

"You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves."

~Mary Oliver, *Wild Geese*

This line of poetry that Megha quoted during the first part of our Let Your Yoga Dance teacher training felt as though Mary Oliver wrote it for me. Although I was raised in an extraordinarily loving, supportive family, I struggled with body shame and never really felt at home or at ease in my own skin. Clumsiness and malaise was not relegated simply to adolescence, but permeated most aspects of growing up in this body. I was never one to embrace physical activity, but thankfully my parents enrolled me in (read: practically had to drag me to) a beginner's dance class at the age of almost fifteen. And something just clicked. Something felt *right* for once, in my body, and also on some deep soul level that I couldn't understand just yet. I still felt like an ugly duckling, but moving to music gave me temporary wings.

Several years later, my mom took me to Kripalu, and (already being a fan of yoga, too) I couldn't wait to see what this "yoga dance" was all about. Happily, Megha was teaching one of those days, and I fell completely in love. What a perfect, unique combination of yoga movements and philosophy with the joy and freedom of expression of dance! I had never felt so alive and at home in my body, and yet simultaneously so healthily separate from it. I finally understood what other teachers had been trying to show me for years; a kinesthetically rooted, yet multi-dimensional knowing that my body is only a *part of* me. And that it feels so much better to simply respect and love and accept it for exactly what it is, because it is just trying to do its best, to "love what it loves." The various formats of "noon dance" classes I took during those few days at Kripalu were all amazing in their own ways, and I enjoyed each immensely. However, none spoke to me the way that the specific practice of Let Your Yoga Dance did- methodically moving up each rainbow color of the energy centers to stimulate, open, cleanse, and balance each of the seven chakras. It is interesting to note how the theme of these *chakra* colors has run through my life.

As a child, whenever it came time for drawing, I colored everything in "rainbow colors." To the audible chagrin of one certain elementary school teacher, my flowers, trees, people, and objects sometimes became unrecognizable for the insistence of being rainbow-colored. When I needed glasses at age nine, of course I chose rainbow frames. Similarly, my teeth became rows of rainbows when I got to choose the colored bands to go over my new braces at age twelve. As a young adult, when I struggled with insomnia, my mom would sit on the edge of my bed and lead me in a certain guided meditation that worked wonders. I was to first picture a healing ball of red light at the base of my spine, then orange at the hips...Sound familiar? By the time we reached the soothing circle of blue light at the throat, I could taste sleep's sweet surrender...

It felt like fate when I discovered Let Your Yoga Dance-- those deeply familiar, meaningful chakra colors creating the roadmap for a spiritual practice filled with the joy of movement and the freedom to do what feels right in each moment-to-moment experience in one's own body-mind-spirit. Right away, I wanted to share Let Your Yoga Dance with the entire world. My soul shouted, "Everyone deserves to have this ecstatic experience!" I wanted to spread this tool, this practice, this wealth of goodness. I thought about taking a teacher training, but it didn't seem practical at the time. And after all, who was I to become a "teacher" of this sacred practice? This part-time ugly duckling lacking the stereotypical "yoga" or "dancer" figure was certainly not graceful enough, creative enough, beautiful enough, confident enough...

Almost two years after my first introduction to Let Your Yoga Dance, circumstances aligned and I was ready to take the two-part training. I graduated in December of 2010 with the Infinite Hearts tribe, and indeed we were. Under the expert guidance of our fearless leaders, I learned how to truly and compassionately face my inner critic for the first time, to witness and to be witnessed, and to bask and participate in the support of the most loving group of strangers who quickly became a community (some of whom I am still close friends with to this day). Many of us exclaimed something to the effect of, "This is better than years of therapy!" I think we all shed some ugly duckling layers during those weeks, really getting to the core of our own unique divine light.

After almost ten years of teaching multiple weekly classes of Let Your Yoga Dance, I have heard my participants (men, women, younger, and older) echo that same sentiment. I am blessed to be able to have created a successful career for myself of teaching different group exercise classes (now about 14 per week!), between low-impact fitness, general fitness classes, Zumba, chair exercise, and Zumba Gold (for active older adults). However, Let Your Yoga Dance remains my very favorite class to teach, for obvious reasons. It also draws some of the most beautiful people I have ever met, from yoga studios, to Women Supporting Women programs, to fundraisers, and now mostly to Senior Centers. I am blessed to call many of these "students" friends. LYYD classes have a way of connecting people, and of keeping them coming back for more. We may enter class from situations of physical or emotional pain, or just frazzled from daily life, but I can see the transformation to grace and ease (and some sweaty smiles!) by the end of each session, and it never fails to move me. When I started my first LYYD class at the Malden Senior Center almost a decade ago, I was the only person in the room. I blasted music, and danced. Slowly, one person, two people, one woman told her sister, her friend... I am daily filled with gratitude for the many regulars and newbies who put their faith in me and devote the time, energy, and funds to show up and dance their yoga together, thereby allowing me to do what I love, and to give and receive in equal abundance. What a dream job! Gratitude flows to each person along the way who has supported me in making this dream of spreading the wealth of Let Your Yoga Dance a reality, and to the creator of this special and transformational practice, Megha.

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*For more information, please visit her website: dancewithemily.org
<<http://dancewithemily.org>>*

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