

Sue Johnson: Growing Edges – Backing In

Sermon by Sue Johnson at Seekers Church 2/2/03

Growing Edges – Backing In

Good morning!

This is a story about a little girl who became a woman but who refused to grow up. All her life she was not good enough, wise enough or skilled enough to do what she wanted to do.

There was the time when she was 38, mother of 4 children and living in Queens, NY. As a challenge to her young son to resume piano lessons, she took organ lessons from the same teacher. She never played organ before. She took them solely for her own enjoyment; certainly, she did not want anyone else to hear her play. Then one Sat. morning, during an ice storm, the organist at the church where she practiced broke his wrist. Could she substitute for him on Sunday? Well, of course not! She was not good enough. At best, she would need a week or two to get ready. She could not be ready tomorrow! Finally, after much agonizing, and realizing the need was so urgent, she agreed to give it a try – just this once. After that, for some strange reason, needs kept arising, and gradually, before she knew it she was subbing all over Queens, in churches of many denominations. Moreover, eventually, she became the regular organist at a nearby church.

Backing into growth experiences, that is what she did.

Staring around age 60, she gradually became aware that God was calling her to dance, to sacred dance in particular. **Obviously**, she would never dance in public – she who had had

absolutely no dance training as a kid; who hated 8th grade ballroom classes; who could not tell left from right and had no sense of rhythm – she could not.

God was having none of that. Now she looks back and suddenly recognizes a pattern here. Once again, she has backed into a growing edge.

First, she would follow along in group liturgical dances, where she was taught or led by others at big Sacred Dance Guild Festivals and where she was somewhat anonymous. Then, wanting more, she and Sheri Bergen called together a dance mission group, and began dancing in her small church community. She never led; she could not. She was a beginner.

She does not know how or when it happened, but over the next 10 years, she sometimes taught a dance to her small group. **Sometimes** she even taught the whole congregation some movements. Once she even taught a professional dance teacher the choreography to a dance and together they led a congregation in Calif.

You would think God would be through. This "I can't" girl turned woman had filled her life doing what she thought she could never do. Nevertheless, God had one more growing edge for her to explore. Therefore, last year, at the young age of 69, she set off on monthly trips to Raleigh, for the InterPlay Leadership Program.

Mind you, she did not want to be an InterPlay leader. She could not lead – too complicated, too much to remember all that stuff; besides, she is not a talker, not a teacher. She is a mover and a follower.

She loved both the philosophy and practice of InterPlay. She loved doing it. She loved the fun of playing in that very safe, totally affirming community that happens whenever InterPlayers gather. If being in a Leadership Program was the

only way to get that affirmation, to have a monthly dose of dance, fun, story, song and stillness – then she would go for it.

Since beginning the program in Sept. '02, she wrestled with whether or not she is called to lead InterPlay, or simply lead her life. An amazing church in DC that offers Growing Edge money to its members who want to explore something new supported her all along.

There is no guarantee the "new" will succeed. She still does not think she is called to lead InterPlay, **and** it is her deepest desire to find others here who want to access the body wisdom that comes to the surface when we play together.

What is the InterPlay thing I have told you about in this story? I really do not have adequate words to describe it. It is a practice that has to be experienced. So let us play! I invite you to join in – or not – as you wish.

Hold up an arm.

Do stuff that is smooth.

Do stuff that is jerky.

Do stuff that is fast.

Do stuff that is slow.

Make a shape – and hold it.

Make another shape – and have stillness in that shape.

Shake out your arm and rest.

Guess what – you have just done a hand dance!

Now I invite you to do a hand dance – stuff like the one we just did – **on behalf of** someone or something who concerns you. A prayer of intercession. Use easy focus – soft focus – just enough so you do not bump your neighbor. [30 seconds] Shake out your arm and let it rest.

Now I invite you to turn to a neighbor and do a hand dance

together on behalf of our impending move to Carroll St. [30 sec] Shake out your arm and let it rest. **have** that dance.

Well, I hope you will not tell anyone, but I think I just backed into something again – leading an InterPlay form!

Seriously, though, I really do not know where this newest growing edge is leading me, but I am deeply grateful for both the money to help me explore, and the mentoring that Kate Amoss has given me throughout this process.

I do know that my own body wisdom tells me I need to play more. It is my deepest hope that lots of us will do the workshops on March 22 or at least that lots of us will see the performance that night, and will want more too. My vision is to have a monthly Bodyspirit Celebration at Carroll St.

Moreover, I suspect that our dancing God wants more play for every body.