

“Do You in Pastels”

A couple years after my father died, my mother married Dody and we moved to Stamford, CT, into his house. I was 10. I went to the local public schools. I didn't like school, except maybe English class and then creative writing class years later when I was in H.S. I wanted to be a dancer, singer and actress. I wasn't interested in the rest of what we were supposed to learn, to memorize for school. Most teachers seemed bored and uninspired. Or maybe it was just me who was bored and uninspired and ineducable.

In the early years in Stamford, I took ballet classes downtown with Madame Jeanette Lauret. I wasn't very good. All Madame Lauret ever said about my ballet dancing was that I looked like a karate expert. (I knew she really meant 'sans expertise'.)

The class was mostly made up of a bunch of puny, pre-pubescent girls with burgeoning ballet dancer eating disorders. We'd sit in the dressing room before class, ruthlessly scrutinizing our tiny bodies and complaining about how fat we were, while scoffing down quantities of macaroni or potato salad or similar high calorie carbs from the deli below the ballet studio.

Most of the students were dedicated ballet students, unlike me. Ballet classes with Madame Lauret didn't last too many years for this karate kid, but my distorted ballet body image endured.

I hated living in suburbia. I just wanted to get away, to be in the city as much as possible. Starting at age 14, I used to take the train into New York for dance classes a few times a week. I got lucky with a sympathetic guidance counsellor in school, who accepted my doctor's note about my bad knee and excused me indefinitely from taking gym class. He also excused me from home room, lunch and study hall, so I could consolidate all my academic classes in the morning and be free to leave school early afternoon to go to NYC for dance class. I never requested a doctor's knee excuse to get out of dance class. Nope, an ace bandage at most, and I was good to go. I wanted to dance. I took ballet classes at American Ballet Theater School on W. 57th St. and modern dance classes with Paul Sanasardo on W. 21st St. I wasn't very good at either --- No extension, no turn out, couldn't remember the combinations... But I went through the motions, or rather, my dancing destiny was in motion, and I followed the lead.

One of Paul Sanasardo's main dancers heard that I was living in Stamford. He was friends with Judith Ackerman, who happened to have been my acting teacher when I was in 5th grade in Stamford. He told me that Judith was back in NY and he got us in contact. Judith was such a generous, ageless person. She later became an activist for Mumia Abu Jamal and for Palestinian rights and joined the Granny Brigade and similar initiatives. She also sang Bach with coral groups at Christmas time and did extra work

on films when she wasn't being a dance therapist for seniors in nursing homes. She was married when she was my 5th grade acting teacher, though she still looked like a kid. I walked into the auditorium for our first class and asked the other kids where the teacher was. She was sitting on the floor with everyone else, looking like the rest of the elementary school kids, and she was as playful and creative as any of us. She and her husband left Stamford to move to Israel to live in a Kibbutz. They got divorced in Israel and she moved back and got an apartment on the upper west side of Manhattan.

When I first saw her again, she gave me keys to her place and said that except when her lover, the Israeli painter, Yehudi was in town, I was free to stay there at the apartment, whenever I wanted, whether she was around or not. I spent many weekends there, often in her absence. I took dance classes and hung out in Greenwich Village, in Washington Square Park. I dressed down with fringed jeans or sometimes little skirts, moccasins and often a short cape. Sometimes I'd panhandle, asking tourists for spare change. I was escaping suburbia with a vengeance. I'd take the train to and from Grand Central Station. Sometimes the train was filled with business men on their commutes. Once a well-dressed, middle-aged waspy-looking man seated next to me, slipped his hand under my cape and up between my legs, feeling around for my crotch and for a way in.

I moved myself abruptly and he retreated. Then I quietly closed my cape in tighter around my body so he couldn't get his hands under there again. It didn't occur to me

that I could speak up and say something out loud to stop him, to embarrass him in public and alert the other adults in the room or the conductor or anyone who'd help me. But would they have even helped me and said anything to stop him and rebuke him? More likely they would have looked at me with disdain, like something was wrong with me as they protected him and his virtuous stature, (and by extension, their own image and impulses). I didn't know for sure, but not a peep came out of my mouth. I knew the drill. I was an easy mark and I knew from experience that supposedly upright, respected, married men often made their move on me.

One time in Washington Square Park a man started talking to me, telling me about an upcoming art show of his. He said I had an interesting face and said other things to make me feel unique and special. He said, "I want to do you in pastels". He encouraged me to go with him so he could draw me in advance of his show. I went along. He hailed a cab and we headed off to his place, which turned out to be in Brooklyn. He made the taxi stop and wait for him at a shop along the way in Brooklyn, while he went in to buy film for his camera. He said something to the cab driver to be sure the driver witnessed that I was going with him of my own free will. I sat in the cab quietly, uncontrollably shaking inside myself in terror. I knew I was in serious trouble, but I could not move. I was immobilized. I could not speak. Even while I was in the cab alone, while the guy was in the shop, I could not ask the driver to turn around and

take me back to Manhattan. I could not get myself out of the cab to run away and find my own way back to the Village or to Judith's apartment or to Stamford or anywhere. I could not move a muscle to save myself. I felt a severe and haunting dread inside.

The certainty of the imminent danger was palpable. The fear was racing through every cell of my body, but my mind and muscles were frozen. I could not escape. It was as though my fate was sealed and I was powerless to intervene in what was already set in motion.

It wasn't until we got to his building and up the stairs and into his apartment, and until he locked the door behind us, that the pathetic words finally came out of my mouth weakly and helplessly and too late, "I'm afraid".

A neighbor, friend of his came down just then to see who was with him, bringing a reefer which they smoked, standing near the door. Then his friend quickly left. The man, whatever his name was, who was supposed to do me in pastels, shoved me into the bedroom and onto the bed. I think that's when he left the room briefly, probably to go to the bathroom and to get the kitchen knife. As soon as he left the room I quickly grabbed my purse and threw it out the window onto the garage or shed roof below, and I tried to jump out myself. But he came back before I could jump and he grabbed me and threw me hard onto the bed. He retrieved my purse somehow. Then the ordeal began.

I don't remember him getting my clothes off. I just remember him raping me for a long, long time, for hours I believe. I remember that whenever I'd resist, he'd put his hands around my neck and start choking me or put the dull kitchen knife up against my throat threateningly until I'd succumb again. He ordered me to suck his dick. I remember it in my hands and mouth. It was a break from having it inside me. He didn't seem to notice the difference. I tried to keep him occupied and satisfied so he wouldn't hurt me, or do worse than just hurt me. He had the craziest, (classic crazy) look in his eyes as he forced me and fucked me repeatedly, in a frenzied, ecstatic delirium.

He didn't know my name, but I remember him saying "I love you" at one point, and then choking me or holding the knife against my throat as soon as I resisted again. I still gag on the taste of that memory, the nauseating sound and brutal insanity that filled his words, "I love you", tainting them forever, relegating them to dangerous, fallacious, suspect realms.

Finally after a really long time, he had his fill. He let me get dressed. It was dark by then. He walked me to the subway and he again said "I love you" before I went through the subway turnstile towards Manhattan.

I got back to Greenwich Village and I remember the feeling of profound relief at being outside, on the street, there on Macdougall St., alive, in the presence of lots of people all around me, safe in the midst of strangers walking past me.

I didn't tell anyone. Of course I never reported it. I knew it was my fault for going with him. I knew that if my mother and step-father found out, I'd never be able to leave Stamford again, or even leave the house alone. I didn't tell Judith. She would have felt responsible and blamed herself, and besides, she wouldn't have let me stay at her apartment unsupervised again.

What good could come of telling anyone? Nothing I could imagine. Anyone I told would just know how stupid and nasty I was. Besides, I didn't even know the man's name or where he lived in Brooklyn, so what was the point?

And what if I had known who and where he was and if I had reported him and tried to press charges and go to trial? I'd surely be the one on trial. Even if they believed me, which they wouldn't, they'd delve into my past and find out about things that happened, dirty things that men did to me, or things I willingly did with boys or men since I was a little girl. They'd find out things that I knew I could never, ever, ever let anyone find out about.

So I swallowed this nightmare, adding it to the cesspool of hidden secrets stuffed inside. It was just more evidence that I was a disgusting, worthless girl who deserved whatever bad things happened to me. I expected more bad things would happen. And so they did.