

Paula Douthett and Sacred Dance Ministries International



Paula Douthett (1932-2015) was an important pioneer in sacred dance. She was born in Wisconsin, USA, and although she loved dance was only able to start her training in College, first at the University of Colorado in Boulder and then at Sarah Lawrence College in New York City where she had the opportunity to take classes with many of the pioneers of modern dance – Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Jose Limon, Merce Cunningham, Pearl Lang and Mary Anthony.

This was followed by dancing first in Pearl Lang's and then Mary Anthony's dance company.

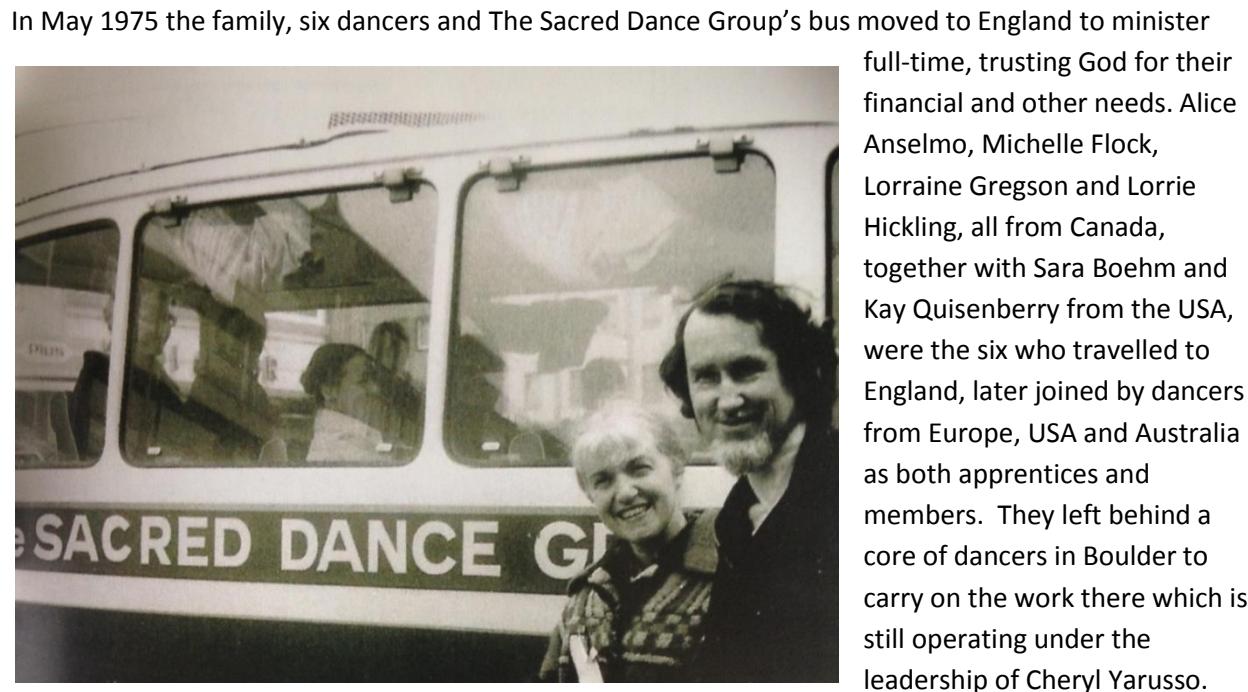


Boulder, Colorado

In 1958 Paula married Bill Douthett, a high school teacher, and after their first daughter, Cynthia Lynne, was born in 1962 they settled in Boulder, Colorado. Their second daughter, Nedra, was born in 1965. Paula had a gift in sales and opened a dress shop near the university that helped to supplement Bill's teaching salary. She also enjoyed teaching dance and opened a dance school. Until she moved to Boulder, Paula had not used dance to express her faith so it was a new challenge when the minister of Trinity Lutheran church, that they joined on arriving in Boulder, invited Paula to dance in church. This led to invitations in other churches and the eventual formation of The Sacred Dance Group of Boulder. This was in 1969, two years after she had been baptized in the Holy Spirit. As well as the challenge of developing her choreographic skills, the dance group gave Paula the opportunity to use her training in dressmaking and costume design that she had received in New York. The Sacred Dance Group began to be invited to dance in many churches and fellowships around the United States and Canada. Especially significant was an invitation to join Shekinah, led by Merv and Merla Watson from Toronto, in a tour of Europe. While on the tour Paula sensed the Lord saying that the group was to return to minister in England for a longer period.



Dorset, England



When the group first arrived in England they stayed with the Post Green community in Dorset. Pinky and Dennis Ball who were a part of Post Green later became leaders with Bill and Paula of the Sacred Dance Group. 1976 was a challenging year with Paula diagnosed with breast cancer and also looking for a permanent home for the group. In 1977 there were wonderful answers to prayer with Paula pronounced clear of the cancer and with the finding of Longmead, a large country house in Dorset. The finance to purchase it was also provided. From then on until 1995 when Bill and Paula semi-retired, closing SDMI down and moving out of Longmead, the group ministered with presentations and workshops first of all around Britain and Europe and then in many other countries around the world. The name of the group was changed in the early 1990s to Sacred Dance Ministries International . Bill was a wonderful support to the group helping in many practical ways and sharing in the teaching and dance. Together they also ministered to married couples recounting how God had enabled them to mend and grow in their relationship after a break and separation in the 1980s. After the group was disbanded, they continued to minister in workshops and presentations as a couple.

Their ministry has brought the Lord's presence in healing, freedom, salvation and deeper relationship to many people and the methods Paula developed in leading people have enabled others to follow in their footsteps. Paula has been an important mentor to dance leaders and teachers in many parts of the world.

Paula's pioneering ministry

Paula has especially pioneered in the areas of congregational movement and workshops with worship, healing and prayer in movement. When she saw that many found it hard to enter into freedom in their worship expression she developed a system of natural movement she called Harmonics. She has authored a series of booklets on these and similar subjects (see Bibliography).



Paula was a gifted choreographer, choreographing complex works as well as simple praise and worship dances, one of the longer and most beautiful ones being Randall Thompson's *Alleluia*.

Major works included *Stained Glass Windows* (1969), *Portraits of Praise* (1972), *Tapestries* (the fruit of the Spirit) (1975), *Litany for life* (1983), *The Armour of God* (1984), *Psalm 84* (1984), *Kyrie and Gloria* (1984), *Our Love Song to Jesus*, *Israeli suite*, *Light Eternal*, *Repentance*, *The Way of Holiness*, *The Marriage Supper*

of the Lamb, *Thorns and Roses*, *Jewels*. Some of these longer works were composed of a number of shorter dances which could be performed separately or as part of another work.

The Beginnings of the Christian Dance Fellowship

Mary Jones was called into dance in 1972 while living in Minnesota, USA, and heard about the Sacred Dance Group in Colorado shortly before they left for England in 1995. She was able to spend a week-end with them and later had the opportunity to visit the group in England to continue her training. When Mary returned to Australia and founded the Christian Dance Fellowship of Australia in 1978, she asked Paula if one of SDG members could help establish the ministry. In 1980 Kay Quisenberry was sent to teach at the first CDFA conference in Sydney and to help pioneer for a year a. This also enabled her to set up a tour for the group. After the tour Kay moved to Adelaide to help establish a branch of the Sacred Dance Group in Australia. Later she returned to her home in Dallas, Texas, to help with her ageing parents and set up a dance ministry *Dayspring*.

Paula sent Australian SDMI member Jan Sebastian to join her and after 20 years they both moved back to Australia to minister in the Uniting church.

Since the formation of the Christian Dance Fellowship, Paula and Bill with members of SDMI have been at the ICDF international conferences and many of the national CDF conferences, often touring more widely in the countries involved. They have been important mentors to many of the leaders as well as the organization as a whole. *Living Word Creative Mission* in Brisbane, led by Noelene and Neil Wait as part of *Harvest Ministries* was a significant ministry formed as a result of a Sacred Dance Group's visit in 1981 and resulted in several opportunities of working together around the world.



The Last Years



When Bill and Paula moved out of Longmead in 1995, they passed it on to another ministry group. They then alternated their time between the home in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where Paula had grown up and a flat they bought in Lyme Regis on England's southern coast. This enabled them to spend time with both of their daughters and their grandchildren as Nedra had married in England and Cindy had married and settled in Minneapolis. In their 80s Paula and Bill moved into a retirement village in Minneapolis while continuing to minister right up to the time they died.

Paula Douthett passed away on August 17, 2015, from a heart attack. Bill had also died suddenly the previous year. It was a special touch from the Lord that with Paula having been such an important part of the Christian Dance Fellowship, August 17 was also the day in 1978 that the Christian Dance Fellowship of Australia was founded in Adelaide.

2012 INTERVIEW on the publication of Paula's autobiography

An Extraordinary Life, An Extraordinary God



The conversation was for an online weekly based in Lyme Regis, England, where Bill and Paula had a house in their latter years.

WHAT influenced you to be a dancer?

I always felt I was meant to do something new in dance and movement. I just had no idea what it was. When I went

to New York to study I was lucky enough to train with modern dance reformers who wanted to create a new form of dance. When I started the course it was like a spark, I just knew it's what I had to do.

DID your parents approve of the profession?

When I came home from college and told my parents, my mother said: "I'm not surprised – you were dancing in the womb!" My mother was involved with the arts so it was no problem at all.

WHAT made you use dance more closely with the church?

After we got married we moved to Boulder, Colorado, to raise our daughters away from the rat race. We joined a Lutheran church there and the pastor visited us to ask what gifts we had to offer the church. I thought "Oh dear" and told him I was trained as a dancer. But the minister said "let's see how we can use this" and invited me to dance at the front of the church. It was a tiny space and I was used to a stage! Finally, I prayed to Jesus to ask how I should do it and he showed me the way. Now I teach how to worship God through the dance.

WHY is dance so important for a person's spiritual wellbeing?

It opens you. Like singing, movement is a language. It expresses things, the movements express the words. It has this amazing effect of opening a person's emotions. It can help with grieving, depression and really can heal. In the secular world it is known as dance therapy.

WHAT is the most extraordinary place you have visited?

I visited Poland when it was behind the Iron Curtain. The people there were suffering terribly – no paper products and no soap products. Yet people had such faith and joy and this blew our minds. We brought them supplies on one visit and they thanked us by giving us food including a month's worth of meat even though it was rationed. Their generosity and spirit was a great influence on me.

WHAT made you write an autobiography?

God told me to write it on my seventieth birthday. This was really tough for me – I thought "I'm a dancer, I use movements not words!" - but that was my calling so I knew I had to do it. I put it off for years until I got to 78 years old and I thought I'd better get on and do it! I visited a monastery in New Mexico where they held a writing weekend. I went on that and it really jumped-started my writing batteries. After that I wrote every day for two years until I finished it.

DO you miss writing the book now that it is finished?

I do, but I don't want to write another book. I find it incredible that a dancer should be there at a book signing, but there I was. I am just so happy now to feel that I have fulfilled my purpose on Earth. I still dance every day and I look forward to dancing in heaven, dancing with the angels.

YOU have lived in many places – which of them do you consider home?

When I moved to England in 1975 I was very homesick – it is such a different culture. But the Lord taught me that your home is anywhere the Lord is and now I can be happy any place – even a nursing home would be fine and I could call it home.

PAULA DOUTHETT MEMORIES

After Paula's death a Facebook site was set up for people to post their reflections and memories. Below is a selection of the posts.

AUSTRALIA

Mary Jones



On the same day that the memorial service was taking place (Friday USA, Saturday Australia) Kay Quisenberry and Jan Sebastian, former SDMI members, danced Pie Jesu in Paula's honour. Paula choreographed it for herself and Jan and also designed and made the costumes. Many people shared their memories. The event was the annual Awards for the ICDF Foundation of which Paula was Patron and also the recipient of one of the inaugural Flame Awards. Photos and video of shared memories at the event can be found on <https://youtu.be/Wy2J-78ALc4> 2 (this includes an excerpt from the 1991 film of the first CDF conference in Jerusalem and from the Foundation event with different people speaking)



ICDF Foundation has set up the Paula Douthett scholarship for the ICDF Diploma of Dance Ministry. We had 7 excellent applications from 7 different countries and the two students selected start the course in February 2016. The scholarships have been awarded to Romina Cia from Argentina and Noel Filemon from Suriname. They will be starting the ICDF Diploma next year.

Nedra Gilson (nee Douthett) UK So wonderful to see Mom's legacy living on. She would be blessed and honored!

Kay and Jan with Jenny Dennis (ICDF Foundation director)

Neil and Noelene Wait

Neil and Noelene, along with members of their ministry group Living Word from Queensland, travelled with Bill and Paula in several countries in joint ministry.



Sister Cecilia Bushnell (USA)

This picture is archival! This was our first tour, Sacred Dance Group of Boulder, to Australia, January - March, 1980. We flew from England and had an amazing trip before Kay, Nicola and I returned in January 1981 to set up the base in Australia. Two of the best years of my life!!

Roz Hancock

Honestly, for some reasons there are some people you just always expect to be at the next conference no matter where it is in the world. It is strange to think Bill and Paula, who told the Australian CDF committee every time they came to teach that it was their last conference, will really no longer be there. I have some very funny memories of twenty five years back, trying to take them to their classroom and how we got lost together as every floor looked the same. They were so gracious. They always took interest in my children and Paula would sit with whichever child/ teen/ young adult I had with me, and she would sincerely listen to them and tell them stories and my kids said they were their

conference grandparents. Paula was very honest with me and at times that honesty hurt, but at the same time she was so gracious that pain led to joy within minutes and we would end up laughing and praying. I went to many of her dance classes over the years and they really impacted me, but the outstanding memories are the quiet words and prayers on the go, at breakfast, in the corridor or as we walked to the next venue.

Heaven will be bouncing now!

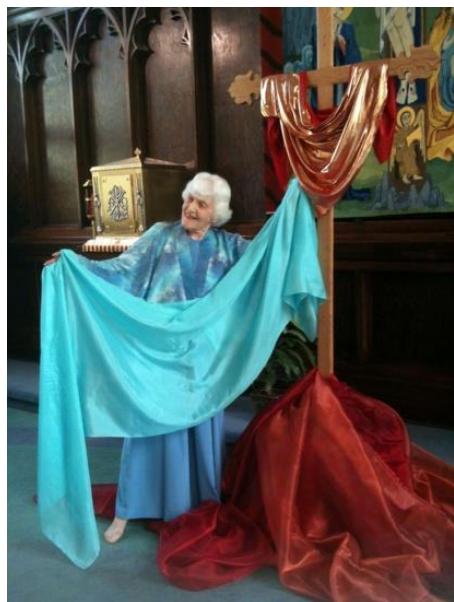
Irene Moore

I was privileged to meet Bill and Paula at an ICDF conference in Mittagong, Australia in July 2000. The Father had begun to birth in me a desire to worship Him with banners and I was also longing to be released to worship Him using my whole body in movement yet I had never learnt to dance. I was drawn to the Harmonics workshop and even though I felt stiff and awkward, with Paula's passion spurring me on, I was able to experience my first taste of worship dance. I still enjoy using Harmonics today as I have choreographed many a Harmonics routine to worship songs. I can still remember her saying at a CDFA conference (I think it was the one in Canberra) that the Lord had told her she was a seed planter and would not see the fulfillment of her dream realized in her lifetime. It seems that this was an accurate word but she has left many 'seeds' in others to continue the work of encouraging believers to worship and intercede through movement. How wonderful that she did not hold back her gifting but readily shared what the Father had given her. I for one am truly grateful.

Rebecca Jeavons

I am sure that heaven is having a surprising time! Just an amusing memory of Paula. The first time I met up with her with her new short hair style she commented that finally her hair could be free, not just her body!

CANADA



Amay Dufault

Our CDFCalgary dance group is so grateful to God for the three marvelous days we shared with Paula over Pentecost and she was so delighted to travel all the way to Calgary, Alberta, to come and bless us. The photo with the blue fabric was part of her dance, "Holy Spirit, Water of Life". I'll always cherish the image in my mind of Paula running down the aisle of the FCJ Chapel wafting the material over the audience to symbolize this Water of Life.

DENMARK

Susanne Jensen

This is a greeting from the Dance group in Århus Valgmenighed, Århus, Denmark. In May 2011, we had the pleasure of having Paula and Bill visiting and we held a dance course with participants not only from



Denmark but also Norway and Sweden! It was such a Blessing and joy. We will always keep this memory in our hearts. We often dance "You are God" - choreographed by Paula. The picture taken on a Wednesday evening, our dance group evening, where Bill and Paula joined us. A wonderful evening. We are so grateful to have met them, they touched our Hearts. We are sure that they dance before the Lord in Heaven right now.

ENGLAND

Liz Babbs



A special lady who touched many lives including mine. I can see her in heaven dancing ecstatically with God.

Sarah Jordan – An extraordinary woman and such a generous and friendly character too. It was my privilege to play host to her and Bill many years ago in Nottingham. We were such a little church and yet she and Bill danced before us and blessed us.

Andy Swinford

I consider Paula one of my chief mentors in life - a huge influence and inspiration. I've been going to Longmead since the late 70s, for Tuesday night meetings and seminars and a couple of workweeks. Paula had an amazing ability to hear from the Holy Spirit

Carol Connolly I first met Paula and Bill at Longmead around 20 years ago. She and the team there changed my life. It was a place where the supernatural happened naturally. I received much healing through dance and a fresh new hope for the future. The last

time I met Paula was in Thornbury at a CDFB day and was able to share with her that through and inspired by her ministry I was now building a Creative Arts Retreat in Bulgaria. The ripples flowing from Paula's ministry reach all around the world and because of her will continue to reap a harvest for the lord until He comes again. I thank God for this precious lady.



Andrew and Marie Bensley

Like everyone else, we feel so privileged to have known Paula and Bill. As we were also a married couple dancing together, they took a special interest in nurturing us. Paula said one of her gifts was "polishing the jewel"! Our Region of the CDFB hosted the last workshop they took for the CDFB before leaving for the US, in May 2014.

Andrew and Marie with Paula and Bill

FRANCE

Christine Jeanville

I have never been in touch personally with Paula and Bill, but I saw from afar that they were shining Jesus and their simple visible testimony of Grace encouraged me and my husband Sodapop beautifully... As professional dancers and choreographers pioneering in France at the time, we needed that shining sign on the road from the previous generation. Thank you so much ICDF and active teams to connect us together through the globe, you have a powerful ministry, yes! We still remember vividly our Celtic times with you in Scotland dancing in the twirl of Eternity... do you? Shalom to you, dear Paula and Bill's memory... Be a continuous blessing to this world even as they left us to dance better in the "skies".

SOUTH AFRICA

Saartjie de Wet

My fondest memory of Paula and Bill are from the 1997 ICDF conference in Pretoria at the time when I was National Coordinator for South Africa. It was a stressful week for the organizers and at one such time I ducked into their room for a time of prayer. I walked out feeling at peace, perspective restored and with a chocolate in hand that they had brought with them all the way from England. I will never forget their caring and gentle spirits

USA

Jeana Hinds Paula was a dear friend of mine and mentor. This Saturday, August 22nd, Paula was scheduled to give a dance workshop at our church in Minnesota, USA. Sally Ann, a friend from England, was also going to be there as she was going to be visiting Paula for a couple days. I spoke with Sally Ann and told her that the workshop was cancelled but that I would be going just in case someone showed up. She encouraged me to dance with whoever showed up or dance by myself, in honor of Paula. How could I say "no". Since Bill passed I have had the wonderful privilege of helping Paula set up for some of her workshops and so I knew one of her favorite scriptures that she used and also one dance! I am not a dancer but a nurse. However, helping out with the workshops I was able to begin to dance and loved it.



Paula helping out at a worship and arts camp two weeks before she died

So this Saturday at 10:30 until a bit before 11, I will be dancing in remembrance of Paula and to give Glory to God for her life and His goodness. Some friends from the bible study that Paula and I attended are also joining me. Would you from wherever you are? I'm not sure if it will be possible due to the time change but I wanted to send the invite anyway. Sally Ann said she would be dancing, from where she is, as she is in the States now.

I will begin with prayer and then read from Philippians 4:4, a passage Paula had used frequently. "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" Then we will be going into some movements to the song

Hallelujah, Hallelujah, let us sing Hallelujah
Hallelujah, Hallelujah, let us sing Hallelujah
Open wide your hearts
Lift up your hands
Let us sing Hallelujah



BOOKS

Spiritual Principles of our Life and Work series:

- The Ministry of Dance: A Vision of Worship
- The Ministry of Dance: A Gift to the Body of Christ
- How to Lead People into Praise and Worship
 1. Through Congregational Participation
 2. Through General Workshops
 3. Through In-depth Workshops – Worship and Healing
 4. Through In-depth Workshops – Prophecy and Intercession
- Hospitality, Godly Giving – a Guide for the body of Christ
- Costuming
- Christian Dance Therapy: Healing for the Body of Christ
- Harmonics
- Out of the Depths – accessing real emotion and learning to express it in movement for effective ministry to others.

These booklets may be ordered from Cheryl Yarusso at Cheryl@earthnet.net

Autobiography: An Extraordinary Life, An Extraordinary God (2012) - presently out of print

YOU TUBE LINKS

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/606985719441822/> Chorus dances and Jewels with SDMI in 1984

<https://www.facebook.com/andy.swinford.9/videos/10208192738158464/> Bill and Paula dance “May the Lord lift up the light of his countenance and give you peace”

<https://www.facebook.com/noelene.wait/videos/1003982929669854/> Paula dancing with Noelene and Sharon West “We lift you to the highest place”

<https://youtu.be/Wy2J-78ALc4> ICDF Foundation event 2015 remembering Bill and Paula with excerpts from 1991 video from the first ICDF conference in Israel and several Australian leaders of CDFA sharing their memories.