Leaps of Faith

MSG Pleasant Lindsey III and other servicemen and women use praise dance to find peace amid war.

August 31, 2007 As told to Rachel Straus

Back in the States, the last thing I would have done in front of others is religious dance. It wasn't until 2005, while stationed in Korea, that I got interested. I was helping a dance ministry put on their performances in an Army chapel. I started watching what the women were doing. Then I learned all their parts. If a dancer couldn't make rehearsal, I would stand in for her. That's when I got the bug.

I danced publicly for the first time in November 2006 at Camp Victory, Baghdad. There were seven of us. Today the team has 12 dancers: 10 women and two men, including myself. We're from all branches of the military, working in intelligence, personnel and communications. At first my male friends ribbed me by mimicking my dance moves. Now they're quite supportive. Male colleagues always ask me, "When are you all dancing next?"

Dancing provides mental and spiritual relief, even for people just watching. We interpret songs about human suffering and spiritual rejuvenation. One Sunday, a rocket or mortar round exploded nearby. We kept dancing—no one left the congregation. We dancers realize Iraq is where Abraham, father of the Jewish, Muslim and Christian faiths, came from. Dancing makes our faith feel universal.

I've been in the Army for almost 22 years. Since November, I've worked inside Al Faw Palace, one of Saddam Hussein's former residences, coordinating the Army's electronic and video communications. There is seven-day-a-week, 24-hour pressure here, and from time to time, someone will ask me when I'm taking a day off. The day I dance is the day I take off. I rehearse twice weekly and cocreate two new dances twice a month. I don't need to leave Camp Victory to experience peace.

Last Easter, after we performed inside Al Faw's ballroom, we continued offstage in the foyer, dancing and crying joyfully. We could hear the audience doing the same inside. Recently, I requested an extension of stay in Baghdad because I want to help continue the ministry. For us military personnel in dance ministries—and there are now six in Iraq and one in Kuwait—there is a strong spiritual connection to being here. We feel it every time we dance.

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