

TRIBUTE TO ROSEMARY RAW FOUNDER AND PIONEER OF CHRISTIAN DANCE SOUTH AFRICA

Rosemary Raw was born Rosemary Taylor. She lived in De Doorns during the war years of 1939-1945, entertaining Italian POWs with her dancing as a 3 year old. She earned an orange for every dance she did!



Rosie studied dance and graduated with her Teachers and Performers Diplomas from the University of Cape Town. She also completed her Cecchetti Associate Diploma. She was invited to dance at the Royal Ballet School in London when she was just sixteen. After dancing there and in Germany, she returned to South Africa in 1960.



She met her husband, Robert Raw, at the Anglican Cathedral in Cape Town and in 1963, they were married. By 1970, Alex and Robert Jnr. Were added to their union and she had a thriving dance school at Mickelfield Primary School, Cape Town.

In 1973, Rosemary gave her life to Jesus, was baptized in the Spirit and had received a prophecy that she would be used by Jesus to dance for Him. The idea of which, she secretly thought was both inappropriate and quite ridiculous! However, the Lord was opening the doors to His plan and, in 1976, she was asked to be part of a ballet "Jesus Passion". Her role was to be the Angel appearing to Jesus in Gethsemane. The ballet was performed outdoors and she had to "float" down and up 36 steps without falling flat on her face. This was her first encounter of 'dancing' in a Christian context. There followed a year of intense ministry and prayer and at the end of it, she decided to lay her ministry down and retire from Mickelfield. While on holiday on a sheep farm in Colesburg, she was awakened at 3:00am for three mornings running, hearing a voice saying:

"You are to go to St. John's Church in Wynburg"

She obeyed and made an appointment to see the Rector, David Prior, about joining the young wives' group. Thankfully, he didn't respond to that question and instead shared his vision for worship at St. John's, asking her if she would pray for a trained dancer to be sent to the parish. To quote Rosie: "After a shocked silence and feeling very pale, I told him who I was and what I had been trained to do. An equally pale David decided the we needed to pray and check it out with the Lord for 6 months."

Unbeknown to Rosie, a group of women had been praying for someone to come and lead them in dance in worship. The ministry began in the carpark of St. John's, Wynberg, as it was the only place that they were allowed to dance. 1978 saw the ministry really take off as Rosie was invited to dance during worship by the worship leader. She heard the Lord saying: "Well done. Dance for ME. I have chosen the right time."

In December of 1978, the dance group were allowed to enter the church during the midnight service. It was a processional to the Ghanaian song, "Sanna". 6 weeks prior to the service, the Lord had spoken to her about choreography, "I know how well you can dance, but for now I want you to WALK AND PRAISE ME from your heart." As they processed simply down the aisle, the Holy Spirit descended in a very special way – some were slain in the Spirit, others gave their lives to Jesus. God had brought danceHosanna into being.

In the 1980s, Rosemary and danceHosanna, went wherever they were invited, including Gugulethu, Langa, St. George's Cathedral, Nyanga, the 2nd Renewal Conference in Johannesburg, amongst a few. New leaders emerged. 10 leaders and 6 assistant leaders met regularly for prayer and guidance. Rosie began learning Contemporary dance under Jenny Van Papendorp in Cape Town and in 1983, the need for a dance fellowship and Christian training centre emerged. The Christian Dance School was started with 5 pupils. Five years later, it had grown to 110 dancers! Rosemary's calling was to intercede for our nation through dance, using powerful choreography for dances of spiritual warfare. By the mid-eighties, danceHosanna leaders were pioneering dance in churches all over the Cape Flats and areas of the Boland.



In interviews, Rosemary would often be asked what her great vision was. Her reply was typical, "I don't have one. I am merely trying to follow God's path one step at a time."

The link to the international dance community arrived in the form of an invitation by one Mary Jones who sent a message to the Christian Community in South Africa that she was trying to find a Rosemary Raw somewhere in Africa, possibly South Africa. Mary wanted her to attend an International Christian Dance

Conference in Bathurst, Australia. Rosie ignored the initial request, as she felt it was impossible for South Africans to go. We were, after all, the polecats of the world! However, Mary persevered and Rosie was instructed by her pastor and some businessmen in the Parish, to take a multi-racial team to the conference. God miraculously provided and so, on 30 December, 1987, the team flew out for a life-changing experience! It ended with Rosie and the team becoming some of the Charter Members of the newly formed, International Christian Dance Fellowship



In August of 1990, Mary Jones visited South Africa and together with Rosemary and other Cape Town dancers and leaders, attended the Valley Arts Festival. It was during this weekend that the dancers from around the country met formally for the first time and the Christian Dance Fellowship of South Africa was formed, with Rosie as the founding National Co-ordinator.

The 90's were interesting times and the ministry continued to grow. Christlight Company was formed and the standard of dance everywhere was improving. New groups and ministries were springing up all over the country. However, Rosemary was in burnout and was forced to stop everything and just rest. This was difficult for her but she obeyed and the Christian Dance Fellowship of South Africa went through the rest of the decade without her at the helm, but very much with her there in intercessory prayer!

Her death in 2012 seemed premature. There was so much she could still impart to dance worshipers. In my personal life, Rosemary has left an indelible mark. There are still times that I want to phone her with some news, ask her opinion and hear her laugh again. The hard work that she put in and the seeds she sowed, in her own, Rosie way, have borne much fruit. When I look around at the leaders out there in this country, I see so many who were taught by her, influenced by her and inspired by her. Her teaching that Christian Dance is about Jesus first, Fellowship second and Dance third, is timeless. The most anointed dancers I have seen follow this maxim and it shows.

Her love for Jesus, her family and her dancers was fierce. This scripture reflects very much how she felt:

"For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong..."

"....When I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech, or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

(1 Corinthians 1:27,28 and 2:1,2)

~ Sue Hodson, Cape Town, South Africa
July 2020

MORE TRIBUTES

~ From Karen Kerr

Some people's footprints leave a path for others to follow in. They may be seen as trail-blazers or pioneers. Rosemary (Rosie to many of us) is just that.

In the Seventies and Eighties, Dance as a means of worship, was being born across the world, in little splashes here and there. Here in our South Africa, God was raising up His "followers in movement" and it was just as hard here as in the other continents. Back then, dance was almost always largely frowned upon in Church circles. Few understood the "called out leaders in praise" leading spiritual warfare as described in the Older Covenant. At most, it was graciously added to some event as entertainment to lighten the "program". I write this with no bitterness, it's just the way it was. I do believe Rosie was raised up to change this pattern, along with a few others in the land. She not only brought others along with her, but managed to document her experiences and lessons, to mentor those following. "Gathering", was her gifting that would establish a community in dance worship "for such a time as this".

At the same time Christian Dance Fellowships were being born across the world, Rosemary investing her life therein. Another significant transformation was her inspiration to use dance, across our much-divided nation in those days. Her special choreography "God bless Africa" incorporated cultural movements rarely seen in Christian circles, and this dance still has relevance today.

I remember her wisdom and call to Holiness, as she imparted during workshops, with her wide-opened eyes and raised eyebrows, one sat eagerly at her feet. Then in a flash, her loud laughter would sweep you up as she drew everyone into the funny side of things.

We would do well to remember the Biblical standards that people like Rosie urged us to uphold in our Praise movement.

You live on... beautiful Worshipper!! We will all dance together again!!

~ From Brenda Ramsay

If my memory serves me correctly, my introduction to Rosie was way back in the mid 1980s through a poster in the El Shaddai Christian Bookshop in Bree Street, Cape Town, advertising aerobic and dance classes at the Christian Dance School in Pinelands. We were living in Pinelands at the time. I had danced from an early age and was keen to get back into it after having had two babies. I started attending the evening aerobic classes and from there Rosie invited me to join the Christlight classes. Along the way Rosie mentored me and I started teaching the aerobic classes. All four of our daughters participated in the Christian Dance School. Rosie mentored and coached me in teaching the tots and pre-primary classes which I eventually took over from her.

Reflecting on and pondering over my friendship and journey with Rosie, the song "I love you with the love of the Lord. Yes, I love you with the love of the Lord. I can see in you, the Glory of my King, and I love you with the love of the Lord", comes to mind. Her love of dance and her passion to share the love of Jesus through it was infectious and tangible. She selflessly demonstrated and shared God's love with me and my family. Rosie recognized my giftings and offered me the opportunities, space and freedom to grow in them. She nurtured and encouraged me not only to use and grow my giftings, but also guided me in facing new challenges. She was never afraid to speak the truth in love. I am so grateful for the time, energy and prayer she so selflessly invested in me as an individual. I val-

ue all the practical skills I learnt and gleaned from her about movement and dance, choreography, production, costume design and making.

She not only supported me as an individual, but she also championed our girls and my husband Dave. Always ready with words of encouragement and praise, she offered them many opportunities to grow in numerous ways through dance and the variety of productions they participated in. Even Dave as MC and in the production of props.

Rosie was like a mother to me. She reached out to us and supported us through trying and difficult times. She and Robert once again selflessly opened their hearts and home to us. They took us in as a family (Dave, a pregnant me and two young girls) for a month as we transitioned from one home to another. Their home became our home.

I am eternally grateful to the Lord for bringing Rosie into my life and for the years I journeyed with her. Rich years in which I was able to share in and draw on her wisdom and knowledge as she loved us "with the love of the Lord".