

2016 Tribute to My Teacher Award



Pam Simpson and Brittney Erickson

Pam is a friend, a mentor, a role model, a colleague, a giver, a listener, a motivator and SO much more than just a studio owner. Forte Arts Center has become more than just the dance studio down the street thanks to her drive, passion and commitment to bettering our community. In the past 24 years, she has gone from a one room dance studio to a mutli-room fine arts facility. She is proof that great things come to those who work hard and never give up. Our mission statement not only explains our core mission as a business, but Pam's mission as a director and person. "At Forte Arts Center, we offer complete instruction programs in the arts for students of all ages and abilities. Our integrity, value

and dedication to excellence is the foundation of all we do. The positive development of mind, body and spirit in all our students, recreational to pre-professional is our focus. Our instructors go beyond technique and poise to develop important life skills such as confidence, respect, passion, determination, trust, friendship and perseverance. At every level of our programs, students are being built up from the inside out through the magic and love of the arts."

At the young age of 46, my grandmother-Pam's mom-was diagnosed with breast cancer. Grandma was our rock. She was our driving force. She was the light in every situation. Pam is proactive and determined...always ahead of the game. She researched and found the BRCA1 cancer screening test and pressed her doctors to test her ASAP. This test showed that, because of mutations, she had not only the 87 percent chance of breast cancer, but also a 54 percent chance of ovarian cancer, and a less than 50 percent chance of colon cancer. This wasn't going to stop her. I will never forget the conversation I had with Pam after that doctor's visit. After getting her results, she asked the doctor if they could just do the surgery that day. As quoted from an article in our area newspaper, "I watched my mom die and fight for six years, I didn't want to spend my time fighting, versus living life doing what I want and need to do." The surgeries began in November and lasted until January. Throughout this process, Pam kept the journey to herself and her family. She wasn't hiding anything from anyone, but rather...didn't see the need for everyone to worry. If you know Pam, there's no truer words.

Something clicked with her during her recovery and she decided to share her story. "One reason I wanted to share my story was to teach and inspire my students and families," Simpson said. "I want them to see that even if you are faced with a difficult situation, a health issue or illness, life will go on and things will be OK. Your attitude in the situation makes a big difference. I often say, 'Sometimes you need to make a little lemonade.'" She told us that even if sharing her story could help one person, it was worth it. One of the first outings we made was to Tribute in Davenport. She was advised not to go but there was no stopping her. She told us that the kids needed to see she was okay and promised to take it easy. One of our favorite things about going to Tribute in Davenport is that each of the studios that attend are like family to us. We had a weekend full of helping hands, support, love and encouragement.

We have all learned so much from Pam's journey. She has shown us all that giving up is never an option. She has had multiple women reach out to her with questions, advice, support and more. Darin stated it perfectly by saying a dance teacher does more than teach an art, they are mentors and leaders and have a huge impact on others in many ways. Pam has helped build confidence, poise, drive and determination into the hearts and minds of hundreds of students through the years. She is humble. She is driven. She is a believer in the good in all things. She is my aunt, my friend, my boss, my mentor and so much more than just a great dance teacher.

Brittney Erickson