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Art Culture Sewn Together as One

Who knew that I would have the nerve to dance in front of hundreds, when I couldn't even recite a poem in front of a class of thirty? I couldn't imagine doing any of these things without my culture and passion for Asian Arts. Dancing has been a part of my life for about ten years, and I've stuck with it ever since because it has merged into my identity as a person. Asian Arts of Talent Foundation (AATF) has increased my fervor for dance, molded me into the determined person I am today, and provided me with many privileged opportunities.

Dance has taught me commitment and dedication. Being involved with such a large activity requires full-time devotion and sometimes sacrifices. Many times we are called to come in for extra practices in order to prepare for upcoming performances. But I have learned that when you take part in something that has such an enormous impact on your life, sacrificing other extracurricular activities for dance is inevitable. With performances about twice a month on the weekends, along with schoolwork and extra classes, my activities are bound to conflict. Therefore, dance has shown me that if you are motivated to do something you are passionate for, you must do all that it takes to receive the absolute experience out of it. Although it is time consuming, never have I once looked back nor regretted all the times I made sacrifices for dance.

I can honestly say that I was not born to become a dancer. My flexibility struggles, my gracefulness lacks, and my rhythm is often off-beat. I struggled. I heard voices in the background whispering about me. I never earned the main roles in the dances. I couldn't keep up with the rest of the class, I got yelled at, I cried, I ached. But I didn't stop. For many years, teachers and parents have looked down upon me. I was the girl people picture in the back of the room fumbling to catch up, and secretly yearn to make her way into the spotlight. But after all the struggling and coming home feeling incapable, I grew and I blossomed. My persistence fired up, and I longed to deserve my very first solo. I stretched every night to become more flexible and came in mentally ready every practice; unbelievable amounts of sweating and aching came along with that process, but I kept going. As dancers, the main source of enjoyment comes from the smile and attention from the audience, and when I finally seized that moment, I realized I could be more than just the girl in the background. I was finally able to shine on stage, and people praised me on how much I've improved. It felt nice to finally be recognized, but I still continued to work even harder to improve. The development I've experienced throughout my ten years at AATF is massive, and I know now that even though I was not born a dancer, I became one.

Persistence is crucial, especially when it's for an activity you have deep passion for. If there were no joy and fulfillment in the activity anyone is pursuing, then there simply would be no purpose.

I am extremely fortunate to have experienced all the opportunities that were given to me. My group has performed in parades, annual shows, restaurants, Disneyland, charity benefits, and even retirement homes. Genuinely, I prefer the smaller events because it is

more enjoyable to form a closer relationship with a smaller audience than a larger one. I am able to see smiling faces, especially those of the elderly's, whenever I am on stage. That is my motivation- to know that I am dancing for the pleasure of others. It's exciting to express myself through this art, but being able to share it with others is the reason I continue to dance. In addition, my organization occasionally performs in other countries like Canada, China, and Europe, and this summer we are going to Taiwan. Along with the performances, we end up visiting different cities' cultures and many Chinatowns to learn about its history. No matter where I go or where I am, a part of my ethnicity always remains with me. In addition, not only does AATF participate in Chinese dance, but also we are exposed to Mongolian, Korean, Tibetan, and Taiwanese. I am grateful to have experienced the different aspects of my culture, and am privileged to link my passion for dancing and Chinese background into one.

Dedication and persistence are key factors to dancing and life in general, and being able to connect dance with my culture enables the journey to be much more meaningful. AATF has shaped me into the hard working, determined person I am today. I am proud to tell people about my hobby because it defines me as a person. These components have taught me life managing skills and aspects of Asian culture, and it will stick with me for the rest of my life. When I look back in twenty years, I hope to pass down a part of my culture to my children and share my beloved, life- changing memories with them.