

**BOOK 2 OF THE SANDY HUNTER SAGA**

**SANDY**  
**AND THE**  
**DANCE OF FAITH**  
**BY J. D. NEWMAN**

**PREVIEW PAGES**



Newport, Maine

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# **SANDY AND THE DANCE OF FAITH**

by **J. D. NEWMAN**

Chapter 1: Swan Lake	1
Chapter 2: In The Beginning	13
Chapter 3: August Heat	23
Chapter 4: The Geometry of Faith	32
Chapter 5: In a Catholic Cafeteria	43
Chapter 6: Ecclesiastical Endorsement	51
Chapter 7: Neighbors and Families	61
Chapter 8: Dancing in the Rain	73
Chapter 9: One of the Boys	87
Chapter 10: Dungeons and Dragons	98
Chapter 11: Apprentices	109
Chapter 12: Saints and Heroes	122
Chapter 13: Veterans and Pilgrims	133
Chapter 14: Christmas Wishes	143
Chapter 15: Gifts from the Tree	154
Author Biography	162



## **DEDICATION**

To my sister, Liz,  
A faithful dancer



## **Chapter 1**

# **SWAN LAKE**

The wooden doors were closing as my sister Roxie and I hurried inside. We struggled up the staircase to the balcony in our unfamiliar “Sunday shoes.”

Roxie was a tomboy, and I had followed her example until that summer. Our mother had died when I was born and my father was the only parent we’d ever known. Roxie wore her only dress and I wore the one I’d received from my aunts, who we playfully called the “Weird Sisters.”

“Thanks for coming with me, Roxie,” I said as we rounded the steep steps. “I’m sorry you had to miss rugby practice.”

Roxie sighed and rolled her eyes. “Dad said I should support you. He says you consider this your ‘Sunday worship.’”

“I do, for now,” I said uncomfortably.

In the crowded balcony, we squeezed down the narrow row of solemn-faced adults. The faithful hushed as lights faded on the starry ceiling above us. Heavenly music rose up from below, lifting us to a higher realm, as the dancers took the stage.

## J.D. NEWMAN

You might not think of watching ballet as a religious experience, but I had to begin somewhere. I would be starting seventh grade at Memorial Catholic School on Monday, and while they didn't require you to share their faith, you had to have some kind of faith to attend. I had to write a "declaration of faith" essay to be admitted and since I hadn't attended church as a child, I wrote about my devotion to dance. I went to dance concerts on Sunday instead of church services. Like other worshippers, I wore my best clothes and attended to an inspirational story.

I was just beginning to learn about faith, but I knew people chose to practice it in different ways. My three great aunts, who lived together in an old-fashioned house, were each devoted to a different religion. Each hoped I would join them in their faith but respected my desire to find my own, as they had done when they were my age.

Father Joseph, the headmaster at Memorial who accepted my essay, must have hoped that my "faith of dance" would lead me to a faith that was more Christian, and preferably more Catholic. However, at this phase of my spiritual journey, my soul found comfort in *Swan Lake*.

My guide on my journey was the chair of the city arts council, Mrs. Juliana Cavendish. If there were a Mother Superior of the arts community, it would be Mrs. Cavendish. That summer, I had volunteered to work one day a week in the arts council office. It was located in a former church that the city had purchased, which is why Mrs. Cavendish had a stained glass window in her office.



## PREVIEW PAGES – SANDY AND THE DANCE OF FAITH

When I went to the arts council the Friday before, the interns greeted me as I signed in on the clipboard and pinned on my “volunteer” badge. They had laughed when I had said I wanted to become an intern when I grew up. What I meant was that I wanted to be like them: people who believed in what they were doing, even if people didn’t believe in paying them.

I knocked on the door of Mrs. C’s office and she told me to come in. “Mrs. Cavendish, I need to tell you something.” She looked at me over her reading glasses. “I’m starting school at Memorial next week, so I won’t be able to volunteer on Tuesdays and Thursdays anymore.”

I could tell from her eyes that she was disappointed. Over the last few weeks, she had been giving me tasks that were too small for interns but just the right size for me. “I could come in on Saturdays,” I offered.

She shook her head. “The office is closed on weekends.”

“I have dance classes after school Monday through Thursday, but I could volunteer on Friday afternoons. Would that be enough?”

“Enough for what?” she asked. “Sandy, as a volunteer, you don’t have to punch the clock. We’ll accept your service whenever you’re willing to give it.”

So that was settled, but there was something else I wanted to request. However, I had to let her offer it.

“A Russian ballet company is performing *Swan Lake* at

J.D. NEWMAN

the Orpheum Theatre this weekend.”

“Yes, I remember,” I said eagerly. I had addressed invitations for donors to come to a reception and meet the dancers. I was hoping that Mrs. C would provide me with a ticket to a Sunday performance, as she had done every other week that month. Once I sat on the front row, below the lip of the stage, watching the dancers from the shoulders up. Another time I was in the balcony, gazing at the distant dancers. I was grateful to be in any seat in any theatre.

“They provided us with some tickets to the upper balcony,” Mrs. C announced.

“I’ll bring my binoculars!”

Mrs. C smiled and reached for something in her desk. “Perhaps you should borrow my opera glasses.” I’d brought my dad’s big field glasses the week before, and I guess she’d heard about that. “I have two tickets to *Swan Lake* for you this Sunday.”

That caught me off guard. “*Two* tickets? Who would I take with me? My father coaches on Sunday.”

“It’s a youth ticket, for someone under 18. I thought you could take your sister.”

“Roxie?!” I said. “She has rugby practice.”

“I’m sure she’d make an exception for a special occasion.” Mrs. C slid both tickets across the desk. “And I think it will prepare you for Monday.”

How could taking my sister to a ballet prepare me for

## PREVIEW PAGES – SANDY AND THE DANCE OF FAITH

my first day at a new school? I decided not to argue anymore. I had already looked a gift horse in the mouth. “Thank you, Mrs. Cavendish,” I said politely, “I’m sure we’ll have... an interesting experience.”

Before arriving at the theatre, I had tried to teach Roxie about audience behavior for a ballet, but she didn’t like learning from her younger sister. Roxie was used to watching sports and I was afraid she might talk all the way through the show, like she did at games and movies. I agreed that she could write questions to me in her pocket notebook and I hoped that the balcony would be too dark for it to be seen. However, the house lighting offered just enough glow that Roxie could scribble, so I had to scribble back.

Roxie’s pencil was still through the first scene in which the queen tells her son that she’ll be throwing a ball at which he must choose his bride. That part was a lot like *Cinderella*. I was hoping that Roxie would be impressed by the strength and athletic ability of the dancers. She was, to a certain degree, but Roxie was mostly trying to figure out the story.

When the curtain came up on the swans in the lake, Roxie’s pencil flew across the page and the notebook was pushed in front of me.

“So are those women or swans?”

“Swans by day, women by night,” I wrote back.

“Who’s the one wearing the crown?”

**J.D. NEWMAN**

“It’s a tiara.”

“So who’s wearing the tiara?”

“Odette. She was enchanted by an evil magician.”

“What about the other swans?”

“They were maidens too.”

“No male swans?”

“No!”

“Too bad.”

“Just watch the ballet.”

Roxie watched quietly, for a while. Then, as the music swelled, she wrote,

“The ballet took its music from synchronized swimming.”

“Other way around,” I wrote back. I held onto the pencil, but a few minutes later, Roxie grabbed it.

“Wow! 32 turns in a row!”

“They’re called ‘fouettées.’ Few ballerinas can do all 32.”

“Like landing a triple axel?”

I nodded in reply. Figure skating was a language we both understood.

Had anyone been seated behind us, we may have bothered them, but being on the back row, no one noticed our message-writing. By the end of the act, Roxie looked confused, so I wrote to her.

## PREVIEW PAGES – SANDY AND THE DANCE OF FAITH

“If a man loves Odette enough, he could break her spell.”

“Does Siegfried love her enough?”

“Watch and see.”

The human prince and swan princess danced the night away, but when dawn broke, the evil magician returned to claim his beauties. Siegfried went back to the palace, hoping that Odette would come to his ball. A flock of swan-shaped light patches flew from the stage to the top of the balcony and the curtain fell.

During intermission, Roxie and I lined up in front of the ladies’ room, watching men go in and out of their facility... with facility. It was 1978 and what the newspaper called “gender inequities” were beginning to be addressed, except with restroom lines. Schools were required to have as many female teams as male teams, but they couldn’t force people to watch the girls play.

“Who wrote the ballet?” Roxie asked.

“Tchaikovsky.”

“A man?”

“Well, yeah,” I said.

“Figures,” she snorted.

“What do you mean?” I asked, not eager to hear her reply.

“He made all the woman delicate.”

**J.D. NEWMAN**

“They look delicate but they’re as strong as steel. I’ve seen them in rehearsal.”

“Well, why do they have to be rescued by a man?”

“Would you prefer they be rescued by Wonder Woman?”

“They could escape by themselves.” I hadn’t thought of that. “They could swarm the magician,” Roxie continued.

I rolled my eyes. “This is Tchaikovsky, not Hitchcock!”

Roxie reached the front of the line and slammed the stall door. Only then did I notice that women were looking at us, hiding their smiles.

The second half began and the pencil was back in motion. At the ball, the prince ignored and rejected the six most beautiful maidens in the kingdom because he longed for his beloved Odette. At the ball, the evil magician appeared with a black-feathered woman, played by the same ballerina who played Odette.

“Is that Odette in disguise?” Roxie asked.

“It’s Odile, but she’s played by the same dancer who plays Odette.”

“Who’s Odile?”

“The magician’s daughter. He tried to make her look like Odette.”

“He did a good job at it.”

“WATCH THE BALLET!”

The magician’s trick worked and Siegfried danced with

## PREVIEW PAGES – SANDY AND THE DANCE OF FAITH

the black swan lady who looked just like his beloved. From time to time, the real Odette, played by a different ballerina, could be seen in the background, sobbing dramatically.

“Why is she sobbing?” the pencil asked. “Why doesn’t she rescue HIM?”

“She can’t leave the lake unless Siegfried marries her.”

“But he can’t marry her if she doesn’t leave the lake?”

I nodded.

When Siegfried pledged to marry Odile, the magician revealed her identity and showed the prince his grieving lover. In the final act, the prince found the swan princess, explained how he had been deceived, and Odette forgave him. Roxie didn’t care for that.

“She forgave him?!” Roxie wrote. “He was stupid! He should have known she couldn’t come to the ball.”

“But Odile looked just like her.”

“Her feathers were black and she came with the magician.”

“He didn’t really know her yet.”

“Then why did he promise to marry her?”

“Watch... the... ballet!” I muttered in what I thought was a soft whisper, but the man who turned around in front of us seemed to disagree.

Sister Libby, the dance teacher at Memorial, had played parts of the record for us that summer and told us the story. As she explained it, the magician ordered Siegfried to

**J.D. NEWMAN**

marry Odile. The prince refused and he and Odette leaped into Swan Lake, breaking the spell, freeing the maidens, and living happily ever after.

The director of the Russian company took it a different direction: the lovers leapt into the lake and drowned. The other swan-maidens were freed, their hair flew loose, and their tutus were covered with peasant dresses. They waited for Siegfried and Odette to come up from the waves, but the fabric was pulled away and revealed their dead bodies.

“The lovers died????!!!” Roxie penciled.

Before I could respond, the spirits of the lovers appeared above the lake, unseen by the others but together in Heaven.

“They usually live happily ever after,” I tried to explain as we trotted down the sidewalk to catch the bus home. “I guess the director changed the ending.”

“So why did he change it?” she asked. She tripped sidewise on her heel and I caught her.

“I don’t know. He lives in the Soviet Union. Maybe he was trying to make a political statement.”

“Like what?”

“Like even if we’re not free to do what we want in life, we can be happy in the life to come.”

“So it was a religious message?”

I considered that. “I guess so.”

We ran, or rather speed-walked, toward the bus. The



## PREVIEW PAGES – SANDY AND THE DANCE OF FAITH

driver had started to pull away but she saw us coming and let us on.

When we'd taken our seats, Roxie looked at me. "So dance is your religion?"

I squirmed. "More like my faith, or my belief system. It gives me comfort and answers."

"So could rugby be my religion?" she asked.

"I guess so," I said.

"I don't know much about this religion thing," Roxie said thoughtfully, "but it seems like it's about doing your part for your team, even when it's not in your best interest."

"I suppose," I said, and we rode along quietly for a few more blocks. Suddenly Roxie broke the silence.

"Do you think Mom is out there somewhere? Flying around on a cloud, like in the ballet?"

I didn't answer. Roxie didn't often talk about Mom, and I didn't want her to stop.

"Why did she have to die?" Roxie said softly. "It didn't do anyone any good."

There was nothing to say, so I didn't say it.

"So," Roxie said after a while, "you want to be a ballerina?"

I blushed but I looked my sister right in the eye. "I want to dance. I want to be free. I want to be... beautiful."

"You want to be a girly girl," she snorted.

**J.D. NEWMAN**

“I am a girl, Roxie, and if you haven’t noticed, so are you!”

That came out mean, but she’d caught me off guard.

Roxie looked out the window. “You want to be a swan instead of an ugly duckling like me.”

“I don’t want to be any kind of duckling,” I said, “following you like you’re my mother!”

“And I don’t want to be Dad’s duckling,” Roxie shouted, turning to me, “but if *you* leave the nest, *someone* has to follow him.”

She tried to make herself the victim, but I wouldn’t let her. “I’m the one who doesn’t fit! You’ve always been ‘Daddy’s girl,’ and me...”

“You would have been Mom’s.” Roxie finished as she turned back to the window. “No, you’ve become your own person. You’ve chosen your own school, your own teachers, your own faith...”

“You could choose too,” I said quietly.

Roxie looked toward the sky. “No, I’m like Odile. I have to be what Dad wants me to be.”



**PURCHASE THE BOOK TO READ  
CHAPTERS 2-15**

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**



**J.D. Newman** — Dr. Newman is a professor of theatre at Utah Valley University and the Director of the Theatre for Youth and Education (TYE) Center, and currently serves as Chair of the Theatre Department. He lives with his family in Sandy City, Utah. Dr. Newman became the first recipient of the Reba R. Robertson Award from the Children's Theatre Foundation of America. At UVU, Dr. Newman has directed such plays as *The Secret Garden*, *Princess Academy*, and *Androcles and the Lion* in the Bastian Theatre. He has also served as the director of the Noorda Theatre Summer Camp and has produced or co-produced touring productions including *A Village Fable*, *The Princess and the Goblin*, *Honk!*, and *Pedro's Magic Shoes*. As a playwright, he has adapted scripts for Newbery medalists including Avi, Paul Fleischman, and Richard Peck. Newman taught and directed at Highland High School for eighteen years, from 1991 to 2010 with a sabbatical to Texas in 1998-99. He served as Artistic Director of the Salt Lake School for the Performing Arts during the 2009-2010 school year. Newman earned his B.F.A. and M.Ed. from the University of Utah, his M.A. from the University of Texas, and his Ph.D. from New York University. With Judy Matetzschk-Campbell, he co-authored *Tell Your Story: The Plays and Playwriting of Sandra Fenichel Asher*, and his book *Playwriting in Schools: Dramatic Navigation* received the 2020 Distinguished Book Award from the American AATE. Dr. Newman chairs the Playwrights In Our Schools Project and served three years on the board of the American Alliance for Theatre and Education. *Sandy and the Weird Sisters*, his first novel, has been followed by 2 sequels, *Sandy and the Dance of Faith* and *Clara and the Mermaids*. His stand alone young reader's story, *Make-Believe Friends* is also published by Leicester Bay Books.

## **Books in the SANDY HUNTER SAGA**

*(available from Leicester Bay Books)*

Sandy and the Weird Sisters (Book 1)

Sandy and the Dance of Faith (Book 2)

Clara and the Mermaids (Book 3)

## **Plays in the SANDY HUNTER SAGA**

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