

From the time I was a little girl, I was always told that I could accomplish anything I wanted to, as long as I had the determination and will power to do it. Generally speaking, this phrase is commonly used when encouraging a child to go for her dream. And as such, it was one of the major encouragements my mom and dad gave me when I decided that I wanted to become a dancer.

At the beginning of my eighth grade year, I began taking a recreational class at Dance Legacy; I was scheduled for a one hour class, once a week in order to determine whether I was certain about this decision. With no previous training but high hopes of getting better, I walked into that classroom ready to work past the limits of my body at every opportunity I was given. Sure enough, I began to progress, and to the disbelief of my parents and my teacher, I still was not satisfied. Each time I improved on a new step, I wanted to do it again, only better and more consistently. At times, I'd go home crying because I wanted it so badly. Yet, by the end of the year, I was beginning to progress.

One day, the owner of the relatively new studio asked me if I would like to join Dance Legacy's Company. I was thrilled with the idea of being a real dancer, and of course quickly said yes. My parents, though slightly in shock of the drastic changes, could not have been more supportive and excited for my new found passion. Over the next few years, I struggled to perfect new moves, and to control my body through the use of the proper muscles. **But all of those years** did not just teach me to straighten my knee, or to use my abdominals to lift up during a turn. I became stronger, more comfortable in my body. I slowly began to gain a confidence that had not existed previously. I developed a home away from home with closer friendships than I had ever experienced. In essence, I found the real me, hidden beneath all of the worried and scared thoughts inside my head. ~~Dance set me free.~~

With every year that passed came new and exciting things. I had new teachers, some that were in my life only for a short time, and others that came and stayed. I met people in the real world of dance at convention after convention, and each time I was inspired by their stories. Every time I competed on a stage, I felt invincible, like nothing could touch me. I have been a cat, a haunted woman, a French maid, a black swan. No matter the character, being on stage makes me happier than almost anything else.

Five years have passed since that first dance class, four of which I have spent in Dance Legacy's Company. Though I have watched myself, my friends, and Dance Legacy reach great heights, I know that this is only the beginning. This past competition season has truly surpassed my wildest expectations. Twice this year, I have placed first in the senior solo category, and every other time I have been in the top ten. I find myself standing next to the people that I have "envied" or "idolized" for their incredible talent, which shows that the clichéd line parents give their children really is true. Five years ago, if someone were to have told me that I would be where I am today, I wouldn't have believed it. And yet, my passion for dance never allowed me to accept reality. I could not let myself sink back because others had had more training than me. That is the miracle of love and determination. If you really truly love something, you *will* find a way to get it; there is *no* trying involved.

I cannot say for sure what my future will hold, but I know that dance will always be a part of who I am. Next year, I will start as a freshman at Ball State University, where I plan to double major in art and dance. If I have learned anything from the experiences I have had at Dance Legacy, it is that anything is possible. Who knows what can happen in another four years of learning? But I am prepared to keep an open mind and, more importantly, to keep pushing myself to become better every day. Dance has given me so many blessings and has helped me discover who I am. I only hope that, someday, I can return some of what I have so generously been given.