

Cover Story
A Passion for Dance
by *Antonia Monokrousos*
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I am from the "Golden Age" of belly dance. I have been dancing professionally for 30 years, first learning under the masterful dancer and teacher Adriana. Since I was a young child, however, I always wanted to be on the Broadway stage. I used to watch the old musicals and I pictured myself dancing up there. But, alas, coming from a strict Greek family, being any kind of entertainer was taboo. I was raised in a Greek neighborhood and even all of my friends had to be Greek. Everything revolved around the church and church functions, and that's the way it was. But I continued dreaming of dance. I used to play "dress-ups" with my little friends, and I was always the one who suggested playing "Nightclub." We would stand in front of the mirror and sing and dance. The mirror was our audience.

When I turned 18, I immersed myself in taking any type of dance possible, starting off with ballet and jazz. I fell in love with ballet and then started dreaming of becoming a ballet dancer. But that was certainly farfetched as most ballet dancers are dancing their first solos at 18. So there I was, dancing my heart out with no place to go. Even though I saw my first belly dancer at the age of 8, I never dreamed of becoming one until a friend of mine suggested it. I was 21 or 22 at the time. Well, I immediately dismissed the possibility of doing it professionally but thought it would be fun to take lessons. And the rest is history. After studying with Adriana for some time, I decided to move to the Washington, D.C. area and start dancing professionally. It was not taken well by my family, but the passion for dance could no longer be suppressed. They eventually accepted it (I met my husband in D.C., and although he was a musician -- not always an approved profession in the Greek way of thinking -- he was Greek, so that made it OK).

I had a wonderful career, dancing throughout the area, and traveling to other states and overseas. Yes, it has been a wonderful ride, but now it's time for someone else to take the spotlight.

My daughter, Christa Marie, has been dancing since the age of four, starting off with ballet and tap. I wanted to give her what I didn't have as a child, hoping that she would love dance as much as I did. She had a dancing mother and a musician father, so even before she could walk we would take her to clubs, gigs and belly dance events. She was surrounded by the dance and the music from the start. I'll never forget one time when we took her to a "Greek Night" when she was about seven years old. She was just sitting there watching until the band started playing a Turkish belly dance number. She got up on the dance floor by herself and started dancing with such abandon that it even surprised me! Everyone just stared in amazement. That was the first time I ever saw her dance like that, and that was just the beginning.

I can recall many times when I would take her with me to shows because she was still quite young and I had no one to watch her. She would watch my bag and patiently wait for me while I finished my show. She would get almost as much attention as I did, and sometimes she would even get a tip just for being there and looking cute.

Once she got into taking her ballet and tap lessons, however, belly dancing was put on the back burner for a while. She got the lead dance roles in her high school musicals. When I would watch her dance on the stage, I didn't wish it was me up there. I found my passion for dance fulfilled *through* her and I'm overwhelmed.

I thought she wasn't that "into" belly dance anymore, but when we went to a Greek or Middle Eastern club or party, the part of her that kept Middle Eastern dance hidden came alive again, and she would dance.

It all took a turnaround when she turned 17 and she came back to the art of belly dance. Now at 18, she dances with me at Amer's Cafe in Baltimore, MD and sometimes even plays the

dumbek for me while I perform. Together we share a love for the dance. I'm very proud of her and I think she is a beautiful dancer with an amazing backbend. I think she has the potential of becoming one of the top dancers in the area if she pursues it. Who knows, maybe one day I will be in the audience holding her bag and patiently waiting for her to finish her show. Maybe I'll even get a tip!



My Mom, the Dancing Spirit

*by Christa Marie Monokrousos
Contributing Journalist*

My mom is one of the most graceful and talented dancers I know. She has been dancing for many, many years. She used to do almost every type of dance, from ballet to flamenco. She eventually started belly dancing and realized that that was her true passion.

She is a true inspiration to me as a dancer. I started dancing when I was four. I started with ballet and tap. I eventually moved on to jazz, modern and pointe. She had always been very supportive as a dancer. She took so much time out of her life to make me happy with dancing. She always took me to my dance classes and rehearsals and also, all of the costumes.....I didn't pay for them! She did. I only hope that she knows how much I appreciate all that she has done, and I'm not just saying that so it sounds good in this article.

I had always loved the art of belly dance, but was never into it as much as my mother. I really started to realize just how much I loved it when I was about 16. It was about two years ago that I began to study belly dance with my mother. She has taught me so much in those two years. Taking lessons with her taught me how belly dance is a lot more than just shaking your hips. There is so much technique to learn with it and so much more.

I really enjoy dancing with my mother in performances, such as the performances we do at Amer's Cafe. I really feel like I am so close to my mother when we are dancing together, because I feel like her dancing spirit is coming out in me. She had always told me that she is happiest when she is dancing. Being a musician, I am happiest when I am playing the piano, violin or guitar. Yet, now that I think about it, dancing with my mother definitely adds to the list of things that make me happiest. The time I spend with my mother puts me in high spirits.

