



# In Person

## DAWNE KASTEIN

### Getting the Job Done

*Not everyone we profile has to be famous. Many go about living their lives in private, learning and leading by example and finding meaning in the everyday. **Dawne Kastein** is one of those people.*

*By: Kenneth E. Seaton*

One third superintendent, one third artistic dancing dynamo and one third den mother to a bunch of very needy tenants is a good way to describe Dawne Kastein. Although, in many ways she defies any label. Just when you think that you have her pegged she goes off in a different direction. "I still jump up to do other things at the same time," she says, "drives my husband 'round the bend."

Married for 21 years, she shares a Toronto apartment with husband Eric, two Chinese Crested dogs, a Siamese cat and two large tanks of assorted fish. All of them are rescues, as is she, she proudly maintains. On her own since she was 15, Dawne is a headstrong person who does things at her own pace (which is frantic most days). She was born in New England in 1959 and has lived at one time or another in most of the larger US cities.

High school was completed while sharing an apartment with a bunch of university students. Once graduating, she went on to study art at a number of universities in various American cities. Art directors would often hire her (while she was still in school) and she used the money to help pay for her studies. She worked for an advertising production company as an in house illustrator and her work was highlighted in an exhibition at the Society of Illustrations in New York City.

Over the years she has also been both dancer and dance teacher; founded an art jewelry company and a hand embroidery company, Idle Hands. Currently she and her husband Eric are the busy superintendents for four low-rise 1930's brownstones and the people who live in them. She says that this is maybe the most fulfilling and frustrating job yet.

As a child Dawne didn't feel any different than other children, but somehow she knew that she was. She says that she "thought in pictures, saw music in colors and was unable – to sit quietly hands folded – like a good girl." This was a different time and it caused her a bit of trouble, "People thought children like me were being undisciplined and naughty." So, she learned how to "fake" it.

She still has vivid memories of a particular eye test that the nurse gave. It had E shapes that pointed in different directions and you were supposed to use your hands to show which direction the E was facing. She remembers that, "I was terrified of failing the eye test. I needed glasses but as a child had no idea this was not my fault. So I adapted, I watched all the kids in front of me show the directions with their hands. I memorized the hand motions and

just copied them when it became my turn. Voila...passed the eye exam!"

Dawne lives with dyslexia but she never had any idea that it was supposed to be a problem. "Reading was just a bit of a challenge, but I loved it because it took you to places so I persevered." She developed her own (funny way) of writing long hand that allowed her to fill in the twisted letters rather quickly. "My husband gets a kick out of watching me write," she says. "Thanks to computers and the corrections it makes as I type, this is not a big deal anymore. I see words as pictures so it gets tricky to break them down into letters which are just shapes."

She doesn't think that having a "weird way" of reading or writing is a disability; it's just a weird way of reading or writing in the way that some singers have odd singing voices. She reads roughly three books a week and has almost learned how to run off her excess energy –like getting her physical work done – so that she can be still enough to concentrate on what she's doing.

When asked about LD she laughs, "For a moment there I thought you were requesting a type of light bulb. I also have bipolar disorder and depression...I have been medicated and head shrunk for years." To her, this is no different than having brown eyes or age spots. "It is just what we humans get when we enter the fray, some weird little twist to keep it interesting." She adds that "no life is easy. Every day is different and we all have challenges that we must tighten our belts and face."

She continues to use medications, "Yes, meds. I am on meds." They aid in managing her depression and controlling the pain of injuries sustained over her life journey. When she was 28 she broke her back in a bike accident, and has incurred other breaks as a result of dancing while being too thin and she also has spinal stenosis.

"We live in a wonderful time, when meds are available to keep the pain to a low rumble and we can continue to live without too much trouble. Yeah some days suck, but even without pain old age and trouble, some days will suck." She adds, "I do have to keep changing up my depression meds. I am aware of the oncoming train wreck that



will be my life if I don't stay on top of that. It is like crossing a busy street.... you have to keep your eyes open and your senses aware to what is happening."

She considers herself lucky to be living in Canada. "When things start to get too dark at the edges, time to go back and switch things up again." Thankfully she has a doctor who is extremely proactive. She is not a "let's dwell on the problem", she is more a "let's just find a solution" type of doctor.

Art is her language, her coping mechanism and an outlet for her energy. "I hear color and see music, dance is another thing that compels me...so I need to release the observations or I will burst." She believes that humans can create beauty; express

higher emotions and show the way to the paradise were we can exist in the here and now. It can be done through art or music or science or gardening or cooking but we humans were meant to create.

As a final thought she was asked if she could go back and change anything in her past, would she. "Would I change anything...hell yeah, but then I would be a different person, who may not have all the wonderful things in my life now. Sagely she adds, "Can you pull one card out of the bottom of a house of cards and leave the structure standing? Tomorrow will happen with or without your being there, so why not be there. What do you have to lose? And if you lose it...maybe you will find something better!" 