



THE LITTLE MONKEY

Her mother calls her 'the little monkey'. She tells family and friends, if this girl is asked to sit for a while and not hop around, she is sure to fall asleep. 'My mum calls me hyperactive' and Rebecca agrees with her because that is how our conversation started.



Proud of her now, Rebecca's mother had doubts about this profession earlier. There were enough reasons for Rebecca not to become a dancer, the family was nervous. However, their concerns about lifestyle, money, studies and friends, only strengthened Rebecca's resolve to pursue dance. The kindergarten teacher embarked on her journey...

REBECCA LEE

Once upon a Time

THE LITTLE MONKEY

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Not a great conversationalist, she says, she observes quietly, if she does not know you, and you will be unsuspecting of her presence in a room. Equally silently she crept to the top with her determination to win competitions. She is a human dynamo on the floor.

Apologetically almost, she says she has never played a musical instrument, and slowly but surely discerned layers of music as she attended workshops and was trained for competitions. 'Dancing to Backstreet Boys and Britney Spears were my dance basics' and being a choreographer and instructor was not even a dream in the distance then.

The LDF has been her support through these times. 'Not only me, they have helped hundreds of instructors in other countries too' she adds. Rebecca hopes she can extend a hand to someone to tell them that it is ok not to be ok. Let us all hold hands and dance to lift spirits on the 26th of September this year. Do not stop working, do not stop dreaming, will be her advice for these challenging times.

'It is my determination' that made me build milestones for myself. At 30, 35 and later 40 she will remove stones one by one as she accomplishes her dreams. She might be dancing hip hop with her husband, or going Rachael's way to have babies and, she adds, 'when I cannot dance anymore, I will be at home sipping coffee with my husband and loved ones and watching others dance'.

Oh yes sweets and coffee can keep Rebecca happy for an entire day.

Your language to your brain is a very open system, your tone of voice and your body language discern it. Her conversation to herself was packed with grit, at the cost of disobedience to her parents. Well it worked.

She started line dancing when she was 18. Line dances seemed to be short and fun, in her aunt's classes. The other students were older women. Class rooms were small. She is excited at the memory of having learnt Red Hot Salsa and Islands in a Stream among the first few sequences. Back then, she reminisces, it was all country and it was fun. Make a mistake, move to the next step, was the general rule. She soon started her own classes.

She had old and young students, the oldest being seventy. She was in awe of their memory for steps and tags, precision and punctuality. She taught social dances and enjoyed the styling and flourishes. Her students were camera shy and refused to appear on social media. I understand that reservation.

At the same time she attended workshops to achieve technique adequacy for competitions, the more she competed, she says, the better she felt about herself. Competitions are a sure stimulus for her to reach her destination, of being the best of herself.

For her students who she trains for Hip Hop and Line Dance competitions, she makes sure that they are not choosing an imaginary path. 'Your aim is not just to win but to better yourself, mentally and physically'. Comparing yourself to others is alright, and you must, if it helps to better yourself, she says. Cutting through the chase, you should have enjoyed your journey when you are done with it.

She wishes she could mix Rachael, Guyton Mundy, Joe Thomson all in one and be an exotic blend of beauty, creativity, style, agility and grace. They are wonderful people and she feels enriched for her interaction with them. Purposeful idolisation.

She too has fan following now, as her dance videos show. These young friends want to be like their instructor in the way she walks, dances and dresses. 'My students are glued to me'. She enjoys the sense of abandon different genres of music from different countries give her. She teaches 'funky' dances that have the sparkle to attract young dancers. To her young competitors who have traveled to Japan, Korea, London and Thailand, she says there will always be someone better than you and you better than them in turns. It depends on how you prepare yourself during this ebb and flow. Teaching internationally is a wish tucked up her sleeve.

Her first recognition and the joy from it, came with her win in 2004. Her teacher and her students had pushed her to participate in 'So You Think You Can Dance, Malaysia', which she had resisted at first because she was concerned about waste of money and time. After failed attempts at choreography because her students felt they could not cope with her style and speed, this was encouraging. The look of visceral dissatisfaction was unmistakable as she spoke of those failures.

She explains how her journey with choreography got a new lease of life with Philip's persuasion. The success with New Thang, which Philip and she wrote, remapped her career in 2015. Then came Clap Snap for which she was invited to the Crystal Boot Awards, a dream realised. She was actually woken up, from a fever, to be rushed to the dance floor as she hurriedly discussed the finer details of Clap Snap with Philip. Decoding music and discussing dance steps with other choreographers has been a most gratifying phase of her dance career.

Visibly excited, she talks about her name in the Spanish Hall of Fame. Disbelief made her pinch herself several times when she saw her name in the top five from 45 nominations. On this forum, she tells me, her big stars Jo and Maddison have been recognised earlier.

Be the best version of yourself

That said, she says she was hard on her students. Hankering after perfection, she was uptight and angry and even walked out of classes when things did not work right. Lessons not regret, she believes, have helped her, because regret immobilises her. From her travels to the USA and UK, and observation of the lovely instructors there, she learnt to be easy and have fun in class.

This young dancer wins my heart with these simple observations.

