

# Feature Story – Nash Dancer

## “Like Walking into a Temple” Nagaraj Shanmugam

He started by learning the Salsa. His favorite dance is the Samba. His experience with dancing transcends the dances. In June 2006 Nagaraj walked into Nash Dancer at the invitation of a friend. As with a number of Brian's Saturday workshops, it was a bit much for a beginning student. Had he not be invited by another staff member to try a beginner class, his life may have taken a dramatically different turn.

He stuck with Salsa lessons for a year even before he began to learn other dances. Although it took some time, he found that other dancers were always helpful and patient as he learned. Even without the benefit of previous music training, he progressed to the point of taking more lessons, learning more dances, and meeting new people in the process. He even entertained the notion of competing in local dance competitions.

But in 2009 his love for dancing paid off in a most unexpected way. A cancer diagnosis sent him spiraling into an emotional tailspin. Not only would competitions now become secondary, but he also wondered if he could continue to dance at all. His dance friends rallied to him. Throughout his treatments they picked him up and brought him to dance socials and lessons. They encouraged him to keep coming, and dancing helped relieve some of the stress accompanying his treatments.

As an added benefit, dancing helped him not to lose muscle tone during this long period of treatment. Furthermore, in one of those bright moments that sometimes intervene during times of trial, one doctor

administering his chemotherapy happened also to be a dancer. Because of their common interest, Nagaraj engaged in conversation during the session and found that it completely distracted him. He says, “I think it was more than a coincidence that this doctor had the same interest in ballroom dancing. I enjoyed the conversation so much that I mostly forgot I was getting chemotherapy.”

Nagaraj is in remission. Thanks to many friends, including his girlfriend and dance partner, Nurit, he is considering a run at competitive dancing once again. Even today he finds that dancing relieves much of the stress from work. When asked what he likes most about dancing, he said, “It's like walking into a temple. I go right into a relaxed state of mind.”

What advice does he give to new dancers? “Take your time. Have fun!” is his immediate answer. He also says that some people keep from trying it because they might expect to attain a high level of dancing too soon. If they just have fun, all of that takes care of itself in time.

Might your experience attain the same religious feeling of “walking into a temple?” Maybe. Did dancing play a role in healing his cancer? We'll never know. Are there other ways of overcoming the anxiety of cancer treatments besides ballroom dancing? Of course. But don't tell that to Nagaraj.

See Nagaraj dance with his instructor, Adriana Chessa, at Nash Dancer:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TURCMk3-5Zw>

(Yes. He's very good!)