



## **My Twisted Process by Martha Carter**

*Article for Dance Central March 2009*

### ***(from martha's diary)***

*Vertebrae are layers of self-reflection*

*if you can't listen to your body and if you are not aware of your body  
then you're not aware of your life or your self...*

*you aren't listening to your life*

*listening is a virtue*

### **The Beginning**

When I started to create *Twisted*, it was a dare to myself to actually dance again. I knew that if I was going to make a piece about my scoliosis story, then I would have to get off my director's ass and perform it myself. I tried to avoid that by considering writing a book or making a movie, but that just didn't make sense. That would have been the ultimate procrastination and the exact opposite process that the subject demanded. This laziness was not only due to being completely out of shape, but mostly out of fear. After years of surgeries and rehabilitation, I had not only lost my body confidence but I had completely lost track of my own physical dance practice. I was afraid of either hurting myself or looking bad, or both. I just wasn't sure that I could do it.

### **September 5, 2006**

*perhaps part of my desire to dance is the need for an impossible goal?*

*unrealistic life...a dream...a fantasy*

Almost against my will, I craved movement. I dreamt of myself dancing...spinning, flipping and doing fabulous ballet and breakdance moves. I felt like something deep in my cells was telling me that the only way for me to write and tell the story was by reconnecting with my own movement. Rather than directing with images and ideas only, I instinctively felt that this was a perfect time to direct myself and the dancers physically again... to trust my own movement as a source of expression. But how to even start? It was a fight with myself...

### **Dream in Chalon, France Oct 10, 2006**

*(on tour with Cie. Chouinard)*

*fighting back, escaping, not putting up with shit*

*2 women with long pink and blue dreadlocks tried to kidnap me, but i slapped one's face*

*she pulled back*

*i hit her with my hand and got her with my ring*

*they both started fighting more*

*in the struggle, i managed to tie their hair together which paralyzed them*

*so i ran away*

## **Kindergarten**

I considered doing longer and harder sessions at the gym. So boring. I looked at schedules for technique class, but that felt intimidating. Pilates? Yoga? I tried a bit of everything, but no matter what I chose, it felt like a distraction from actually dancing. I just had to do it. So I began going into the studio alone. The first few times, I started with some yoga exercises and then took a nap. This usually took up the whole rehearsal time. Lee Su-Feh as my dramaturge assured me that this was normal, whatever normal is. The feelings of non-accomplishment that followed, created a lot of judgement within me but this did not stop me from 'wasting' time. It made me think of kindergarten where we had nap time every afternoon, so I took that image further by setting up the studio with different areas for different activities. The yoga/nap area was the central focus with an office area for my computer and phone on one side, a writing station with pens and paper on the other, a video camera that could move around on a tripod, a snack corner by the wall and a dress up box beside that. But I still had trouble getting to the business of dancing.

## **January 2007**

*Pain is part of the process*

## **Hot and Bothered**

Now the studio took longer and longer to set up, but I always managed to write a few emails, scribble down some ideas and doodle on the paper before doing some yoga exercises and taking my nap. That became my new practice. Things got better when Su-Feh came into the studio to direct me through some physical and theatrical exercises that were always interesting, challenging and very provocative (and usually made me very hot and bothered!) Her ability to tap into the moment inspired me to find it too. Slowly I noticed that even though I didn't feel like I was doing very much, I was inspired with a multitude of ideas and plans about what I wanted to do. I started selecting music tracks, and my notebooks started to fill up with diary entries and choreographic scribbles. I worked my mind and body to become more and more physical, but when the other dancers were in the studio with me, I would still end up sitting down and watching from my traditional director's role. This went on for a few months until I went to Banff for a self-directed residency where I had a big, gorgeous studio for 7 days, 24 hours per day – BY MYSELF. TERRIFYING.

## **February 4, 2007**

*Deep sadness  
tremendous desire*

## **Dining Room vs Studio**

The first day at Banff, I tried to settle in by setting up my 'kindergarten' class, but to my dismay, the studio was so large that I suddenly felt very lonely and very lost. I made a list of all the things I could work on, and then avoided starting the list by immediately going for lunch...of course. For anyone who has been to Banff, you will understand that meal times are not to be taken lightly. Not only is the gourmet buffet delicious, but it is located in the most amazing room with stunning 360 degree views of the mountain range. I found the dining room to be a much more hospitable place than my cavernous studio in the music building, so this did not bode well for my evolving, but still challenged practice.

## **February 16, 2007**

*Is it better to think of it as disappointed that I don't have the guts to do it?*

OR

*to do it against all odds even if it causes disappointment?*

OR

*like just face it and don't set myself up for disappointment?*

## **Lonely and Confused in Banff**

After a few days of this confused, well-fed procrastination, I noticed that I was not having any fun...in fact I was lonely and miserable. I had been handed this fantastic opportunity to develop my work in residency, but I still did not know how to work. This made me feel even more depressed, so I just gave up and spent one afternoon feeling sorry for myself which actually felt really good. Thanks to that, everything changed. I

started to feel things differently. I started to let myself go into the studio day and night and basically do whatever I felt like, in whatever order I wanted. I didn't dance very much that week, but I came out feeling like I accomplished something by giving myself the permission to give into my confusion. I made every act - confused and otherwise - part of my creative process, and saw it all in a positive light by seeing myself jumping over what seemed to be endless hurdles in creating this new work.

### **March 2008**

*Don't know the difference of not having a scoliosis  
wishing things were different  
but not wanting to change  
resisting, afraid of letting go  
The body is the messenger*

### **Slowly but surely**

Fast forward ahead one year. I slowly start to observe some key things that seem to explain my difficulty in settling into a disciplined process. The more time I spend with myself and my story, the more it feels like I am peeling back the layers of an onion so that the memories and sensations can pour in. *At some point, it occurs to me that my twisted process is inextricably linked with my twisted spine.*

I have spent so many years fearful and distracted, denying myself the permission to spend time on my physical process. This is not going to be an easy habit to break. I know now, that if I am really going to go deep into my own body, then I have to give myself lots of time and cut myself lots of slack. And slowly but surely, I have become addicted to going to the studio by myself. I still procrastinate, but I often go without any of my kindergarten accessories. The studio has become a sacred place for me and the more I go into the work physically, the more everything in my life clarifies. And now with new-found wisdom, awareness and consciousness, after all these years, I am finally listening to my body...listening to my desire ...reaching for what I love...punctuated with lots of naps.

*"Not determination, curiosity. Follow bliss to find the universal story" Lee Su-Feh*