

EDITORIAL SECTION

GETTING TO KNOW STELLA MARIANS



There Must be an Angel

It warms our hearts when we watch scenes of some stranger extending a helping hand or doing some random act of kindness in a movie or soap opera. Could this happen in real life? Do you believe in angels?

Well, in this month's edition, we bring to you not just a heartwarming story but a personal journey taken by one of our teachers, **Ms.RathiMalar Govindarajoo** who teaches dance at our secondary school.

The name Rathimalar is not an uncommon name in the performing arts world, especially in Indian Classical among the other traditional and contemporary dances she does. Let's venture into her story of how an angel, a complete stranger had helped her to ignite her love for performing arts, and helped to cultivate this passion within her.

(1) What inspired you to venture into performing arts?

When I was four years old my mother enrolled me in a classical dance class, to help me with my hyperactiveness. Little did she know, that this very first step ignited a spark for dance within me, without me realizing back then. My dance class did not last long for me, as my restlessness in class was disruptive to the rest of the children. I left the class and later that year my mother enrolled me in the *Bharatanatyam* (Indian Classical dance) while she volunteered at the Temple of Fine Arts center.

Throughout the tutelage of Master Guru Gopal Shetty we were taught the basic steps of Bharatanatyam, and in the later years after the passing of Guru Gopal Shetty his wife Radha Shetty began to expand the horizon for us to perform, and one of the performances that I vividly remember would be a *Kolattam Dance* (Traditional Indian Stick Dance) we did during the Merdeka Celebration along the streets.

As time passed on with these dances, performances, and rehearsals, I always had this thought to myself - is there more than this? Having this unexpressed contemplation at the back of my mind, one day, as mom and I were on our way to TFA (Temple of Fine Arts), my eyes got caught an interesting sight of a group of children dancing in a choreography that was new to me and it intrigued me even more when I saw Datuk Ramli Ibrahim, the founder of Sutra Foundation and the pioneer of Odissi dance in our country was teaching these kids.

In an unexplainable way, my heart was instantaneously drawn toward this art of Odissi dance and I knew within me, I wanted to do something like this. Thereafter, through the intervention of my sister and my teacher Radha Shetty's blessings, I began my journey in acquiring the art of Odissi at Sutra while continuing my *Bharatanatyam* lessons at TFA.

Soon after joining the Odissi classes, Datuk Ramli Ibrahim immediately picked me for the role of Goddess Keramat for the show titled **Pesta**.

"Kindness is lighting someone else's torch with your own inner flame."

-Raktivist-





(2) Can you please share with us some of the challenges and breakthroughs you experienced during your younger days?

I don't come from a wealthy family, my late father was a police officer (ASP) and my mother was a housewife who had to raise four children on her own with just my father's pension alone.

I am not sure, but I must have been dyslexic because when I was a child I never could properly read or write until Master Ramli coached me to speak and narrate for my solo debut (Arengeteram in 1995) - I was only 16 years old! I was an underachiever at school and never did well academically. It was Master Ramli who molded me into the person I am today. Who would ever think I'd end up being a school teacher (I pinch myself every day!). Master Ramli not only molded me into a professional dancer, but he taught me to speak, read, dress, and even learn to carry myself sophisticatedly.

Master Ramli is indeed a blessing because, through him, my mother got the best education for me, her youngest child who was perhaps dyslexic and who was struggling at school as an underachiever. Both my mother and Master Ramli are my pillars of strength to this very day! What would I have done without them?! My mother gave her all and put so much effort into my passion for dance, taking me back and forth to dance classes day and night by public transportation for over a decade during my formative years of dancing. I am just blessed to have her as my mother who continues to give me unconditional love, encouragement, and support. I must appreciate how much she has sacrificed as a single parent after my father's passing.

Moreover, we all know that not every parent in an underprivileged household would allow their child to pursue a career like dancing! On the other hand, I am blessed to have someone like Master Ramli who came into my life and shined the light upon my dreams of becoming a dancer - a world class dancer and artiste! He opened my eyes to a world of dance and art. He showered me with opportunities and taught me to rise above and beyond my dreams! I am forever indebted to him as my mentor for whom I humbly bow to his graceful feet with the utmost respect and gratitude for everything he has done and given me.

Apart from these, one of the most beautiful experiences that I will hold close to my heart would be, he made us all, my batch of dancers mingle amongst the elites and influential people in society, and took us on dance tours all around the world! I have traveled to all parts of South East Asia - Malaysia, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, and other parts of the world; like Australia, Europe, the UK, and the USA. It was the best education one can ever have. I grew up dancing and traveling around the world and when I finished college, I auditioned for a fully British-funded dance company in London - Shobana Jeyasingh Dance UK. There, I was employed full-time as a professional dancer for 5 years before I returned to Malaysia for good in 2006. I then continued to freelance, perform, collaborate, and teach locally and internationally.



3) Your biggest and proudest achievement?

Winning several awards. Especially for the BOH Cameronian Arts Awards 2018 – Awarded for Best Feature Performer in Dance Category, for Marie Claire's August 2011 issue – I was Awarded for Women of Style & Substance 2011, for being in Malaysian Women's Weekly Magazine November Issue – Great Women of Our Time 2011, for also being Awarded for Watsons's extraordinary woman in the Arts & Play for their Women of Watsons campaign in conjunction with International Women's Day 6 March 2013 and recently as Odissi Dance Artiste of International Repute – 13th Guru Debaprasad Prativa Award 2019!

I am also thoroughly proud of getting a full-time permanent job at Stella Maris International School as a teacher and simultaneously being sponsored by Yayasan Tan Sri Dominic Vendargon to pursue my Master of Education at the AeU. Who would ever think that an underachiever like me would have been able to be a professional dancer, a seasoned TEDx speaker, a Dance Judge at Kakiseni, an educator/teacher, and a choreographer who created a niche not only in the Performing Arts but also in the Education industry!



Be a rainbow in someone's cloud

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Rathimalar Govindarajoo