

“DANCE HAS SHAPED MY PERSONALITY, FORCING ME TO BECOME MORE EXPRESSIVE, SOCIABLE, DISCIPLINED AND FIT.”

AVO GUEDEKELIAN, A MEDICAL STUDENT, DANCER, PHOTOGRAPHER AND VIDEOGRAPHER, REMINDS US OF THE VALUE OF BOTH THE SCIENCES AND THE ARTS, AND TO ZOOM IN ON WHAT MAKES US HAPPY AND FEEL FULFILLED



A self-portrait (@photogravoug)

YOU ARE THE FIRST IN YOUR FAMILY TO GO TO UNIVERSITY. WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE YOU HAD TO OVERCOME TO GET TO UNIVERSITY AND HOW DID YOU CONQUER THESE?

I went to school in Lebanon, where university is not as accessible as it is in the United States. The majors you are eligible to choose are contingent on your high school grade average, which makes

the entire process costly and competitive. At that time, I was spending around five hours a day, four to five days a week, at my dance studio, which was affecting my academic studies. I thought university was out of my reach and was trying to find other avenues to find fulfilment.

When I moved to Los Angeles, I not only experienced endless opportunities but was also encouraged to attend university. Though I still loved dance, away from my Lebanese dance academy I had more freedom and decided to give the last two years of high school my best.

High school was administratively complicated for me. My transcripts were not being translated correctly, and I had to make up for a lot of classes I had already taken in Lebanon. I was also thrown into tests such as the SAT college admission test. Without the help of the Boys and Girls Club at my school, I would have not been able to apply to universities on time. It took a room full of volunteers and staff to put me on the right path.

WHEN DID YOU BECOME INTERESTED IN MEDICINE?

I've always liked being in a social work environment, and I was interested in both the arts and the sciences at school. Medicine first caught my attention when I underwent a life-threatening surgical procedure at 8 years old. I felt so helpless and had lost hope in a successful outcome. The team of nurses, physicians and staff kept me positive during and after the surgery. I remember them cheering me on as I started walking again around the unit!

Studying medicine became a serious option when I volunteered at the UCLA Santa Monica Medical Center. I was at university studying biology and I interned as a care extender for three years. I rotated through

emergency medicine, paediatrics, labour and delivery, etc., which was fulfilling to say the least. I realised I had made the right decision to major in biology and complete the premed requirements [courses you need for medical school]. Feeling like I'm positively contributing to the team and patient care is something I can see myself doing for the rest of my career.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO DO WITH YOUR MEDICAL DEGREE?

With my medical degree, I hope to be of service as an emergency physician and, later on, subspecialise in sports medicine. This subspeciality brings together my love for medicine and my background as a dancer and dance choreographer.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN DANCING?

I began taking ballroom/Latin dance classes at the age of 7. Since then, dance has shaped my personality as it forced me to become more expressive, sociable, disciplined and fit.

YOU OFFER ONLINE DANCE TUTORIALS. WHY ARE YOU PASSIONATE ABOUT SHARING YOUR DANCE SKILLS WITH OTHERS?

Yes, I do have a few free dance tutorials on my website and YouTube channel. At some point in my dance journey, I stumbled upon a few choreographers who were pioneering how we learn dance by uploading free tutorials online. I remember learning so much, from breakdancing to hip hop and popping in the comfort of my home. I wanted to do my part in advancing and expanding the accessibility of dance online.

VIDEOGRAPHY AND PHOTOGRAPHY ALSO FEATURE ON YOUR WEBSITE. WHAT SERVICES DO YOU OFFER?

I work as a freelance photographer and videographer in Los Angeles and San Francisco, and offer professional photoshoots, photography for social media and events (such as graduation), and videography services for dancers and performers. I'm very happy with the progress I've been making in this space.

HOW DO YOU MANAGE YOUR TIME BETWEEN STUDYING MEDICINE, DANCING AND TAKING PROFESSIONAL PHOTOS/VIDEOS?

If you don't take control of your time, it'll take control of you! We work or do tasks for a reason, whether it's for money, socialising, physical health, mental health, etc. The more purpose you can attach to a hobby, the more likely you are to satisfy all of your needs while doing something fun.

Dancing, for example, helps me with my physical health and mental health, provides social opportunities, and money if I'm the one teaching a class. I don't have a full-time job because my income comes from photography/videography, and I rarely go out to party with friends since I already see them during dance classes. Additionally, I organise my days with Google calendar to make sure nothing overlaps. When classes begin at med school, I'll have to adapt and balance my needs and wants.

OF YOUR FOUR INTERESTS (MEDICINE, DANCE, PHOTOGRAPHY, VIDEOGRAPHY), WHICH BRINGS YOU THE MOST JOY?

I think of these four interests as a vessel through which human connection is forged. Simply put, seeing a patient get better or having a friend tell me that a photograph I took of them helped them get the job both bring me joy.

ARE YOU AIMING TO WORK IN BOTH MEDICINE AND THE ARTS OR WILL YOU VEER TOWARDS ONE OR THE OTHER OF THESE FIELDS?

Although my work in the arts always comes secondary to my academic career time-wise, I value both of the fields I'm in as much as each other. It will all come down to finding a healthy balance and coming up with proper time management strategies.

WHAT HAS LIFE TAUGHT YOU SO FAR?

Life has taught me that our view of the world is skewed and even backward.

ABOUT AVO

Avo has a BA in biology from California State University, Northridge, USA. He is currently studying medicine at Touro College of Medicine.

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In a micro-world view, you celebrate your grades, degrees, awards and job opportunities, which are metrics by which others value you. Life has taught me to look at the bigger picture. In a macro-world view, you evaluate your happiness and fulfillment no matter what you're doing. That is what matters to you, and we should zoom out once in a while.

FINALLY, WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO WOULD LIKE TO PURSUE CAREERS IN THE SCIENCES AND THE ARTS?

This is the time for you to experiment and explore various careers and interests. Take risks while you're young. Don't force yourself onto a path. If it's meant to happen, it will happen. All it takes is one elective/optional class in high school or college to alter a student's career choice, and even if it doesn't change your initial career goal, you will possess a unique perspective in your field. Steve Jobs sat through a calligraphy class in college, and although he didn't become an artist, his work with Apple benefited and was influenced by his unique perspective in the tech space.