

Why I Love JourneyDance

by Joanna Carichner | January 2, 2010

I have always loved to dance, loved to move my body to music, but from a young age, I felt awkward and uncoordinated. I felt I could never be a dancer in the traditional sense. I took ballet classes as a child only to be embarrassed by being the chubby girl in the leotard. I was uncoordinated and lacked the physical type to have any success.

I found dancing at clubs when I was a teen and loved the feeling that my body had while dancing, but all the competitiveness of wearing the right clothing, the right makeup and hanging around with the right people brought down the fun of just moving, not to mention the second-hand smoke and caffeine pumping through me...

While I loved to move my body, I never felt like I could follow anyone else's choreography. I tried belly dancing in my 20s and again felt constricted and awkward trying to get my body to look a certain way. Over the years, dance became less and less a part of my life.

While living in the Bay Area in my 30s, I found a group that put on dances once every 3 months. They were amazing experiences of community, but the pressure to dress up and look some particular way was also strong there. Again, I tried dance classes, modern this time, but found myself not able to keep up with the choreography and feeling very much like a stick figure on the dance floor. I yearned for a feeling of letting myself go in a group of people who would not be judging how I danced.

In 2003, at the age of 34, I went through a devastating depression that left me wondering who I was and what I wanted in life. I decided it was time for me to go on a retreat. I was on the East Coast visiting my family, so I took a day to go to Kripalu Center in Western Massachusetts. Looking at the schedule for the day, I saw that they had a noon class called DanzKinetics. I did not know anything about it, but I felt compelled to go.

I went into the large room with about 50 to 60 other people. Just as we were starting the class, a woman peeked her head in the open door and saw that we were dancing. She immediately backed away and said, "Oh, I don't dance!" I waved for her to join us anyway. I just had a good feeling about it. She tentatively stepped in and joined us. As the class continued, we were led in yoga-like movements, flowing and freeform sequences, given freedom to roam around the space moving to the music as we wished. At times, we were led in games where one person led a movement and the rest of us followed. I got to play and interact with many people, move to my own rhythms and follow the lead of others, not trained dancers, but average people with all the beautiful body sizes and shapes that we had. I felt free and happy and filled with a sense of joy of movement I had not felt in years. And the woman who had joined us went from tentatively moving to flowing, laughing, smiling broadly, and seeming to enjoy her body in such a beautiful way.

By the end of that class, I was hooked. I knew somehow that this was something I wanted to do with my life. I had seen the transformation in myself, my feelings about my body change in that hour. I'd seen that woman go from feeling like an outsider who did not dance to a beautiful

dancer. I had also found my home for the next several months. I stayed at Kripalu from October 2003 through February 2004. During that time, I took Danskinetics nearly every day.

I was planning to take the Danskinetics teacher training when I could. One Saturday, a woman named Toni Bergins came to teach the class. She called her version of Danskinetics "JourneyDance." It was similar to what other teachers were doing but with a bit of a twist: she added ritual to the class. Right in the middle of the class, we were encouraged to "build a fire" with our imaginations. Then we were given the opportunity to dance in that fire and burn off anything that was not serving us. I had been going through a particularly challenging time in my healing that week, and I had a lot to burn off. It was transformative. After, I felt like a Phoenix rising from those ashes. I had cried and yelped and let go more in that hour than in months. I then knew that JourneyDance was going to be part of my life path.

It took a few years, but I finally took Toni Bergens' JourneyDance training in 2007. I still love all those feelings I get from JourneyDance, the freedom, the release, the sense of feeling myself from the inside, not attempting to create a look for anyone else's benefit. JourneyDance is dance for the self!

I encourage anyone out there who may feel like dance is only a performance, or who just wants to move his or her body without judgement, to come and explore with me.

Joanna teaches a weekly JourneyDance class on Sundays at 5:00, and is the director of Tucson Yoga.

Joanna's Ongoing Classes:

Sun 5:00-6:30pm, JourneyDance

Wed 5:30-7:00pm, Mixed-Level Yoga

Fri 9:00-10:30am, Mixed-Level Yoga
