

Just what is lemonade? Meet Leah Simpson, 20, African American ballerina and owner of Monet School of Ballet in Jacksonville, FL—this is her story:

Young, black, gifted and well on her way to stardom under the mentorship of the American Ballet Theatre's Misty Copeland, Leah Monet was dealt a bountiful basket of the bitter fruit in the form of an injury.

In the winter of 2014 Copeland's young protege suffered the first of what would become several tibial stress factors that quickly and painstakingly shifted the direction of her dream of dancing professionally. "I knew I wanted to remain in the dance field, but now I couldn't go to college for dance—because I couldn't...*dance*." Simpson said during an earlier interview. Leah Monet was the recipient of a full scholarship to The Hartt School in Connecticut, one of the most recognized performing arts programs in the country; this would prove another dream deferred.

Facing some very tough decisions about a future that had just recently seemed so certain, Leah returned to her hometown of Jacksonville Florida. She began attending Jacksonville University, with the gravity of her dashed dreams looming overhead, after opting against a surgery to insert a steel rod into the injury prone tibia. Still driven by her love of dance, she began conducting her own in-depth research on dance careers that would keep her passion for ballet alive without placing any more stress on her body, and that is when she learned, from a former mentor, she could open a dance studio without the dance degree the injury sidetracked her from attaining. Her inner-strength and determination had paid off. Leah found the conduit for her sustained passion; she would open her own ballet studio.

Leah told her mother of her research and her plan to open a studio, right at home, in Jacksonville. While she may not follow Misty's direct path by becoming one of just a handful of African American ballerinas to reach principal status, Monet's School of Ballet is the only black-owned and operated dance studio in Jacksonville, FL.

Zareya White, friend, colleague, and fellow ballerina met a similar fate as Leah's when tibial tendonitis sidelined her professional dance hopes. She has since been hired by Ms. Simpson as teaching staff at Monet School of Ballet, and says, "When I was given the opportunity to teach at Monet School of Ballet, I was very excited. I love kids and dance more than anything. When I was first told [of my injuries]...I wasn't mad or or upset, I just knew I had to do something, and I did. I set a goal for myself to find a studio with young children and share my talent. As young adults we have to learn not to give up, but to share our God-given talents [with] the next generation. Give them an opportunity to experience something amazing!" The two shared the stage together as young students of Florida's LaVilla School of the Arts, and they are now sharing their knowledge, passion, and experience for dance with others.

With just a few more weeks before the school's second annual dance recital, enrollment for their first three-week summer intensive program is underway, Ms. Simpson says the experience thus far has been nothing short of, "breathtaking!"

Two young women—against the odds—empowering themselves, each other, and others; it's hard to find a sweeter spot in a bountiful basket of bitter fruit: lemonade.