

Mary Jane Johnson

For her five children (Paul, Larry, Susan, Sylvia, and Eric) Mary Jane Johnson served as an inspiration to what they could each become as they journeyed through their lives. Her guiding spirit helped form the core of her children's spirit.

Mary Jane's spirit remains within her children and the hundreds of children who had the good fortune to learn from her as she served them in the day-care centers she created and operated between the 1940s and the 1980s.

Mary Jane's spirit shines in a poem she wrote about herself:

What's my name?
Mary Jane, puddin and tain.
Ask me again, I'll tell you the same.

A childish game?
I'm not wearing a mask. So why do you ask?

Who am I? I'm a twinkle of a star,
The green of grass, blue of sky.
One day a bird. One day a fly. I'm I.

Now you need not ask
Why I don't wear a mask.

What am I? I'm a girl. I whirl and twirl.
I'm songs and dance, pretty and slim,
On a whim.
Coy and naive, wear my heart on my sleeve.

Now that you ask, yes,
Sometimes, I wear a mask.

What did I do?
I'm the lady who lived in the shoe.
Had so many children
I didn't know what to do.
A teacher, a mother, a wife.
I loved. Led a full life.
If you must ask -
I was too busy to wear a mask.

Where am I from?
From Nowhere and Everywhere:
A happy/unhappy home,
Society, propriety, desertion,
Disillusion, death, confusion.
And if you persist to ask, yes, I wore a mask.

All my feelings I tried to hide.

What will I do? I'll be happy and free. Me.
Just made up my mind.
There's not much to it.

Just to do it.
So, go ahead. Ask. I took off my mask.

No more questions? What a surprise!
Do I know you? What's your disguise?

Mary Jane's spirituality is reflected in something else she wrote and shared with her children:

Early one morning in 1956, I dreamed I was standing in a pool of light. It encircled me with warmth and comfort.

Looking upward, I saw at the far end of the light beam a figure clothed in a white robe, arms extended and face hidden by darkness.

On one side of me stood some people within a gray mist.

On the other side of me stood another group in bright colors.

A beautiful voice proclaimed, "There is no death!"

A woman left the people standing in the mist and she walked into the middle of the light.

She knelt and wept. She was holding a baby and I wondered if the baby was going to die.

I tried to force myself forward to tell her there was no death. But I could not move.

The scene disappeared and I was standing beside my bed looking down at my sleeping form, feeling my sleeping form must be my shell and this must be the real me standing here.

I soon found my total self beneath the bed covers, awaking.

I looked at my children's sleeping father and wondered how I could tell him about this dream without him scoffing.

I was elated and frightened. Could this be a premonition or a shield to protect me from something that could happen to one of my family? Was this to make death easier to bear?

As a girl, an only child, I worried about my parents dying.

Approaching forty, I was still fearful of the death of any of my relations or children.

I eventually told my husband about my dream. Surprisingly he understood. He knew people whose heart had stopped during an operation, and he said they had similar visions.

Later, when I told our minister at Lake Harriet Methodist Church, Dennis Nyberg, I thought he must think I'm crazy, as though I were telling him I saw a flying saucer.

He said, "Mary Jane, your story surprised me, but this will astonish you. Just minutes before you sat down in my office, a woman left my study having told me the same story."

I confided this to Mrs. Krier, a friend of my mother's who was like a second mother to me. Her response was also startling.

"Recently," she said, "a friend of mine had the same experience in downtown Minneapolis while waiting for a bus. The incredible light and all the rest you told me."

Ten years after I had this dream the father of my children died, Oscar Edward Johnson, and during the following years other losses occurred. This dream helped me transcend despair, seek new horizons, and live with a joyful expectation of life to come. After all, where is that fine line between a dream, a vision, and reality . . . and what is reality?

For Mary Jane's children, her grandchildren, her great grandchildren, and for all who were fortunate to know her, may her spirit continue to sing on.