

There is rhythm in everything. It is in the pattern of raindrops drumming on the roof during a midsummer storm, in the hurried steps of pedestrians crowding the sidewalks in a big city, and in the scrape and clink of silverware as a family gathers to celebrate Thanksgiving dinner. For me, it has never been enough to just listen to the natural music that life creates. I unconsciously tap my feet at even the slightest hint of a beat, and on the rare occasion of complete silence, I feel compelled to create a rhythm of my own.

Dance has given my feet an outlet for these odd compulsions. Whether the pulse of music flows from a stereo system or I am creating it myself with the taps on my shoes, I find a supreme joy in the movement and flow of the body as it reflects the insistent throb or gentle pace of its guiding music. There is a certain harmony that is only be found in the collision of body, music, and soul as a single yet distinct entity which can, in turn, bring an audience to its feet or move it to tears.

I still have my first pair of tap shoes. It is hard to believe that my feet could ever have been so tiny as to squeeze into them; there was no joy greater for my three-year-old self than to slide my feet into the shiny black shoes, clumsily tie the black ribbons and commence a great clattering of noise. Soon I discovered the pleasure in finding a pattern, a purpose, in the knock and thump of my taps against bare wood. I suppose that many first pairs of tap shoes remain shiny and new, taken out once or twice a week at class and then tucked snugly into a bag for safekeeping. Mine are neither shiny nor new; they are dull, faded, scratched, falling apart at the edges - a state of disrepair born entirely of love rather than neglect. They are not damaged, but careworn. These shoes were my security blanket, worn everywhere and used constantly. No matter how much I scratched up our hardwood floors or how many times I accidentally stomped on my siblings' feet, my family always encouraged me to continue.

I suppose that, in truth, I began constructing original choreography at the age of three, but I was not officially offered support for my ideas until I was sixteen. The opportunity to work with an entire group of tap dancers, the responsibility to guide their feet from complete discord to total harmony, was both daunting and exhilarating. I would like to say that I was completely successful, but in the interest of honesty, I will admit that the group never did reach the perfection that I had hoped for. It was enough for me, however, to watch the performance, to know that my inner thoughts had been translated into a visual and auditory rhetoric, and to appreciate that someone had confidence enough in my abilities to entrust me with this task.

I know that I will never stop dancing; something inside me is connected indelibly to the power of music and movement. Whether I am lucky enough to find a studio full of talented and enthusiastic dancers to work with or I am just alone with nothing but my own two feet, there is no question that my toes will always be tapping. It is impossible to quit something which is such a permanent part of you that it runs through your blood.

And this is the reason for my irresistible compulsion to jump to my feet and echo the tapping of heavy raindrops on my windowpane. It is the reason why, as a shy ten-year-old, clutching my mother's arm as we navigated the crowded streets of New York City, I broke out in a frenzied series of shuffles and flaps that made passersby stare in confusion and amusement. It is why at Thanksgiving dinner every year, my sister and I line up pots and pans, tap out a drumbeat with chopsticks, and encourage everyone, from my toddling, giggling cousins to my wise and wizened grandparents, to join us in a lively dance.