



dance at illinois

COLLEGE OF FINE + APPLIED ARTS | UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

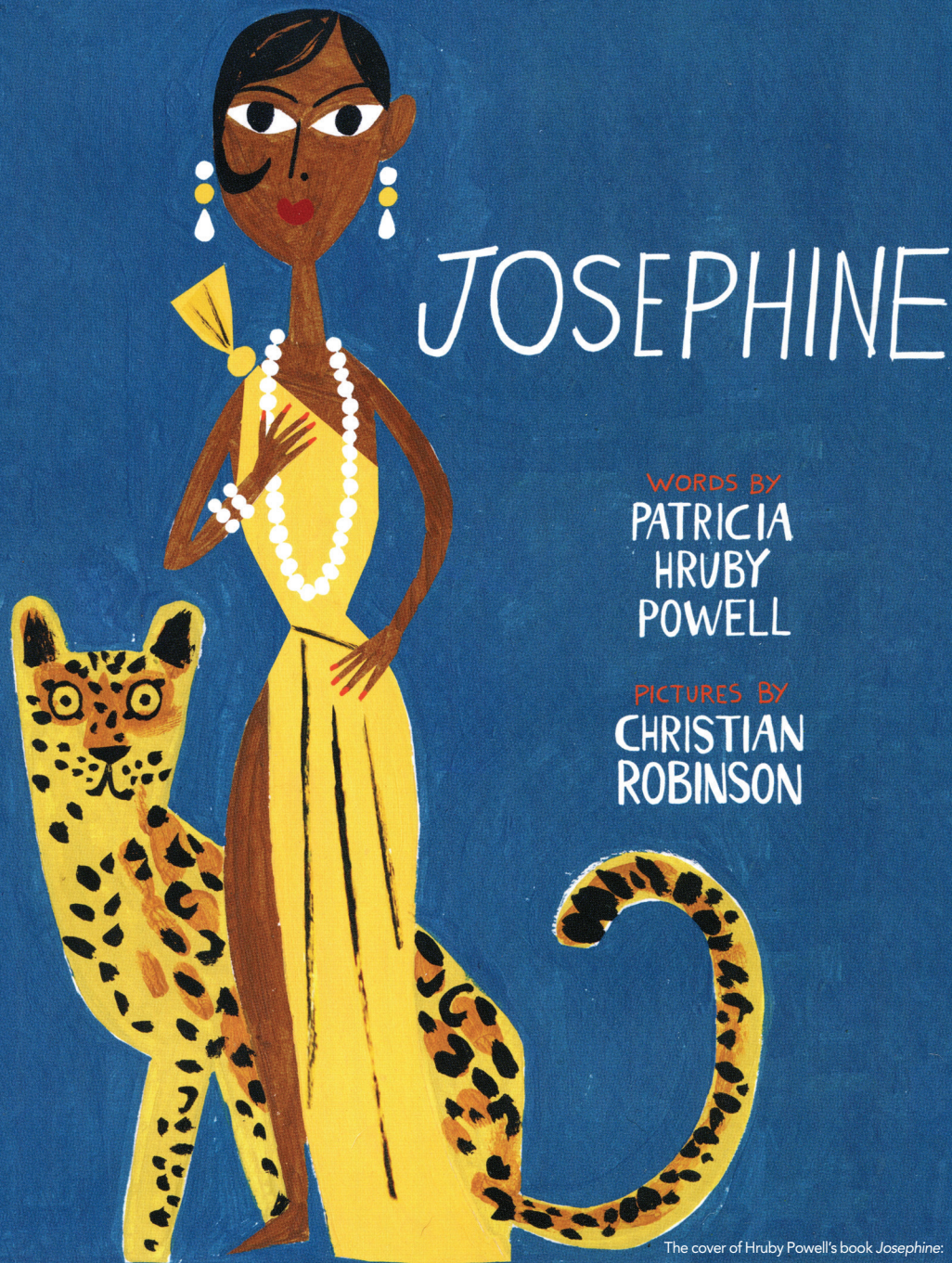
LOCATE CENTER.  AND GO FROM THERE.



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The cover of Hruby Powell's book *Josephine: The Dazzling Life of Josephine Baker*

featured alumna BY PATRICIA HRUBY POWELL

**"My passion was writing the stories,
not performing them."**

I was drawn to UIUC in 1969 because Dance was in Fine and Applied Arts rather than Physical Education; Krannert Center had been built; John Cage and the Cunningham Company had recently been in residence. And then I found Beverly Blossom. Yahoo.

I think some people dance because they're born performers. Others are artists. I fall in the artist category. I might have been a visual artist, but I was coordinated, flexible, musical, and energetic. Dance was a perfect avenue for me.

Chester Wolenski demystified technique for me. Steve Paxton deepened my love for improvisation. I was quietly in love with him. Who wasn't?

But the Vietnam War, Kent State shootings, National Guard and boycotted classes of 1970 distracted me. Would I be a political activist or a dancer? I was determined to become a fine dancer. So...I hitchhiked around Europe (because adventure was important), danced on the Greek island Paros, and ended up at the London Contemporary Dance School (LCDS) where I was dismayed by the affront of Graham technique. However, a year later, suffering the betrayal of a boyfriend, the angst of Graham proved an invaluable emotional outlet.

After earning my diploma from LCDS, I danced on scholarship at Alvin Ailey's American Dance Center and produced concerts, but NYC felt brutal to me. I returned to Champaign and danced with Somedancers and completed my BFA in 1979, largely on happenstance, experiential credit, and one final correspondence course in French Literature. Throughout a year of touring the Americas and Europe with my dance company One Plus One, I read French classics. I'd always been an avid reader, but the French was challenging.

Years later, my career as a dancing storyteller was transitional. My passion was writing the stories, not performing them. Nowadays I write, tango, and dance—sometimes with the improvisational performance group Spinnin' Slidin' Scratchin'.

Josephine Baker? When I was young I was aware of Josephine, but she was a showgirl in my mind. It took advanced adulthood and viewing early footage to appreciate her as an original razzle-dazzle groundbreaking dancer. *Josephine: The Dazzling Life of Josephine Baker* is my attempt to make words dance.

**Find out more about Hruby Powell's work with dance
and storytelling at www.talesforallages.com.**