



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LIZA DALYOT

**LIKE MINDS AND BODIES:** Dalyot, second from right, grins for the camera with a group of Israeli dancers she befriended on a 2006 cruise.

# DANCING WITH DALYOT

*Liza Dalyot is San Diego's Jewish Dancing Queen*

Liza Dalyot has lots of missions in life, and just as many passions. Inspiring people. Continually being inspired. Dancing. Teaching. Learning. Helping those less fortunate. Boosting their confidence and self-esteem.

She's also a self-proclaimed seeker in life. It's a good thing, because her search for the perfect career was anything but effortless. Discovering what truly made her happy was more like solving a process-of-elimination logic puzzle, each step providing clues that eliminated other possibilities.

Three years ago, Dalyot finally found a way to weave all her pursuits and passions into her being. Dalyot formed her own business, Dance With Liza, in which she gives private social dance lessons to clients in their own homes.

Her decision to establish her own dance business was never something Dalyot had planned, though her love of dance had always been unquestionable. Practically from the time she could walk, Dalyot danced. Her father, a professional Israeli folk-dance instructor, introduced her at a young age when she began attending

**Sometimes when you're across the world in the middle of nowhere on the ocean, you have some serious revelations.**

his dance classes.

"My childhood was filled with Israeli culture, in particular, Israeli dance and music," said Dalyot, who was raised in a Sephardic Jewish household. "He instilled in us the importance of Jewish culture, especially through dance and music. Even on holidays, it wasn't just saying the prayer, it was break out the flute, start dancing, stuff like that."

In junior high school, Dalyot was a member of the drill team, and in college she experimented with tap and ballet and was in

## Dalyot said she wants to offer the same supportive service to her clients that the Jewish community has always offered her.

modern and theater dance performances. She also was in Israeli dance performance troupes in high school and college and was the queen of the Cottage of Israel in Balboa Park. Mostly, though, she viewed dance as a dearly loved hobby, but nothing she could make a career of. Instead, she got a bachelor's degree in social sciences from San Diego State University.

"I went to college with the intention of working with kids either as a teacher or in recreational programs, like camps," she said. "I tried both and realized my true love was teaching adults because it provided the intellectual stimulation I love. I will always love children, but I have found my niche with teaching adults."

Dalyot had narrowed the field for her career path. She knew she loved to teach, but she still felt she was stifling her free-spirited side.

"I was a late bloomer when it came to figuring out a career," she said. "My first job out of college was to be a disc jockey, because I knew I loved music and dance. But there was something really big missing, which was that I was up there spinning the music, and I was so antsy because I wanted to be out on the dance floor."

An ad turned up about a year later, in 2002, seeking a ballroom dance instructor, no experience necessary — just the ability to teach — at Mac Vitties Dance Studio in San Diego. Dalyot responded, and within minutes of demonstrating her dance skills, manager Kenneth Stevens hired her on the spot. It was a turning point.

"That job changed my life," she said. "Mr. Stevens was the most influential person in my life besides my parents because he didn't just teach me how to dance or to be a dance teacher, but he was a mentor to me and he built my confidence. He really just made me believe in myself."

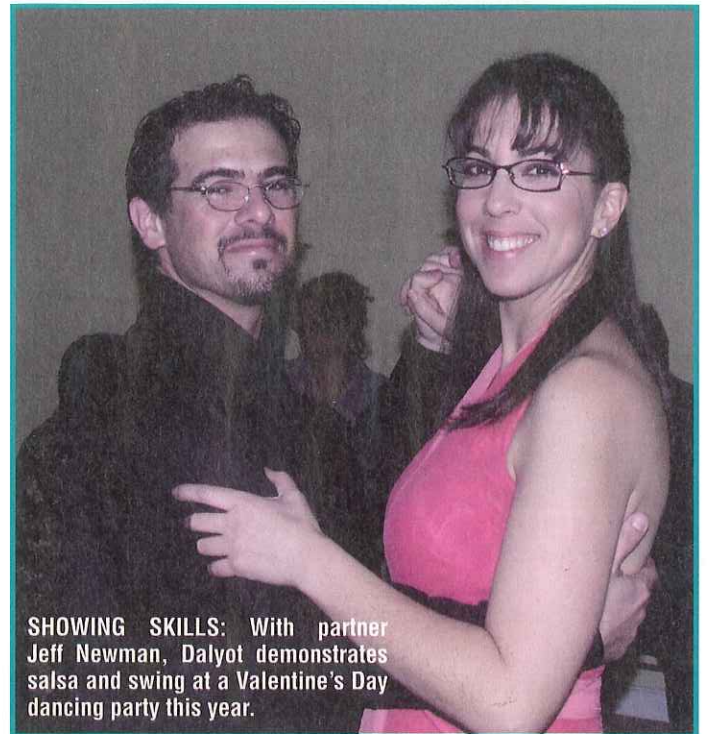
Dalyot's job at Mac Vitties provided her with the confidence she needed to evolve from an amateur folk dancer to a confident professional.

"From the very first minute I walked into the studio, he switched me from just being a dancer to being a professional," she said. "I found my niche because it blended the social aspect of folk dancing with the more sophisticated and artistic ballroom, swing and Latin styles."

Dalyot remained at Mac Vitties for two-and-a-half years before visiting relatives in Israel, where she had lived for a few years as a child. Upon her return to San Diego, Dalyot had an epiphany — or several of them — that told her she needed to leave the studio.

"I was progressively getting more and more detached from the Jewish community," she said, "but I just knew I still wanted to stay connected to my Jewish roots."

Dalyot said she was encouraged at the dance studio to break away from her Jewish past.



**SHOWING SKILLS:** With partner Jeff Newman, Dalyot demonstrates salsa and swing at a Valentine's Day dancing party this year.

"I really felt like, 'Oh, maybe I need to break away from Judaism and I'll be happy,' but that's really who I am. It's never going to change." Dalyot also said she had taught for so long and so diligently that dancing become more work than fun.

"I kind of needed to find myself," she said. "I had literally devoted my life to teaching dance in that studio. I had gotten so serious about dance that I had forgotten how fun it was. And so I kind of slowly but surely started going out dancing for fun again and reminding myself how it should be."

Dalyot knew, at that point, that her dance career had come to a standstill.

"I was in a plateau. I was earning only 30 percent of what he charged, and I knew I needed to do something. I think I kind of always knew I wanted to work for myself, but I didn't think I could do it because when you work in a dance studio, they make you think you can't."

Dalyot began offering a few private dance lessons, including her sister and her sister's fiancé for their wedding. For full-time work, she decided to explore teaching English at a private language school.

A year into that job, she returned to Israel for another visit, this time taking a cruise from Haifa, Israel, to Alanya, Turkey, during which she met a group of Israeli folk dancers aboard to perform for passengers.

"They totally inspired me," she said. "It just sort of reminded me how much I loved dancing and performing and music. Sometimes when you're across the world in the middle of nowhere on the ocean, you have some serious revelations."

Dalyot's main revelation was that she liked teaching dance much more than teaching English. Upon her return to the United States, she left her job for dance.



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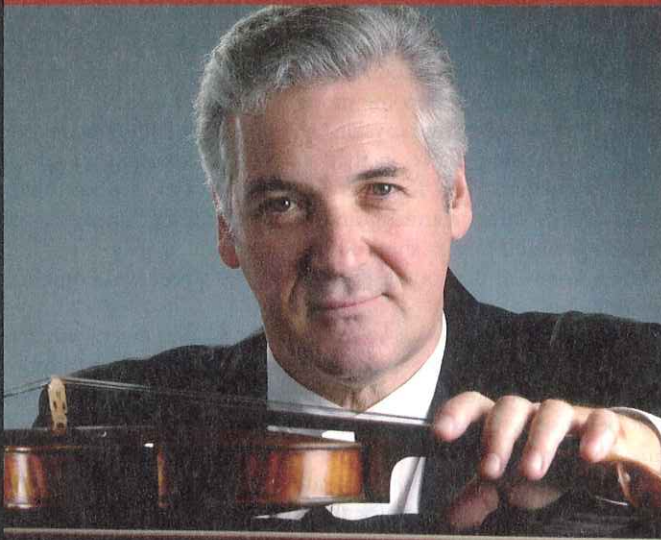
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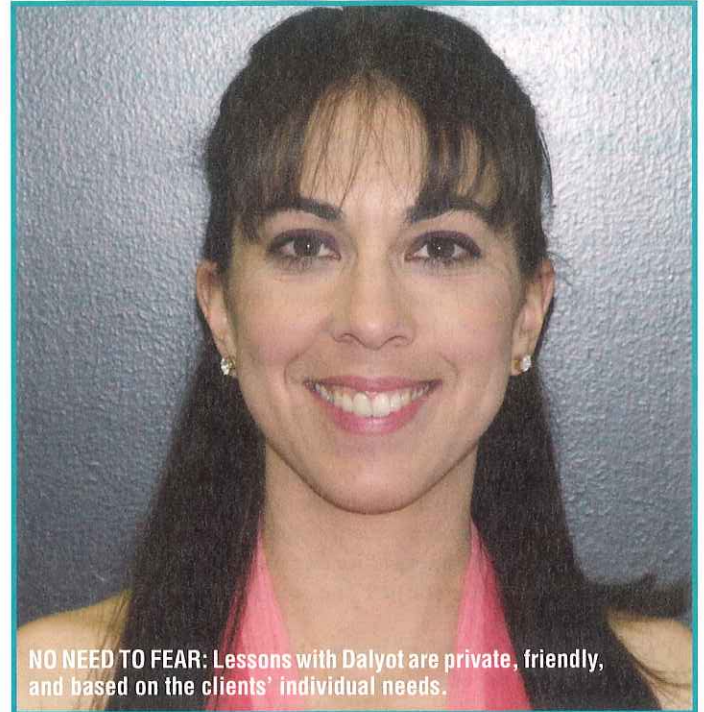
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**NO NEED TO FEAR:** Lessons with Dalyot are private, friendly, and based on the clients' individual needs.

"I went to at least three or four different studios at least, thinking, 'Well, maybe I should start teaching again at a studio,' but none of them felt right. Why? It turns out I just needed to do it on my own."

"Through word of mouth, a couple that I've known for years came up to me and said, 'Hey Liza, I'd like you to teach us how to dance.' And that restored my faith that I could do it on my own. So I taught them how to dance in the comfort of their own home. And I realized, 'Oh my gosh, I could totally make a business out of this.'"

Dalyot decided she'd make herself a mobile dance instructor, though she also will work from a studio at a client's request.

"I bring the dance studio to people by coming to their house, making it really convenient for them," she said. "Sometimes people don't have the time or don't have the desire to drive all the way to a studio, or sometimes people might be intimidated, especially if they have two left feet."

Being mobile, she said, suits her personality perfectly.

"I like it because I get to come to the peoples' houses and see how they live and really mingle with them and their family and their kids. I get to be more down to earth, more genuine with the people, whereas I feel like in the studio, you kind of have to put on airs a little bit."

In 2007, Dalyot decided to get serious about her dance business and make it official. She took business entrepreneurship classes and gets business coaching in addition to continually keeping up to speed by going out and dancing socially with other accomplished dancers.

She's also taken some of her business practices from her mentors

in the Jewish community, including Dr. Richard Stein of San Diego.

"What they do is they have their rates, but they basically never turn anyone away," she said. "It's like they do a mitzvah. I need to make a living, and I have certain rates, and hopefully people pay those, but I also want to help people in need or people less fortunate."

Dalyot said she wants to offer the same supportive service to her clients that the Jewish community has always offered her.

"I feel like in the Jewish community, there's this whole idea of helping those less fortunate," she said. "For example, Jewish Family Service. I can remember a time when I used their services when I was really down and out and they let me pay whatever I could afford, and I'm forever grateful. It's the same idea."

Dalyot also helps her students in other ways.

"I want to give people the tools to have self sufficiency when it comes to dance, to be able to go out there and do it on their own and have fun," she said. "I also like what it does for relationships between spouses. It helps them build respect, admiration and patience for each other. I think that's important too. I'd always thought of being a counselor, but I just have too much energy to sit still in a chair listening to people's problems, but a dance teacher is kind of like a therapist in a sense."

One of her most epitomic cases of dance therapy — and one of her favorite students — was a 17-year-old boy she taught when she worked at Mac Vitties. During their first meeting, he was shy and socially awkward, but he was creative and artistic, she said.

A year and a half later, by the end of their lessons, he had completely transformed. A few years later, on a return visit to the studio, Dalyot saw a new instructor — the man who had once been her awkward and shy teenage student. She said she saw a bit of her childhood self in his struggle and transformation through dance.

"When I was young, I moved around a lot and I was always searching and trying to fit in because I didn't have friends," she said. "What really helped me was dancing because when I was young, I lacked some social skills, but when I was on the dance floor, it's like all that was set aside and I was just completely comfortable. To this day, I'm a lot more confident, and I really just like to be able to give that to others."

Finally, after years of searching, Dalyot had discovered what she loves most and has been fortunate enough to make a career of it.

"I wouldn't have it any other way," she said. "Life is really too short to be miserable to be doing something you hate. I would rather be dirt poor and doing something I like. Because what is money anyway? But I'm not going to be dirt poor, because what do they say? Do what you love and money will follow."

Maybe someday, she said, she will have her own dance studio. But no matter where she's teaching, the power of dance to uplift and encourage her students and herself keeps her going. "To put it simply," she said, "dancing makes me smile." ☆

• To learn more about Liza Dalyot, contact Dance With Liza PO Box 19284 San Diego, CA 92159 (619) 861-6260 [www.dancewithliza.com](http://www.dancewithliza.com)



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