

Taking a Leap of Faith

The definition of dance is to move rhythmically to music, typically following a set sequence of steps. But for a dancer, what does dance mean? What does dance mean to me? To me, dance is sharp and powerful yet still so fluid and graceful. Dance is an outlet for creativity, a chance to show my passion and what I have worked hard to learn. Dance has been a part of my life for the past 11 years. My love for dance grows every day and so does my knowledge and skill.

As a kid, I don't think I appreciated dance like I do now. For years, I fell in and out of love with dance. I couldn't find a connection with my peers in dance class, nor could I connect with the teachers. As I struggled to find a place where I wanted to dance, an opportunity came up that changed my life forever. The MacArthur dance team. Tryouts were right around the corner, and I was so excited to try something new. I practiced for days, hoping I would make the team and start this new chapter of my life. Everything changed when I found out I made the team. My passion for dance was on fire. I ate, slept, and breathed dance. Each day I came to practice eager to learn a new dance, skill, or make connections with the girls around me.

As my time at MacArthur came to an end, I found myself completely in love with dance but never had the confidence in my abilities. I didn't think I was an exceptional dancer. I didn't think I had enough skill to continue dancing. To me, I thought that after junior high, dance would just be a memory, but I didn't want that to happen. I loved dancing so much, and I didn't know what would do without it. Then, the Jonesboro High School dance team posted a flier for

tryouts. I never thought I could get the opportunity to dance with a group of girls that I had looked up to for years. I knew that this was something I couldn't pass up, but I only had a month to grow and perfect my skills. I needed to learn a headspring, triple pirouette, kip up, and a variety of leaps and jumps. I spent so much time every day watching YouTube videos trying to learn these skills. Some nights would turn into meltdowns because I didn't understand how I was supposed to learn these skills. I had put my heart and soul into dance for the past three years, and it felt like everything was crumbling down. I had to pick myself up and continue to be the best dancer I could be.

After working on my skills for two weeks, I had grown a lot, but now I had to face a new challenge. I had to learn two dances for my tryout, one being a mix with my own choreography at the end and one hip-hop. I have always struggled with learning choreography because I have dyslexia. Most people think that dyslexia just makes it hard to read, but it is so much more than that. It is something that affects my daily life. Most people don't think that dyslexia could play a role in dance, but it does. It takes me longer to pick up and understand choreography. My struggle with dyslexia is something that has played a large role in my lack of confidence. It has always been so hard to watch people around me learn the choreography so fast while I struggle in the back. Trying to learn the tryout dances was very hard, but I persevered and learned them to the best of my ability.

Before I knew it, it was the day of tryouts. While I was at school, all I could think about was my dances. I was thinking about when to breathe, when to change my facial expressions, and when to really point or flex my foot. After school, it was time for tryouts. Before going in, I prayed with my mom in the car and gave her a hug and kiss goodbye. I had worked so hard for this day, and I knew I just had to give it my all. I had to show my passion, work ethic, and potential. I had to show them the dancer I was and could become.

When I got inside, I talked to my friends, which calmed my nerves a little bit. I got my tryout number, and the whole thing started to feel real. As I was sitting with the girls, I could imagine myself with them; I could see all the joy and friendships this team could bring. Before trying out, we practiced our dances for the last time. As I watched the older girls I looked up to, I saw their passion and energy. They had complete control of their movements from their hips to their knees, down their ankles, and finished through their toes. I saw graceful motions that showed me how I needed to be. While watching these girls, I saw the skill they had—the skill I didn't have. I started to feel scared and wasn't sure of what my future held.

Now, it was time to tryout. As I waited my turn, I could feel my nerves kicking back up. I started to feel weak, and my stomach began to turn. I constantly heard the music from the other girls trying out, so I kept reviewing the dances. I thought that maybe if I went over the dances again and again, I would calm my nerves, but I soon just psyched myself out. I tried to sit and control my breathing, but then I heard my group get called. I walked into the room with a smile on my face and my head held high, trying to hide my nerves. It was time to show what I had in me.

First, I had to perform my mix and hip-hop routines. I got set into my starting pose for the mix routine and took a deep breath, waiting for the music to start.

“Ladies, your music is on,” said my possible future coach.

As the music started, counts flowed through my head; my movements were sharp, hitting the accents in the music. I took over the floor and gave it my all. As I hit my ending pose, I heard an eruption of cheers from the people watching; I was so proud of myself. As I got set for my hip-hop dance, I reassured myself that I could do this. When the dance was over, I heard another eruption of cheers. Now, it was time to show my individual skills.

“Do you have three fouetté turns into a double?” asked the coach. “Yes!” I responded with a smile.

I took a deep breath as I prepped for my turns. I just had to remember the little things to make these turns good. I needed to point my toes, pull up and stay tight, keep my shoulders back—the list goes on. As I took off, I could feel the stickiness of my freshly hair sprayed jazz shoes helping me stay grounded to the floor. I kept my legs straight and turned out, toes pointed, and my head held high. I had nailed my turns, an overwhelming sense of joy and pride swelled within me.

“Now, can you do a headspring?” asked the coach. “How many can I do?” I replied.

“Oh, just one is fine, or you can do however many you want!” she responded. I thought to myself,

Just one? I can do more than that. I have to show what I can do.

I did my first headspring, but it didn't feel right. So, I did a second and then a third. Wow, three headsprings in a row. As I stood up, I looked at the soon to be graduated seniors in front of me; their jaws were dropped. They didn't think I had it in me, but I did.

After tryouts, I went home and prepared myself for the best and the worst. After waiting two hours, the list was out. It took me a second to register the names on the list. Ella Lewis. *Ella Lewis!* My name was on the list. I had done it; I made the team. I was beyond excited to start this new chapter of my life! After letting the news soak in, I heard something at the door. Knock, knock, knock. I opened my front door to see 11 amazing upcoming dance seniors running towards me, giving me a big warm embrace, and congratulating me with candy and a cupcake. I couldn't believe it. I felt so loved and welcomed. I had never been more thankful for the talent God gave me and this new opportunity dance had given me.

Now, I am in my senior year of high school. The time has flown by, and it's hard to believe my JHS dance journey will end soon. I couldn't be more grateful for my dance team experience and all the wonderful things it has brought me. My dyslexia has been a big struggle the past few years, but I have fought, and I will continue to fight. My fight has made me lose and gain confidence, but I have come out the other side a better person and a stronger dancer. A dancer I never thought I could be.