

Pass It On®...

More Than Just Dancing

How inclusion helps overcome mental illness.

JuJu loved to dance. She had a smile that filled the room and moved as if she was actually creating the music. But when she was away from her high school dance class, she was more reserved, a little bit guarded — something the group of girls in her class noticed.

JuJu's real name is Julie. She hid behind the nickname, creating a bubbly persona that concealed the pain she was experiencing at home. Her father struggled with mental illness and found his refuge in alcohol. Julie kept schoolmates at a distance but let JuJu out when the music was on.

Corrina, one of the other dance students, picked up on Julie's closed nature outside of the dance room. When she found her at lunchtime, sitting alone, earphones in, ignoring the world, Corrina sat beside her. At first, they talked about dance and music. As the conversation turned to siblings and family, JuJu steered the subject back to dance.

Corrina could tell that Julie needed a friend — actually, a few. So she included Julie in the group of dance kids and started hanging out after school. Julie soon became part of Corrina's family, spending after school hours there and sometimes spending the night on weekends when she didn't have the strength to face her own family.

Slowly, trust between the two girls developed, and then a sister-like bond. One night, Julie tearfully talked about how desperate she felt at home, how her father was slowly killing himself, how she also had dark feelings that she couldn't control. She also said she felt more a part of Corrina's family than her own, that when she was there, it was like she was floating above the darkness. With Corrina's encouragement, JuJu got professional help. She learned how to let go of what she can't control, and how to connect more deeply on an emotional level.

High school ended, college followed, marriage, kids. Julie's father did die too young. And Julie was supported by Corrina's family, the family Julie felt most comfortable in. There were many times when Julie would lean on Corrina and her parents for advice during life decisions.

Julie had two girls and a family of her own, built on the same trust and open relationships she had learned from Corrina and her parents. But when her daughter reached her teenage years, she was plagued with mental illness issues that seem to run in families, and she isolated herself.

Julie remembered how she had isolated at the same age and how a friend had taken note and taken care. So she took her daughter frequently into the wilderness for hikes, biking, skiing and long conversations. The daughter learned to trust her mother again, and she agreed to get professional help.

One day, Julie and Corrina took their two daughters hiking to the top of a nearby peak to catch the sunrise. As they sat catching their collective breath, Julie inhaled deeply, feeling the early morning sounds like music. "I love that you can always trust the sun to rise again," she said — and they all agreed.

Inclusion... [PassItOn.com](https://www.passiton.com)

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