

Susan Lee - Titus's Story

By Angela Newman

Ever since Susan Lee-Titus was a child, teachers felt she had a gift for writing which wasn't surprising since her favorite classes were English courses. She attended college and after graduating, Susan worked as a college instructor and in Public Relation firms but becoming an author was really her dream profession. She has since published three books and is living her dream but getting there hasn't been all that easy. I don't think I could do Susan's story justice if I wrote about the horror she experienced one December night while attending an aerobics class, so I'll have her share it in her own words.

"On a December night, at 7:00 P.M., in an aerobic dance class, I was raped, beaten and held hostage at gunpoint for two hours. Terrified, I promised God that if I lived, I would give up my self-centered ways and try to do some good by reaching out to those less fortunate. Though I survived, I still had to literally pick my broken teeth up off the floor and re-start my life. What followed was an eight-year odyssey – a physical, mental and spiritual journey that took me places that I never intended to go. The first place it took me was to a mental hospital to treat debilitating Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). I had developed a constant tremor in my hand. Sleeping and eating were impossible. And then there was the voice – the voice that echoed incessantly, punctuating my every activity. It was the voice of the rapist ordering: "You get over there and take off your clothes." I couldn't get rid of that voice. But the hospital therapy I received relieved these symptoms and prepared me for the other stages of PTSD that I would experience.

During my continued recovery, I turned to dance to alleviate the stages of anger and depression. I carried this to the extreme and exercised 30 hours a week. I tore all the ligaments in my ankle, and an operation was necessary. I was told by nine doctors that I would never dance again, but one surgeon healed me with a new procedure. While recuperating from surgery, I finally had time to think about everything that happened to me. I realized that my excessive aerobics was due to my anger and lack of forgiveness. I knew that only when I came to the point of truly forgiving would my anger cease. Suddenly, it

came to me. Prison. I could go into prison and work with criminals – not only to be sure that I had forgiven, but to keep the promise I had made to God that I would try to do some good in this world by reaching out to those less fortunate. Then I had another epiphany– a prison dance outreach. I could teach aerobic dance to inmates, facing the same criminal element that harmed me, thus completing the circle of forgiveness. I would call the prison outreach The Joy Dancers because I wanted to provide an hour of joy to these troubled individuals.

Despite the horrific experience of the rape, deep in my heart I feel that night of terror marked my beginning and not my demise. The rape was the defining moment of my life because through suffering, I became a woman of compassion. And because I survived the nightmare, I can foster the dream. By reaching out to others, I transcended the pain and transformed my life into one of purpose and service.”

When I first read Susan’s story, I was so moved and can only imagine the horror of that evening and the fear she experienced. So many of us go about our daily business and tasks as we should, then something so unexpected and horrific as being raped to turn your world upside down suddenly faces you. Life from that point will never be the same. After physical and emotional healing from the experience, Susan turned her nightmare into a positive not only for her own healing but for the many inmates she has worked with in prisons.

She knows all too well the effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and what it can do to your life. Regardless of what caused the traumatic event, there are many people that suffer from this disorder. Susan extends her compassion beyond prisons by helping soldiers who are suffering from PTSD. She lends an ear to listen as someone who has been there and has prevailed. As a guest on radio shows talking about her story and book, she discusses the effects of PTSD. Many of the callers that reach out are soldiers who have faced traumatic experiences in war who know all too well what Susan is referring to. Thank you Susan for reaching out to our soldiers and to the inmates!

Visit Susan Lee-Titus at www.thedancerreturns.com



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