey of faith.

Chapter Three: Faith, Hope, and Perseverance



Photo Credit: Sandy Arena from Yahweh Ballet's "Creation"

*"Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see."
Hebrews 11:1*

If I could do it over again, I wish I could take back the many draining hours of worry, stress, and anxiety in this walk of faith heeding to the call of God. With each new circumstance and the many ensuing changes that would inevitably take

place, I would find myself worrying or crying out to the Lord in distress; fear overshadowing my every thought and move. I struggled to believe that the plan on the other side of the valley would be a good one. I always imagined God to be angry with us, greatly fearing that perhaps we had built in vain and indeed this is not what the Lord purposed for our lives. "Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love" (1 John 4:18). I had yet to fully grasp the love the Father had for us and this ministry that ultimately belongs to Him and it was hard to realize that He always takes what is meant for evil and turns it into good for those called to His purposes (Romans 8:28). There is great freedom when you realize that God is in the business of resurrection and that all good seeds must die to bear fruit and that indeed if it did all go away, it was because it was part of His plan for our lives and for bearing more fruit for His kingdom (John 12:24).



Photo Credit: Debbie Davila from Yahweh Ballet's "Creation"

"I will bring that group through the fire and make them pure. I will refine them like silver and purify them like gold. They will call on my name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'These are my people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.'" Zechariah 13:9

One particular time of struggle for me with this ministry was when God showed me a lesson in faith firsthand. We had to move out of our second studio, which was housed within a five thousand square foot warehouse, because we were having

trouble meeting our expenses. Each new day, God always provided for us, but we felt there must be a more affordable option for our space needs and the stress was getting the best of us. We had a board meeting and I asked the other board members, my husband, and Amanda Rose’s mom, Tracy, to decide what we should do—stay in this location or be like Abraham and Sarah and go (again) to the land God would show us. I felt inadequate to make such a decision since I was devoted to the daily inner workings of the studio more than the other board members. Most likely I would have decided to stay and sweat it out—high expenses and all—for the sake of convenience and because I didn’t *feel* like moving again. The board members decided that we would leave. That was *hard* news for me to handle. It was one of those moments where I thought perhaps God had turned His back on us.



Photo Credit: Debbie Davila from Yahweh Ballet’s “Creation”

“For we live by believing and not by seeing.” 2 Corinthians 5:7

Moving out took several weeks. We had to rip down the many walls we had painstakingly built. Out came the floors. Off came the mirrors and the barres. Into boxes went so much stuff—costumes, cleaning supplies, office supplies, arts and crafts, books, and toys. We had managed to fill up five thousand square feet of space in a few short years—helping people birth all kinds of ministries and movement classes, and we had the stuff to prove it! I remember during moving week that I was exhausted and disappointed with having to move, *and* I had lost my contact lenses. Moving is bad enough, but moving without

being able to see two feet in front of you is just downright brutal, not to mention the inner turmoil I was experiencing! In the midst of my grumbling and complaining, the Lord reminded me of the scripture “For we live by believing and not by seeing” (2 Corinthians 5:7). As God so often does, He was teaching me in the natural what faith looks like in the spiritual—a degree of blindness! Sure enough, we landed in a beautiful studio at a fraction of the cost. (O me of little faith.)



Photo Credit: Debbie Davila from Yahweh Ballet's "Creation"

“Look at the lilies and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?” Luke 12:27-28

The Bible tells us that without hope, our hearts grow sick (Proverbs 13:12) and we can become discouraged which greatly hinders our progress. Hope often comes in tangible gifts from God designed to encourage us. I remember one summer when we were struggling to meet our bills. Summer dance attendance is always sparse and that time of year continually proves to test our faith. Oftentimes, I felt very discouraged and hopeless wondering why we thought we could ever start this ministry in the first place?

One evening during the summer, about two hours before midnight, I was sitting alone in the studio begging God for an answer of how we were to pay our rent. We were one thousand dollars short and had two hours until our final day of grace arrived. After I prayed, I sat there. There was nothing more I could do after that. Suddenly, someone walked in the door of the studio with an offer to cover rent for us!



Photo Credit: Jim Delmege from Yahweh Ballet's "Amanda Rose"

"And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:19

Another time, in the same predicament, we were still feeling quite discouraged and figured we should just quit. This time, we were two thousand and four hundred dollars short for rent, still during the sparse summer months. I was on my way

to the studio where my computer was located and we were tempted to send out a “we are closing” email. We had given it our all and it looked like God was shutting the door for us. I opened the door to our studio and before my eyes I saw a giant pile of garden lattice. Now this doesn’t sound like much, but at the time it was the most beautiful thing I could have seen. It was a sight that sent me to my knees to ask God for forgiveness for doubting Him. He truly does provide for every need (Philippians 4:19)! You see, earlier we had asked God specifically for garden lattice—making a point to pray in agreement with one another throughout the summer for garden lattice, of all things! (Matthew 7:7). We were in need of some walls and boundaries in our space, and we had mapped out a few areas where we thought lattice would serve an inexpensive and attractive solution. We had asked for lattice and that is exactly what God gave us!



Photo Credit: Debbie Davila from Yahweh Ballet's "Savior"

“Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.” Revelation 3:20

I called the parent who had donated the lattice to us (she did not know of our specific prayer request) and tearfully blurted out how the sight of the lattice alone kept me from closing the school. God promises to never give us more than we can handle and He knew I needed a boost of encouragement that morning. “There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it (1 Corinthians 10:13). That particular morning, this parent said she was hard pressed to get the lattice to the school. It had been on her “to do” list for quite a while, but God told her she had to get it there that day! And of course, it was the right amount of lattice, in the right dimension to complete the walls in the studio as we had planned.



Photo Credit: Jim Delmege from Yahweh Ballet “Amanda Rose”

“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a dream fulfilled is a tree of life.” Proverbs 13:12

Other times, God required us to be like David and encourage ourselves in Him. From many of these examples and the remembrances of this journey with God, times have been tough whether it is dealing with finances or dealing with strife amongst believers. Sometimes the Lord would not send a person or a word of encouragement or manifested example of His provision—such as a big pile of lattice. Those were the moments where I had to really dig deep and encourage myself in Him. I remember one Christmas when our ministry was in the midst of some trouble. We were on the receiving end of much public criticism and gossip. Although this was not what I *felt* like doing, I decided that I would spend time looking back on the former year and remember all the goodness of God that had taken place. I decided to encourage myself in the Lord and have a victory party on His behalf because of

all the great things He had done! I made a photo DVD of our favorite pictures and incorporated praises to Him for a banner year of the privilege of serving Him. I chose to renew my mind to the truth of Jesus Christ and the good plans He has for our lives.



Photo Credit: Jim Delmege from Yahweh Ballet "Amanda Rose"

"Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." Romans 12:2

Despite the hardships that were taking place around me, I remember this as being a very special time of reflection and an intimate moment with Jesus Christ. It was a time that I could rejoice in Him no matter the cost was of serving Him. This act of encouraging myself in the Lord was just what the Great Physician ordered. I am so glad He takes such good care of us. We reopened the school that following January with the highest influx of new students in the history of our school, and experienced a significant increase in our finances. The Holy Spirit also downloaded two incredible songs to me (*Silence the Critics* and *Heal My Soul*) that we recorded and used for our spring ballet called "Amanda Rose." This ballet honored the life of Amanda Rose Belmont. It also shared the history of our school opening, as well as offered a message of healing in the midst of unthinkable grief. Amanda Rose's parents Mike and Tracy Belmont had been very instrumental in the building of this ministry and entrusted the name and legacy of their daughter to us, something that will forever remain sacred to me.

There was so much healing that took place from those songs, from the *Amanda Rose* ballet, and in that season. I am so glad we didn't allow strife to rob us of the plan God had for us that year. Following are the words to these songs given as a gift by the Holy Spirit. One day they may encourage you too!



Photo Credit: Jim Delmege from Yahweh Ballet "Amanda Rose"

"David was now in great danger because all his men were very bitter about losing their sons and daughters, and they began to talk of stoning him. But David found strength in the Lord his God." 1 Samuel 30:6

Silence the Critics

Words and Melody Released by the Holy Spirit to Sandy Arena

Silence the critics, the perfectionist too. We want to love You and serve You with a heart that is true. Because we're made in Your image. And through sin took a fall. And the only One who is perfect is Your Son, heed His call. Judging this and judging that. Your words take a toll. You like this. You don't like that. It wears down our soul. If you want to be heard, take your thoughts to the cross. Let the Lord sift right through them and remove all the dross. Silence the critics, the perfectionist too. We want to love You and serve You with a heart that is true. Because we're made in Your image. And through sin took a fall. And the only One who is perfect is Your Son, heed His call. Judging me and judging her, Your plumb line so high. You like this. You don't like that. What about the plank in your eye? Jesus warned of this. All the love that we miss. Tearing down one another with our imperfect lists. Silence the critics, the perfectionist too. We want to love You and serve You with a heart that is true. Because we're made in Your image. And through sin took a fall. And the only One who is perfect is Your Son, heed His call.

Heal My Soul

Words and Melody Released by the Holy Spirit to Sandy Arena

O God, You're my God and You're my Savior. I call unto You when I am low. O God, You're my God and You're my Savior. Savior Lord, come to me and heal my soul. This world is so dark and full of hatred. Your men turn their backs and crucify. Tongues just stakes the ones that nailed You. Curses flow from the mouths that glorify. O God, You're my God and You're my Savior. I call unto You when I am low. O God, You're my God and You're my Savior. Savior Lord, come to me and heal my soul. Shield us from words sent to kill us. Your love shelters us under its wing. O You shelter us. Send words that curse back to the sender. Send them back my Lord. Let them know that You are judge and You are King. O God, You're my God and You're my Savior. I call unto You when I am low. O God, You're my God and You're my Savior. Savior Lord, come to me and heal my soul.



Photo Credit: Sean Baker from Mossa School of Dance Photo Shoot

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.” 2 Timothy 1:7

This is another favorite Bible passage we love to quote about enduring hardships perseverance. So many well-intentioned people told us to quit over the past six years, including myself, who entertained the thought more times than I would like to admit. But I always come back to the marathon I ran and the many lessons I learned in that race. When I was at mile twenty-five in the race, I called a family member to share my emotions at that time that I indeed was going to finish! I couldn't believe I was at mile twenty-five and I had done this! I needed to share; I wanted to cry. The person answered the phone and the first thing she said was “Honey, are you calling to tell me you quit?” I was a little annoyed and said, “NO! I did not quit! You don't quit at the twenty-fifth mile because then all the pain you endured and the lessons you learned from mile one to twenty-five would have been for nothing!” I hung up the phone and realized the hard lesson that sometimes it's just better to share my heart with my God than with “man” because man oftentimes disappoints, although usually this is not their intention to do so! Regardless, don't quit at the twenty-fifth mile. God will give you the strength, grace, and endurance to finish the race He has set before you!

Chapter Four: Hearing the Voice of God



Photo Credit: Lora Ann Benson from Yahweh Ballet's "Savior"

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." John 10:27

How do we hear from God? First and foremost, God speaks to us through the Bible. It is the foundation of our faith. Everything we need to know about life is in there. It is the core of our being in Him and the study and meditation of what we need to continually do. When I ran the marathon, I focused most of my training time on running and improving my cardiovascular strength and endurance, as well as strengthening the muscles in my legs. If I were to ever run a marathon again, I would instead focus more on strengthening my abdominal muscles, otherwise known as the "core" of the human body. Towards the end of my race, it was the muscular strength and endurance of my "core" that gave out first, not my legs as I thought would be the case. My core was not strong enough to hold up my upper body and at the end I was running bent over through my abdominals. I found the more erect I could hold my upper body while running at the end of this race, the more body weight was taken off my legs. But my core was just not strong enough to do this towards the end, and the pain was just unbearable on my legs. Likewise, if our core—our foundation and study of the Bible is weak—we will be bent over and experience pain in the extremities of our lives and ministries! We must study His Word to hear His voice and to know our assignments.

God also shares His heart and divine secrets in other ways. Knowing what God wants us to do is what keeps us on our knees and continually drawing closer to Him. Never in my life have I sought the Lord as desperately as in the past few years

since we created the Yahweh Ballet ministry. On a daily basis, we need the wisdom and guidance of the Lord. I need to hear His voice to mother my earthly children. Likewise, I could never “mother” my other “baby”—this ministry—without hearing from my Dad in heaven.



Photo Credit: Debbie Davila from Yahweh Ballet's "The Life Ballet"

"Then, after doing all those things, I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions." Joel 2:28

One way we hear from God is through dreaming. Many times our dancers have dreams and through them God gives us directions, warnings, creative input, or words of comfort. We have heard songs in our dreams that we have recorded and used for our ballets. We have seen choreography in our dreams. One of my favorite dreams was when God spoke so clearly to me that there was no denying what He was saying! I love it when He is clear! I had been crying out to the Lord one night in complete and total distress in the midst of personal battles in our home that were affecting our ministry; battles that had been going on for quite some time. The only relief I found that evening was to finally fall asleep. The Lord visited me in a dream that night and He showed me the words "Psalm 6:9," a scripture I was not familiar with. That was it. That was the dream. You can imagine my delight then when I woke up to read Psalm 6:9 in my Bible as: "The Lord has heard my plea; the Lord will answer my prayer." Of course everything we need to know and hear is in the Bible, but sometimes we need it pointed out to us—as in this occasion—through a dream.



Photo by Debbie Davila from Yahweh Ballet's "Savior"

"The Lord has heard my plea; the Lord will answer my prayer." Psalm 6:9

A few years ago, my daughter, Alexis, had a very visual and involved dream (about three pages long when written out) about dancers who were helping girls (she referred to as moaners) who were walking aimlessly around the streets. One "moaner" girl in the dream had bleeding feet and she was dancing around a gymnasium and leaving trails of blood on the floor. Alexis still remembers the choreography and patterns from the blood. A few years later, another dancer had a dream also about bleeding feet, while another dancer had a dream about human sex trafficking including choreography for a dance about this subject. As we were developing this dance on the sex slave trade into a full length ballet, the Lord gave me the name for the ballet as "Shattered Glass Slippers." After receiving the name for the ballet we figured out what the bleeding feet meant—and to think all those years this was in the plan! I love those revelation moments. It is faith and team building to finally figure out what God is saying through the unity of His Holy Spirit among His people.



Photo by Lora Ann Benson from “Shattered Glass Slippers” Photo Shoot

Chorus from “Shattered Glass Slippers” Given to Sandy Arena by the Holy Spirit.

“Shattered glass slippers, blood trailing from your feet. Cinderella dreams are vanishing with realities you meet. Reflections of your past in broken glass can’t you see? So when looking for a glass slipper from those with broken crowns, know the King whose crown was broken for you will never let you down. He’ll draw the shards right from your heart, you will see.”

(Shattered Glass Slippers will feature original music and dance vignettes exposing the loss of life, love, dignity and innocence of all people through the evils of pornography, human sex trafficking and sexual abuse.)

I often hear Christians speak of God showing them signs in nature that speak specifically to them. I've heard stories of deer, blue jays, herons, robins, swans, cardinals, foxes, alligators, beavers, and wolves, to name a few—sightings which came at opportune times to speak or confirm a certain word or display God's divine nature.



Photo Credit: Debbie Davila from Yahweh Ballet's "Creation"

*"For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God."
Romans 1:20*

We too have heard the voice of God through witnessing His creation. Immediately after we did our precursor show of "The Life Ballet," which then was called "Life: Being a Voice for the Voiceless," we left the church and saw

an enormous double rainbow brilliantly displayed across the sky. It remains the one and only double rainbow I have ever had the privilege to see. This show marked the first time I had publicly shared my abortion story and healing and we interpreted that rainbow to be His promise to be faithful to complete the good work He had started in us with this unique ballet (Philippians 1:6). Likewise, God used a rainbow to stop us from making a terrible mistake on behalf of “The Life Ballet” a few years later. We had a commitment to perform the show on a Christian television show that we had secured through an electronic service that connects artists with potential venues. We were well into the planning for this performance which would require traveling internationally. One day, I randomly received a rejection notice about this venue from the electronic service. This was confusing and devastating to me because we were so far into the planning stages for this trip and opportunity. I was tempted to walk away from this opportunity after reading this, feeling insecure and rejected that perhaps it wasn’t going to happen after all. I stepped away from my computer and looked out the window in my distress, and saw a gigantic rainbow in the sky! It reminded me of the double rainbow the Lord sent on behalf of “The Life Ballet” and I resolved that I would contact the producer again to investigate the rejection notice. It turns out it was a computer glitch!



Photo Credit: Jim Delmege from Yahweh Ballet's "The Life Ballet"

*“Then God said, ‘I am giving you a sign of my covenant with you and with all living creatures, for all generations to come. I have placed my rainbow in the clouds. It is the sign of my covenant with you and with all the earth.’”
Genesis 9:12-13*

As another example, I have seen two foxes on the side of the road in the past six years since opening the Yahweh Ballet. Both times, it was right before we found ourselves in a calamity and unfortunate circumstance. Another time, I saw the power of God in action. It was a bright and sunny day and I was standing at the end of the hallway in a Christian school where our studio was located. Since we were located on the lower level of the school, I would look at the window and would be eye level with the front parking lot. On this particular day, I looked out just in time to see a powerful buck with a full head of antlers charging across the parking lot! The school was located in a business and residential area. It was not in the woods. It was shocking and delightful to see such a magnificent creature charging across the blacktop. To me it was a reminder of the beauty, majesty, and power of God in action!



Photo Credit: Debbie Davila from Yahweh Ballet's "Creation"

*"Tell everyone about God's power. His majesty shines down on Israel; his strength is mighty in the heavens."
Psalm 68:34*

In seeking the voice of the Lord and hearing His direction for our lives and ministry, we are told to "Be still, and know He is God." As a perpetual "doer," being still is a task for me. It is a learned behavior, especially when I know God is asking me to wait. When we were first set to open our school, the Lord had provided our building and many other physical needs for the vision, but we still did not have teachers, and we were one month away from opening. I was being patient and the clock was ticking away. I was in Chicago at an airport, and I heard the voice of God speak to me about approaching a young lady who was in the terminal and tell her about our ballet ministry. We were on a layover. I internally argued with the Lord on this in fear and embarrassment, but I obeyed. My heart was pounding and I felt extremely awkward. I almost could feel the hand of God pushing me from behind towards this young lady to talk to her! We struck up a conversation after I approached her (I didn't tell her God told me to do that until much later!) and found out she was from our city and was a Christian. She was also a classically trained ballet dancer and was looking for a way to continue dancing when entering college which she was set to do in the fall that year in our

city! She began working for our school and has blessed our ministry abundantly ever since. In all my efforts and recruiting, I do not believe I could have found a more appropriate candidate for our school! I am in no means saying to “do nothing” when working for God and building His kingdom, but there are those glorious moments when He wants to build our faith and show off His sovereignty and *that* requires “stillness” on our part!



Photo Credit: Lora Ann Benson from Yahweh Ballet Photo Shoot

“Be still, and know that I am God.” Psalm 46:10

I’ve had some very poignant moments when God spoke very clearly through others, and sometimes not exactly what I wanted to hear. One of my favorite stories was at the beginning of our ministry. I was teaching a Christian

fitness class at a church which I would later teach for a season at our school. There was one cardio exercise I would lead our class in where we would do wall squats and I would talk about Jesus being the wall and we were to lean on Him, that being the foundation (or wall) that doesn't move. Then we would skip around the gym and talk about childlike faith (fun for grown women). After that, we would circle and hold hands and gallop around in a giant circle. We would talk about the unity of the body of Christ and helping each other out whether bringing a meal, or praying with someone in need. The rule was we had to go as slow as our slowest student in the galloping, not let go of hands, and not leave any of our sisters "in need" behind.

I had met a very dear friend in this fitness class who God sent as a sympathetic listener during the extremely hard first year of opening the ministry. My friend, of course, being the good friend she was, really wanted to help me and started reaching out by suggesting ways to help in very practical and tangible matters. I resisted her help! I was so wrapped up in this assignment, and my tasks for God, and feeling sorry for myself in all the challenges (and I suppose I expected people to listen to me), that pridefully didn't want anyone to help me. After all, I was the helper! It is my namesake. (The name *Sandra* means, "Helper of Mankind.") One day, my friend announced that she was no longer going to hold hands with me in fitness class during my little "unity" speech and exercise. She said, "So why is it you can help all these people, but no one is allowed to help you?" She was so right! Here I thought the little exercise routine was so clever and was meaningfully given from God, and really the meaning of it all was about how we all need help!



Photo by Sean Baker

"He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress where I will never be shaken." Psalm 62:2

Chapter Five: No More People Pleasing



Photo Credit: Debbie Davila from Yahweh Ballet's "Savior"

"It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in people." Psalm 118:8

I personally struggle with "people pleasing." I remember as a child praying so hard, asking God to please make me a nicer person. I really wanted to be kind to people. As a ninth grader, I was voted best personality and the friendliest. I was quite proud of this at the time because it was so important to me to connect with everyone in my school! I just love people. People pleasers struggle to say no and I've had to really give this one to God and continually lay it at the cross. My desire to please others and inability to say no can leave me confused and worn out.



Photo Credit: Debbie Davila from "The Life Ballet"

"Obviously, I'm not trying to win the approval of people, but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ's servant." Galatians 1:10

I tend to think out loud, and that can lead to trouble if I'm trying to make a decision about something and spilling my thoughts to various people. One time, when our ministry was in a crisis, I was at a restaurant with a few people we were working with and also with my very trusted friend and advisor, MaryAnn. I was doing my typical "thinking out loud about a situation." I should have been in my prayer closet, since ultimately my husband and I were the ones who had to make the final decision after hearing from God about what He wanted us to do, but here I was thinking out loud again about it. Suddenly I felt a hard, swift kick under the table. Surprised, I looked over at MaryAnn (who was the one who kicked me) and she mouthed, "Button your lip." I was so engrossed in my thoughts and trying to figure out my dilemma in my public discourse that I was taken back when I felt the kick. "What?" I mouthed back. "Button" she motioned her fingers over her lips, like you would do to a child. Unfortunately, I didn't get what she was saying. It was a big mistake, and one I'll never forget. The Bible has a lot to say about fools and their talking, especially the book of Proverbs. Years later and after many hardships in this area, I have finally figured out that it is better to keep my mouth shut until I *know* what God is saying; then I can speak His truth and direction with conviction and boldness.



Photo Credit: Debbie Davila from "The Life Ballet"

"Fool's words get them into constant quarrels; they are asking for a beating." Proverbs 18:6

My struggle with people pleasing perhaps grew our ministry in the early days in ways that maybe the Lord did not ordain. When our studio moved into the five thousand square foot place, we had about twenty-five teachers on payroll and classes going morning and night. Not only did it lead to burn out on my husband and I, who were ultimately responsible in a practical sense for everyone and everything, it also got quite confusing. Someone once said that I like to "biggie size" things which I suppose can be a good thing in some regards, but when the main focus is muddled by so many other things—many of which were very good things—there comes a point when you realize you need to cut back. In the height of this pandemonium, we had what seemed like every movement class under the sun like tap, jazz, hip hop, salsa, step, and ballroom. There were also three or four other ministries that started out of that place. Every person I met had an idea, and to me, the more people around doing things for God, the merrier. This concept can be good, but it made it quite difficult to focus on the *one thing* we knew God wanted us to do—the ballet school and company. When we moved out of that giant space, God put us in a smaller studio just large enough to hold two classes at a time, forcing us to return to the basics and focus on the one thing we were best at: ballet. Our work for the kingdom and the fruit we were bearing for Him became stronger as the ministry and the space we were in grew smaller. Our hearts were being pruned, but our gardens for Jesus greatly flourished in the aftermath, and that is what matters most.



Photo Credit: Debbie Davila from Yahweh Ballet's "Creation"

"Even before you begin your attack, while your plans are ripening like grapes, the Lord will cut off your new growth with pruning shears. He will snip off and discard your spreading branches." Isaiah 18:5

Chapter Six: Expect a Battle



Photo Credit: Debbie Davila from Yahweh Ballet's "The Life Ballet"

"The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life."

John 10:10

The battle often comes from within. Years ago (pre-Yahweh Ballet), I remember once when I was so offended by a church that I sent a four page letter to the entire pastoral staff to let them know just how I felt. In the aftermath of this, one of the pastors met with me and told me she meets women like me all the time. And I said, "You mean women that write long letters to everyone and tell them off?" With her white, shimmery hair and joyful, green sparkly eyes, she said with a chuckle, "Yes, women who do things like that." The fact that she could meet with me and make light of what must have been so hurtful to read, was an indication of the Holy Spirit in her *and* an indication of my wounds yet to be healed.

Years later, when my husband and I got our first "tell off" letter from someone we had unknowingly offended at Yahweh Ballet, I called the senior pastor of the aforementioned church and asked to meet with him. I was so ashamed of myself for the things I had said in my letter to his church. I was now on the receiving end of such a letter, and I

needed to apologize. *How could I have done this*, I wondered, looking back? There is a saying that hurting people, hurt people. This pastor, with grace and love, received my apology and to this day welcomes my family when we go to his church. That is the love of Jesus right there. Jesus asks us to look at our own faults before pointing out the faults of others (Matthew 7:3-5).



Photo Credit: Jim Delmege from Yahweh Ballet's "The Life Ballet"

"But if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another." Galatians 5:15

I will never forget what we experienced at our first performance. My daughter, Alexis, choreographed a dance with the first student we ever had, honoring the opening of our school. There was also a rose ceremony planned to thank her for inspiring the school. Right before all of these special moments were to take place, Alexis walked offstage near the lighting control panel. She bent over and at the same time the operator (who happened to be my husband, Sam) pushed the heavy metal toggles up and the handle of one jammed into her eye socket. She ran into the gym behind the stage and someone ran to get me. On my way to the gym to see what was happening, all I had heard was that her eye got jammed with a light stick and because of the way the accident was explained to me, I imagined her eyeball was burned. It was a horrible, freak accident. I ran into the gym and there she was screaming. All the kids were screaming around her. We were praying.

The next thing you know, one of the parents tells me she had just met a man who was an eye doctor and that he was leaving. She ran outside and grabbed him in the parking lot. There were also three nurses on hand. After taking a look at her, they told us that her eye was badly bruised, but she was going to be okay. Alexis insisted on doing her dance, but in all the mayhem someone had dismissed the show! We walked out into the hall and called everyone back into the auditorium. She did her duet with the other student with just one eye open.



Photo Credit: Debbie Davila from Yahweh Ballet's "The Life Ballet"

"I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them." 1 Timothy 2:1

There were two things that I walked away with after this experience. In the future, if something like this were to happen, we would stop the show and testify to give God the glory for what He had done, because He is the whole point of the performance and ministry taking place! "And they have defeated him by the blood of the Lamb and by their testimony. And they did not love their lives so much that they were afraid to die." (Revelation 12:11) I was so mad at myself for not testifying what God had done; He had even brought an eye doctor right on the scene! God always takes what is meant for evil and uses it for His good (Romans 8:28). The week after this show, I was a little shaken and queasy about the whole ministry. I would have never imagined it could be so hard and that the battle would be so great. In one day, however, I had three pastors ask me if we had intercessors—people assigned specifically to pray for our ministry. I was so naïve. I never had heard of such a thing and at the time would have never thought of asking people to be praying specifically for us and our family. One pastor said, "I would never step onto a pulpit to do the work of the Lord without having people praying specifically for me." God used these moments and the trials we had experienced to teach me about intercessory prayer, and it is a lesson I never forgot.

I had a very simple, but poignant dream once that depicted a wonderful visual of how we are to overcome battles. In my dream, I was treading water in the ocean and then I started sinking. I heard the voice of God say, “When you are going under, you need to learn how to breathe.” A hand placed a snorkel over my mouth. I went under, but remained breathing. Jesus said we’d face battles, so going “under” should be no surprise. The snorkel, however, represents the breath of God in the midst of the battle which is the whole armor of God, the breastplate of righteousness, the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.



Photo Credit: Jim Delmege from “Amanda Rose Ballet”

“Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God’s righteousness. For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” Ephesians 6:14-17

Despite circumstances we face as Christians, we have every reason to have hope and be filled with joy. We know how the story ends and that one day when we are reunited with our Savior in heaven, we will have our eternal reward. There came a time in this ministry where we had to decide to find joy in the midst of the storm. I had a dream

where Jesus came to me and showed me various aspects of His character and love for us, one of which was His love of joy and laughter! In this dream, He was standing behind me and poked me on the shoulder. I turned to look and then He looked quickly away (like He was saying, “not me, I didn’t do it”). He then did it again and I turned and this time I knew it was Him because He was the only one there. He then broke out into this giant laughter at the little joke He had played on me! Anyway, it was one of the nicest dreams I’ve ever had. It showed me various aspects of God’s love for us and “components” of Him. I had not yet grasped the Father’s love and yes, one of the components of His love is laughter! One of my favorite scriptures is, “You have turned my mourning into joyful dancing, you have taken away my clothes of mourning and clothed me with joy” (Psalm 30:11). In the midst of our battles, I hope we never forget to laugh and display the joy that comes from serving Him. The joy of the Lord is our strength!



Photo Credit: Lora Ann Benson from Yahweh Ballet Photo Shoot

“We were filled with laughter, and we sang for joy. And the other nations said, “What amazing things the LORD has done for them.” Psalm 126:2

Chapter Seven: The Call Refined



Photo Credit: Debbie Davila from Yahweh Ballet's "Creation"

*"For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die."
Ecclesiastes 3:1-2*

All marathons eventually come to an end, as in life, and there is a time to know when a particular race is finished and a new season has begun. Likewise, marathon runners must rest between their races.

Throughout the history of our ministry, God has taken us out for periods of rest. Each time this happened He restructured our ministry for His purposes. One time, we hired an executive director to replace me. She ran the daily operations of the school

and ballet company as I had done for years. I remember the first week after this happened, every time I would go to a parking lot in a shopping center, I would get the very first parking spot directly in front of the location I was going to. I started noticing it happening, and then it became downright funny because it was happening all the time! I wondered, *What is the meaning of this?* Then I realized that God was speaking to me. He was showing me favor in parking “my car” (in many of my dreams, our ministry was represented by a car or a bus or an airplane, and depending on what was going on, it would be stopping, accelerating, climbing hills, crashing, refueling, etc.). During this time the Lord had me write “The Life Ballet,” our pro-life show that we now tour with and is at the very core of our ballet company’s work. During that season of rest, I began to hear music and lyrics in my spirit, which was a new anointing and precious gift to me from the Lord. I now write, arrange, and record many of these songs and we use them in our dance programs and ballet productions.



Photo Credit: Debbie Davila from Yahweh Ballet's "Creation"

“Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts.” Colossians 3:16

Many things over the years have changed for the Yahweh Ballet and it is very different then it was in the beginning. We recently restructured the ministry so that the ballet school portion will run as a private business owned and operated by our daughter that will help to support the Yahweh Ballet company. We will continue to produce shows, tour and do some of our

most fruit-bearing programs including our “God’s Girl Princess Ballet Camp,” in honor of Amanda Rose Belmont. We recently moved our studio again, and in this transition time we pulled out the boxes, costumes, and items that we would need to work along the vein of the programs and the shows mentioned above. It was necessary for us to store those items in the basement of our home while the studio was in transition. As we were packing up gobs of wood and rubble, I realized—with great surprise—that all of the costumes, accessories, and boxes that we need for our next season fit neatly on one garment rack. *One Garment Rack!* Easy to pack and easy to travel! As I gazed at the rack, it was amazing to me that *one* garment rack could bear so much fruit for His kingdom. Right there on that rack in my basement is what remains. What a beautiful rack it is!



Photo Credit: Jim Delmege from Yahweh Ballet’s “Amanda Rose”

“So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.” 1 Peter 1:6-7

Runner's feet are not always pretty to look at. I lost three toenails when training for my marathon. Dancer's feet exposed can be quite gnarly, as well. At one point in their ballet career, most ballet dancers will also lose their toenails. My daughter has lost many over the years. It is ironic then one of our favorite Bible verses for our ministry speaks of beautiful feet.



Photo Credit: Jim Delmege from Yahweh Ballet's "Amanda Rose"

"And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, "How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!" Romans 10:15

The last ballet we did with the old structure of our ministry in place was our "Creation Ballet," which was written and directed by our daughter, Alexis, who is now nineteen years old. The ballet took place on her 19th birthday. It was a shining moment for our family in which we greatly rejoiced in our Lord and all He had done over the years. As a mom, there is no greater joy than to see your children flow in their gifts for Him!



Photo Credit: Lora Benson from Yahweh Ballet's "Creation" Photo Shoot

"I could have no greater joy than to hear that my children are following the truth." 3 John 1:4

I kept thinking about feet while helping our daughter prepare for the "Creation Ballet," and then it dawned on me that the Lord would want us to wash the feet of all the dancers in the show. It was a very special and intimate moment for us, and one I will always remember. We prayed the verse over each dancer, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news," from the wee performers up to the young adults. We declared that God would be sending them out to tell the world about Him through their dancing. As I read the Scriptures about Jesus washing the feet of His disciples in a ceremonial act of service, knowing He would be leaving them soon to return to the Father, the foot washing became even more precious to me. At this point, we knew we would be closing the school portion of our ministry, but we had not yet communicated this to our parents and students. It was a joyful day for us as a family on behalf of our daughter's accomplishments, but it was also bittersweet as we wondered what was ahead for Yahweh Ballet and the new twists and paths He would bring us on.



Photo Credit: Sean Baker from Mossa School of Dance Photo Shoot

“‘No,’ Peter protested, ‘you will never ever wash my feet!’ Jesus replied, ‘Unless I wash you, you won’t belong to me.’” John 13:8

My daughter set up her first photo shoot for her new school and she chose feet as her main subject, as she too had been contemplating the feet of dancers and the new path God would pave for her. She has named her school Mossa School of Dance. *Mossa* in Italian refers to movement. She chose this word in honor of dance movements. Later, we found this word to specifically mean movement as in a chess game, which really blew our minds because chess and our dance ministry have been correlated in meaning over the years. During the very first month that we opened our school back in 2006, my friend, MaryAnn, told us that while she was praying for our ministry she was looking up into clouds and saw a chess board.

She called me so excitedly to say she felt like God showed her this chess board on our behalf because He was shifting and moving us like playing chess, because He had a place for us to eventually be. But in order to get us there, we would have to go through this shifting and moving. Over the years, when I would call her to tell of yet another change or another new path (some of which were very hard), she would respond, “More chess.”

We know because of His great love for us, that this is just the beginning of the story! Praise God for a confirmation that He knows the beginning from the end in the races He has set before us!



Photo Credit: Debbie Davila from Yahweh Ballet's "Savior"

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne.” Hebrews 12:1-2

About the Author

Sandy Arena and her husband, Sam, serve as the directors of the Yahweh Ballet ministry. First opened in February 2006 as a one-room ballet studio located in the basement of a Christian school, the ballet company now travels nationally and internationally performing live, original productions, and has also been featured on Christian media and in Christian film festivals. Prior to this call from God, Sandy was a freelance writer and publicist, and part-time fitness instructor. Through all of her accomplishments, her most valued position has been that of a wife and stay-at-home mom.



Photo by Sean Baker

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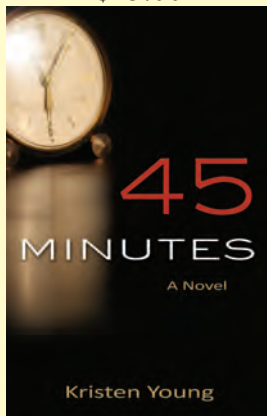
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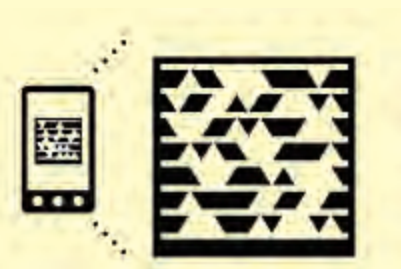
Author Stephen Lewis raves, "Kristen's style of writing will capture you and keep you reading as different events take place both spiritually and physically. As you read *45 Minutes*, you will see what can possibly happen if we choose to forgive those who have hurt us. You will also see firsthand, that making things right with others before it is too late is a must, no matter what the circumstances are."

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Has God asked you to fulfill a vision or dream that seems impossible?

When Sandy Arena was asked by her thirteen-year-old daughter to open a Christian ballet school, little did she know that God had been preparing their family for this journey for a long time. In the midst of what seemed to be impossible circumstances—most notably that she was a stay-at-home mom with three young children, *not* a dancer, and had little free time on her hands—she said yes to her daughter and to the call of God.

Pushing aside defeating thoughts, she opened her mind and heart to the promises of God, as she and her family embarked on the journey set before them. Now, as the director of Yahweh Ballet, a Christian ballet company, the author offers a raw and inspiring account that will encourage you to pursue supernatural dreams for the Lord no matter how far reaching they may seem. This is a story of family and love, God's provision and purpose, and the passion for dance that is developed along the way.



Sandy Arena and her husband, Sam, serve as the directors of the Yahweh Ballet ministry. First opened in February 2006 as a one-room ballet studio in the basement of a Christian school, the ballet company now travels nationally and internationally performing live, original productions, and has also been featured on Christian media and in Christian film festivals. Prior to this call from God, Sandy was a freelance writer and publicist, and part-time fitness instructor. Through all of her accomplishments, her most valued position has been that of a wife and stay-at-home mom.



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