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The Art of Expression

A brief look of shock and hesitation fluttered across his face as his friend made a suggestion completely out of his comfort zone. After insisting and giving encouragement throughout the entire class period, Nicolas eventually gave in and agreed to go to a dance audition for homecoming that year with his friend Ashley, an already highly skilled and talented dancer. Upon arriving at the audition, he immediately felt overwhelmed and nervous, surrounded by determined faces. Dancers of various levels were already there, practicing until it was their turn to audition. After what seemed like an eternity, it was finally his turn to demonstrate his skills. Heart beating wildly in his chest, Nicolas demonstrated his shallow knowledge of hip hop and improv with several others beside him. After stumbling through a few steps and hesitating during some parts, the nightmare was finally over.

Despite the initial embarrassment he felt during the audition, Nicolas had successfully gained his first dance experience. Whether it is dance or another hobby, maintaining a hobby throughout one's life is essential for health reasons, as well as creating a way of self expression. The article "Self-Expression and Creativity: Managing Feelings" by Nadia Sheikh describes a study conducted by Alex Korb, a UCLA neuroscientist. Korb found that when people honestly express themselves, they are able to deal with their emotions in a healthier way, leading to reduced stress and anxiety. Dance is just one of the many forms of self-expression; all are important for navigating through emotions and obstacles in a healthy manner. Hobbies prove to

be especially important during this time as Covid-19 has swept through nearly every country, causing many to isolate themselves in order to protect themselves and those around them. With limited social interaction as well as freedom to go outside, picking up a hobby during quarantine would be an effective use of this time. Individuals like Nicolas are able to spread their love and passion for activities they enjoy, inspiring others to do the same. With Covid-19, there has been an increasing number of social media users who like to share and watch videos, articles, posts, anything they find entertaining. Specifically, when a significant number of schools started closing in the month of March in 2020, TikTok saw a 27% increase in downloads compared to the month before (Johnson). Nicolas was among one of countless influencers who took this opportunity to demonstrate their talents on this app, garnering positive reactions and attention. By proving anyone is capable of achieving goals that may seem impossible at first, Nicolas is a valuable character who will undoubtedly have a strong impact in this society.

After joining Dance Spectrum, a dance organization at Mountain View High School, the school Nicolas was attending at the time, he was tasked with a challenging yet exciting job. The majority of dances learned in Dance Spectrum were self-choreographed, so when they were looking for someone to choreograph a new hip-hop piece, Nicolas rose to the challenge. He teamed up with three of his friends; they had less than a month to come up with the choreography, so they had to work efficiently during those three weeks. However, one of the biggest challenges that occasionally stumped their progress was reaching a consensus between the four of them when they had various opinions on a specific part of the dance. They worked through this issue by going through the motions of each of the possible options and choosing the one that they all felt comfortable with. Nicolas explains, “Even though we were under quite a bit of pressure because of the limited time we had, the overall experience was definitely fun and

valuable to me, considering the fact that I had never choreographed a piece before.” Despite the few obstacles they faced during this unfamiliar experience, they were eventually able to feel accomplished and proud of the dance they had created from scratch.

When they performed the dance later that month, Nicolas received an astounding amount of compliments and genuine feedback from all of the students who watched the performance. His friends who had been dancing for years already expressed their admiration, saying, “That was amazing—especially for your first dance—you did so good.” Naturally, Nicolas felt encouraged and more confident after this experience, marking it as the first time he felt proud as a dancer.

Before deciding to give dancing a try, Nicolas found himself enjoying performances he found online. He admired the stage presence that his favorite artists had when they were singing or dancing, and a part of him longed for that feeling of power. He had always been an outgoing and sociable person, however still being shy in certain situations, so when he was presented with the opportunity to learn how to dance, he hesitantly took it. The uncertainty did not last long though, as he quickly found himself enjoying dance. Before joining Dance Spectrum, he had to train with Ashley and Manon; both were experienced dancers who had been taking classes outside of school for years. Aware of his good work ethic and overall determination, Ashley insisted, “Manon and I will train you and we’ll help you get into intermediate or even advanced. I bet you could even get into advanced!” They helped teach him basic moves and dances, slowly building up his foundation and his confidence. When it was time to audition, Nicolas felt nervous, but as ready as he would ever be. He ended up making it into the intermediate class of Dance Spectrum, as he had expected. Although the class was not as strenuous as the advanced class, Nicolas still faced some challenges. He explains, “In the beginning I was not very flexible and I wanted to get really flexible, so I would stretch every day.” Clearly, he took this hobby

seriously and genuinely wanted to improve. Furthermore, he was one of only two boys in his class and he felt especially anxious at first, until he realized that everyone there was friendly and encouraging. In spite of these challenges he faced when first getting into dance, he was quickly able to come up with solutions and overcome them. Overall, Nicolas has found his dancing journey to be full of only positive memories. Even during the times that he felt embarrassed, he was able to learn a lot and it led him to where he is today.

Outside of class, Nicolas finds the time to watch videos primarily on YouTube to learn new dances. Recently, the K-pop group, Twice, has caught his attention. South Korea is well known for their music, attracting millions of fans from all over the world, and Twice is regarded as one of the most popular girl groups with songs adored by the entire industry. Their most recent comeback with the title track, “I CAN’T STOP ME,” has been the focus of Nicolas’s attention. Unlike other dances that require taking a class to learn, most K-pop dances can be picked up by continually watching performances or dance practices. Nicolas stands in front of his laptop, with music blasting, as he simultaneously watches the video and mimics the moves. A week or two later, he pulls out his phone and plays “I CAN’T STOP ME” at full volume, eagerly motioning for his family to watch as he proceeds to dance the entire choreography. While some choreography does not last an entire song, Nicolas explains, “I learned the whole thing because in K-pop they have choreography from the top of the song to end. The performance and dancing aspect of the song is just as important as the vocals and rap in K-pop.” He then turns to social media to post his new accomplishment.

Similar to K-pop in some ways, every culture has its own traditional dance or event that involves some variation of dance. There is the tinikling dance from the Philippines, Irish dance, the Chinese dragon dance, and countless others because dance has always been highly respected

and enjoyed in every culture or region (Newell). Nicolas believes that he will be able to learn more about different cultures through dance. It opens up a whole new path, where one can be exposed to numerous languages, traditions, customs, and more. Additionally, when asked about what genres of dance he would like to explore in the future, Nicolas replied, "I know at UCSB they have ballet classes, so I was hoping to take it with my friend who I made a plan with." He is also interested in jumping deeper into jazz, a genre he had been lightly exposed to in high school. Considering how little he knew about dance only two years ago, he has come a long way and he has his friends to thank. Nicolas hopes to one day inspire others to try dance or another activity they may be too nervous to try, the same way Ashley inspired him. He empathizes with them, "If you had asked me when I was a freshman, 'Oh, you're going to do dance spectrum,' I would say, 'No, that's crazy, I'm too shy for that.' With hobbies like dance, you just have to go for it because you never know and there's really never anything to be embarrassed about."

Works Cited

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