

Ms. Frances Made Me Feel I Could Do Anything

The Story of a Heart of Dance Fifth Grader

BY EMBER REICHGOTT JUNGE, CO-PRESIDENT, HEART OF DANCE

WHEN 5TH GRADER HARRY STARTED Dancing Classrooms last spring at North Park Elementary School in Fridley, he was new to the school and didn't know anybody. "I was really shy. I thought people were going to see my mistakes and laugh at me," he told over two hundred attendees of the Dancing with Heart luncheon on May 8th at Midpointe Event Center.

"One girl was very shy at dancing, and every time we met we wouldn't touch each other. But after a while, we were getting into dance frame and dancing pretty well with each other," Harry continued. "After a couple weeks, Ms. Frances (Emberley), my dance teacher, made me feel like I belonged there. She made everyone feel like that. I started liking it and wanting to do it."

"The biggest change for me from Dancing Classrooms is I'm not shy anymore. I lost my stage fright because I feel like I can do something really well. I'm not nervous about doing anything now because Ms. Frances made me feel I could do anything. Like, if I want to climb Mount Everest right now, I'll pack my bag, get my food, and start climbing and climbing until I reach the top! I just need to be a little older," he told the audience to laughter.

Harry brought that confidence with him when he was selected to join the North Park Elementary team at the May 20th Colors of the Rainbow Team Match. Dressed elegantly and with perfect poise and posture, he danced Tango and Swing before a packed house of cheering parents and families at the Intercontinental St. Paul Riverfront

Hotel. The competition was tight, and when the results were announced, North Park tied with another school for second place.

Now Harry had to lead his team in the first-ever "Dance-off" in a Heart of Dance Team Match! This time all twelve team members from North Park danced the Swing along side the team from the Mississippi Creative Arts School in St. Paul. The four professional ballroom dance judge volunteers, Eric Hudson (Cinema Ballroom), Eliecer and Rebecca Ramirez (Costa Rica Ballroom) and Katie Taintor (professional theatrical dancer and former Heart of Dance

Teaching Artist) made the difficult decision: North Park placed second!

In all, over 160 students from fourteen different Duluth, Rochester and Twin Cities schools participated in two back-to-back Team Matches, sponsored by JCI Saint Paul, formerly known as the St. Paul Jaycees. Every student received a medal and every school a trophy. Every student was a winner.

Some students showed exceptional team spirit. Take Windom Dual Immersion School students of Minneapolis. Six of their ladies volunteered to dance with the gentlemen of Learning for Leadership Charter



Photos provided by Heart of Dance.

School, because their class, by a fluke of enrollment, consisted of only 5th grade gentlemen! The Wisdom and Learning for Leadership students met for the first time in the warm-up practice. They proudly walked in escort position onto the dance floor, danced with students they never met before, and won third place in their Team Match. Talk about gender and multicultural respect! That is the magic of Dancing Classrooms.

Yes, the life lessons of Dancing Classrooms are Respect, Teamwork and Elegance. But for Harry, there was more. "If you have a dream and you want to do something, don't stop because you feel someone else is going to think you're bad at it. It just means you probably need to practice and that's what I did and that's why I got picked for things."

Harry concluded his comments with this sage advice to the May 8th audience, earning a standing ovation:

"If you want to do something, don't let anyone else put you down. Just look up and say I'm going to do it. And when you do it, feel good and give yourself a pat on the back."

"My mom is here today. She is really supportive. She says, 'Harry, you're going to make me proud.' And I tell her, 'Yes I am!'"

*To watch Harry's speech, other speakers, and student dancers at the Dancing with Heart luncheon or Colors of the Rainbow Team Match, go to www.heartofdancemn.org/dancing-with-heartspring-2018 or www.heartofdancemn.org/spring-2018-colors-of-the-rainbow-team-match. To audition for a Teaching Artist or become a volunteer Classroom Assistant, contact andream@heartofdancemn.org. To bring Heart of Dance to a 5th or 8th grader or school you love, contact emberrj@heartofdancemn.org. **E**



Harry speaking at the May 8th Heart of Dance Luncheon.

