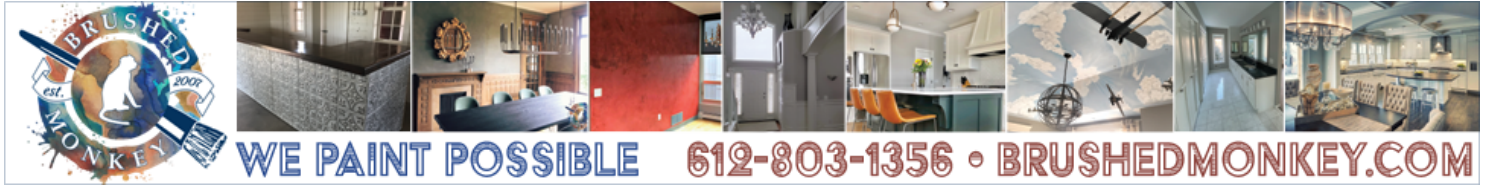


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Happy Dance

by **Judith Brin Ingber**  08/01/2017  2

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What creates our private body image? So much started for me when I began my ballet studies at age seven. I was captivated by the energy, the music and what I'd seen on stage, but I also remember looking in the mirror, wishing I were different.

We were disciplined to struggle for the classic ideal of long legs and little, sleek, taut bodies. Even as I grew, my body didn't conform to those proportions. Was there a way to stop what seemed like an insidious change as curves appeared of their own volition?

My body image shifted during my modern dance studies in college. My instructor's shorter legs and longer back, like mine, had nothing to do with how effectively she moved. We were told to stop studying ourselves so intently in the mirrors – curtains would be pulled across them, since mirrors don't reflect the ineffable nature of performance or intuition or expression.

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Shortly after I graduated, I landed a job as the editorial assistant at a dance magazine. My image of the dancing body shifted dramatically once again. I realized I had absorbed a hierarchy of values when confronted by the images that the editor decided to feature on the cover: Folk dance above ballet?

I didn't really confront my bias, however, until I lived and worked in Israel. I saw that effective and dynamic dancers weren't only those with studio training. They could come from family wedding celebrations in the Moroccan or Yemenite Jewish communities. They could be drummers and singers, admired in their neighborhoods for their dance and music prowess. They came from kibbutzim, where they were strong, group-oriented dancers, because the farmer generations had created homegrown harvest celebrations. They helped to show me so much more variety in dancers, full of more excitement and verve than I had ever imagined. [[In-content Ad]]

I live in Minneapolis, but as I write this I am visiting New York City. My biggest treat in Manhattan is taking ballet class from a teacher who is a creative force and doesn't ignore his beginnings as a kibbutz folk-dancing kid. These classes are made up of a variety of body shapes, sizes, colors and ages. What we all share is the joy of executing exhilarating combinations. After class, on the subway, a young woman stands up to offer me her seat. What body image does she see when she looks at me – another tired, grey-haired woman? Or does she see the real me: yes, a grandmother, but also a happy, satisfied dancer.

Judith Brin Ingber teaches and performs dance around the world. jbriningber.com

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