

Ballroom dancing completed my life even more than it changed my life. Let me explain: For as long as I can remember, I have had music coursing through my veins. No matter where I was, or what I was doing, the soundtrack was always there in my head. Sometimes, it was just a faint whisper, other times I could make out a melody, and then there were the times the music was so loud it was all I could hear.

Playing piano, as I have done almost every day of my life since I turned four years old, allows me to let some of the music out of myself. But still, it isn't enough. I walk away from the piano and still hear Sonatas. I turn off the radio and the lyrics continue to play on in my head. The music never stops. I need to articulate this music I feel deep within my soul.

Ballroom allows me to express this music that is within me, the music that is me. Dancing sets me free! I can dance my emotions. I can dance my hopes, my fears, my pains, and my joys. Everything I feel inside, I can bring out on the dance floor when I move.

At competitions, the audience, the coaches, and the judges evaluate me on how well I perform each dance. But I don't judge myself by the standards of the people around me. Instead, I judge myself by the joy I get from dancing and the joy that seeing me bring dance steps to life brings to others. I love to share my passion for music and dancing with others.

New routines are sometimes challenging and uncomfortable. They feel awkward. To learn them, I have to be thorough and committed, so I don't put my mistakes into muscle memory. When I come across a new step that is difficult, it makes me feel a little frustrated. Some steps feel so un-natural at first, like when my feet turn towards each other, pigeon-toed style, in the Tango, that I feel like a klutz. Other new steps, like spirals, curls and rope spinning are so exhilarating that I master them right away. Even though learning a routine can be grueling, it feels rewarding when a new dance is mastered. I stop thinking about the steps and let my instincts take over.

Ballroom dancing challenges me to grow both as a person and a dancer. Being part of a "couple" can be fun. My partner is someone who I can laugh with, someone who shares the same goals in dancing with me, and someone who is my friend and sidekick.

Although being in a partnership can be fun, it can also be difficult. Some days, I just don't feel like practicing at all, but I have to anyway because I don't want to let my partner down. Other days, I have to miss opportunities to hang out with my friends because I have a ballroom lesson scheduled. Even if what my friends are doing is really cool or fun, I have an obligation to my partner, my coaches and myself. I just can't let everyone down. Sometimes, when either my partner or I have an "off" day and we are not dancing our best, we have to find a balance between ourselves, even though it can be pretty difficult. Through ballroom

dancing, I have developed teamwork and patience and have learned to work more cooperatively with my partner.

All the hard work and dedication that ballroom dancing requires of me is worth the effort because dancing frees the music that lives within me. Just as every dance has a song, every song has a dance. So I dance!