

# THE OPEN WINDOW (or, *The Station Wagon Story*)

by Joyce E. Pennington

I have always been a never dying drill team girl. Drill team opened so many doors to me throughout my life. It all started in the spring of my sophomore year at Haltom High School when it was decided that our school would implement a drill team program. Our rival schools both had outstanding drill teams that were the envy of the community so we had a challenge to be good from the beginning.

We had tryouts on the stage in the auditorium and the one of the rival school directors came to judge. We had a simple tryout routine that all of us did in our sleep for three days, making sure that it would be perfect on the day of tryouts. Our director, Dorothy Mize, and the visiting director chose officers from the higher scores and I was one of the lucky ones to make second lieutenant. It was an exciting year starting new traditions, coming up with our name (Highsteppers), designing a uniform, planning for camp and our first performance season.

That summer we practiced two weeks prior to camp and practiced a lot of things that were no more useful than the *Man in the Moon*. We were definitely the *blind leading the blind*. Fortunately some of the officers had taken dance or twirling, but I was from a strict Southern Baptist family where dancing was considered a sin. My mom always said that I danced as soon as I could walk and that she had to hide me behind her skirt at church on Sunday because I danced all the time.

Camp was an eye opening experience. Ironically, we attended **American Drill Team School**® camp at Southern Methodist University. I had no earthly idea that one day I would lead that company. We saw so many incredible teams from Dallas, Houston and around the country. We were in awe of their skill precision and high kicks. That was very much a goal setting and learning experience. We observed that way they walked, talked, dressed, sat and said "yes ma'am." There was so much to being a good drill team!

We had a most successful opening season and the charter members became very close as we met for 5:00 am practices each morning. I was always there working hard and pulling antics. I sometimes spent more time sitting next to Mrs. Mize at basketball games than in my ranks because of my rowdiness.

As the next few months rolled around it was time to think about officer tryouts for my senior year. I was really focused (I thought). I was really disciplined (or, so I thought). I chose the heavy plywood orange and black discs for my original routine because I knew that was Mrs. Mize favorite. I had a really good routine, performed it to perfection and sat down dreaming of the position I had just earned. Everyone came up to congratulate me and tell me they had voted on me in the *straw poll* votes. My confidence was soaring.

When all routines were concluded, Mrs. Mize sat us all down in the gym to make the announcement of the new officers. She began calling out the second lieutenants...then the lieutenants. I reached over to congratulate each new officer. My heart began to pound as I awaited the announcement of co-captain... Carol Woods...Captain for next year is...Katy Kothmann! I sat there numb. My name had not been called. I stood to pat the winners on the back then slipped out the gym door inconspicuously. I started walking down the long hallway that led to the front of the school. I passed the lockers, through the foyer and out the front doors as I saw my mom's yellow station wagon awaiting for me next to the curb. When my mom saw me running and tears streaming down my face, she leaned across and opened the door as I fell across

the seat sobbing in her lab. As she stroked my hair, she told me she loved me and that I was the best one out there (as all great mom's know how to say).

I sobbed all the way home as the rest of the Highsteppers drove through the Dairy Queen to celebrate their victory. I had a couple of phone calls to offer comfort, but one came in from the devious one on the team to ask what course of revenge I had planned. The more she talked the better the revenge theory sounded. I plotted my return to practice the next day with a vengeance. I strutted in front of the long mirror in my room practicing my haughty tone of voice and quips I would make to the new officers and, finally to my director. I would let them all know how sorry they would be for not choosing me as a returning officer. The more I practiced the speech, the more guilty I began to feel. I knew that if I went in with that attitude the next day that I would certainly lose twice: once at tryouts, and secondly, confirm to my peers and my director that I would have certainly been a poor choice.

I never like to lose so this theory went by the wayside. I sat down in my grief and began to evaluate why I might not have made officer. Was it because I had been disorganized? Could it have been the many times I was called down for being rowdy at games? Could it have been that I needed more self-discipline? I found many answers to my questions. The difficult task was to boldly return to drill team practice with the determination to have a perfect attitude, the best kicks, the best splits, the best dedication, so that my peers would say when I graduated from Haltom High School, "Joyce was a leader in the line without a title. She was the heart and soul of the team. She gave it her best."

The grieving process took months, and yes, perhaps a year or two. I still didn't feel it was fair that my senior year had been shattered. God closed a door to me to show me so many more things in my life that needed focus. *He* opened a window to lead me to be a drill team director and eventually a leader in the dance/drill team industry.

As I sat in my English classroom in Denison, Texas, my first year of teaching school, I contemplated the many goals I had set for myself, to my family and to God. I told my parents that I would be someone very famous one day...maybe win an Olympic Gold medal...run for President...make them proud. I told God at sixteen years old that I would be a missionary and go through the jungle witnessing to natives that needed to hear the word of God. *He* spoke to me that day and said that I was on my path *He* had set for me and that I would have the opportunity to witness to thousands. *He* told me I needed to start being the best school teacher and drill team director that I could be right then and that the rest would follow accordingly. I learned that defeats could be turned into victories for myself by allowing each challenge to become a learning experience to prepare me for the next. Many times the blows seemed too hard to handle, yet through prayer and soul searching, I learned to rechannel each negative to a positive.

I attribute any success today to the valuable Christian upbringing from my parents, the discipline I learned from drill team and Dorothy Mize as a director, and the fire in my soul to reach for the stars. Most of all, I feel the most valuable lesson was the day "God closed the door and opened a window." This is why every contest and event that I present with my company (American Dance/Drill Team©) ends with this quote. I never dreamed I would be President, CEO and owner of this great company that launched my love for drill team in 1966.

I feel that through this experience, I have been able to share that life does not always deal you a winning hand. Everyone is not rewarded that is the most dedicated, hardest worker or most talented. This will be true both in school and in business as well. You have the opportunity to create for yourself the chance to pick up and start again and again, each time stronger than the last.

I read three passages and want to share them with you...

## THE BOTTOM LINE

### *Face it.*

*Nobody owes you a living. What you achieve or fail to achieve in your lifetime is directly related to what you do...or fail to do.*

*No one chooses his or her parents or childhood, but you can choose your own direction. Everyone has problems and obstacles to overcome, but that, too, is relative to each individual.*

### *Nothing is carved in stone.*

*You can change anything in your life if you want to badly enough. Excuses are for losers.*

*Those who take responsibility for their actions are the real winners in life.*

*Winners meet life's challenges head on, knowing no guarantees, and they give each challenge all they've got.*

*Never think that it is too late or too early to begin.*

*Time plays no favorites, and will pass whether or not you act.*

### *Take control of your life.*

*Dare to dream and take some risk...compete. Be enthusiastic. Show some compassion.*

*If you are not willing to honestly work for your goals, do not expect others to.*

*And most importantly...believe in yourself.*

## Thoughts of a Winner

*Author Unknown*

**Although I am only one out of a million, I *am* somebody; and that makes me as good as the next person. There is nothing in this life I cannot do. There is no goal I cannot tackle and have success. If I feel deep down inside that it is important to me, then I can do it--because if my mind can *conceive* it, and my head can *believe* it, then I know I can *achieve* it.**

**No longer will I drift through life feeling sorry for myself, because self-pity is the seed of destruction. I will search for a goal, and with enough hard work, total commitment, determination, dedication, and self-sacrifice, I know I will reach it.**

**I know there will be many times when it will seem that all the odds are against me, and I will have to fight one battle after another...**

**...but I *will not* give up!!!**

## Be a Winner

Winners take chances.

Like everyone else, they fear failing, but they refuse to let fear control them.

Winners don't give up.

When life gets rough, they hang in until the going gets better.

Winners are flexible.

They realize there is more than one way and are willing to try others.

Winners know they are not perfect.

They respect their weaknesses while making the most of their strengths.

Winners fall, but they don't stay down.

They stubbornly refuse to let a fall keep them from climbing.

Winners don't blame fate for their failures nor luck for their successes.

Winners accept responsibility for their lives.

Winners are positive thinkers who see good in all things.

From the ordinary, they make the extraordinary.

Winners believe in the path they have chosen even when it's hard,

even when others can't see where they are going.

Winners are patient.

They know a goal is only as worthy as the effort that's required to achieve it.

Winners make this world to a better place be.

---Nancy Smith