

Dancing with Mori

M: Mori Sanchez

J: Joseph Frankel

N: Narration

M: I'm Moria Granot Sanchez and I teach Salsa

N: For years now, Mori's been the instructor for the Brown Salsa Club, and coach for the Brown Salsa Team. And when she's not at Brown, she's teaching elsewhere in Providence. Or she's running socials—salsa dance nights—downtown. Or she's choreographing with her company, Team Fusion RI.

J: As you might be able to guess, Mori is *really* into salsa. She often describes herself as a "salsa addict"—that's a phrase you'll hear a bit in this interview. But when she first discovered salsa as a teenager in her hometown of Haifa, Israel, it was completely by chance.

M: "Well I go into salsa when I was, just before I was 18. I had a friend of mine that she introduced me to salsa because she was taking salsa lessons in high school. She had this one song and that one song I thought called salsa, I didn't understand it was a whole culture and a whole thing."

M: "And then one day I'm walking and there's this outside little, what we now know as a social, but it was like outdoors in front of a mall and it had a stage and those lights and a DJ and all these people dancing and I was looking at it and I was like "oh my God what is this!" and I was with a bunch of my friends and we were walking and I'm just looking at these people and I'm like what is this what are they doing? this is amazing, this is music, I just want to move, and I decided to just stop and watch them.

I stared there for at least three hours I think or even more and I just watched and watched and watched and I remembered saying to myself 'Oh my God, that's what I wanna do this is what I wanna be I wanna do this, this, this exactly!' I didn't know what it was, I had no idea this was salsa, I had no clue...

And I was like OMG this is insane I love it and I got addicted and I started going out every single day, anywhere I could find salsa I would do it.

N: From then on, Mori was hooked. She'd always loved to dance, and had taken lessons as a kid, but salsa was something else. She started going out to dance salsa at every possible opportunity. For her it was an outlet, a release, a joy, that she would do almost anything to keep in her life.

M: Then I joined the military and I got in trouble.

N: Remember, this is Israel, where everyone serves in the military

J: Oh. what kind of trouble?

M: We were in bootcamp and I decided I was just gonna teach everybody salsa one day and I just got everybody out of the tent and we started dancing and the commanders didn't really like that. They stopped us right away and they said if they ever catch us doing that again, they're gonna blame it all on me because they saw I was conducting the whole thing. And it wasn't our free time so I shouldn't be doing that so I'll get in trouble next time, so.

J: So was there next time?

M: Yes of course, there was always dancing, but just out of sight. You know?

J: So you didn't get in trouble again.

M: No, no, not then. Only later.

N: At night, Mori started to sneak off base to dance salsa.

M: I was addicted, don't forget! I was 18 and addicted to salsa. So any chance I got to go to a salsa club I would just go.

N: Which she wasn't supposed to be doing. For a while, though, Mori managed to sneak out and back in without a problem. But one day she was recognized by a military officer who was also a salsa dancer, and had seen Mori when they were both out dancing.

M: And yeah they called me and put me up on trial

J: Oh my God

M: It was so bad, they gave me like a super warning, like I don't know, like a warning that if next time they catch me do anything else I will go spend time in jail and I was like 'No, this is just dancing let me be!'

N: After that, Mori went up in her rank, and things were a little more laid back. She could go out dancing without fear of being thrown in jail. But that wasn't enough for her. She had *her* outlet, but she wanted to help others find that outlet too.

M: But during my military time I decided with a few of my friends that were serving with me and also from the salsa scene, we created like a, like a little dance school and we rented a hall and we started doing socials and teach salsa and we were all like super beginner so I don't know where we got the courage to do that. But we just did it. It was in the community it was a low income community in Migdal ha emek, which is a city in Israel, in the north of Israel.

M: we would literally just go to people and be like "Hey, come to salsa class!" Like in person, it was like a lot of kids, older people, families, people would just come out and dance.

N: Mori says this went on for at least a year

M: The hall we rented was exactly across the street from my apartment so I had my friends that served with me that didn't do the salsa with us let me know. Somebody would run and call me so I could check in with my commander and I would run right back into class. So I'm like "excuse me people!" and I would run up the stairs, five flights of stairs, and then I'm like **sigh** 'I'm here, yes, goodnight. Yes everybody's here. Bye.'" Click, down the stairs, out to the club!

M: no, never found out.

M: It was my first experience as a salsa teacher. But it was ten of us, it was very laid back, it wasn't very formal, no one gave us any formal training. It was a very jump to the water, and just see what happens kind of experience.

M: It was amazing. I always loved teaching. It was part of what I did also in the military which I really liked and just applying that to salsa, both things I really loved to do, so it worked out

N: Eventually Mori finished up her time in the army without getting court martialed. She gave university a shot, realized it wasn't for her, and went to massage therapy school, which she loved. By day, she worked as a massage therapist out of her apartment in Haifa, and by night, she kept dancing. Things were going pretty well for her until the war between Israel and Lebanon in 2006.

M: I was working out of my home so I couldn't afford rent, I couldn't do anything, and a lot of well the whole economy kinda just shut down.

N: With nothing else to do, she took a gig chaperoning a group of middle schoolers on a trip to the U.S.

M: When we came back, I was devastated. It was like a month since I'd been in Haifa and you know like the war area and you know I just got really traumatized by it, and I had, well now I know I did but then I didn't know I had PTSD and I would like jump from any sound and somebody would slam the car door down the street and I would think like oh my God, it would immediately throw me somewhere else. So when I got home I realized that I couldn't stay. Okay,

I need to go back, I need to go back to the U.S., it was the only thing in my head, and that's what I decided to do.

N: Mori tried her luck in L.A, but the city was a little much for her. And she didn't have a car, so she couldn't go salsa dancing.

N: A friend from home had given her the number of another friend who lived in Providence. Mori decided to visit, and kind of fell in love with the place.

M: All of a sudden I knew someone, and I was hanging out with people my age, and it was nice, and I was seeing things, and I was meeting people and it made me feel more comfortable. So yeah, and then I went to my first salsa club over here and I was like 'Yes, this is it! I love it!' and I would go out every Wednesday to Black Rap, which now is Aurora, but it was like *the* place to be on Wednesday nights. And they had like a live band and people dancing it was great. I loved it, and I kept going, and yeah, that's how I got into the salsa scene in Rhode Island.

N: Being Mori, she spent every minute she could dancing. She got tapped to help start a studio and teach classes in Rhode Island, and for a while things were going great.

J: She traveled around the country with her team for competitions and performances. And while having her own outlet made her happy, she realized, once again, she wanted to teach more. She was already teaching lessons at Brown, but she wanted to help build the salsa scene Rhode Island. And that meant staying put.

J: It was that desire to build a community that gave Mori an idea. She decided, after talking about it with her students, to open up her class at Brown to students from around Rhode Island. According to Mori, it took a while to catch on, but then...

M: Little by little, 2013 2014 and especially this year, it just BOOM.

M: I just thought it was it would be a great opportunity for people who couldn't afford taking lessons in different places because it's expensive, it's very expensive

M: Last year, which is something I wanna do even more because I really loved it is I started working at Central Falls High School. And so I had a few kids from there and salsa addict, its not even a word, literally they are the definition of it. They've been coming to every single social event in RI, any class I do, and I told them look, if you're part of my program here, I'm taking you, I'll sponsor you to come take lessons at Brown.

M: I feel that if you learn a skill like Salsa, you can go anywhere, you don't even need to learn the language, you can find the salsa scene and go dance, and meet people.

N: That was kind of the case for Mori, who taught herself most of the English she knows after she came here. Teaching salsa is also how Mori met her husband, Angel, but that's a story for another time.