

COMMUNITY

Hero of the Week - Bernadette Boylan

Bernadette Boylan, Supervising Social Worker at Children's Bureau and resident of Santa Clarita, works each day to promote the best interests of children in foster care who have joined Resource Families throughout the Santa Clarita and Antelope Valleys.

"I feel most fortunate to be part of a large team of professionals who work diligently to help Resource Parents to protect and nurture children, meet children's developmental needs and address delays, support children's relationships with their birth families, and connect to safe and nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime," said Boylan. "Each day is a new day to

strive for the best possible outcome for every child who enters our foster care and adoption program," she added.

However, Bernadette reminds interested adults that "there are many, many children that Children's Bureau can't help because there are not enough families to call upon. Also, it is very difficult and challenging to find families for older children and sibling groups.

If you have ever thought about becoming a resource parent, this poem by Forest Witcraft may encourage you to make that call: "A hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was,

the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove . . . but the world may be different because I was important in the life of a child."

If you have the willingness, ability and resources, consider applying to become a Resource Parent with Children's Bureau and provide a child the opportunity to experience stability, safety and well-being. A new online orientation is now available. Email your request to RFrecruitment@all4kids.org or call 800-730-3933. The website www.all4kids.org/programs/family-foster-care-and-adoption/ also has a form where you may sign up to receive the orientation or to request more information.



Fiction

by Jason Wright Downs
Contributor

A Man Who Can Dance

Will Bradley thinks he has a lot in common with his soon-to-be father-in-law.

John Dykstra doesn't think he and his soon-to-be son-in-law have as much in common as the boy thinks they do.

They both adore Kimmie, thats for sure. And because of that, John Dykstra began allowing Will Bradley to tag along when he'd head to the shooting range, or an early morning trawl for a few fish in the reservoir, or the occasional Monday night football game. They partake in these activities without speaking more than a few words to each other.

They're both big guys, well proportioned, former athletes. Have that in common too, Will Bradley would think to himself as they sit with a beer clutched in hand. Will Bradley finally felt like he'd found a home. Not just in Kimmie, but in Mr. Dykstra as well. You see, Will's dad had passed when he was only six years old and that had left a hole about the size of John Dykstra in the boy's heart. He felt lucky to have found someone to look up to in his soon-to-be father-in-law.

"You're gonna dance with me at my wedding, Daddy, you've got to," Kimmie said as she stood in front of the TV, blocking the game. "And I don't mean swaying back and forth all stiff like Frankenstein, neither." Will Bradley regarded John Dykstra closely, to clock his response. (He wasn't looking forward to the 'dancing' part of getting married, if he was being honest.)

"Baby, you know I don't dance. A man doesn't dance, not even if they love their daughters."

"I'm not taking no for an answer, daddy. Me and mama are taking classes down at the Legion Hall and you and Will are coming with us."

John Dykstra laughed, on the outside. On the inside he felt nervous and conflicted. "I never set foot on a dance floor in my life...not even at my own wedding," he said, without letting his forced smile fade.

*"And that's exactly why you're doin' this. Not just for me but for Mama too."
"I'm sorry, baby, but the answer's no." And he went back to drinking his beer.*

Will Bradley felt conflicted too. He wasn't eager to make a fool of himself on his wedding day, looking like an idiot on the dance floor in front of all his buddies. He knew folks danced at weddings, like he'd seen in movies, but he was the first of his friends to get married. His momma hadn't remarried and hardly got off the couch much anymore. Then again, he'd do anything for Kimmie. Even dance. But that's not really what he felt torn about. What would his soon-to-be father-in-law think of him if he just went along with the ladies. Would he think less of him as a man? Would he quit hanging out with Will like he was part of the family? Laugh at him?

The day approached for their first dance lesson at the Legion Hall and Will Bradley still felt like he was holding his breath. "What was Mr. Dykstra gonna do?" Will wondered.

When he showed up at the Dykstra residence on the night of (it was a Wednesday night, 6:30 in the evening), Will could hear loud words being spoken inside the house. It was Mr. and Mrs. Dykstra goin' at it pretty good. After a moment, Kimmie came bursting out the door lookin' steamed. She opened the door of the truck, climbed in, and slammed it shut. Will didn't dare say anything.

An eternity passed as the soon-to-be bride and groom sat in silence while the argument continued indoors.

By the time the foursome walked into the Legion Hall a half hour later the dance class had already begun.

To both Will Bradley and John Dykstra's surprise, a man was teaching the class. A young guy not much older than Will himself. In fact, he kind of looked familiar to Will, like he may have played for a rival football team in high school.

"Hey, folks, so glad you could make it," the instructor said, "Jump on in here. I'm Blake and this is Stacie." He indicated a perky blond woman to his right. She smiled and waved the two reluctant couples toward the middle of the floor. "Come on...no need to be afraid," she said. "We're all in the same boat here, aren't we, ya'll?" The small group of three other couples nodded, shyly.

John Dykstra could barely summon a thought in his mind, he was so angry. He didn't want to be in the same 'boat' with these saps. He had already shut down back in the kitchen before they left the house. He had shut down every day over the past week as his wife and daughter guilted, griped and goaded him into this room. The sensation was familiar, this feeling of shutting down, and it came up a lot in reaction to many different things in John Dykstra's life: arguments of any kind with his wife in which he eventually lost track of his position, whenever politicians came on the news (especially damn Democrats trying to turn this country soft), TV shows that inserted gay persons into the plot, being alone in a room with his aging father, dealing with complaints from customers at the shop, and definitely, as it turns out, dancing.

"This class is mainly for the men. We're here to make our women happy and that's about the only reason we're here, am I right?" Blake said, to grunts of agreement and a few snickers from the ladies.

Lynn Dykstra swatted John Dykstra on the shoulder by way of apology and to perhaps break a little ice. She couldn't tell if it worked or not.

Will Bradley's palms were sweating as he continued to check in with Mr. Dykstra, watching carefully his every move, while trying his best to look as though he was intent on Kimmie.

"Listen, here's the truth. I had never danced till I met the love of my life," Blake said, pulling Stacie to his side, "and I still can't dance a lick."

This got both Will Bradley and John Dykstra's attention.

"All I do out here, is show off my lady. Here's what I mean..." and he walked over to the record player and placed the needle down. The familiar intro to Ring of Fire by Johnny Cash filled the room. This also surprised Will Bradley and John Dykstra. Good taste, they both thought.

As Blake returned to Stacie's side, he said, "Watch how I just walk around her, in rhythm to the music or not, doesn't matter, and allow her to be the beauty she is...I'm giving her focus; my attention...I'm giving

her my strong arms to fall back on...I'm giving her support...I'm allowing her to spin free." Everyone watched as Blake took Stacie's hands and swung her away from him and back, all the while walking around in a circle, sometimes fast, sometimes slower. He'd occasionally take her by the small of the back and spin her under his arm, then support her body as he dipped her down onto his bended knee. It looked effortless. And Stacie looked so happy gazing up at him.

Will Bradley and John Dykstra had the same thoughts at the same time: "I can do that" and "I wanna make my woman smile like that."

The wedding came and went. Will Bradley danced with his beautiful new bride. They cut it up. They shocked and impressed the guests. But no one shocked the onlookers more than John Dykstra, who danced with his wife...and his daughter...and half the extended family. Everyone wanted a turn. Even Lynn's gay cousin from Minneapolis. John Dykstra became the star pupil at the Legion Hall. Blake and Stacie used him as an example so often they handed over the class to John and Lynn after eventually deciding to move away to the city. The class size grew so large at the Legion Hall they had to start using the high school gym instead. Then it got so big they had to break up classes into beginners, middlings and advanced. Will and Kimmie eventually outshone everyone. Blake and Stacie began inviting them to statewide competitions, which they won some years later.

Back home, and to this day, John Dykstra always starts his classes the same way. He shakes his head, looks down at his feet and says, "I never knew I was a man who could dance. But if you got someone who can open your heart just a little bit wider, like my wife and daughter do everyday...like my son-in-law too...doesn't matter who they are, then you can learn to show'em off the way they deserve...and have fun doing it yourself cuz it feels so dang good. You see, dancing is just one more way of loving folks who deserve to be loved."

Turns out, Will Bradley and his father-in-law have a lot in common.