

Again: A Dancing Inspiration

The floor felt like clouds.

Not the ones where you could fall right through but the ones where you could jump and bounce right back up. My hands felt like the wings of a bird, arching towards the sky in an attempt to fly. My feet, a little sore from earlier practice, were pointed to the clouded floor - sharp curves and straight lines. Everything was a blur of pinpoint focus and trained muscle memory honed from years of practice.

I began dancing when I was 5 years old. I was too young to fully realize what I was signing up for but old enough to have fallen in love with dancing. I believed that anywhere was my dance floor from the long aisles of the grocery store to the cramped space in my room. Everywhere was a perfect place for a plie, kick, and pirouette.

I would spend hours outside the studio watching videos of recitals, performances, and studio practices from companies like the Boston Ballet. My eyes were glued to the ballerina leaping through the air. My head and shoulders mimicked the dancers, turning abruptly but gently settling back down to first position. My legs tried to mirror the men's effortless broad jumps and soaring leaps with questionable success.

I couldn't rely on muscle memory for the next part though. I reached upward, in preparation to raise my leg behind me in an elegant arabesque. *Shoulders down, hips square, legs turned out.* Thousands of thoughts in my mind as I began lifting my leg.

Then a loud yell.

Then the music stopped. Someone's foot flew in my face. I hope it was a foot, maybe it was an arm. Strong arms turned to spaghetti and perfect lines, to messy scribbles. Gangly limbs

and sweaty feet grouped in the center with our dance teacher, who had a notepad in hand. It was nothing out of the ordinary; simply the usual “stop and adjust” of a regular dance practice.

As I grew up in the dance studio, I met friends who bonded over worn shoes and types of hairspray and learned from remarkable teachers who all shared their passion for dance. Some teachers have specific techniques - for years after every pointe class, we would spend ten minutes writing the alphabet using our feet to strengthen our ankles. Others have unique styles and love to tell a story with their choreography. All of my teachers wanted us to grow as dancers and individuals. To do that, they often gave feedback either minor comments or crucial corrections. Either way, we gladly took them as an opportunity to improve.

“Make sure to point your feet,” she said to my classmate.

“Sharper arms for a better turn,” she advised another.

She turned to me, “Look graceful, this part is difficult but no one needs to know that.”

I nodded, mentally kicking myself for being distracted with clouds. This choreography *was* intense. A mix of modern, jazz, and ballet, our teacher combined her classical background with our contemporary knowledge. After she combed through what seemed like a mile long list of corrections, she folded her notepad and stared us all in the eyes.

“Again.”

We took a deep breath - taking in our mistakes and focusing on our next run. Fixing our stray hairs, adjusting our shoes, and placing ourselves in position, we waited for the 5, 6, 7, 8 before the music began. But before the count, I looked at our teacher and smiled - a little thank you for being my most influential person in sports.