

Your Autograph Please
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Mary Verdi-Fletcher

Beneath every good dancer, lies an enormous amount of passion. That passion releases when that person begins to dance. The audience can sense the passion, they can see it in every move the dancer makes, and they can feel it from the dancer's heart. When I think of a passionate dancer that inspires me, I think of Mary Verdi-Fletcher. Mary was a dancer who could not contain her passion. Mary Verdi-Fletcher was born with spina bifida. This caused her to be in a wheelchair at an early age. Most people would just decide to give up, but not Mary. She started dancing at the age of three, and she was not about to give up her passion just like that. She believed that she was born to dance. She could not just throw away her passion because of an injury. She was going to be better than that. She took it to the next level. She also cared about other dancers, and went on to begin a company for disabled dancers. She had a heart of solid gold and wanted to do what she loved. So many things about her inspire me as both a dancer and a person.

I look up to Mary because she did not let the fact that she was handicapped stop her from dancing. She loved it way too much to ever quit. I know personally, if I ever injured myself, the hardest thing to go through, would be watching dances instead of dancing myself. Dancers have a tendency to fear injury. When I hear her story and I think to myself, "Well if she could still dance with all of those barriers, what's stopping me from pushing myself harder?" It just makes me realize how lucky I am to be healthy and able to dance. A true dancer dances from the heart, not just the feet. Mary is a prime example of a dancer who dances from the heart. She never took a day for granted; she poured her entire heart out onto the stage each time she danced. I only hope that someday I will acquire that characteristic as well. I know with a passion for dance, I will.

Mary would have given anything to be a normal dancer, but she wasn't. Mary knew there must be other dancers who are handicapped. This led her to start her own dance company for handicapped dancers. She knew how they felt about being handicapped. She believed dancing would help them cope with their disability. The company is called "Dancing Wheels." This amazes me because of her outstanding persistence. She did not just stop with helping herself, but she helped others too. This inspires me to reach for my goals, no matter what the limits might be. Because, if you have a deep enough passion for something, there really are no limits.

Not only has she inspired me, but she has also impacted my life. Now that I have learned that there are people who are disabled and still able to stick with dance, I have more encouragement to stay with dance. I see how these people have a true passion and desire to dance, and I never want to stop. People tend to run away from their problems or just decided to give up altogether. I have been guilty of that before too. But after hearing Mary's story, I find myself never wanting to give up. I also never want to forget that I could lose the ability to dance any day. Something that has taken a lifetime to perfect, could be gone in an instant. This has led me to take each day for granted, never forgetting that this could be my last ballet class. It is both a scary and inspiring thought.

She has also impacted my life in a way that not many people have. She has combined two things that I am passionate about. Personally, I have a special place in my heart for any disabled person. Special Needs Education is something I feel so strongly about. I would love to be able to help them cope with their disabilities. Then, I have an obvious love and passion for the art of dance. I have danced for fourteen years. Every year, my love for it grows stronger. There is always another piece that just tops the previous favorite. Mary brought the two of the most

passionate things in my life together. She combined disabled people with the art of dance. If I could one day do something similar, it would be a dream come true.