

Memories of a Midwest Dreamer

Joan McKinley

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I have always thought of myself as the little Midwest girl with big dreams. Dreams were free and that was a comfort to me since I was not born with a silver spoon. I grew up in a large family that had just enough to pay the bills and a little left over for lessons and emergencies. How fortunate I counted myself to have been born in a town with a university-a dream factory.

I was to become a part of Ball State University long before I ever stepped foot in an Elementary Education classroom at the Teacher's College. It began when my mother took me to see a performance by the Ball State Ballet Company. The beautiful music, the satin and tulle costumes and the graceful movements of the dancers on stage were almost too much for my young eyes and ears to take in. I decided then and there that one day I would dance with the Ball State Ballet. Four years later, at the age of 12, I auditioned and was accepted as part of the corp. I danced 4 more years with the company before moving on to another goal-going to England through the Ball State Overseas program.

If my parents ever doubted the likelihood of my going to college and traveling abroad, they never let on. Dreams were free, college was not. My father spoke with me about the realities of life, namely, how I was going to pay for it. He told me that he couldn't pay for my college, but if I worked hard in school I might get a scholarship. He couldn't pay for me to go to England, but if I got a job and saved my money, I might be able to study there. My parents never told me I couldn't go, but they made sure I realized I would have to be the one to make it happen. At 16, that's all I needed to hear.

My efforts paid off with a 4 year teaching scholarship and money towards my junior year trip to England. Three and a half years of saving my earnings was enough to pay for the rest of the trip. The last two weeks I traveled all over Europe with three classmates. My eyes were opened to how the rest of the world lived. The experience made me appreciate my life in

“America’s Hometown” that much more.

I graduated with a Bachelor of Science and, later, a Masters degree in Elementary Education from Ball State. I have spent the last 29 years teaching the children of Muncie about reading, writing, and how important it is to dream. I will be forever grateful for the generosity of the Ball family for providing Muncie with such a wonderful institution of learning. May it continue to serve well those who dare to dream.