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Intel Commercial Dancer Paige Fraser & Ailey II Dancer Lloyd A. Boyd Didn't Let Scoliosis Stop Their Dreams

By Tiffany Walden



Paige Fraser Photo: Kendrick Wallace

Paige Fraser soars and twirls effortlessly in the latest Intel commercial highlighting the company's new innovations in computer technology. But if you look deeper, technology isn't the only awe-inspiring beauty in the commercial. It's Fraser whom suffers daily from scoliosis – a sideways curvature in the spine.

“I do experience muscle tightness because if your spine is S-curved, one side is compensating for the other, which then pulls on your pelvis, which then makes one leg longer than the other,” Fraser, 25, says while sitting inside a rehearsal studio at Visceral Dance Chicago, a contemporary dance company of which she is a founding member.

“I've been dancing professionally for five years. I've been dancing with the condition for about 12 years... it's a blessing to be able to move and keep up with my coworkers,” she says.

Fraser began dancing at 4 years old. According to her mom, she wouldn't stop singing and moving around, so she put Fraser in ballet.

Yet, while a freshman at The Ailey School in New York, Fraser received the worst news of her young life. “I had a curvature in my spine,” she explains. “The first doctor visit I had, I was told I needed surgery.

The Bronx native thought she would never dance again.

About 7 million people in America are living with scoliosis, an incurable disorder. The primary age for diagnosis is between ages 10 and 15, according to the National Scoliosis Foundation.

Ailey II dancer Lloyd A. Boyd was a sophomore in high school when he found out he had scoliosis. In 2007, an instructor at his Summer Intensive program in Dayton, OH noticed his uneven back. A doctor diagnosed Boyd with severe scoliosis and told him he had two options – wearing a back brace for the rest of his life or surgery.

“I was about 16 at the time, and I knew nothing about back surgery. I knew nothing about scoliosis,” Boyd tells Blackdoctor.org. With the advice of his parents, Boyd underwent spine fusion surgery. Doctors inserted metal rods into his back to hold his misaligned vertebrae together. He couldn't dance for six months, and was home-schooled.

“I didn't want to wear a back brace when I dance or on a regular basis,” he says. “I just felt like the surgery would be long-term and it would help me, and it has.”

Unfortunately, during his senior year in college, a few bumps on Boyd's back turned into a second surgery. The rods in his back somehow became infected. He missed another six months of school and dance, including his senior showcase.

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LLOYD A. BOYD III - Photo: EDUARDO PATINO, NYC



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with Alvin Ailey where we're on a rigorous schedule and we're always dancing, sometimes it gets sore and it gets really hard and stiff. That's when I actually have to rest and I need to chill out."

Fraser didn't choose surgery in high school. Instead, she used a back brace and the help of a chiropractor to adjust and lengthen her spine. "I asked myself, why me?" she says. "I wore a back brace all through high school, which was also tough, because in high school you're growing into your body. You're trying to make new friends. You're trying to fit in. And here I am, wearing a plastic brace."

Recently, Fraser experienced her first back spasm; a symptom of scoliosis.



Paige Fraser Photo: Courtesy Intel

"I woke up at 4 a.m. with shooting pains on the right side of my back," Fraser says. Turns out, one of her ribs were dislocated. She's unsure if that happened because of intense full-day rehearsals or something else. "So I really, at that point, had to just surrender and be safe and be smart on how I approached the rehearsal."

Fraser and Boyd never gave up on their dreams despite their battle with scoliosis, and it's paying off. Fraser is preparing for a season at Chicago's Harris Theatre in April with Visceral. Meanwhile, Boyd will make his New York debut with Ailey II on March 30.

"I'm fortunate to have a career as a dancer and to see from that day I was told I needed surgery to see me dancing now and doing things that my body shouldn't even be able to do," Fraser says. "There are a lot of dancers who have it who have phenomenal successful careers.

I found healing through talking about it."