



Without a song or a dance, what are we?

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By
March 8, 2017



I stopped growing when I was 12 years old. In my early teen years, I towered over my peers, and found myself highly aware of the strange curves on my new body, while other girls in my class were perfectly petite and uniform. My mental maturity had not yet reached the point where I could rationalize the beauty of differences and individuality, so I was quick to despair about being a beastly giantess in a world of fairies.

This anxiety and sadness I felt manifested itself in physical punishment. I steadily minimized my nutritional intake. By this time, while other girls were becoming women, I was turning back into a little girl.

Blessed by a community of caring (and observant) friends and family, I began to receive the help I needed to come back into a body which could support the gift of life. The journey was as rough and bumpy as any old back road, but within a few years, I had reached a point where I was trusted to be an individual again, capable of navigating her own triumphs and downfalls. I never lapsed again into quite as deadly a state as I was once in. But change is a fickle little thing that summons its own host of hardships and trials.

When I started my first year at Luther, I found it difficult to maintain a healthy eating and exercise pattern. As I gained the standard first year weight, I felt my self-confidence dip every time I wore a belly shirt or skipped the salad line at dinner. I thought often but acted seldom on restrictive eating patterns of the past. I found that my body could no longer sustain malnutrition, schoolwork and a social life the same way it once could. Feeling faced with no other choice, a vicious cycle of attempting restriction, bingeing and self-loathing became my norm.

On a whim, I had decided to take Contact Improvisation with Jane Hawley that semester. Though at first the unfamiliar dance and movement style was jarring, it grew to become my own personal therapist. A month into that semester, I had hit a particularly low point of body image and eating patterns. Contact Improvisation became a little angel on my shoulder every Tuesday and Thursday which slowly began to ease my inner torment and fight the devil. This hour and a half of leaping, twirling and rolling about the dance studio made me feel freer than any wild bird, as Jane emphasized that no movement in that studio was the wrong movement.

A core aspect of the class was physically interacting with classmates. After a few weeks, we began to respectfully explore not only what our bodies could do, but what they could do in conjunction with the movements of others. At first I was self-conscious about the way my soft thigh felt against the taut muscles of some partners, or how I was too weak to hold up the weight of even the smallest dancer during a lift. But I soon came to realize that what Contact Improvisation meant to

me was celebrating the diversity of human bodies while exploring their beauty and capabilities in an active, supportive communal environment. Lying on the floor at the beginning of class every day, slowly stretching, folding and pulling at my body, fostered an intense and almost spiritual bond with the sack of skin I had loathed ever since I thought myself a beastly giantess.

By the end of the semester, I started to feel myself again. Contact Improvisation had unleashed a power to unabashedly love the way my body is and how it moves uniquely from every other body in the world, because it is mine, and it is my one given gift of life inside it. Why waste fleeting years harming my unique form? Contact Improvisation urged me to adopt a philosophy on body care which was kind and generous, anything but harmful. Touch, movement, skin and flesh are meant to be celebrated aspects of the human experience of individuals and communities.

I do not know what would have happened to me that first semester of college without Contact Improvisation. Oh, yes, I probably would have come out on top eventually. But on the other hand, I may not have. Jane and her course, I truly believe, gave me months of emotional and physical health I might have otherwise lost. And for that, I will always be thankful to her, to dance, to the healing spirit of art. For without a song or a dance, what are we?



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






[Connie Plaehn](#)

A beautiful story of loving your beautiful self! Thanks for sharing!

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