

Teacher uses dance to lift students higher

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Ami Salzman is keeping a secret from her husband, Michael.

The Nazareth Academy dance/health instructor is afraid how he'll react if he catches her doing what she does when no one's around.

"I dance alone," Salzman confessed. "I don't do it as much around my husband because he might think I'm nuts."

If Salzman is nuts, it's not her fault; it's a genetic condition, according to her father, Jonathan Reichert, professor of physics at the University of Buffalo.

"Well, you know, Ami danced ever since she was a baby," Reichert recalled, later adding, "I remember it being very difficult for her to sit down at a meal."

Salzman also remembered "dancing before walking," and pointed out that "my mother used to say I didn't walk into the room, I danced into the room."

With encouragement from her husband, the 26-year-old teacher at the all-girls' school on Lake Avenue has spent the last couple of years building a career that fills each week with a flurry of activity.

To start off, Salzman teaches 21 periods of dance and 15 periods of health class each week. In addition, Salzman co-directs the school's show choir, and choreographs musicals at Nazareth and Aquinas Institute. And she spends her Friday evenings on the slopes of Swain Ski Center in Alleghany County as an adviser for the Nazareth ski club.

Outside of school, Salzman currently teaches a dance class at the Monroe Avenue YMCA, and has used her fancy footwork and modeling skills in promotional videos and advertisements of such companies as Champion and Xerox.

Although she studied business while at the University of Buffalo in the early 1980s, Salzman decided to shelve any corporate ambitions and pursue graduate stu-

dies in dance after being persuaded by Michael, to whom she was engaged at the time.

"I said, 'You have to love what you do,'" Michael recalled telling her, adding that she was unhappy with her career track leading to the world of business.

At the end of her graduate studies in 1988, Salzman's master's thesis put forth a framework for a four-year dance program in a public high school. Her words today reflect the philosophy that undergirded her thesis' emphasis on the value of dance as a high school course.

"Dance is the only art in which we ourselves are the stuff of which the art is made," Salzman said, recalling a quotation of another dancer.

In her thesis, she emphasized the personal worth and self-esteem students can gain from taking dance classes. "The discovery and creation of personal meaning is the central task of dance education," she wrote.

Hence, while teaching her pupils to dance, Salzman is to a great extent teaching them to find what is good in themselves and to nurture it. She said she strives to make reluctant students enjoy the class.

"If they really hate the class, they tend to be insecure about themselves or their weight," Salzman said of her students.

When a girl appears ill at ease in class, Salzman will have a conference with her to determine the reason. Usually, she said, such students talk about the music being "dumb" or complain about the sweat pants they must wear. Rarely do the girls admit to being insecure about their weight, the teacher noted, emphasizing that such physical problems can be real or exaggerated.

Salzman helped one student overcome some of her shyness by striking a deal with her. The girl did not want to perform with her class at a school recital, so the teacher said the student could perform her final exam project privately.

But the day before the final performance, Salzman told the girl that she had to participate in the final rehearsal on stage with the class before she doing her final exam in private. After some protest, the girl reluctantly conceded that Salzman wasn't breaking her end of the bargain, since the rehearsal was not the final performance.

When the rehearsal was over, Salzman approached the girl. "I said, that wasn't too bad," and the girl agreed. The next day, she showed up for the final show, Salzman recalled with a smile.

Another way Salzman involves her teenage charges in her class is by varying the dance styles she teaches.



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

Nazareth Academy dance/health instructor Ami Salzman strikes an unusual pose in the school's dance studio.

Nazareth Academy slates spring musical for March

ROCHESTER — Under the direction of Herb Katz, the Nazareth Academy Lamplighter Players will present the musical *Hello Dolly* on March 15, 17, 22 and 23.

Sister Mary Clouser will produce the show. Ami Salzman is the musical's choreographer and Michael Klesch is serving as the musical director.

Nazareth Academy junior Keesha Fleth will play the starring role of Dolly, accompanied by a cast of 50 students.

"The one thing is my course is not designed for any one type of dancer," she asserted. "It designed for all types of dancers." Jazz, disco, square dance, and avant-garde are all labels Salzman applies to the various styles she shows students throughout the year.

More importantly, the teacher tries to show her students their own beauty.

"You want to tell these girls, 'You are a beautiful young girl,'" she said. "I think dance is beautiful. I think that watching these girls is beautiful."

Salzman also prides herself on being available for all her students to talk to, whether about problems in her dance class, or more serious issues like sexuality and drug abuse.

"I felt that some of my teachers in high school were a bit stifling," she said. "I wanted to be this young teacher that the kids can relate to."

She credits her father, whose teaching methods she has studied, with inspiring her

to interact with her students. Reichert, who sat in on some of her classes when she was a teaching assistant in graduate school, noted that his daughter absorbed his lessons well.

"Ami has a real instinct for getting (her students) involved and demanding more of them than they want to give," he observed.

High school girls invited to attend weekend retreat

ROCHESTER — The Sisters of Mercy invite any interested high school junior and senior girls to join them for an overnight retreat on Feb. 1-2 at High Acres in Geneva.

The retreat, entitled "In Celebration ... of the God Who's Watching Us," will be presented by Sisters Karlien Bach, RSM, and Kathleen Wayne, RSM.

For information, call Sister Mary Fran Wegman, 716/342-9594.

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK
January 27 - February 2, 1991
for more information call the school office at 328-3210