

The Fairies in Rainbow Land



For as long as I can remember dance has been a part of my life. It may surprise you to know that as a child I was pretty agile and athletic. I was always running, skipping, doing cartwheels, climbing trees or riding my bike but I was also a daydreamer. I spent most of my childhood in my own little world full of rainbows, fairies, elves and pixies - I blame Enid Blyton!

At school I loved Art, Drama, PE and quite enjoyed Cookery and even the little bit of Woodwork and Metalwork we did too. I hated pretty much anything academic! I saw Maths a punishment, Geography was boring and History just gave me the creeps! I mean, who wants to learn about DEAD people??

My mother took me to my first ballet class when I was about five. My doctor had recommended ballet classes to help strengthen my feet which are over pronated and were causing excessive wear to my shoes. I guess she decided that dance classes would be cheaper in the long run than replacing my shoes every six weeks.

I absolutely loved it! It was the perfect combination for me. It allowed me to be physical and energetic but most importantly, it gave me permission to actually become one of those little fairies who danced in that world full of rainbows in my head.

When I was little older, about nine I think, I started to take more traditional, strict classical ballet classes. I accepted that if I was late for class or had forgotten my ballet shoes or if my hair wasn't in a neat bun, I would not be allowed to take part in the class. I could only sit, very quietly and watch the others while I rehearsed my apology over and over again in my head in the hope that it might just soften the stern words that I knew my teacher was about to deliver. I learned very early on that making excuses would only fuel the fire. "Deborah, ballerinas do not stop part way through their performance of Sawn Lake to redo their hair! They make sure that their hair is tightly secured before their performance begins!! Ballerinas do not keep their audience waiting and they certainly do not dance bare foot!"

By today's standards I suppose my dance training may seem a bit harsh but I was brought up in a different era. Children didn't question adults in the way that they do today. I just accepted that my dance teacher would slap my legs as she corrected and reminded me that they needed to be fully stretched or that she would probably hurl her shoe at me if I did a glissade over instead of glissade derriere for third time running! To me it all seemed very straight forward and black and white; pay attention, work hard, follow the rules or expect the consequences. It's just how it was, not necessarily right or wrong, it was just a

different mind-set on teaching and disciplining children and remember, I was a daydreamer and away with the fairies most of the time! I expect that I was pretty frustrating to teach and needed a bit of a shake-up to bring me back into the real world – Nothing's changed there then!

But today children are brought up to question more and to have an opinion. They are expected to see reason and explain their behaviour. Their behaviour is analysed and scrutinised for possible underlying psychological or emotional problems much more than it was when I was a child. I have no evidence to suggest that that is necessarily a bad thing, but I do often wonder if we forget that they are just children and not mini adults who are capable of such sound reasoning and understanding.

Personally I am grateful that I was brought up in an era when discipline seemed so much more straight forward and instinctive. I am glad that my boundaries were clear and consequences were simple. I did wrong; I was punished, learned my lesson, was forgiven and simply moved on. I am grateful that I was not made to spend endless amounts of time reflecting on or explaining my misdemeanour. I'm sure that my explanation would have simply been an excuse and my reflecting would soon have turned to sulking. I would probably have blamed it all on one of those naughty blooming pixies in Rainbow land and ended up with numerous appointments with a child phycologist!