***Dancing Does a Lot For You — Be Smart Learn To Dance***

Being born in an expanded one room apartment over a garage has advantages, especially when the two-car garage can be converted into a dancing area. Of course, it helps if your mother is a dancer! As a boy I spent many hours looking out of the windows of that apartment garage since I was allergic to everything that blew in the air, whether it was bituminous coal dust, blast furnace slips or ragweed. It was a great time to watch the world from a second story view, see daily “fireworks” shows from the National Tube Steel Works in McKeesport, Pennsylvania or the Duquesne Works in Duquesne, Pennsylvania, and watch fresh snow covered with black soot. While some children could see the beauty of the stars at night, when it was evening in McKeesport we imagined that we could see the stars which were apparently living beyond the hazy covering above us. But the soot covered snow was like a black netting hugging the snow, allowing us to create our own stories of what we saw, not unlike what others could do if they were blessed enough to see the cloud formations. But inside there was the garage. My mother had been a ballerina, but not too many years after my grandparents were killed by drunk drivers on the way home from my parents’ wedding, and my first and then second sister died several years later, my mother fell down the steps from our second-floor palace and broke her ankle. The Flapper style, ukulele strumming, piano playing ballerina saw the end of her serious dancing. Nonetheless when I was born in 1946 in no time at all I was step ball changing, shuffling off to Buffalo from my Evans Avenue Dance Studio: Music, dancing, and some coal dust from the coal cellar, which made it unnecessary to pour salt on the garage floor for that extra touch. My mother had also taken some classes from Gene Kelly when he had a dance studio in Pittsburgh, so while Fred Astaire was debonair, Gene Kelly was a “Yinzer” (Pittsburgher) and in our house Gene was the victor. Ironically that was the name of the husband of my mother’s best friend - Victor Jasper - whose incredible wife, Lillian Pomilio Jasper was my next dance teacher, with her Mom at the piano playing the necessary dance music, with Victor and Lillian’s adorable daughter, Joyce, and remarkably kind son, Jennis, all a part of this spectacular endeavor. On some occasions “Grandpa” Alex Pomilio would play his mandolin and add cultural richness by uttering incomprehensible Italian phrases! Lillian brought life to dance and invested herself in the lives of her students. Before the culture began speaking of “Diversity” Lillian Jasper’s Dance Studio in McKeesport Pennsylvania was celebrating it! The theme song was — “Be smart learn to dance.”

My hero was a boy, 10 years older than I, whose name was Grover. On stage he became known as Grover Dale. He epitomized, for me, one of the lines of the theme song, “You’ll find a few lessons will do so much for your style.” As years passed, any time Grover was in a movie, like “The Unsinkable Molly Brown” or on the Stage, we took note. My garage dance studio was a place where I could try out some “Grover moves.” Truly, this is a man who to this day understands the true nature of dance.

Well, I still dance, and I still sing. However, my “stage” is often behind the Altar Rail, where I “dance for and with” Jesus sometimes with intricacies not unlike the ones I had learned in my garage dance studio and from Lillian and Joyce. Having all three of my children in dance, and then in theater - and always in Church -demonstrates to me that the drama of life requires being in synch with Jesus’ directions. Performers rarely allow us to see their pain when they perform. We generally do not know when they are dealing with tragedies or are carrying an extra burden. Their goal is to engage the audience and draw them into the vivifying experience of dance, where every step by itself may seem to be inconsequential, but in the context of the event, the music tells their feet what to do, and the act engages the hearts of those who watch. As a priest for 44 years, 24 years of which I have been a bishop, I still can see the world from the second floor. But now I see pain, I see brokenness and I have heard the voice of Jesus calling me from the garage apartment into the streets where I am free of allergies and am dancing and singing with people whose rhythm in life has been disrupted by the tragedies of life. But, for magic moments on the Stage in Life, Jesus draws them and me into His dance, and he puts a song in our hearts. In this regard, it is called surrender - for to be truly engaged in our vocations we must surrender to the call, and we must allow Him to dance and sing through us.

“Dancing does a lot for you. Dancing cheers you when you’re blue. **Dancing is the thing to do. Be smart — learn to dance.”**