

A Kind of Dance: Part Two

Written by Mark Shaffer

Tuesday, 10 September 2013 11:00



A conversation with award winning Beaufort writer Teresa



Bruce about her upcoming book, "The Other Mother," and the transformative power of chance encounters.

[\(Read Part One.\)](#)

"Why not shake things up a bit?" I tell her. "You are strong enough to lift the men." Byrne Miller sits up straight again, vertebra by vertebra. "Scandalous," she says with a thin, mischievous smile. Her hands flutter down to her hips and she pivots one shoulder to a jaunty angle. Her chin lifts. "Just what this town needs. Call the newspapers. Get the TV cameras. You and I are going to turn things on their heads." □ □ – From "The Other Mother" by Teresa Bruce, copyright 2013, published by Juggling Board Press, jugglingboardpress.com.

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In 1989 Teresa Bruce moved to Beaufort fresh out of grad school to take a reporting job at WJWJ TV. Among her first assignments was a story on Byrne and Duncan Miller. Soon after, everything changed. The Millers were exotic creatures. Byrne worked burlesque during the Great Depression. She'd been at the vanguard of the Modern Dance movement, owned studios and worked as a choreographer before moving to the Lowcountry to found a dance theater and enlighten the local educational system. Duncan was an original Mad Man of Madison Avenue – a gifted and troubled individual whose great, unfulfilled ambition was to be known as a novelist.

Wherever the Millers had lived and worked Byrne "collected" children. She simply adopted people of all sorts into a huge, extended family. Teresa was among the last to join this vast collection of "brothers and sisters by Byrne." Their memories were a crucial part of this "rememoir" of their shared Other Mother. It will be available locally this month and nationwide on November 5th.

This interview took place in the house the author once shared with Byrne Miller, one she now shares with her husband, the photographer Gary Geboy.



Mark Shaffer: Part of the research for the book involved interviewing your brothers and sisters by Byrne. Were there any revelations?

Teresa Bruce: Yes, a couple. One of my "Sisters by Byrne" said, "Don't be surprised if not everyone has the same warm, fuzzy memories you do." She likened it to when her own mother

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died and the recollections of her sisters were so different it was as if they were all talking about a different person. She opened my eyes to that. Not everyone was going to have the same feelings about Byrne.

The main revelation came from one of her first "adopted" children, my Navajo "Brother by Byrne." I realized by talking to him that she wasn't very good at it when she first started "collecting" children. She really didn't know when to back off and when to let their personalities grow. She was a bit of a bulldozer. She knew he could be a world-class dancer and she was going to make him have that opportunity. She was also culturally insensitive in a way. She didn't realize what a tempest she'd stirred up in his life.

They worked it all out and he did become a dancer and eventually a teacher and he considers her as influential as I do. But it was interesting to see that when she started out being "The Other Mother" she wasn't exactly perfect at it. I was at the tail end of her "other mothering." She had it down to a science by then. She knew not to critique my decisions or give me direct advice. She just tossed her "womenisms" in the air like confetti and stepped aside and let them come down as they may. Half of what I learned from her were things that years later I realized, oh, that's what she meant.

MS: The book is subtitled "a rememoir." That's new.

TB: It's a word we invented. And it was kind of a risk. Any time you invent a word it can backfire. But it really felt like it described this book better than "a memoir" because it's the truth as I remember it. Her story starts fifty years before I was born so I'm telling the story of a relationship that defines me, but to do that I really needed to be inside her head and I wasn't there. So I told it

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the left with the Daintier with the white shirt. She's 5'4" and is at the time at the bottom of the frame and is holding a small object in her hand. She is looking at the camera and smiling.



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