

## A Zoom of My Own BY CARLA FRANK

It took the events of 9/11 to jar me out of my "I'll do it later" mode of thinking. I'd been afraid to fail at photography again, having been so klutzy with its technical demands when I last studied it in college. Now that I'd witnessed *real* fear, I tossed this particular one aside and took a leap into photographic adventure. My life has been texturally enriched in a way I couldn't have conceived. It's not just that I've met hundreds of people while studying and shooting. Sometimes it's the pure exhilaration I feel when I've approached people on the street to take their portrait. There is a thrilling moment of intimacy in the exchange—I'm about to document what they choose to reveal. I've captured visual ironies, exotic faces, and even ugly moments that I wouldn't have had the courage to see or let in before I took the camera back into my hands.



## Swan's Way BY KATHERINE B. WEISSMAN

I'm almost 60, and not a sylph. I have injury-prone feet, a thickish middle I camouflage with a sweater around my hips (my teachers, who have X-ray vision, still remind me to pull in my stomach), and a brain that often can't keep up with the combinations of steps I'm handed. But for 25 years, I've been putting in regular time at the ballet barre, dressed in a stretched-out unitard, baggy shorts or

a gauze skirt, and a sleeveless men's T-shirt, accessorized with an elastic knee bandage. I pick my spot, scrape back my hair, and prepare to sweat. (A towel and a water bottle are never far away.)

Those 90 minutes three times a week are the spine of my life, a ritual as hard and satisfying as any I've ever known. It's helped see me through my mother's death, my divorce, and 9/11 (in class the next day, the pianist played "The Star-Spangled Banner," and we wept).

I took ballet when I was young and, frankly, fat, but gave it up, as girls do, when it became clear that my talent was not equal to my rapture. Then, in my 30s, I fell in love all over again. I hadn't retained much except a vague memory of the five positions of the feet. I didn't have to strive

## I learned...

...to repair the toilet in my roommate's bathroom: "You fixed it?" she said. "I don't need a man as long as you stick around. Maybe you could move in with me and my husband when I get married?"

...to hook up a phone jack to the wiring in the wall.

...to prioritize and break a project down into steps that are much less intimidating. With the help of a coach, Patricia Lutke, and the book *Getting Things Done*, by David Allen, I now know the first step is to get every single thing I have to do onto paper and out of my pinball machine of a brain.

—SUSAN BOWEN



for “beginner’s mind.” I *was* a beginner.

My attitude, however, was entirely too grown-up—by which I mean cerebral, unspontaneous, and a bit grim. I had the school-ingrained habit of pouring data into my brain, waiting until it was “cooked,” then applying it (in this case, to my body, where it would be swirled a little, like cake frosting). Now I realize that the process of learning to dance is considerably more subtle: My physical self seems to acquire knowledge on its own, doing a grand jeté right over my reluctant and analytic mind. It sounds a little schizoid, but I don’t always *know* what I know. The more I can trust my body, the better things go.

Things don’t always go well, that’s for sure. Ballet isn’t safe. It is physically unnatural (your hips and feet turn out; you arrange your fingers just so; you move with the hauteur of a denizen of Louis XIV’s court, which is where the art was perfected), and it is psychologically exposed (every class is a performance, sort of). The studio is a minefield: I’ve landed on my butt while attempting a grand plié, collided with another student because I was going the wrong way, blanked totally on the step I was supposed to do next.

Yet I persist, as hooked on dance as the doomed heroine of my favorite movie, *The Red Shoes*. I bring CDs on vacation so I can practice in hotel rooms. My first question after a recent surgery was “When can I go back to class?” During a year in Israel, I braved class with Russians speaking Hebrew; not understanding the words, I got by on pictures. (It is heartening that in a warlike and divided world, ballet survives as an international language.)

Obsession loves company, and adult ballet students, especially older ones, socialize like crazy. We form coteries as we stretch before class or in the humid euphoria of the dressing room afterward, chatting and complaining and comparing notes about teachers, and somehow this coalesces into intimacy. In fact, most of the good friends I’ve made in the past ten or 15 years are women I met in class. There is something about the common passion, the shared risk, the revealed and

imperfect bodies that bonds us like soldiers—or nuns.

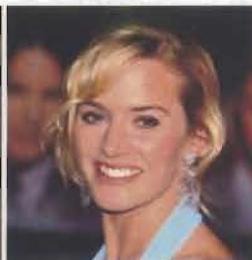
Once the music begins, however, I work alone, even if the room is so crowded that my neighbor’s pink slipper on the barre is nudging my hand. Class only appears to be a communal activity; it is actually a kind of meditation, a time and space I claim to focus on feeling centered, physically and mentally. Sure, there is criticism and, less frequently, praise, but learning ballet is a surprisingly private affair. It has taught me not only to hold an arabesque but to maintain an inner grace—drawing on a psychological or spiritual core, a place of honesty and strength. You have to give your heart to dancing; otherwise, you’re just going through the motions.

No wonder I’m seduced: Where else would I get to exercise my imagination as well as my body? I envision feathers, tulle, and satin shoes while I’m actually wrapped in layers of Lycra, wool, and ragged cotton. Sometimes—often—I grimace and panic, look wildly about as I totter and flail. But if, during class, just once I find my balance—perched on one leg, arms held high—I am suddenly the remote, powerful, glamorous creature I always dreamed, in my girlish reveries, of becoming: fusing sex with art, soaring into the ineffable, swan *and* woman. Ballet transforms and uplifts. Through it, I take flight.

## What Do You Want to Learn? We asked, they answered.



“I’ve already set up belly dancing lessons for my girlfriends and me for my birthday.”  
—Susan Sarandon



“I want to learn how to play piano.”  
—Kate Winslet



“To be able to fix a car...pop a distributor cap.”  
—Tom Hanks



“I want to learn to be a country-western singer.”  
—Teri Hatcher



“I’ve always wanted to be able to play the Spanish guitar.”  
—Jennifer Lopez



“I would learn to cook. I haven’t been around a kitchen long enough to learn. I’ve been ordering room service all my life.”  
—Beyoncé Knowles



“I’d like to learn to play pedal steel guitar.”  
—Johnny Depp



“What I want the most at this point in my life is to learn how to let go, calm down, relax.”  
—Celine Dion