

Laurie's journey: When the dance is interrupted a new path is revealed, part 2



Photos courtesy of Laurie Kammer

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Nancy Dennis, Associate Director of **The Dance Extension** in New London, Conn. was not surprised that her alumni students wanted to help former member Laurie Kammer, now paralyzed from the waist down due to a 2011 fall from a tree.



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“Even though some had not seen each other in 10 years, they still have the mentality that it is important to ‘give back’” says Dennis.

To help with Laurie's medical expenses Dance Extension **Community Dance Ensemble** students and alumni along with 15 other Conn. dance schools have partnered with **Mitchell College** and **HelpHOPELive** to present: **Rise Up Together We Thrive Benefit**, March 23 -24. Below is the second installment of Laurie's **March 8 interview**, revealing how her life is today, her future goals, and how a dance community has come together to support her.

"I always had a desire to help others" says Laurie "however I now had to come to terms that my life was going to be different". In addition to dancing most of her life Laurie already had a BA in sculpture and digital art, as well as a minor in music. "I knew my passion for art was going to be the key for me to continue to live a full life."

Through her commitment to self-recovery, by 2012 Laurie was able to travel which enabled her to spend time in Florida, the warmer climate being easier for her to get around in her wheelchair. She enrolled in the **Avatar Course Master's training** in Orlando to understand how to help others "become self-empowered. I have awakened to more responsibility over my life and my own recovery. I want to assist others in awakening to their own power and passion so they can learn how to use these tools and make the best use of them in their own life."

Florida is also where Laurie found a community of artists with whom she felt at home. "**Rise Up Gallery**," a non-profit organization of artists who are paralyzed themselves had come together to: create an adaptive art therapy studio for those with disabilities, develop employment opportunities, fund **Quality of Life Grants** and support medical SCI research.

In Rise Up Laurie says "I found the supportive community and therapeutic environment I had always dreamed of to continue my own self-recovery while also supporting others down their own path. When living with an injury, it is important to realize that we are all in it together; we are all part of one big community in this world. When one person suffers we all do, but when one rises up, we all can rise up as well."

Laurie admits to periods of feeling stuck, but now she relies on using the tools to not remain there, and makes sure she keeps practicing every day. "In order to be able to assist others, I have to make sure I do not remain in a place of discouragement. Generosity is a two way street; I have to make sure I am not succumbing to old patterns of disconnecting and continue to allow people in, if I am to be useful to others".

Helping others was a prominent lesson for Laurie and her fellow dancers growing up "The main focus of our school has always been community service" says Dennis of Dance Extensions. "We taught our students that dance was a way to bring happiness. We performed for nursing homes, hospitals, anywhere we were asked."

Now adults, the group continues to operate from that mindset. According to Maggie Dennis, who began Dance Extensions in 1978 and now runs it with daughter Nancy; "20 of the girls who were in the company with Laurie will be dancing at the March benefit. They will be performing a favorite tap piece chosen by Laurie, and are rehearsing together through a You Tube link on-line. The girls (who now are in their late 20's or 30's) live all over the country and some may not have seen each other for years, but they were such a tight group that of course they wanted to help."

Laurie continues to work on her art, **play her ukulele**, and to practice living a passionate life so she can be a resource to others "before they break." Half-way complete with her **Institute of Integrative Nutrition** course, her goal is to coach others utilizing a comprehensive healing program that combines all varieties of art with the principles of self-empowerment and preventative care. Already involved with **Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation**, Laurie is becoming a mentor.

She hopes one day to also create a retreat, "a place for people who are feeling stuck to get out of the box they are in and find their own passion. I have learned staying in place does not work--- the doors are open if you do not place limits."

AND YES she plans to always dance: "I was at a Reggae concert a number of months ago, I actually let go enough to get on stage in my chair and danced with my upper body, visualizing what my legs would be doing. In that moment I felt the same connection to the movement and joy that I would have felt when I danced before the accident. That visual connection is everything and those first steps towards one day actually having it happen in my body."

Keep dancing Laurie--- we applaud you all the way.

Rise Up: Together We Thrive Benefit Concert Clarke Center, Mitchell College, 437 Pequot Ave., New London, CT. Saturday & Sunday, March 23 (7pm) & 24 (2pm), 2013. \$20 donation – tickets may be purchased online at **Rise Up:Together we thrive benefit concert**

If you cannot attend but wish to make a donation, or for more information please contact on-line **HelpHOPELive**, or call 800-642-8399.