

*Finding yourself
dancing into Joy*

A Workbook

Rev. Lori Keller Schroeder

with excerpts from *Dancing into Joy*
by M. Kathleen Chesnut

DewSpirit Publishing
Dickinson, North Dakota



Published in the United States by
DewSpirit Publishing
Post Office Box 1208
Dickinson, North Dakota
DewSpirit.com

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Bible verses from the New Revised Standard Version
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Dancing into Joy: Transforming our Darkness into Light
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Cover:cover design by Irene Archer, www.book-cover-design.com
Kathleen Chesnut photograph by Ron Sticka Photography, Dickinson, ND
Lori Keller-Schroeder photograph by Janora Barlett

ISBN 0-9785090-1-3
LCCN 2006938777

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Prelude

If you are holding this booklet, chances are that you have decided to read or have been encouraged to read M. Kathleen Chesnut's book, *Dancing Into Joy*. Know that you have been blessed.

*You have been blessed with a unique opportunity to explore your own process
from stillness to movement, from paralysis to motion,
from life survived to life lived.*

*You may have never thought you needed that blessing.
You may have come to this book believing that you were already moving.
That's fine. Just be prepared to move a little more.*

*You may rather prefer stillness. It feels safer, or more familiar.
That's fine, too. Just give a little movement a chance.*

Either way, a blessing awaits you.

There are eight chapters in this booklet – seven of which serve as companions to the seven chapters in Rev. Chesnut's book. In each of the first seven chapters, you will be invited to the dance floor, a few steps will be reviewed and the music will begin. Feel free to make the dance fit your personal style. You may dance alone in the privacy of your own room, or chose a partner, or dance with a whole group of friends. Just avoid “sitting this one ... or that one ... out.” The eighth chapter is an invitation to go get a bit of punch and anticipate the next song.

Every chapter begins with a warm-up exercise. Every good dancer knows that warming up is essential for fluid movement. And those of us who have not danced in years know our muscles simply do not automatically move the way

we wish without doing a bit a stretching first! Warming up is also essential to protect the body from further injury. So it is with our warm-up exercises here. They are intended to loosen up stiffness of the heart and protect our souls from further injury.

Finally, a word about what to wear. (Sounds silly, doesn't it?) Think about all the occasions for dancing ... ballerinas have their tutus and ballet shoes, tap dancers have their tap shoes, even proms and weddings require certain kinds of attire. Unlike all those other occasions, there is no dress code – neither on the outside of your body, nor on the inside. Literally, come as you are – with your tears and your laughter, with your “rags” and your “riches,” with your two left feet and your ten thumbs and that different drum you seem to walk to. And if you don't know how you are or where you are today ... just come.

Know that you have been blessed.

Can you hear it? The band is warming up ...

Rev. Lori Keller Schroeder

Excerpt from the Prelude
of Dancing into Joy

AND I SHALL DANCE THIS WAY AGAIN

I have walked this way before,
but then the sun was hidden
the earth was frozen
the air was stiff and dead.
walked enclosed in winter
through which I had not chosen to travel
into which I had been thrown
unclothed, broken, five-years-old, alone.

A winter of years, not days
A winter of years to teach distrust
of loss to teach emptiness,
of terror to teach silence.
A winter peopled with icicles of anger
snowdrifts of pain engulfing
survived, not felt.

The desire to destroy that which had hurt so much
refused entry to my heart
but controlling in a frozen fight.

But not quite.

At the core of my heart a spark of love
responded to a voice at the core of my soul
a voice I held onto in faith and believed
even when I did not believe in myself.

The voice I held to spoke of other things
I listened-
I followed-
hesitating, frightened, but accepting the help I was shown,
help readily given which slowly transformed my life.

At thirty-one I awoke one day
hearing a song so new I cried with joy-
the song of life that we were born to hear-
that we were born to sing.

I have walked this way before, but-
not with so light a step upon an earth
breathing with rain-washed life,
not with the sun warm upon
my back and shining in my heart.

And I shall walk, no-run, no- dance this way again.
For I have let people love and heal and touch me-
For I have learned to love and touch and grow.
And if the sun does not then shine,
No Matter

For I will have it glowing within me
singing and healing and growing in joy.



Movement One – Faith

*“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for,
the conviction of things not seen.” —Hebrews 11:1*

WARM-UP EXERCISE:

Read the following passage from the Gospel of Matthew aloud and reflect on questions in italics:

Early in the morning,
Jesus came walking toward them on the sea.
But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea,
they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!”
And they cried out in fear.

What frightens you? How do you experience fear?

But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said,
“Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”

*When you are afraid, what helps you?
How do you deal with being afraid?*

Peter answered Jesus,
“Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.”

Jesus said, “Come.”

So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water,
and came toward Jesus.

But when he noticed the strong wind,
he became frightened, and beginning to sink,
he cried out, “Lord, save me!”

*When you are afraid, who can you trust
and who can you not trust?*

An invitation to dance:

If you have not done so ...
Read “Movement One: Faith” in *Dancing Into Joy*

EXCERPTS FROM DANCING INTO JOY

Lighted by Faith – meditation – 2005

It is hard to imagine what life would be like without the presence of faith to light the dark corners. Fear would have a greater place within my heart. Fear is still present; it hides in the corner until I try to do something difficult, something that works against those who caused my abusive childhood. Then fear does its best to tell me how dangerous such an undertaking is. Fear seeks to cause me to protect myself, to believe that protecting myself to be the highest goal that there is.

But self-protection is not the highest goal. It is an important goal, surely. We don't walk the dark city streets at night without looking around us, seeking as much safety as possible. Some streets we avoid even in the daylight without someone to walk with us. Fear does serve its purpose in preventing us from doing many a silly thing. But we should not let it chain us to our houses with the shades drawn so that no light can get in, for it is light that gives us life. Nor can we bar our hearts if we wish to live. Fear should not be allowed to dictate to us what we should do.

Our faith is a far better rule to follow. Faith becomes a beacon in the darkness of our fears. I can't imagine what life would be like without my encounter with God under the bed. I probably never would have gotten out from under

the bed. I know I never would have written this book. I have done many things that without the light of faith I never could have accomplished.

I still get stuck sometimes. And Jesus stands before me, asking me if I want to be healed. Sometimes I say no, I like hiding. The darkness is much more comfortable than forgiving people who have hurt me once again. The darkness is much more comfortable than reaching out again, only to be hurt again. For it is in reaching out that we get hurt.

But it is in reaching out that we get healed, that the pain filling our heart lessens through the touch of the light of those who care about us. It is in leaving the darkness behind that we learn more about life. It is in leaving fear behind that the music fills our hearts again and we begin to dance to the music of life.

Eventually, I get bored of the darkness and accept the gift that is offered to me. And the light of God's love makes the darkness that had filled my life disappear. And I begin again on the road to greater love and wholeness. I begin once more to dance.

SEEDS OF TRUST – 1989

Silence surrounding the child
echo less vacuum, desert dry world
frozen, no brightness.

Sitting, eyes closed, mind shut
speaking within to One who listens.

Listening herself, for love which comes
surrounds, makes light
teaching integrity
wholeness.

Outside - chaos, pain, owned guilt
used object
discarded.

Inside peace, warmth, forgiveness
beloved being
treasured.

Seeds of trust
planted, grow
watered in spite of wounds
by wounds healing.

Universe transforming
slowly unfolding
newness surprising
yet always was there
smothered by hate.

Seeds of self hidden grow
watered by moments of oneness
being of people.

Universe transforming
rapidly growing
lightness surprising
yet new, yet more
self hidden
recovered.

Seeds of openness
planted grow
watered in spite of pain
by pain.

Universe transforming
rainbows bursting
enlightening others
yet always remembering
what was, might still have been.

Seeds of life
unfolding grow
watered by sharing, giving,
dancing duets.

Movement One – Faith

Surprised by self
affirmed by others
standing, speaking, shouting.
Strength, uniqueness echoed back

by a world rain bowed with wonder
filled with beings clothed in uniqueness
filled with a future dreams could not tell.
Dancing alone, yet encircled
Dancing together yet as one.
Dancing with the ones
who listen.

Reviewing the steps:

In the section “Come Let us Walk in the Light of the Lord,” Kathleen speaks of dancing down a road “filled with craters” – “a move this way, and another that way, and I leave the holes behind.” Indeed, the road of life can be littered with obstacles, barriers and pitfalls. Some of our fears are directly related to these. For example, we have been unemployed or wounded in a relationship and therefore are afraid of losing our job or getting involved in a relationship.

However, some of our fears do not have a clear and direct relationship to the obstacles, barriers and pitfalls in the road of life. Nevertheless, they effect how we encounter difficult situations and the steps we take to negotiate them. The fear of a specific gender, for example, effects our ability to be in relationship with someone of that gender whether the relationship is intimate or plurtonic, personal or professional, casual or formal. It even effects how we see ourselves, if we happen to be that gender!

Movement requires courage which is faith’s victory over fear. When faced with one of life’s obstacles, barriers, or pitfalls, we need courage to move around it, jump over it or swamp through it. “Hand-holds” are helpful; they sometimes help to bolster our courage. But if we are paralyzed with fear, we might not even have enough courage to step out onto the dance floor!

Reflection:

***In your experience of life, what obstacles, barriers
and pitfalls have you encountered?***

***How have you negotiated those rough roads?
Or have you avoided them?***

Movement One – Faith

*Who or what have you been able to reach out to
for comfort or stability?*

*Have you been the person for whom someone reached
when they encountered craters in life's road?
How did you experience being in that role?*

*How has your experience of negotiating
the craters in life's road changed your faith?*

The music begins:

Close your eyes
and negotiate your way around the room.

If you are alone,
Pay close attention
to the way each object you touch feels –
the texture, the temperature,
the solidity, the security.
How much do you trust your knowledge of the room?

How much do you trust your other senses?
What information would you need
to trust yourself more?

If you are with a partner or in a group,
Take turns leading one another around the room.
Pay close attention
To the way you are being led –
Hastily or carefully, silently or with verbal cues.
How much can you trust your partner? Why?
What information do you need
to trust that person more?



*Movement Two –
As it Sometimes Grows Dark*

*“Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord ...
I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope.” —Psalm 130: 1 & 5*

WARM-UP EXERCISE:

Read the following excerpts from Psalm 22 aloud and reflect on questions in italics:

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?”
(Psalm 22:1)

What have been some moments of darkness for you?

“I am a worm, and not human: scorned by others, and despised by the people. All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads” (Psalm 22: 6 & 7)

*How have others been involved in that darkness?
How have they placed you there, kept you there, or rescued you from there?*

“I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast” (Psalm 22:14)

*In what ways have your experiences of darkness
effected your physical health?*

“From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.
I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the
congregation I will praise you.” (Psalm 22: 21b & 22)

How have you come through and out of those moments of darkness?