

Personal Insights from the Old Pueblo Group

Sharing our world with you.

Fuel for My Life

Bailamos! – Rosa Reyna

Since I was a young girl my life has been filled with music, dance, and laughter. I am the ninth of ten children, six girls and four boys. Needless to say, we had a big family and life for me was never boring. My love for music and dance began with my parents so it is only fitting to start my story with them. They both were born and raised in Mexico and came to live in Tucson in 1953 in search of a better opportunity and a brighter future. Amongst many home goods, toys, and clothes, they brought with them one of the most important treasures of all - their love of music.

My father was a self-trained mandolin player who loved to spend his free time plucking out tunes. My mother loved to sing. Traditional, moderns, pop, classics, you name it, she loved to sing it. You put them together and thus was born a musical duo for all to enjoy. I still remember them singing and playing wonderfully together during holidays, family gatherings as well as small intimate times on the back porch or near the fire. It was a scene out of a fairytale. And it wasn't just their music, it was all genres of music all the time! Something was always playing while mom cooked, while we cleaned, when we gathered to talk and laugh. Tunes of some sort could always be found in the air of our home. This was the foundation of my childhood.

Oh, and the fond memories of Sunday evenings, fighting for the right spot on the carpet in front of the television to be able to watch the Wonderful World of Disney! You would definitely hear someone say, "excuse me", "Ow! You stepped on my hand", "I was here first, I only got up to use the bathroom" or "move, I can't see". As a young girl I also loved to watch the Lawrence Welk Show then later it was American Bandstand (yes, I am aging myself – be kind). As I grew, the love of music, and dance filled my heart.

These moments are just a fraction of my youth but led to the most precious memories I hold dear to my soul. Recently, I discovered that a wonderful, kind, intelligent and talented woman passed away this year. Had it not been for her kindness and willingness to bend the rules as a Professor of Physical Education at the University of Arizona, I would not have experienced the personal growth or developed the love of dance that began for me at the age of 10. My older brother and sisters had joined a folk-dance group that this woman had founded in 1963 called Folklanders. It was a dance group through the University of Arizona meant for teenagers and adolescents to learn and perform traditional dances of countries and cultures around the world. Due to the complexity of the dances and the hours involved, no young children were allowed to participate. However, through the encouragement of my siblings and other members of the group, she allowed me to stay and watch. The Folklanders would meet in the early evenings to learn new dances and practice for performances around the community. I was enthralled to hear so many strange beats, listen to different instruments, and see so many colorful costumes of diverse countries. They brought to Tucson a taste of culture from so many places one normally would not be exposed. Once a year they would incorporate cuisine for our audience to enjoy from the origins of the dances we performed. The combination of dancing, food, and music energized my imagination and I soon found myself being taken to different parts of the world.

Week by week I would watch and slowly inch my way out of my shy shell from the bleachers to standing behind the line of dancers trying to learn the intricate steps and movements. I believe the passion that I had for dance allowed me to be a fast learner and I was quickly included and taken in by the group. This was a real rarity considering the strict age limits. I imagine for some; it was a challenge to dance next to a short little girl. I secretly hoped my enthusiasm and skill made up for my shortcomings (pun intended). My favorite dances were from Hungary, Bulgaria, Mexico, and Israel. As I reminisce, I am proud to have been permitted to spend valuable time learning and dancing with 5 of my siblings along with the talented troupe.

After a few years, I was blessed to have been given the opportunity to dance with one of my older brothers, a dance called Baile de Santa Rita. It's a representative dance that embodies the state of Chihuahua, Mexico. We presented this tradition at a festival held in Tumacacori, just south of Tucson. This was the first of many public performances and to this day I still remember the exhilarating rush of performing for an audience!

However, in terms of complexity, that performance could not compare to that of my older sister and brother when they performed a dance called La Bamba, from Veracruz. If you have not seen it, I highly encourage you to find it on YouTube and see it for yourself. What makes it unique is that both dancers create a bow out of the mans red sash using only using their feet. Considering the sash is tied to his waist makes this truly amazing!

By the time I became an adult, the Folklanders had come to an end, its participants moved on as the group dispersed, but the spirit in me remains indefinitely. This group is credited with bringing a taste of world culture and style to Tucson and I enjoy great pride in knowing I participated. However, for me it directly helped me overcome my fear of public performances and gave me confidence in my ability as a dancer and more importantly as a young woman. This experience led me to explore further my love of music and dance. As I grew older, I discovered the choreography side of performing as well as became highly proficient in Cello and choir. All of these require skills and disciplines that I still carry with me and practice to this very day.

Music and dance - It fuels connection between human beings across the world!

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