

Sunday Mornings. So many things in life that we thought would be forever come and then they go. But for me, the one constant that has remained is a deep passion for the purity that is classical ballet and its more rebellious offspring of contemporary.

I always say it taught me everything I know that has carried me into seemingly polar opposite working field today. But it is not so different as you think. It was through this medium that I began to understand the world from inside a sheltered childhood bubble, it was the educator a textbook could never be.

For those who know it, know it and you just know it in a kind unexplainable way.

I learned of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement through the lens of Alvin Ailey's "Revelations," and the writhing, sharp contortions of grief physically manifested when Judith Jameson performed "Cry." After watching and re-watching a Canadian company Ballet Rampart's "Rooster" set to the work of The Rolling Stones, I traced every twirl of "Ruby Tuesday" back to the hippie hedonism of the London streets. I was exposed to the movement rituals of indigenous tribes and the transformation of cultures through what dances they kept and what dances faded through the passage of time, the minimalism of Fosse, and the way the body transcends light in Jiří Kylián's "Fallen Angels."

I loved the unencumbered nature of Martha Graham in the same way I loved the freedom Martha Gellhorn carved into her life as a trailblazer pushing forth.

As a child, I didn't want to be anywhere else, but that next studio where the creaky, musty pianos sat. But at the same time, it was an athletic art that made you want to be everywhere else.

It was a passion that drove me to curious places and faraway studios, some small and stuffy and others were grandiose and imposing. Rome I could never get on the right bus, my bun was messy, my shoes untied ("Senorita my wild bird, you are too late again!") to the stricter, frozen streets swirling the Bolshoi in Moscow to the broken orphanages in Tijuana to teach, when the idea of floating between the bunk beds to Bach or Tchaikovsky was akin to a doll-like dream of the tiny girls, a subtle reminder of what I had taken for granted too many times.

It gives you a unique discipline, focus, resilience, a strange acceptance of injury. You have little choice but to embrace healing, watching the leg ever so slowly lift higher and higher as elastic weeks become months and the severed hamstring comes back to life. Every inch up is a moral victory. Then there is the strange blunting of fear.

The first time you slip and fall you are destroyed, Suzanne Farrell wrote in "Holding On to the Air."

But unpleasant situations teach you things. I have never been afraid to fall since.

Hollie McKay, 2020.