

DANCE LIFE  
COACHING

A COLUMN TO  
HELP DANCERS  
JOURNEY IN LIFE

*By Susan Silva*



**“A TRIBUTE TO MY DANCE PARTNER  
DAVID VAN HAMILTON”**



Ballroom photo of David & Susan

My heart is heavy with sorrow and tears; as I write this article remembering my former dance partner and ex-husband, David Van Hamilton. On September 23, 2017 at age 69, David went on to heaven. I spent the last week of his life with him in a hospital in Connecticut, believing for a miracle but it did not take place. No words can adequately describe how one feels when someone you loved and danced with dies. Grief tries to take you over, and you push through one day at a time to overcome the feelings. I had recently gone through hurricane Irma in South Florida where I am currently living. This alone was incredible with no power and no water for days, and then flying to Connecticut to be at David's side. But no one should die alone, and being with him was all I could think about. This is a tribute to David's life and some of his journey.

David started ballroom dancing in Atlanta at an Arthur Murray Studio in the early 70's. He was told he could never succeed because he was bow-legged. Bill and Bobbie Irvine came to his studio in 1973 and they encouraged David to pursue his Ballroom career. He read their autobiography, "The Dancing Years", and it became his inspiration to succeed in the Ballroom field. In 1976, David went to a Fred Astaire studio in Atlanta and became the Ballroom Director there. Then in 1977 David came to New York to the Fred Astaire Studio on Fifth Avenue. This is where I worked as a teacher and supervisor.

When I saw David dance for the first time an International Smooth (now known as Standard) demonstration, he was incredible, and I was enamored. Maybe it was love at first sight! His desire was to do International Smooth, and I had a background in ballet, jazz, and danced on Broadway. We started dancing together almost right away, studied every Ballroom style and competed in all four of them, which at that time was International Smooth, Latin, American Style (which had two Latin, and two Smooth dances), and Theatrical. We trained with the best ballroom coaches in the United States and England, eventually making a decision to focus our attention to Theatrical/Exhibition and American Smooth. We took Pilates training strengthening for all the lift work, plus worked with top ballet choreographers in NYC.



David with cape

There were many wonderful times I remember dancing with David. We worked hard and long hours, rehearsing and continuing to teach in New York City. Together we were finalists and won many United States National Championships in American Smooth, and Theatrical/Exhibition. We were also privileged to be invited and compete in the British Professional Invitational Exhibition Championship in Blackpool, England in 1983. This was where we performed our famous signature piece “A Matador’s Fantasy” using dual capes in the choreography. We won the Ohio Star Ball Exhibition Championship twice, in 1982, and 1985, which is when we retired. During our career, we made several television appearances, and toured in our Adagio Nightclub Act throughout the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Europe. For two years we performed as the featured Adagio Team in the famous eastside New York City nightclub, Cachaca.

David and I developed The Bronze Theatrical Ballroom Syllabus for Arthur Murray International on video and in written manual form, plus performed in the video. He was a coach, judge and also owned an Arthur Murray Studio in Charleston, SC. David was a brilliant choreographer and teacher, competed with many students and winning Theatrical Pro-Am with his student Nicole in the United States Ballroom Championships, which was televised on PBS.



Hamilton & Silva with cape

He was a Vietnam War Veteran, and was a great fan of football and baseball. David had a great sense of humor, and was always positive no matter what his circumstances were. In 2007, after I had battled Lyme disease and came out of a wheel chair, David traveled from Atlanta where he was living to Connecticut to see me dance again which was a total miracle. He decided to move there, and another miracle took place, David and I danced together after 22 years, and did a few local ballroom studio shows. Since that time we were constantly in close contact and great friends. He was like an Uncle to my daughter Autumn, encouraging her to pursue her dancing art of ballet.

Even in his recent months of illness, he never complained, and always encouraged me. I will always be grateful to have danced and known David, no words can describe how much I miss him. There is a scripture in the Bible that says, "*death where is your sting?*" David had great faith in The Lord, and knew for sure he was going to heaven. In his hospital room, he watched on You Tube some of our dance pieces, remembering our times together. My prayer is that someday I will dance again with David in Heaven. To those of you that have lost a loved one, may time heal your wounded heart as I pray it does mine!