

## The Importance of Dance in My Life

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When I look back and remember the first time I went to see the Nutcracker and saw the Sugar Plum Fairy dance her solo, I knew I wanted to dance in pointe shoes just like her some day. Getting my first pair of ballet shoes was one of the most exciting things for me at the time. I remember walking into the dance store and seeing all the leotards hanging on the racks and all the shoes on display against the wall. After I had my first dance class here at ATD with Mary, I just could not wait for the next class. Two years ago, I was in the same exact dance store where I got my first pair of ballet slippers, though this time I was getting my first pair of pointe shoes. The excitement of going on pointe for the first time was the most fascinating thing. It was one of the most breathtaking moments. Now, at the age of 14, I have accomplished my dream of dancing on pointe, and am able to do combinations and turns across the floor! Now, when I go to the Nutcracker and see the Sugar Plum Fairy's solo, I find myself trying to figure out what steps she is doing and I have a different understanding of just how hard the steps are on pointe.

Dance has given me the chance to explore my personality as a dancer, through different styles of dance. Last year was my first year of doing company. I was assigned to a genre of dance that I was not as familiar with. I learned the choreography and embodied the character and personality of the dance. Once I did, it made the piece come alive for me. Through dance, I have found that I am capable of doing anything when I put my focus, strength, positive attitude, and all my heart into it.

Recently my doctor told me I would have to wear a hard, plastic brace for my Scoliosis. At first I thought, in the long run this will be the best for my back so it does not get a more severe curve. Then, he said I would have to wear it during all my dance classes and it felt like a part of me just vanished. I was extremely discouraged. I knew it would change the way I dance, the way the choreography would look in the mirror, and the way it would feel when I dance with my movement limited.

The brace has opened my eyes to just how much dance means to me. As I prepared for my first ballet class in the brace, I was very nervous and worried about what I was going to be able to do in class. At first it was a little frustrating, because the movement in my legs and upper body was not like it used to be. I expected that, but the reality of doing dance class in the brace, without having my full range of motion, is just something I will have to overcome. Knowing Mary and my classmates were there to support me, gave me courage to dance in the brace. I learned in that class that this is going to be an opportunity for me as a dancer to learn patience and be willing to compromise.

As I look to the future, I have new goals. I will strive to keep a positive attitude through the process of learning how to dance in the brace. I know dance will be a bit different for the rest of this coming year and it may have a few struggles. But, I will keep on dancing and striving to learn more each week.

The community here at All That Dance has always been a supportive and positive environment for me. When I walk into the studio there is always someone who says hello, and when I leave, I always walk out with a smile on my face. With this new obstacle in my life, I believe I have a stronger, more optimistic attitude towards it, because of the people here at ATD. Knowing that everyone here is encouraging and reassuring, helps me believe in myself, helps me know that I can dance, even if my full range of motion is different right now.

The dance studio has become a grounding place for me, a place to relax, to respect myself, to be free, and to be full of happiness. During these last couple of years, dance has made me more confident, and still makes me more courageous each week. The ATD community has taught me to be my best self, stay true to being me, and to encourage others.