

## Performing For Life

By: Erick "Bacon"

Many performers around the world whether in front or behind the camera are willing to admit and tell the world in their credits that –all of this is due to- "God, family and friends". However, it is difficult to thank things in which you do not believe in. When was the last time you heard someone thank his or her own "mind, body and soul"? Is it not what dance is supposed to be about? To take a deeper look at these three things that make up your whole being, how could you not mention them? You are nothing without a soul. You're body is what carries your soul and you're body cannot live without the mind. Friends come and go. Families are there for you through thick and thin; yet never really provide you with what you need as a performer. The rhetoric replies that performing is a waste of time and will never pay is not helpful. While God...well, as a touchy subject for many, "God" works in mysterious ways. I guess the hardest question to me as I was starting to grow up was whether I believed in fate or faith. What was faith? It was drilled to me that "faith" was the belief of God. In actuality, faith was a "confident belief or trust in a person, idea, or thing". So would one classify "God" as a person? Not really. An idea? Could be. A thing? I would hope not. Did that mean I didn't have faith? As I later grew up and learned about myself I realized in fact I actually did have faith. I had faith in MYSELF. What about fate? Fate is "the supposed force or power that determine events". When others asked if I believed in fate I could only answer no. It was hard for me to believe in fate because I didn't like the idea that I was not in control of my life. However, now that I am older and wiser (with still a lot of information to learn), it is hard to believe that I have done the things I've done and gone as far as I have on sheer knowledge and talent. I have acquired the knowledge as time progressed but never knew per each path I began. The talent was something that was given to me. That I understand now. But with the knowledge I gathered throughout each journey, it gave me the potential to push my talent to the end of one path. Not always ready to embark on a new one, I was always willing to accept the challenge. As this article goes on, you will get a glimpse on why it was hard for me to understand "God, family and friends" and made me believe that "mind, body and soul" would make such an impact on my life as a performer.

To begin and get it over with, coming from a Roman Catholic family I found myself going to school up north with the nuns. Never understanding it as a child and still bewildered as an adult, I was reminded that my way of thinking was not believed by God...I was hit by the meter stick for running...asked too many questions...was hushed because I was told "you think you know too much"...was told my ideas and thoughts were preposterous...and worst of all, was hit by a ruler everyday because I wrote with my left hand. Although nothing beats getting thrown out of my church as a child for "showing tendencies of homosexuality". As far as family...well, basically it was only my mother and I. Her trying to hold down two jobs to support the both us, funds were limited. Middle school down south left me a lot of homework and studies to only make C's, D's and F's. Dyslexia and ADD would neither help that or my mom. Although, I would come to find out only band class would give me an "A" and as a 6<sup>th</sup> grader I would ask my mom for a trumpet. But being 4 feet 8 inches and 95 lbs., I would soon ask for an instrument that was smaller. Two months after school began and a bit of that mother sarcasm, she had indeed found something smaller. A flute! I don't have to tell you that middle school never got easier, but within the next 2 years I would become one of the best flute players in the county. 8<sup>th</sup> grade came along where playing the flute wasn't enough. I had to stand out. So I picked up the piccolo. Indeed I stood out by being the loudest one (some things hadn't change

and they would never). High school followed shortly where I became bored with marching band. I followed by picking up the clarinet, continued with my earlier lessons of trumpet. Proceeded with mellophone, saxophone and colorguard. I joined the winterguard program to spin flags (while high school never got easier as well). Flag spinning being too easy, I learned how to spin a rifle and saber. The summer of my sophomore year I joined a drum and bugle corp. A summer never to forget and too young to appreciate it, I traveled the United States. On my return, I learned that my high school colorguard wasn't good enough for me and there was only one thing to do. Join the independent colorguard known as the Alliance of Miami. This is where I would meet my new family for the next 7 years. Learning a lot of new life lessons I would soon learn the basics of dance. Falling in love with the movement aspect I would learn that dance was where I was heading. Most people know I can tumble and have this idea that I took years of gymnastics. Maybe I stretched it a little, but the truth of that didn't come along until the 1992 Olympics. Watching the gymnasts, I would sit on the floor wishing I could do what was attempted on my 36-inch screen. During the commercial breaks I would run downstairs to the back yard and attempt all the back flips and tricks of Svetlana Boginskay (which while performing I met) and Jarrod Hanks (which I worked with at Disney). The few following years would allow me to be on the Marching Auxiliaries staff as an auxiliary instructor. As we traveled I saw the dancers and said that is what I wanted to do. Coming back from the summer and having no help from the family (money wise she couldn't help) I put the money I had made for the summer towards dance classes. Had I known unlimited classes would wipe away my bank account I would have thought of a different way to spend my money. After a month of my first dance classes I had learned jazz, tap, hip-hop and ballet. I would soon fall in love with it all. Well, all except ballet. It still would take me 3 years to prove myself for M.A.'s dance staff. I quickly noticed that my savings account was dried. As much as I loved the art I realized that it was too expensive. Quitting school February of my senior year left me to find odd jobs and work on my GED. Taking the test in March and acquiring such high scores, I received my High School Diploma in April and walked the stage 2 months before the rest of my class.

Not receiving any help from my "family" for a talent and love of performing that was as she said, "a waste of time. Education is more important". I decided to head on over to the library and check out books. When the stick figure had one leg on the floor and the back leg out in a 90-degree angle, I soon learned that it was called an arabesque. Through a couple of years of research and readings of modern and jazz dance on books, video and audio, I eventually lied on my resume to get a job at a dance studio to teach. I then became one of Broward County's best dance teachers. I knew by taking this job I would now get paid for what I loved and most importantly, receive the keys to the studio. For after hours I would be able to come in and practice what I had learned in the previous books. As I taught, "I'm A Little Tea Pot" to 4 and 5 year olds, I realized that I needed to further my career. I moved to L.A. In my early 20's and about a year of dancing in my bag I would welcome the hospitality of my good friend and fellow M.A. staff member, Helen Wild-Norris. How was I supposed to know that if you had no money and no car you were not going to make it? Even though I didn't have any of these things and no dance experience I did have something. I had talent. A gift. I had found faith...faith in myself. Still not liking the idea then, I also had fate as a guide. Finding any jobs was very difficult yet I was still able to be assistants for some major choreographers/teachers and be seen by agents. I was soon asked to be part of the Kazarian Spencer Agency (KSA), which is the top dance agency in L.A. Less than a year of realizing performing in L.A. was going to

be harder than I thought I made my first adult decision to move back home. Shortly after Christmas I would once again invade my mother's life and be subjected to the words, "see, I told you that performing didn't pay. You need to think about your future and the rest of your life". Towards the middle of March of 1999, I decided I would need a vacation from her and my standstill life and visit my close friend in Orlando and fellow auxiliary M.A. instructor, Suzy. While visiting her we both received calls from a mutual friend of M.A. that she would be in Orlando to audition for Walt Disney Resort. "Yuck", I thought but when asked to come and cheer her on for her first dance audition I figured I could help out. Not being able to be in the same room without a picture and resume, I gave Disney what they wanted and sat in the corner to watch my friend Marissa tear it up. I guess it is at this time I realized about fate. Fate had intervened and stood me up to audition. Actually, at that time fate was Pam Bolling and she was running the audition. I had not expected to audition for I was unshaven, all pierced, tattooed and wearing a "wife beater". I eventually auditioned with the thought of just getting through first cuts to then head for lunch. I truly was not expecting to stay in that room until mid-afternoon to be in the 4<sup>th</sup> cuts, pictured and measured. Marissa unfortunately, had made it to lunch much earlier than I would. That was on March 19<sup>th</sup>, 1999. On March 22<sup>nd</sup> I was getting ready to head home for one more month of the "mother" for the summer of M.A. was soon approaching. I received a call that day from Disney Casting offering me a full time contract but had to relocate to Orlando, Florida by April 4<sup>th</sup>. Excited yet torn, for this was to be my 7<sup>th</sup> year with Marching Auxiliaries and 1<sup>st</sup> year as a full time dance instructor, I allowed fate to steer me towards a new path. I then learned Beauty & The Beast...Pleasure Island Explosion Dancer...Followed by Tarzan Rocks dancer. After awhile I realized I could learn stunts to Tarzan Rocks. So I became a roller-blading monkey...Literally! Finally, I chose to move on to singing. With Disney I have managed to be seen on Regis And Kathy Lee and Rosie O'Donnel. Prior to that I had done a few other things that had aided me to learn about television. Zena, Buffy: The Vampire Slayer, and America's Most Wanted would soon follow. I have been able to gather myself with Actor's Equity Association (AEA) and moving on to the Screen Actor's Guild (SAG). To think that at one point all I wanted to do was dance. Then, in desperation all I kept thinking was that's all I would do and not be discovered. Was I scared to think that M.A. was all I would ever do? Then Disney came along. After a year and a half I was definitely afraid that I would forever be dancing for the "Mouse". Then came stunts and singing and movies and videos and choreography. After 3 years with Walt Disney World, do I believe I will be there for much longer? Not really. Fate will eventually step in and head me towards a new journey. As far as friends, I've come across many throughout my life. In this industry I've learned that friends are your potential enemies. They will be the first to bring you to your knees prior an audition. It seems at many times that everyone is out for themselves. My Disney friends are my good ones. Everyone there however is getting ready for their next journey therefore making most of them unavailable or moving on. My closest friends I would have to say have spent endless summers and countless nationals with me through my years with M.A. Seeing them once a year does make it difficult but the ties will never break. To most people my life seems very interesting yet I have much more to do. As many performers, could I move on? Have I settled for something? Maybe. But right now the paychecks are steady. My life is a lot of fun and I am learning a lot more to move on. I have heard and learned that the whole L.A. and New York audition process is very hard. Do I have it made? Yes, I do. I entertain 2,000 people; most of them children three or four times a day. I have full benefits, insurance, pensions and my schedule consists of

showing up to work at 9:45am and being finished by 3:45pm.... yet only “technically” working an hour and a half!!

Yet my life isn't as fulfilled as I want it to be. However, faith in myself and fate will provide that for me. Teaching throughout the United States and for 10 years I see so many teachers telling their students what to do. Parents persuading their children towards something they think are “best for them”. In fact, everyone is different in his or her own fate. I feel that whether teacher or parent, the student must learn their lives on their own. Let them learn from what they see and do. We are only guides. Walking information booths with jazz shoes at each intersection of the student's life if you will. As they have a lot to learn so do we. How can you be expected to get on the next ride without your “information ticket”?

People have asked me what is “Perform”? Perform is merely “to begin and carry through completion”. The way you begin your life. The way you end it. The way you start your day, performing every thing you do until the curtain closes while your head rests on the pillow. Either way, no matter what you do you will always “begin and carry through completion”. But the only thing you should remember is that no matter what happens, no matter what your family tells you. No matter what your teacher tells you...life is a performance. So perform life. But knowing the path and walking it are three different things. Mind, body and soul.