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If you fall out of love with dance, are you on the wrong journey?

Sometimes it takes a change of direction to rediscover why you chose dance in the first place

by Allison Eversoll

If I was given the chance to tell my younger self one thing, I never would have imagined it being that my love for dance would go away. Dance has been such a major part of my life that I never asked myself, “What if dance was no longer what I loved to do?” Where did this thought even begin, and why would I let it creep into my mind?

I knew as an undergraduate I would make it to California at some point in my career, so I could become a commercial dancer. Music videos, tours, movies, commercials, TV shows, you name it—I wanted to be a part of the commercial dance industry and “make it.” Whatever that meant to me at the time. So, in 2014, I made the big move to North Hollywood and hit the ground running. I got an agent within a month and was taking class two to three times a week or multiple times a day. One audition after another was in my calendar, and I was a server at a restaurant to make ends meet. I made sure that I was doing everything possible to survive as an artist in California.

My relationship at the time took a turn for the worst because my focus and love was dance, which put many things on the back burner. Dance was the only relationship I wanted to have, because I wanted to make it in this industry. A year passed and nothing really changed. Same routine of working, finding last-minute swaps for work so I could make an audition, getting cut and then going home. Sometimes, I’d wait around for weeks and never receive a response; sometimes I’d get an occasional yes for gigs, which would last a day, then turn into words on a resume that people may or may not look at, at my next audition.

Was this what I worked all my life for? Why did I feel like something was missing after a year of doing this? I kept it up for two years, but I still felt there was a missing puzzle piece in my life. I’ll never forget the time I did not even want to go to another audition. I dreaded it the entire time I was getting ready. Then I drove to the audition site, but when I reached the parking lot, I turned around and went home. That was the moment I realized that I no longer loved dance. The question then was why? Why did it come to this, I wondered, and where do I go from here?

One thing I knew is that I loved to choreograph. I reached out to a contact working in the cruise ship industry, which landed me as the choreographer for my first musical, “A Chorus Line.” With four months to put this dance-heavy show together, I was thrilled. I could feel the spark in my mind, and although it took two hours in traffic to get to rehearsals, it was worth it. I was able to drive away from the commercial world, and it was freeing. Each mile that crept between me and the place where dance was no longer a joy for me was a wonderful feeling.

The day of the show came, and “one singular sensation” after the next overwhelmed my whole body and mind to the point of tearing up. When I stood and clapped, it was not as a dancer, not as a starving artist, but as a choreographer who was proud of her dancers. I was proud of all the hard work they had accomplished over the last four months. I was proud of the dedication every single performer put into the show, and I could feel how proud of themselves they were. I felt love for the dances they were doing.

So I asked myself—did I truly fall out of love with dance? Maybe for a split second, but only as long as it took to direct my love towards a different path. The reward of directing those dancers was so much greater than being in a music video. It meant so much more than the resume I had built up the past two years. It was so much more than the feeling of performing and being in front of the audience. I have danced for over 23 years, and had so many opportunities I would never trade for anything. But I realized two years ago that it was OK to change my path and my love for dance—in fact, it was necessary. I had to fall out of love with dance, to rediscover my love as a teacher, as a choreographer, and as an educator.

Allison Eversoll is entering her second year in the Dance MFA program at University of California, Irvine, and will focus her thesis on creating a freshman seminar for dancers to help bridge the gap between high school and higher education.