

## *Finding my Sweet Spot in Dance and in Life*

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After struggling for several months with a topic for this presentation, I came up with the idea of a “sweet spot”, now, I am not a sports person at all, but I know from my many failed tennis lessons, that the sweet spot is the area of the racket where you are most effective in returning the ball. I was curious whether others had a similar idea about life as a sweet spot. When I goggled the idea, I found there were many, many sites devoted to this notion, some were books for business and personal success and others were personal blogs devoted to day to day attainment or not of that sweet spot. I even found a New York Times section devoted to many people complaining about specific incidents in their lives that kept them from their sweet spots.

However, today, I want to share five lessons I have learned through my dance experiences that have allowed me to find my sweet spot in life.

I imagine the sweet spot to be a space in the center of a continuum with a negative side and a positive side, where we combine our strengths and passions and aim for this zone of satisfaction. Due to unpredictable challenges at work, at home and in the world at large, finding that zone may be somewhat elusive. But definitely possible! I will share five lessons I have learned during my journey in dance and in life.

As a first-year student at Hampton, I wanted to continue taking ballet lessons and found a studio in the City. My parents and I knocked on the door of the studio located in a house – the teacher took one look at my parents, and me and said no she had no space for me. My father said to her – Is it because we are Colored? She closed the door, but not before I could see her students at the ballet barre.

Now that was one incident that for a moment moved me to the negative side of the sweet spot – but – I found that learning dance, choreographing, and finding about my African American heritage at Hampton, brought me back – in ways I never would have experienced – had I been involved in an off-campus ballet program.

Life Lesson 1 – When one door closes, find another – it just might be a better opportunity

As I progressed through my work, family, career, I was very interested in research for dance – after conducting a simple pre-post test for my Master’s Degree, I was very interested in pursuing a research career - or at least help facilitate the research interests of others.

During the time I was working on my Ph.D. I was introduced to Jim Humphrey, a retired professor, who was co-editing books with current U of Maryland Professors in kinesiology on a variety of topics, - I inquired about dance – and at first he was skeptical – just send your papers to one of our existing books – but I persisted, and he became a mentor to me in the production of Dance: Current Selected Research – We recently published volume 9 on – line. Over the last 20+ years many dance scholars have published their research in these volumes.

Life Lesson 2 – Persevere – *If it is meant to be – it may be up to me* - You may have to take the lead in helping others see the value of supporting projects and then you have to be willing to do the work required for the realization of the project.

Later I became very interested in making dance accessible to everyone – not just for those who could afford the classes. Becoming a member, committee chair, officer, and writer for several dance education focused organizations, including NDA, Michigan Dance Council, DC AAHPERD, Eastern District AAHPERD, daCI, and NDEO, has given me the opportunity to create programs and opportunities that because of the organizational support – promote dance as an art form for many students and teachers.

Life Lesson 3 – Get involved in dance/arts organizations that sponsor programming designed to positively impact the lives of many – to be successful advocates for dance, each one of us must step up and say use me as one of the collaborators who together can make a difference.

One additional example

When I began to venture out and work and lead people who were from other disciplines, I needed to speak multiple languages – the language of higher education, K-12 education, also math, English, history, etc. Being an integrator – an interdisciplinary thinker has allowed me to help individuals and groups to gain a better appreciation for the art form in a way that goes beyond liking – or disliking – they can also see a far-reaching connections and benefits

Life Lesson 4 – Become an integral part of a group of policy/decision makers where you can help them see the many dimensions of dance -- at my University I serve as one of the administrators of the Community Engagement Initiative. Because of that affiliation, I was able to invite our Dean, President and Provost to a multidisciplinary dance performance –Because of this experience, one of these higher-level administrators provided financial support for a group of dance students who traveled to Australia in July for the daCi conference.

And a Final life lesson - A salute to Family/Friends/Mentors – the ones who are with us and the ones who are looking down on us.

I am a new Grandmother, and now, I am constantly trying to figure out how I can see Myles more often, and support my daughter and son in law – can I take day here and there? Watching Myles grow and seeing my daughter becoming a mother has been an amazing experience – I definitely go beyond that sweet spot to a sweeter spot during our times together. I so appreciate the support.

my family - My Brother James and Sister-In- Law Veronica, Husband Cordell, Children Collin, Casey and Son-in- Law Rodney, Grand Child Myles and My Mother Susan Young Browne, and those who are no longer with us on earth, but are forever in our hearts and minds.

Life Lesson 5 – Family first

As I look out into the audience, I feel very humbled and know my five lessons may resonate with some and not others and that there are many people here with much more important kernels of wisdom to share – However, I do know that working to maintain a zone of satisfaction with your life as a dance educator and as a person is a challenging path – but a path worth pursuing.

As I close, I want to again express my deep appreciation to the National Dance Education Organization for presenting the 2018 Lifetime Achievement award to me. And to recognize my colleagues, friends and family who made this day possible.