

Sherry Black: Tapping into the Positive

By Stephen White

“It was fun! We all had so much fun.” – Sherry Black reflecting on her life.

Preface

It’s impossible to pinpoint when I first met Sherry Black. When I did, it was as if I already knew her; I had heard so much about her, her reputation preceded her.

Victoria is a small city and the creative community even smaller. Within months of arriving here in 1984, together with my then partner and a group of his theatre school friends, we launched an improvised soap opera called *Beacon Hill* that we performed each Friday night in Kerry Krich’s dance studio on lower Johnson Street. I have vivid memories of that studio (located above today’s Paper Box Arcade). It was a large open room with floors and walls painted robin’s egg blue. This may have been where I first heard mention of Sherry Black and BroadStreet Dance (BSD).

It’s likely I met her in person in the early ‘90s at the YMCA’s annual racquetball tournament. My new partner Bill Hamar was a competitor and so was Sherry’s husband Tom Black. In fact, I’m almost certain this is where we met. I recall a group of us watching the men play in the court below the viewing gallery where we stood on the second floor. I was achingly self-conscious, the only man in a sea of wives. I felt conspicuous and vulnerable. Sherry helped alleviate some of my anxiety with her ready smile. If you know her, you’ll agree she is hard to miss. With her strong, upright posture, coiffed hair, and red lipstick, she cuts a striking figure. She exudes warmth, compassion, and positivity making her very easy to like. Our worlds continued to intersect in the ensuing years, especially after I took the job as Dance Victoria’s Producer in 2000 and stepped into the world of dance. Suddenly we had more people in common.

When I started the research for this profile, I asked Sherry to provide me with names and contact information for her friends, colleagues, and former students so that I might interview them. Everyone I approached was eager to share their memories and impressions of Sherry. You’ll find their quotes peppered through this narrative. Sherry remembers a period of roughly twenty years from the mid-seventies to the mid-nineties as BSD’s “golden years.” Her former students from that era: Heidi (Vanden-Bulck) Benetti, Mandy (Dewey) Niddrie, Pia Wyatt, Lynn Stevens, Rasna (Sehmi) Pitt, and her daughter Nicole (Black) Gait all taught dance at BSD, and later, some transitioned to teaching in the public school system, or in professional dance companies. Nicole opened her own studio (twice), and Pia, after pursuing postgraduate studies ended up teaching at the university level. All these women credit Sherry with showing them that if they committed to hard work while maintaining a positive attitude, they could realize their dreams.

Friends and colleagues like Sylvia (Mobey) Hosie, Adele (Smirl) Hansen, Heather Day, Kari McLay, Kim Breiland, and Jim Leard helped provide insight into Sherry’s life outside her studio. All sang her praises, recognizing her talent as a performer in the ‘60s and ‘70s and her impact

on Victoria's dance culture as a teacher and studio owner in the decades beyond. Arabella Martin would come to Sherry's studio in later years. As a team working together, they would take BSD to a new level.

At our last face to face interview in the fall of 2023, before Sherry and Tom flew off to winter in Miami, we reviewed another draft of this profile, and then it was my turn to share a story or two of my experiences at Dance Victoria. When I was finished, Sherry said, "We could have been friends, Stephen." I knew what she meant. It's not that we aren't friends now, we are. She was referring to those earlier years, when we lived parallel lives, walked the same streets, engaged with many of the same people, sharing common experiences, breathing the same air, somehow, we had missed the chance then to connect on a meaningful level. I'm grateful that working together on this record of Sherry's extraordinary professional life has meant that we have finally made up for that lost time.

At the Beginning

When the 1960s dawned in sleepy, provincial Victoria, 15-year-old Sherry Ross was coming into her own. The city was stretching its arms, casting off its heavy colonial mantel and slowly but surely, becoming a more cosmopolitan centre. Sherry's career as a performer, teacher, mentor, and studio owner, would grow as the city grew; among the first of a generation of dancers that were raised here, training, performing, and cultivating fulfilling careers without ever leaving the Island. Endowed with a strong work ethic and optimistic disposition, Sherry would build a performance career, a vibrant, popular school, and within it, a teacher training program that contributed to Victoria's dance milieu for generations to come.

Early Years

Born June 1, 1945, to parents Cecil ("Cec") and Florence Ross, Sherry spent her formative years in the house her father built at 3165 Donald Street in the Burnside-Tillicum neighbourhood, close to today's Tillicum Mall. Sherry attended Tillicum Elementary and Colquitz Junior High, graduating from Mount View High School (today's Spectrum School) in 1963. Over the next two decades (while raising her daughter, teaching, and administering a busy school), Sherry would complete coursework toward a Bachelor of Science degree in Kinesiology from the University of Victoria (1991).

For more than 40 years, Sherry's father Cec was the proprietor of Victoria Super Service, a 24-hour gas station at the corner of Johnson and Blanshard streets. He was a skilled welder, mechanic, auto-body worker, and heavy-duty towing operator (he also had the tow-away contract with the City of Victoria). He built trucks capable of towing logging trucks and vehicles damaged in collisions on the Malahat Highway. Sherry remembers her father as a hard worker who put in five nightshifts every week, working from 4:00 pm to past midnight each day and all-day Sunday. Cec doted on Sherry, bringing her along to games and other activities. Annually, Cec took only two weeks holiday. For her graduation from high school, he built a car for Sherry by joining the front end of a 1954 Dodge with the rear end of a 1953 Plymouth.

Sherry started dancing at a very young age. When she was five her mother took her to a friend's house where, in the living room with other girls her age, she learned the fundamentals of ballet and tap. In addition to the weekly classes, the teacher organized a recital with costumes and engaged a professional photographer to record the event. A year or two later, Sherry's mother took her to the Royal Theatre to see three of her school friends perform in Florence Clough's dance recital. "I was hooked! I wanted to dance with them," Sherry recalls.

"Florence Clough's recitals at the Royal Theatre were spectacular," Sherry says, "from the full orchestra led by Billy Tickle to the breath-taking adagio *Slaughter on 10th Avenue*, starring Lucy Tomczyk and Ron Purcell, and Alicia Tubman's *Adagio* (she was thrown the full width of the stage, and amazingly, caught!). Shows were often four hours long, and most dancers were in six or more numbers.

"The *Santa Claus Shows* were also held at The Royal Theatre – three shows for each of three weekends prior to Christmas. There was the usual...ballet, tap, acrobatic, as well as Hawaiian, Egyptian, Cancan, Charleston, Mexican, Dutch Clog, Hungarian... and, of course: elves, reindeer, Santas, and sleighs...everything! All with glorious costumes, lighting, and sets to enhance the stories."

Adele (Smirl) Hansen, who would become a close friend of Sherry's in those early years remembers a similar experience. When she attended a performance of Miss Clough's *Santa Claus Show* one year, she says, "I knew I just had to be part of it all." She begged her mother to enroll her in ballet classes.

Shortly after seeing the recital, for \$5.00/month (\$3.00 for ballet plus \$2.00 for tap), Sherry was enrolled at the Florence Clough Dance Studio. The original studio was located on Courtenay Street. Cec would drop Sherry off on his way to work.

Miss Clough had established her school in 1927 when she was only 18 years old. According to Sherry, by the time she enrolled in the early 1950s, the studio on Courtenay St. smelled old, but it was "magical."

"There was a big changing room inside the entrance door with benches and hooks to hang our clothes. There was a tiny old bathroom, plus a small change room for the big kids. There was a door leading to the studio where Mrs. Shakespeare played the piano. It had high ceilings and two big bay windows. Two walls had mirrors. Drums and staircases used in (theatrical) "sets" were piled up in one corner. Miss Clough's small office was in another corner, just on the left of the entry. Of course, the floor was wood!"

In the early sixties Miss Clough's studio would relocate to 723 Fort Street. The new venue, in the basement of a mercantile building was "gorgeous." In addition to a large ballet studio, with a sprung floor, mirrors and a barre, there was a separate purpose-built tap studio. Miss Clough had a penchant for collecting antiques which were displayed in a reception area that resembled

a living room replete with sofas and a china cabinet. There was also a full kitchen. The changing room was spacious.

Adele met Sherry when she was eleven or twelve and Miss Clough put them in the same classes. Soon, they began dancing the same routines. “She has always been a warm, kind person so it didn’t take long for us to become close friends,” Adele says of Sherry.

They would sometimes practice for the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) exams they were enrolled to take at Miss Clough’s and swapped clothes, which worked well because they attended different junior high schools. They would both arrive at the studio before their ballet class was scheduled to begin so they could “goof around” in the large change room. They were taking two or three ballet lessons a week. Sherry was also taking tap with Miss Clough.

In addition to the annual recital and *Santa Claus Shows*, Florence’s students performed at local seniors’ homes and at the BC Protestant Orphanage (today’s Cridge Centre for the Family) and were featured in the Victoria Day Parade. Adele recalls riding with Sherry in one parade, “We were sitting on the edge of a speed boat on a trailer, pulled by her dad's tow truck. We were wearing bright coloured cellophane Hawaiian 'grass' skirts, bra-like tops, and a Hawaiian lei. I recall it being an especially chilly day that year!”

Adele and Sherry studied ballet (Royal Academy of Dance syllabus) with Miss Clough and Doreen Bull at the Clough studio. Sherry remembers Miss Bull as having the most beautiful hand gestures. She would spend hours copying them.

In just a few years, Sherry was assisting Miss Clough by demonstrating steps and combinations to younger students. “It was an honour to teach at Miss Clough’s,” says Sherry. A profile in the *Daily Colonist* newspaper on December 18, 1960, titled *Up and Coming* featured a 15-year-old Sherri (sic) Ross. Accompanied by a photo of Sherry in an exotic middle eastern costume, her arms stretched above her head, the article noted that in addition to her participation in the studio’s revues and Christmas shows, Sherry had a burgeoning career as both a group and solo dancer, and as a member with Nadine Stewart of the dancing duo *The Twin Tones*.

From ages 16 to 19, Nadine and Sherry performed a “floor show” at local restaurants, conventions, parties, and special events. Together they would develop routines. Nadine would often sing. They had representation through a local agent (and *Daily Colonist* newspaper journalist) Bert Binny author of the *Up and Coming* article that featured young Sherri Ross, but Sherry was also involved in securing performance dates.

The article was prescient: “Miss Ross declares with conviction that she would rather teach dancing than actually become a dancer.” Little did she know however that just a few months after the article appeared in the newspaper, she would receive a phone call from Jerry Gosley, creator, and principal performer of Victoria’s very popular *Smile Show*, an annual summer revue that sold out to locals and visitors nightly over extended runs. The *Smile Show* experience

would test Sherry's conviction to become a teacher by providing her with more than a decade of exhilarating performance experience. "It was the best job in the world," Sherry says.

Victoria in the 1960s

As Sherry was coming of age in the 1960s, so too was the City of Victoria. Prosperity and promise coloured everything in the first half of the decade. There was a new hustle in the capital city. By the mid-sixties, half of Canada's population of 20 million was under the age of 25. As the decade waned and the first wave of baby boomers matured, social unrest (much of it imported from south of the border, some homegrown) took the sheen off the decade's early optimism.

Victoria had been a culturally vibrant centre for a century, stretching back to the colonial era when the 1860s introduced what would be a succession of musical societies offering concerts and recitals. The Pantages (now the McPherson Playhouse) and the Royal Theatres were both constructed in 1913/14 as venues for touring productions. At the beginning of the 1960s however, the Pantages (which in the interim had become the Totem Cinema) had been abandoned and fallen into disrepair, but the revitalization of Centennial Square in 1964 to celebrate Victoria's centennial, included the renovation of the theatre, opening it to the public to experience local and touring presentations. Sherry would perform and choreograph on its stage during the latter half of the '60s in the *Smile Show*, and in many Victoria Operatic Society (VOS) productions through the '70s and '80s.

Other developments included the foundation of the semi-professional Bastion Theatre Company in 1963 under the direction of Peter Mannering (it would become fully professional in the early 1970s). In 1964, the Victoria School of Music was inaugurated under the direction of the Victoria Symphony's Music Director Otto-Werner Mueller. In the '60s the Symphony was offering between 12 and 15 concerts annually at the Royal Theatre. Langham Court Theatre had been producing amateur theatre for 20 years and during the decade would present an annual season of six to eight plays. VOS was also active producing two or three popular musicals each year.

In the world of dance, second and third generation teachers operated well-subscribed dance studios including those owned by Florence Clough, Velda Wille, Wynne Shaw, Bebe Eversfield, Rae Burns, and Vivian Briggs. Each produced an annual recital and special performances at various venues in the region.

The University of Victoria gained full autonomy from its 50-year association with the University of British Columbia and was accorded degree-granting status through a provincial charter in the summer of 1963. That fall, Sherry would enroll in her first post-secondary classes.

Tourism was on the rise. In 1927, 350,000 people in 18,300 vehicles had visited Victoria. By 1969 tourist numbers had grown to 2,283,000 in 700,000 cars. In 1967, a private entrepreneur purchased the city's first double-decker bus. Local attractions like Fable Cottage, Anne

Hathaway's Cottage, Sealand, the Wooded Wonderland, Undersea Gardens and more were developed to serve the growing visitor sector.

Despite all this change and dynamism it would be at least another couple of decades before Victoria would be able to shake its entrenched reputation as "a bit of old England." Part of what helped perpetuate this impression was Jerry Gosley's *Smile Show*.

Smile Show

In 1961, Sherry got the call from Jerry to join the cast of the *Smile Show*. In that first season she re-met Sylvia (Mobey) Hosie after first getting to know her when they competed in the city's annual dance festival. Two years Sherry's senior, Sylvia had been training with Velda Wille and Bebe Eversfield, and was quickly given the task of choreographing several of the dance numbers for the show. Jerry fashioned his annual summer entertainment in the character of a British Seaside Musical, a show one might come across at the end of a pier in a holiday town like Blackpool or Brighton. He had struggled to bring an audience to the show in the early fifties, but by the time Sherry and Sylvia joined the cast for the 12th annual production, the *Smile Show* was selling out Langham Court Theatre in a solid eight week run.

"What a fabulous job opportunity! At age 16 to be performing our hearts out six nights a week...and earning money doing it!" says Sherry. When the show was up and running in July and August, she spent her day at the beach before heading to the theatre each evening to sing and dance in the chorus.

The shows were built around Jerry who had spent years honing broad caricatures like the Symphony Lady, the British Schoolboy, the Fairy of the Woods, the English Major (resident of Oak Bay), the celebrated explorer Captain George Vancouver whose statue sits atop the BC Legislature in Victoria's Inner Harbour and, most famously, Queen Victoria. A tender ballad performed by either the Lancashire Lass, Irene Henderson or Scottish Tenor, Bill Hosie would be sandwiched between a dance number and a comic sketch. A choreographed opening routine featuring the chorus girls, Sherry, Sylvia, and Nadine (of the *Two Tones*) would most often precede Jerry's entrance. For one show at the newly re-opened McPherson Playhouse in 1966, Jerry in the character of Queen Victoria, was lowered to the stage from the fly tower above, seated on a throne. "It was quite something watching him go up [onto] the catwalk prior to curtain," recalls Sylvia. A small orchestra (Reg Stone on the organ, Al Denoni on the accordion, a percussionist, and a fourth musician capable of playing multiple instruments) was in the pit.

Sherry, Sylvia, and Nadine were in heaven. Jerry always let them know how much he appreciated their contributions to the show. In her first year with the *Smile Show*, Sylvia asked Bebe to come into a rehearsal so she could offer pointers on a piece she had choreographed. As it turned out, Bebe's reputation as a featured ballerina originally from New Zealand who danced professionally in wartime Britain preceded her. Jerry and Reg, the organist, recognized her immediately and a new partnership was forged. In the ensuing years, Bebe would co-write the *Smile Show* with Jerry, as well as design the costumes, choreograph the dances, and direct the show.

Sherry's introduction to Bebe was providential. For her, Bebe was "Hollywood Glamour." She was always beautifully dressed, hair stylishly swept up, her makeup impeccable. She had flair and personality. Soon Sherry was also taking ballet and jazz at Bebe's School of Theatrical Arts.

The 1960s would shape Sherry's future life in fundamental ways. In 1963, shortly after she graduated from high school Sherry started dating a Golden Gloves boxing champion named Tom Black whom she'd met through the son of her mother's best friend. Sherry had seen Tom in several bouts she had attended with her dad, Cec. In August 1965 Tom and Sherry were married. Just two months earlier, Tom had been brought up from the juniors to play on the Senior Shamrocks Lacrosse Team, and in October he landed a job as a City of Victoria firefighter, a position he would hold for the rest of his working years, retiring in 1998. They completed their family with the birth of their daughter Nicole in 1966.

As previously mentioned, in 1963 Sherry had enrolled at the University of Victoria (although after first year she would put her post-secondary education on hold, returning to it again in the late 1970s). She remembers classes were offered in two locations that year: the Lansdowne Campus (now home to Camosun College) and in the newly built Clearihue Building on the present-day university lands. She would drive herself and two or three friends between the two campuses each day in the car her father had built for her, often racing to make it to the next class on time.

Sherry remembers teaching at Florence Clough's studio in the evenings until the day before Nicole was born. She returned to teaching and taking classes just a few weeks after giving birth. Recital and Festival were approaching, she had to prepare the students for the show and the competition.

The September after Nicole was born Sherry began taking ballet classes with Wynne Shaw. Miss Shaw was serious about teaching and offered something that was not available at Miss Clough's studio: the opportunity to take Major RAD exams. Miss Clough only offered exam preparation for up to Grade 5.

The competition between the two Clough and Shaw studios was well known. If you were a student of Miss Clough you couldn't be taking classes from Miss Shaw concurrently. It was one or the other. Sherry knew that by enrolling with Miss Shaw she was severing her relationship with Miss Clough, but she was determined. She wanted to be the best she could be and that meant completing her RAD. (Years later when Sherry was visiting her mother-in-law in a hospital ward, she heard a soft voice coming from the bed behind her. "Sherry, is that you?" It was Miss Clough, now 99 years old. That day they had a wonderful conversation which for Sherry, brought a satisfying resolution to the strained relationship. Miss Clough had been so important to her development as a dancer).

"Miss Shaw was brilliant! I loved her classes," recalled Sherry. According to her, Miss Shaw's best students – referred to as "Her Girls" – were so well prepared. "After about a year, she

referred to me as one of “Her Girls.” I felt honoured.” Sherry would continue taking class with Miss Shaw for about five years, enrolling her four-year-old daughter at about the same time she completed her adult exams and stepped away. Sherry says, “Miss Shaw was a master at exam prep. She was strict but kind.” One day, Miss Shaw saw Sherry stifle a yawn in class. “If you’re going to yawn, don’t bother coming!” Sherry was mortified.

Sherry returned to the stage and finished the decade performing in the *Smile Show* each summer.

In September 1967 Bebe offered Sherry the opportunity to open her own independent tap school within Bebe’s larger school. Bebe operated out of three studios in the Duck’s Building on Broad Street. The building was originally constructed in 1892 with a large assembly hall on the third floor so its owner, Simeon Duck, could host meetings of the Knights of Pythias, (a fraternal organization not unlike the Masons or Oddfellows). Over time, the hall was divided into three studios: large, medium, and small. To start Sherry would have access to the smaller studio. Her rent was \$3.00 per hour payable to the music store at street level in the same building. Later Sherry would say, “Bebe gave me my CAREER!!!” (*Sherry’s emphasis.*)

“I started on Saturdays with very few students, one or two in each of five levels,” says Sherry. Tom spent Saturdays with Nicole when Sherry was teaching. “My school got larger at the same time as Nicole was growing up.”

As the 1960s drew to a close Sherry was happily married with a four-year-old daughter. She had chalked up hundreds of stage performances and established her own school. It’s a testament to her resolve and personal vision that she had navigated a way forward with her ambitions in such a turbulent time. Most new mothers would have been content to raise their child, perhaps teaching one or two classes each week. Not Sherry. She had embraced her father’s work ethic and combined it with the discipline she had learned in the dance studio to put herself on a path to realize her dreams. Later in life Sherry would reflect on the decade saying that while she had some smart, non-conformist friends (hippies) who were actively engaged in the counterculture she had too many responsibilities to be in that group. Her focus was family first and her burgeoning small business.

The Development of BroadStreet Dance

In the 1970s, Sherry hit her stride. Classes at her BroadStreet Dance (BSD) got bigger, mostly through word of mouth. Soon she was running classes in two studios at the Duck’s Building on Friday afternoons, and all-day Saturday. (BSD operated out of the Duck’s Building from 1967 through 1991.) Nadine (Stewart) Schaddelee, (the other half of the *Twin Tones*) taught the Friday classes in one studio while Sherry was in another.

Early in the 1970s, Sherry began teaching beginner tap classes for adults at the downtown YM/YWCA. The classes she taught there fed into BSD. As her students at the Y improved, Sherry would encourage them to enroll in more advanced adult classes at her studio. This was one way in which she grew her adult classes. Sherry taught continuously at the Y for 15 years.

The Studio

“I loved administering the school: placing the students, getting to know the parents, scheduling, advertising, registering, bookkeeping.” (Sherry)

Sometime in the 1970s Constantine (“Connie”) Darling, an émigré from Montreal, started to share the large studio in the Duck’s Building with Bebe. Connie would generate a new excitement in the local dance scene. With business partner, Lynda Raino, he would establish a dance company called Spectrum Dance Circus and eventually venture into offering an annual summer training program featuring international instructors of the highest calibre.

In her early twenties, Heather Day was taking jazz dance classes with Constantine, and adult tap with Sherry. She remembers Sherry’s studio as being clean and bright, “The studio on Broad Street was intimate, and up a couple of staircases. We used to joke that it was a typical ‘A Chorus Line’ studio, ‘up the steep and very narrow stairway’. A tiny room next to the studio was used as a change room. The studio was whitewashed and had one wall of very large windows facing east which was great for afternoon or evening classes (never too bright or too hot), and the facing wall was all mirrors. It smelled like an old building: warm dust with a hint of stale sweat, and fish and chips from the shop downstairs. Although the tap studio was small, Constantine's studio was large, and his music was blasting, and dancers were coming and going. You could sense the hum and the floors vibrating as you entered the building and climbed the first section of the staircase and then you were hit with sound – taps to your left and Connie's sound system ahead and to the right. There was a wonderful energy in that building [that] lifted you up that long staircase. “

“BroadStreet wasn’t in the best part of town, and we sometimes arrived at the studio to find interesting things left behind in the bathroom and dressing room as well as some interesting people hanging out,” says Mandy (Dewey) Niddrie.

Lynn Stevens: “the studio was very welcoming and professional... the cleanest studio I have ever been in; her husband Tom cleaned the mirrors every week! Like Bebe, she employed a pianist for all classes... This was a major bonus, as the pianist (Winnie Smele) taught us musicality. We used to stand around the piano and learn musical terms. Most other studios did not do this with their students.”

Sylvia Hosie says, “Sherry ran a well-organized and very happy studio.”

Lynn remembers, “[Sherry] spent time getting to know all her families, not just her students.”

Each year, BSD would be part of the Santa Claus parade in downtown Victoria, a ritual Sherry had brought forward from her earliest days at Florence Clough’s studio.

Kari (“Muffy”) McLay, a small business owner and philanthropist, has found her life entwined with Sherry’s. Her mother also studied dance with Bebe and her father was active in the boxing milieu and was friendly with Tom. Muffy took tap with Sherry as a child and later enrolled her daughter Kayla at BSD.

“I think it was 2000 or 2001,” says Muffy, “[when] I signed up for an adult class [at BSD] and participated in the Santa Claus Parade. The entire school including staff and kids tap danced from the Legislative Buildings, along Government Street, [past the Hudson Bay department store to Capital Iron’s parking lot on Store Street]. It was freezing cold, and we had to do [our] routine with huge smiles and arms and tapping to music. I was 40 years old, and it was a milestone and an accomplishment. It was really tough, and I remember seeing Sherry up front leading us and thinking... if Sherry can do this in her mid-50s I sure as hell can too. I think my feet are still killing me.”

Teaching Style

“I was never teaching in a class and didn’t want to be there. I loved teaching!” (Sherry)

Sherry credits her own teachers with influencing her style of instruction. From Wynne Shaw she learned that children must always be children, and this should be reflected in music choice, costume, and choreography. She would adopt Bebe’s favourite expression, “That was wonderful! Now let’s do it again, just one more time!” (Over and over and over). Dianne Walker always said, “If it’s not right, it’s wrong.” David Keith of Central Junior High School, where Sherry taught dance for a time, coached his students by saying, “You’ve been trained well. Now remember who you’re representing.” Dave Petri, Principal at Central Junior High often said, “Work hard and prosper.”

Sherry’s values were consistent in both life and dance were, “honesty, integrity, [a] conscientious attitude, kindness, [and] encouragement combined with a strong work ethic.” These were underpinned with her appreciation of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s belief in “the divine sufficiency of the individual,” and his encouragement to “trust thyself.” She also took inspiration for Max Ehrmann’s *Desiderata*.

Sherry always worked to be her “personal best – better than yesterday.”

Sherry’s daughter Nicole (Black) Gait who started dancing at a young age says, “...my mom’s teaching style was fun and upbeat - so much so, that you would be in a sweat and didn’t realize how hard you were working! I would say she was always positive and encouraging when we were learning new combinations.”

As a young girl, Heidi remembers peeking into Sherry’s studio while waiting to be picked up after ballet. She thought, “Wow, tap looks like fun and the teacher (Sherry) seems so NICE!” Today she recalls, “ Sherry was an amazing teacher with a perfect blend of firmness mixed with kindness. Her ‘teacher presence’ commanded respect and her classes were always well run,

challenging and fun! Sherry was enthusiastic, but always calm and professional no matter the situation. For many of her students she became not just a teacher, but a role model.”

She was strict, she challenged students. She adopted a metric that she applied to all. For Sherry, every one of them came into the studio a “10” but, if they were late, if they didn’t have the correct dancewear, or they didn’t work to their potential, they didn’t stay a 10.

Mandy says, “The thing I most admired about her teaching style was how much she stressed the importance of respect to the students. Respect for the art form, respect for the studio, respect for their teachers, respect for themselves, and respect for their classmates. I also thought that her teaching style and the way she dealt with the students was always very professional.”

Lynn concurs. “Sherry’s teaching style was professional, yet warm. She taught to the middle ability in the class and made sure to review material from the week prior. She expected everyone to be dressed properly and have their hair tied [up], as to her, although tap was its own entity, ballet was the basis of all dance forms... She ran her classes with structure and truly believed that the discipline learned in ballet should be present in every studio, no matter what genre or style is being taught.”

“I knew I was a good teacher.” (Sherry)

Life Beyond BroadStreet Dance

“Nothing just “happens.” You are given opportunities but then you have to make wise decisions and step up...” (Sherry)

Sherry’s reputation as a good teacher and solid choreographer were gaining traction resulting in new opportunities presenting themselves.

From 1972 to 1980, Sherry was involved in eight Victoria Operatic Society productions as either a dancer (1972’s *Pajama Game*, 1973’s *Guys and Dolls*, 1974’s *Man of la Mancha*, 1976’s *Can Can*) or a choreographer (1976’s *Stingiest Man in Town*), a co-choreographer (1973’s *Merry Widow*, and 1980’s *Fiddler on the Roof*), or both a co-choreographer and dancer (1975’s *Oklahoma*). She worked with noted local directors Allan Purdy and Colin Skinner, Art Bud, and Ted Gaskell. It’s hard to fathom how she managed this on top of teaching classes, running a studio, preparing students for festival, choreographing an annual recital, and raising her daughter. Nicole says, “I have never met a person, more dedicated... to whatever commitment she had put on herself.”

Heather Day recalls working with Sherry on *Fiddler on the Roof*. Speaking of that time, she says, “...the rights to produce *Fiddler* at that time included replication of some of the original choreography. I remember Sherry and I studying the manual we received and dividing the work. I was performing in the show as well so I believe that Sherry set most of the choreography and I would run it with cast members while she was working with others. She

was always very collaborative and would ask for my input or assign a piece to me and was unfailingly kind and encouraging.”

In December 1975, Sherry, Tom, and Nicole took their first trip to Hawaii, spending three weeks over Christmas. They would return every year until 1994. Over time, three weeks grew to be five weeks.

In 1977, they added a Spring Break trip to Palm Springs, returning every year through 2003. After Nicole married and took up residence on the American east coast, Sherry and Tom dropped Hawaii and opted for Miami. In just a few years, after Tom’s retirement, they were spending four months in Florida. Sherry made a point of returning to Victoria for six weeks (mid-January to the end of February) each year to prepare students for festival.

In 1978, with her school well-established, Sherry returned to school at UVic, taking courses on a part-time basis in anatomy, physiology, and exercise science, towards what was meant to be a BSc in Kinesiology. In fact, Sherry never completed her degree. She was short two courses at the end of her studies.

“I wanted to be a better teacher,” she said. Sherry always considered herself more scientist than artist. She often says, “I didn’t have an artistic temperament.” She was interested in the physiology of dance – what happens in the body when you turn or pivot. She loved science, mechanics, physics. As a result, she was never as confident in her ability to choreograph, despite receiving accolades over many years. She identified other people, including her daughter Nicole, and Lynn Stevens as creatives.

Our response to dance is subjective. At the annual Greater Victoria Arts Festival competition, Sherry would worry that a piece she had choreographed might not be as good as she hoped. What if the adjudicator didn’t like it? After all, they were judging one performance on one day, often comparing one entry to another, apples to oranges. “Your students are depending on you to make them look even better than they are,” says Sherry. Thoughts like these would fuel some anxiety. Arabella Martin, who would teach at BSD in its later years, says that despite Sherry’s unfounded insecurities around choreography, she always “found a formula that worked.” Sherry does confess that often when she was choreographing a piece “the end could be surprising.”

In 1979, back at BSD, Sherry found a new opportunity when she recognized the growing ethnic diversity in her classes. She pulled together a small company of twelve young dancers, each from a different cultural background who were costumed in their individual traditional dress. It was the UN Year of the Child. This small company would perform to the famous Disneyland song, *It’s a Small World* many times that year at venues throughout the city, bringing awareness to the UN’s initiative that gave attention to the many hardships the world’s children were facing.

1980s

When the 1980s dawned, now in her mid-thirties with a teenaged daughter and a successful school, Sherry landed a gig working with Dr. Dale McIntosh in the Music Education department at the University of Victoria. Dale was an innovator. He created a course that pulled together four levels of students (40 or more students in total from levels 118 through 418), tailored to provide future educators with first-hand experience in the art of producing the school musical. Rather than teach from a textbook, Dale offered a practical experience. He selected a new musical each fall, brought in a theatre director (Gary Rupert, or Jim Leard, or John Kritch, and later Bindon Kinghorn) and hired Sherry as choreographer. Dale acted as musical director. Students auditioned and were cast in the show. For three hours each week, they rehearsed, learning their parts and their choreography. At the end of the term, the students performed. It was a fruitful relationship. Sherry admired Dale's commitment to the project, his joy in its execution and his tremendous sense of humour.

Also in the 1980s, Ken Shields, the famous coach of the University of Victoria basketball team (the Vikes) approached Sherry with a proposal. He was looking for dancers to animate the team games. He didn't want cheerleaders per se, he wanted dancers. He had Air Canada as a sponsor and while he was unable to pay the dancers, he could provide resources to purchase shoes, outfits, and giant pom poms. Furthermore, in compensation, Air Canada would offer a free flight anywhere they flew for each of the girls every season.

Sherry auditioned dancers and hired eight plus two spares. She and the dancers themselves choreographed short 40-second pieces to be performed during time-outs and longer dances for the half-time. The rules for the company members were simple: they must be on time for rehearsals and games, and they had to commit to performing at all games. Spares were added when one of the dancers was sick or injured. Most of the dancers were University of Victoria students. Pia was a dance captain, and Nicole was a dancer for one year.

In 1986, working with KIDCO Dance's Kerry Krich, Sherry was given an extraordinary opportunity to choreograph the opening number for David Foster's Celebrity Baseball Game (organized for charity). Foster, with 16 Grammy wins to his credit, is in a class of his own. He is one of Victoria's most successful sons. He used his incredible influence to put together two teams that included A-list Hollywood actors, seasoned athletes, sportscasters, even a sitting Prime Minister: Linda Thompson Jenner, Catherine Mary Stewart, Wayne Gretzky, Tommy Chong, Gordon Lightfoot, Michael J Fox, Tiger Williams, Olivia Newton John, John Candy, Mark Messier, John Travolta, Rob Lowe, Kristy McNichol, Lee Majors, Sam Kinison, several hard rockers from Platinum Blonde, Brian Mulroney, Terry David Mulligan, Gordie Howe, Alan Thicke, Rick Hansen, and Ron MacLean.

The dance number, performed on the baseball diamond, opened the game played at Royal Athletic Park and featured 48 dancers from multiple local studios who had auditioned and been selected by Sherry and Kerry. The theme song for *St Elmo's Fire* (written by David Foster) was used as the score and the choreography featured Vancouver-based rhythmic gymnast Lori Fung, who had recently won a gold medal at the 1984 Olympics.

During this time, Sherry was travelling to the US each summer (most often to Las Vegas, sometimes Seattle or Los Angeles) to attend dance conventions like Dance Olympus or Tremaine. She registered for jazz, lyrical, tap and musical theatre intensives, taking detailed notes of the music and choreography that she could later incorporate into her own practice in Victoria. Nicole, Rasna, Heidi and other dancers often accompanied her and participated in the classes and competitions. These conventions brought together some of the continent's best teachers and were a way for Sherry to be inspired and remain current, aware of the newest trends in the world of commercial/competitive dance.

Heidi recounts, "...coming in with Rasna, to observe the end of Sherry's class in Vegas. It was packed with dance teachers from all over the country and Sherry was one of the best! We had so much fun learning new choreography, meeting new people and then seeing shows at night!"

Mentoring

"One can't teach a person to teach. You can give them some skills, but you must be a born teacher." (Sherry)

One of Sherry's proudest achievements, something that still gives her great satisfaction, is the number of students that she mentored and supported on their path to teaching during their time at BSD. The list is long and includes Matthew Howe (Musical Theatre and Dance Fitness), her daughter Nicole (Tap), Heidi Benetti (Adult Tap), Lynn Stevens (Tap, Neo Classical Modern), Mandy Niddrie (Adult Tap), Michael Boston (Tap, Hoofin'), Kelsey Dukelow (Children's Classes, Teen Jazz, Zumba), Leah Smart, (Tap, Jazz, Hip Hop), and Kristen Low (Tap). Almost all the faculty at BSD had trained with Sherry.

Sherry developed a pattern for training young dancers to teach. She had good intuition; she could spot a potential teacher in her classes. Initially, she would invite a prospect to assist her in class, working with those students that might be labouring to learn a new step or combination, or perhaps demonstrating a sequence in front of the class. Eventually, Sherry might give them tasks like choreographing four or eight bars that would be integrated into a piece the class was working on. The best assistants weren't "show-offs," they needed to demonstrate that they genuinely cared about the individual they were helping and showed interest in their progress. Gradually, as the dancer gained confidence and her skills were honed, Sherry would make it possible for them to teach a class, most often starting with the youngest dancers.

Heidi recalls being excited when Sherry approached her mother about the possibility of assisting in class. She was about 12 years old at the time. Heidi would discover that she loved teaching. She always felt very supported by Sherry. Rather than discuss specific teaching strategies, her growth as a teacher came from observing and emulating Sherry, while bringing her own style. "One of the special things with Sherry, is that there is no drama ever. You could always come to Sherry with a question or a problem, and it would be dealt with immediately with no fuss."

Rasna says that Sherry provided her with important life skills, "...discipline, time management... how to present myself, to be confident and how to work with others." Mandy says, "I always liked to pass along the importance of respect to my students the way she did to hers..." a tool that was crucial to building a strong team but also extended beyond the studio.

Lynn recalls that Sherry's feedback after watching her teach a class was always positive and supportive. She learned to "trust your teachers when you own a studio... Sherry could do this better than anyone I know... She truly believed that we all had our strengths to share and could learn from each other."

"Sherry's approach... is that you CAN dance, and you CAN get it. She never met a 'non-dancer' ... You just did not have the skills yet. She went over and over and over the steps as many times as we needed it," says Pia.

Sherry's commitment to training the next generation of dance instructors served her well on a few fronts. She was never in the position of needing to search for a teacher. She had a full roster at hand. Additionally, she was able to cultivate a strong studio ethos, or culture because all her faculty had come from her school. Giving young adults responsibility, demonstrating that you trusted them, supporting, and encouraging their development was a gift. It gave them confidence not only in the studio, but in their lives outside.

Nicole

"My daughter was my best production." (Sherry)

The apple certainly did not fall far from the tree. Nicole showed an interest in dance at a very early age. "She loved performing. She loved the mirror," Sherry says. She started in 1970 at Wynne Shaw's (aged 4) where over the course of the next decade she forged a strong relationship with Miss Shaw. Sherry encouraged her to go to other teachers as well, so she could become a more fully rounded dancer. Initially she took classes with Velda Scobie (aged 10 through 12),

Sherry remembers (in the days before seat belts) Nicole would do her hair and change in the car after she was picked up from school at 3:15 and before being dropped off at Wynne's studio for class at 3:45. It was a busy, but exciting time.

"Wynne Shaw taught dance with the perfect combination of 'strict, but kind instruction', and *always* believed in me. I wanted to do my best for her and to never disappoint her," says Nicole. "[She was] very strict but it made you want to work so much harder. Wynne would speak aggressively one minute, but always would end with an encouraging note, or teach you how you could improve on whatever you were doing."

In her teen years, Nicole would come to BSD. "I loved being taught by my mom, and I felt like she pulled the best out of me because she knew me so well! I also got to dance with some of my good friends, [people] that I am still close to, to this day."

Nicole had travelled to conferences with Sherry, becoming familiar with several American training institutes and instructors, so when she graduated from high school, she was offered a full scholarship to attend Dupree Dance in Los Angeles. There she received instruction from some of the industry's best professionals, artists that had performed on tour and in music videos with America's top talent. Nicole wanted to pursue a career as a commercial dancer.

After six months with Dupree, Nicole returned to Victoria and worked locally in summer shows at Harbour Towers choreographed by Bebe, on CHEK TV's *Body Moves*, and cruise ships. In 1987 she moved to Toronto. There she secured an agent, went to many auditions, and landed work. Married in September 1991, Nicole moved to the US with her new husband, professional lacrosse player, Gary Gait. Eventually Nicole established her own school, The Nicole Gait Center of Performing Arts, in Baltimore, Maryland. It was headquartered in a complex with four studios. At its peak, Nicole employed a faculty of 25 to teach 900 students. Her business acumen came from her mom.

"When I taught dance, whether it be at my own studio... or at other people's dance studios, I incorporated many valuable lessons that I learned from my mother. I learned that when you are giving a student a correction, to always tell them how *well* they are doing at it and acknowledge their effort and progress." says Nicole.

Nicole's husband would be transferred a few times in the ensuing years but wherever she landed, she found employment as a dance instructor. Early in her career, for six years, she had been Director of the Dance Program at the exclusive all girl's school Bryn Mawr. Later she taught at the Colorado Ballet School. More recently, in Syracuse, New York, she opened a more modest school, the Nicole Gait Dance Studio where she taught part-time. Like her mother, Nicole did not shy away from hard work and multi-tasking. She did all the above while raising two children – a daughter, Taylor (now coaching women's lacrosse (WLAX) at Brown University), and a son, Braedon, who works in New York City after graduating from Princeton.

The 1990s and Beyond

In 1991, KIDCO's Kerry Krich approached Sherry. Local developer Gerald Hartwig had acquired a building on Fisgard Street and was interested in renovating it as a purpose-built dance studio. Kerry suggested the two of them join forces in a new studio. KIDCO had been at 715 Yates for some time, renting from Kaleidoscope Theatre. The rent was getting expensive.

Sherry had some reservations. She wanted to ensure that each school, BSD and KIDCO, retained its own identity, and each had their own sound system and other assets. Once they had fashioned a friendly agreement, they worked with Gerald to design the facility: Sherry on the main floor and KIDCO on the second floor with two studios. The design included a shared a waiting room, change room and office. They picked their colours. A large mural was painted on the exterior of the building. Both Sherry and Kerry were very excited to move into the new facility in September 1991.

Unfortunately, Gerald, Kerry, and Sherry didn't account for ceiling height in the upstairs KIDCO studios. With its sprung floor and lowered ceilings to accommodate fire sprinklers the studio lacked necessary height. On the first day of classes, Kerry's ballet teacher declared she couldn't teach in the studio. The room was simply not tall enough to accommodate lifts. Sherry and Kerry couldn't switch studios, tap would be impossible above a ballet studio. Shortly thereafter, Kerry moved back to 715 Yates and Sherry continued at Fisgard until December 1992 when BSD moved to the Saint Barnabas Church Hall on Begbie Street.

Sherry reached a milestone in 1991, finishing her studies at UVic. A few years earlier she met with a university counsellor who looked at the roster of courses Sherry had completed and recommended that by adding a few non-electives like calculus, she could graduate with a Kinesiology degree. It wasn't to be. One required course was Chemistry and the professor for that course would not accommodate those students that might like to write their exam early. Not writing early meant Sherry couldn't leave for Hawaii until much later in December. Not an option for Sherry. The second course was swimming (Sherry doesn't like getting her hair wet). She decided she wouldn't finish her degree because she had gleaned everything she needed at that point and appreciated what she had learned. Although she wouldn't hold a diploma, she had accomplished what she set out to do.

Later in the decade, Sherry was approached by husband-and-wife team Jacques Lemay and Janis Dunning, who recently arrived in Victoria with the intention of starting a performing arts training institution they called the Canadian College of Performing Arts (CCPA). (The CCPA quickly established itself as one of the best performing arts colleges in the country). They asked Sherry if she and another local tap teacher, Janice Tooby-MacDonald would teach tap to the students accepted to the college. Lemay and Dunning each had impressive credentials having worked in television, live theatre, dance, and festivals across the country before arriving in town. Additionally, Lemay produced Royal Galas and had staged the opening ceremonies for the Olympics, Commonwealth Games, and the Confederation Bridge to Prince Edward Island.

Sherry and Janice Tooby-MacDonald at first decided to share responsibility, teaching alternate classes in each term but quickly realized that to ensure continuity for the students, it was better that each take charge of a full term.

"I loved my time there," says Sherry, who would teach for a full decade (1998 – 2008). "The students were like sponges, very talented. They wanted more and more." Particularly special was the first day of class, when each of the 60 students at the school (selected through a national audition tour) stood to tell their own story: why they were there, what they hoped for in the future. "It was spellbinding,"

Classes were split into three levels with roughly 30 kids in the beginner class, 20 in the intermediate and six to ten in the advanced.

One student, Duncan Stewart, had been admitted as a mature student. After completing his training at CCPA, Duncan moved to New York where today he owns his own Broadway casting

agency (Casting By ARC). Sherry continues to be in touch with him. There were many other students who went on to successful careers.

At around the same time (2000), accomplished dance teacher and choreographer Arabella Martin approached Sherry about teaching at BSD. Arabella had an interesting, circuitous journey from her native Britain to Victoria before she began teaching at BSD. She first emigrated to Canada at age 21 after landing a job as a dance instructor at a beautiful dance studio in Edmonton with its own purpose-built tap studio. Unfortunately, it was Edmonton, and after a year and a severe winter she ended up in Port Hardy which she recalls being a thriving artists' colony at that time. After three years there, she took a job in Durban, South Africa but racial unrest brought her back to Calgary and shortly thereafter, Victoria, where she has spent the past 25 years.

Arabella taught at a local studio for some time in the '80s and '90s, but an increasingly heavy workload teaching Tap, Modern, Ballet, National (Ethnic) Dance and musical theatre, plus preparing students for exams in each, led to burnout, so she quit dance and went back to school. She secured an Interior Design certificate from the Pacific Design Academy and began her practice, soon realizing that she took no satisfaction in having her proposed designs irreparably compromised by her clients. She contacted Sherry and returned to dance.

The two forged a productive partnership in the 12 to 15 years they worked together. With her ISTD (Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing) background and experience, Arabella brought annual exams to BSD. The ISTD, like the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD), offers training and accreditation across many dance genres in its mission to standardize dance education; so, for instance, a level two tap dancer in the US is equal in proficiency to one in France. Exams are offered annually at every level, adjudicated by an accredited examiner who travels from the UK. Together, they developed a curriculum where Sherry taught fundamentals to her classes and Arabella taught the ISTD syllabus to the same students. The result was the dancers were more fully rounded than those that had only been exposed to syllabus work.

Sherry, because of her own experience with RAD exams as a ballet dancer, understood exam work. Arabella says, "...she had very clear idea on her business plan of how to run a studio, keeping things relatively simple and always being open to new concepts... Sherry was always approachable both for her students and staff. A delight to work for and with."

Around 2015, Sherry now in her late sixties, wintering each year with Tom in Miami, began thinking about reducing her workload. In 2012, she sold BSD to Kelsey Dukelow whom she had trained. When Kelsey bought the business, she left three classes on the table so that Sherry could continue teaching at St Barnabas Church Hall. Two of the classes she taught were for youth (particularly strong groups at the time) and the third was a Level 4 (advanced) adult class. Eventually the administrators at St Barnabas told Sherry they were looking for a tenant who would rent more hours on a weekly basis.

Sherry then approached Kim Breiland at Stages Dance to ask if there might be a way that she could teach these classes at Kim's studio.

Kim remembers, She had a class of students that she had been teaching since they started dancing. To have the honour and privilege of Sherry at the studio was something that I would move mountains for." And indeed, she did.

Sherry recalls how generous Kim was. She not only welcomed Sherry into her studio, but she also accommodated all of Sherry's requests, providing her with access to the STAGES studio during prime times, ensuring there was minimal disruption for her students. Sherry was also engaged to teach tap to the STAGES Company of dancers.

And thus, Sherry continued teaching until in March 2020, COVID brought everything to a halt.

Conclusion

The city that provided Sherry with so much opportunity over a 65-year career has changed. Today the regional population has more than doubled since 1960. The university has become one of the largest employers. Five thousand (5,000) faculty teach over 22,000 students and one in nine local jobs is associated with the university. Tourism has flourished and become more sophisticated, offering whale watching tours, visits to Butchart Gardens, high tea at the Fairmont Empress Hotel, hiking and cycling on regional trails and much more. In its annual survey of the world's best small cities in 2023, Condé Nast readers selected Victoria as number one.

Culture has also grown up. Victoria boasts a professional opera company as well as a well-supported professional theatre, a dance presentation series, professional ballet company, and vibrant symphony orchestra. The Art Gallery of Greater Victoria houses the province's largest collection, including significant holdings of works by Emily Carr and a very important collection of Asian art.

Sherry not only benefited from the many opportunities that were presented to her by a maturing Victoria, but she also contributed in a significant way to the city's cultural growth through her teaching, mentorship, and performance. Her impact is without measure. And what is perhaps most impressive is that she loved all that she was doing, she had deep respect for her students and colleagues, and she approached every day and every challenge with a positive attitude (and red lipstick).

Last Words

"I was dancing between two studios and had a really hectic schedule. I was late for a solo rehearsal with Sherry because my other rehearsal ran really overtime. I was extremely stressed when I got there and broke down in tears. She told my mom to get me something to eat and to take some time. She then had a conversation with my other dance teacher about making sure they worked together so I didn't feel so much pressure. Dance teacher and dancer can be a

complicated relationship, but I always knew Sherry had my back. She showed me that especially that day and I always remember it.” (Rasna)

“I admire her love of dance, her work ethic, her dedication and her vibrant, gentle soul. Sherry and I don’t socialize [as] much these days, but it is always such a delight when we cross paths from time-to-time... there are many people in the City of Victoria who have been involved in bringing joy to others through their love of the performing arts. Sherry is definitely one of those people.” (Adele)

“Sherry influenced me to pursue my love of musical theatre. When I considered applying for a performing arts/leadership program in the US, Sherry offered encouragement and wrote a letter of reference that helped me gain admission. When I returned to Victoria, she recommended me as choreographer, supported my directing projects, and cast me in my first leading role (as Mavis in a Langham Court production of *Stepping Out* which she choreographed). She also offered her studio space to use for rehearsals when I was directing/choreographing a show. I am so grateful for her support and friendship.” (Heather)

“...there was the time our senior tap class was in rehearsal for *Steppin’ Out* when the studio was on Fisgard Street...We were running through some sections of the piece (choreographed by Matthew Howe and Sherry). Sally Hannah popped her head in to say hello to Sherry. We all stopped, and Sherry introduced her to us. Sally was quite a bit older than Sherry (born in 1926), so many of my classmates didn't know her as a former ballet teacher in Victoria. In her introduction, Sherry says, “Everyone, this is Sally Hannah. She has been teaching ballet for a hundred years.” Well, you can imagine how horrified Sherry was given her choice of words! Again, when you know her, you know how completely out of character this is. I looked at her and we locked eyes and I started laughing. She shot me a death glare, but I just couldn’t stop. Sally, of course, didn’t address it and left quickly, (thank goodness). My laughter, however, continued throughout the rest of the rehearsal. Sherry was barely speaking to me by the end. OMG it was so funny. Even as I type this, I am still laughing.” (Lynn)

“I have great memories of my time with Sherry: travelling to dance conventions in Seattle and Las Vegas with her and some of the other teachers at the studio (we always had a lot of fun), performing at the FolkFest every June (even the day after my high school graduation. I didn’t get any sleep the night before), performing in shows at UVic and Langham Court Theatre that Sherry had choreographed, Sherry treating all the teachers to dinner in December before she travelled south for the winter, and joining Sherry and some of her adult students for coffee after class on Thursday. They were all such wonderful people!” (Mandy)

“I am a theatre and dance professor at a university in the United States. I still use Sherry’s approach to teaching tap. Her warm-ups and some of her combinations are still being taught! As an older dancer, I would write them down after class so I could remember them. They were tough! Which is exactly what is needed. She made you feel so accomplished when you finally “got it.” Sherry was so full of love as a teacher. She took time with the girls that were struggling and pushed those that got it right away. She never picked favorites (even though I think we all

felt like we were her favourite). A stellar teacher. One of a kind. A recommendation from her was full of passion and love. *'One more time'...*" (Pia)

"I love that Sherry has known me for 60 years...[She] has been a constant source of kindness to me over my entire lifetime. She has been a role model... for how to live. Sherry truly cares about people and what is important in life. For her, it has never been about the material things. It has always been about the experience of living each day to the fullest with grace and charm. Whether it is in downtown Victoria, Oak Bay Village, Willows Beach, Miami Beach or New York... [She] exemplifies how to balance working very hard with having fun and enjoying the art of travel and relaxation." (Muffy)

Very early in the process of writing this profile, Sherry lent me a scrapbook that had been prepared by her friend Bonnie Helm Northover (her two sons, Cameron and Dylan, were BSD students) to mark her retirement. It was filled with photos of young dancers in costume and countless messages of gratitude. Sherry's lifelong friend Nadine Stewart Schadalee, her partner in the tap duo, *The Twin Tones* when they were both in their early teens, offered the following tribute to her friend. It reads:

Ode to Sher

We were going with the Flo when it all began...

Twin Tones birthed

Ambassadorettes to the City of Victoria's Centennial
Red velvet tuxes, top hats, and part of a time capsule
To be dug up in a hundred years in Beacon Hill Park

Fundraisers with very black faces
Floor shows with Egyptian, Can Can, Tap and Blues
Plus the occasional song by me.
The Butchart Garden's Shows.

Five years with the world-famous "Smile Show"
Including being on tour.
Our own Taste of choreographic Honey with 'Flo'

Your opening of your own hive with BroadStreet Dance
Inviting me to teach with you
Your BSC Human Performance Degree and teaching in the schools.
So many dancers you have inspired...
Good times and new beginnings
Marriages, babies, and memorials
Always connected and tapping in
So much love and congratulations
Your Nat

Postscript

“What I admire most about my mom is her ‘positivity and dedication’ to her everyday life, and her students... When I was growing up, my mom was always positive about whatever I was doing. My mom would tell me that ‘anything was possible in life.’ I remember when I was young, and Mom was going to university to finish her degree, all the while teaching full-time, and running our household, not to mention sewing all my festival costumes, it was very rare that she was in a bad mood or would complain about all that she had to do. Instead, she would be positive about it all. If I have taken anything from the woman that she is, it is to ‘live life to the fullest, and always dedicate your time to things you love’ ...and you will always have a positive outcome.” (Nicole)

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