When I was 6, my dad got me a monkey bar and he’d ask me to stretch for ten minutes daily. It was his solution to an ostensibly perennial stagnation of my height. At first, I detested it- I’d rather be buried under my agglomerate of dinosaur books. I mean, who wouldn’t? Nevertheless, imagination was my emancipator and I’d pretend that I was dancing in front of an awestruck assemblage. The imaginary track reverberating was ‘I have a dream’ by Abba, of course. I’d employ the bar as a point d’appui in my piece, twirl and spin, concocting the next step to my sequence as I oscillated about the monkey bar. From abhorring the monkey bar, it transmuted to become the acme of my day, an hour of aerial acrobatics slipping under the masquerade of ten minutes.

Despite progressively mastering this self-conjured dance style, my audience remained forever fictitious as a result of my diffidence. I was beleaguered with insecurities- I wouldn’t vociferate my engrossment with Quantum Theory, I wouldn’t articulate my affinity for Math and I wouldn’t glamorize my monkey bar in public. I pompously surmised that my peers wouldn’t understand or be sardonic, hence, I abstained from sharing my interests, always feeling like I was off at a tangent.

As I grew older, my feet now touched the ground for I was almost the height and weight of an adult. Nevertheless, succoured by the resilience of my monkey bar, I continued producing peculiar concatenations, now to different music alongside Abba. I never really danced outside the confines of my room, or so was true until one acutely aggrandized, retrospectively romanticized ball after an MUN conference. I remember sipping cola on a cocktail table as the music played. I remember my feet, restrained with consternation, awkwardly twitching to the rhythm- but then they played Abba. As they dialed back the clock, I too was taken into the realm of my monkey bar reveries and I began dancing, euphoric, for Abba and all the songs that followed.

I was no Fred Astaire but my peers were astonished, and for the first time there was a sense of appreciation and a sharing of interests that was tangible. This divulged a jamboree of social interactions and on the bus ride back home, I remember impassionedly discussing my interests while agreeing to explore some of theirs’. I discovered new hobbies and although, the monkey bar to me remains a cathartic and personal story, I no longer experience alienation.

That night, I realized that I had sequestered myself before that ball, repudiated new things and refused to share my opinions with my peers. That night, I discerned that the problem was never them, it was me and my conceited assumption whereby I thought they wouldn’t understand.

Dancing and the monkey bar made me realize that daydreaming was okay and that attempting something that seems experimental, ambitious or foreboding can yield results. That ball, I conquered a leviathan, and since then I have attempted several ambitious projects from partaking in Natural Language Processing research to organizing a TEDx to forecasting stock price movements using Geometric Brownian Motion and Fourier Transformations in my Mathematics Extended Essay- all of them, a rendezvous between my reveries and reality. Now, when I look in the mirror and ask myself ‘Who am I?’, I see that I am someone who is no longer confined, I am someone who is open to new experiences and I am someone who is comfortable in my own skin- all things that I couldn’t say about myself earlier.

Even today, I have my monkey bar, still nestled across the opening to my room, beckoning, every once in a while, a tryst to create sequences amongst the ecstatic commotion of my quotidian activities. For me, the monkey bar and dancing is something that empowered me to dream, create and grow- figuratively and literally.