

Dancer of the Year

By: Shannon Bell

Well, let's start from the beginning. In 1994, I woke up at 8:00AM on a Saturday morning, and slipped into my very first pair of pink tights and a rainbow leotard. Soon after, my mom drove me to a place in Greece, New York called Marilyn Schneider's School of Dance. I was a bit nervous, but once I stepped into the main part of the studio at 9:00AM for class, I was overwhelmed by excitement. Half of class was ballet, and the other half was tap. Looking around the studio, at pictures of past dancers who I would now follow in their footsteps, I felt a feeling inside of pride. To have the ability, the chance, the willpower, and the passion to begin my journey of dance, I couldn't get enough of it.

I guess you could say that dance was in my blood because my mother and my aunt both danced at Marilyn Schneider's School of Dance for 12 years when they were younger. My mother even danced while she was pregnant with me in the womb; I've been dancing now for more than 13 years, it has been almost 14!

A few years had gone by and I was now in sixth grade, rather than kinder garden. And I now had the opportunity to take part in my very first school musical, "Broadway Mix". At first, I was a bit skeptical, but with the assistance of my dance teacher, she gave me the confidence to try-out, and to actually succeed in making it. I took part as a chorus member, but also as a soloist. The following year, I again tried-out for our school's musical, the story of the ugly duckling "HONK!"; only this time I was only a chorus member. But I had worked up such a reputation of a hard worker within the director, that the following year, when I was in eighth grade, I was given the part of the Cheshire Cat in "Alice in Wonderland".

Dance has taught me that in order to succeed, you must try and try again, and never give up. Not everything is a free lunch, or in other words, you must work hard to get what you want.

Sophomore year at Irondequoit High School, I pushed a petition through the school to get a dance team there. Amazingly enough, through my determination I succeeded in getting what I wanted. It proved the statement that there is no such thing as a free lunch. I was filled with great pride when the team first performed for the school.

In 2003, I was given the grand title of "Most Improved In Lyrical" at my studio. It was such a thrill to go up in front of everyone on stage at our dance recital and receive that big trophy. I was so honored, and that title has only made me keep pushing myself further and further ahead in the dance world.

Everyone always asks me, "So what is your favorite form of dance?" But how can someone pick just one style? But I will admit, that I enjoy lyrical style way more than any other style. It is true that I enjoy all the others, but lyrical I have an ultimate passion for. But then they ask me another question, "what is lyrical?" And I pondered this thought for a little while because there is never a real correct answer for anything, but I have decided that it is basically similar

to interpretive dancing. It can either be fast or slow, filled with compassion or hatred, either way, you're making a point.

In May of 2004, I was given the colossal opportunity to become a studio assistant. I immediately accepted the offer, and every Saturday afternoon for the next 3 years, I have shown the younger girls of the studio the passion and joy of dance. I have taught them something that cannot be given, confidence. Not only did I demonstrate for the younger girls, but I also was given the opportunity to teach for them once and a while. A chance that only the most the mature dancers could receive.

Every great dancer has a role model, but mine are not my mom or my aunt. No, mine are the director of my studio, Marilyn Caccamise and one of my teachers, Deana Connell. Both of these women have given me the strength to push through the worst points of my life, and succeed in everything I do. Not only have they been there at the studio to guide me through a problem there, but they have also guided me through situations in life. Since I have become an assistant, I have also become a major role model to the younger girls at the studio. I love being on stage performing, whether it be pointe or soft shoe ballet, tap or lyrical or hip hop, I love looking down and seeing their little eyes filled with wonder and amazement watching me. I want the younger girls of my studio to follow in footsteps as I have to previous dancers, fill their shoes with passion and confidence to do their best in everything they do.

To me, being a dancer doesn't mean that I go to every competition possible and always win. To be honest, I've never been to a competition because, I have taken classes from professionals, but I've never actually competed. I feel that you don't need to prove your abilities to others; you only need to prove your abilities to yourself. So I might not be able to hit a perfect quadruple pirouette, but I push myself to at least attempt it. So foetays are not my forte, but I still try them.

I have a passion for dance, as an artist has a passion for art, or a teacher for teaching; it's something I need to survive. Dance has become my life; it has consumed my whole being and soul. When I hear a beat, I don't care where I am or who I'm with, I start to dance. I start choreographing inside my head. In the words of Clarence Day, "Information is pretty thin stuff unless mixed with experience." You can teach someone about dance without having them step foot into a studio, but they can't actually learn it until they do it. Dance is the best thing that has ever happened to me. When I'm upset and I have to go to class, as soon as I begin moving across the floor, all my worries and problems go away for the time being. The studio is my home away from home, my shelter from riddles of life. If I had to describe dance in two words, I would say... my life.

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