



Pam Kuntz

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A short-haired woman stands in the middle of a large, empty room and stares at her reflection in a tall panel of mirrors that cover the wall from end to end. She begins to sway her long limbs gracefully in beat to her slow-tempo counting.

One. Two. Three. Four.

Other people are spending the day out basking in the abnormally warm weather, while Pam Kuntz spends her time inside the small commissary building teaching young dancers to explore creatively. But for Kuntz, dance was never a choice; it was a necessity. Kuntz has been dancing in Bellingham since 1999. Throughout her time in the region, she has worked with aspiring new dancers, co-founded Bellingham Repertory Dance, and began Kuntz and Company.

It was 2005 when she first gathered community members and professional dancers together for a piece on mothers. Kuntz found people open to sharing their experiences in motherhood and then used those

interviews to craft a dance piece that could translate to audiences just what those mothers were feeling and went through. She said these pieces function as a way of learning for both viewers and participants.

“Dancing and learning from the community, engaging their interest and their lives is a way for artists to turn around and tell it back,” Kuntz said. “It lets you see those lives in a different way.” It was during this time that she decided to form Kuntz and Company, a dance and theatre organization that would bring light to topics including Asperger’s, death, and body image.

Throughout the years and many profound productions, Kuntz has worked with various community members as well as professional dancers. One of her longest bonds was formed during one of the dance classes that she teaches at Western Washington University.

Ian Bivins was registering for classes when he stumbled across Modern Dance I in a course catalogue. Bivins mistook the course as a partners dance class that would potentially include Square Dancing or Swing, lending

Bivins an opportunity to meet women his age.

Years later, the pair have worked together on various dance pieces in the community, including *Stories From Jim and Jo*, a piece that tackled the issue of Parkinson's disease and other neurological disorders. "There was something really personal at stake here," Bivins said about the piece. "It involved having to do my homework as an actor and get inside what Parkinson's is, and develop an understanding of Multiple Sclerosis."

Kuntz has been working with individuals diagnosed with Parkinson's disease for over seven years. She co-created a Parkinson's and Neurological disorder dance class that with Rick Hermann, a man diagnosed with Parkinson's himself. Parkinson's disease is characterized by shaky hand tremors and rigid movement, potentially posing a challenge for dancing. But Hermann said it's this continuous movement that helps to slow the progression of the disease.

"I think [Parkinson's disease] is something you have to be brutally proactive about, the more things you can throw at it the better, dance is just one aspect," Hermann said.

Before Kuntz was a dance instructor for people with Parkinson's and students at Western, she was a young child with a physical and creative need that couldn't be met through activities like competitive sports or running. It was during a baton and dance class that something clicked for Kuntz. She discovered a means of meeting her needs with a newfound love of dance. "I can't, it's not a choice to stop dancing ... I'll always be moving in a way that expresses how I feel," Kuntz said.

Through the years, not much has changed. Kuntz still spends a good portion of her time in the dance studio and dance is still an essential part of her life. Kuntz was lucky to have found her lifelong passion at the age of 10. Something very few of us are lucky to find at all. ◀

