

2015 Tribute to My Teacher Award



Kelly Marie Gordon and her grandmother Grace Wakefield

I have met so many dance teachers that truly have inspired me throughout my life! There is one who has motivated, encouraged and inspired me more than all the others! Grace Wakefield, my grandma, is my true inspiration. Her passion is dance. She has undoubtedly been the most influential person in my life as I have spent more time in her presence than with any other human on the planet. She started out as a USO dancer and met my grandpa, Richard, a merchant marine when she was 15. She has been faithful to him her entire life, although he went to be with the Lord 14.5 years ago. She opened a dance studio in her home and taught so many dancers for many decades. She has served God by teaching dance therapy in hospitals. She then gave the studio away to one of her dance teachers while serving for 19 years as chairman of Dance Educators of America, DEA, as well as holding positions of Regional Director, Executive Director, President and serving on the Board of Directors. She has choreographed many musicals including Pajama Game, South Pacific, Wizard of Oz, Bye Bye Birdie, Oklahoma, Guys and Dolls, Fiorello, Wish You Were Here, My Fair Lady

and so many others. Her students have become famous dancing in various shows, appearing on television, and becoming dance teachers and she continues to make the dreams of dancers come true by helping them to get work and become stars. She met Gary at DEA and they began Starpower, one of the worldwide leaders in dance competitions almost 3 decades ago. They have now created 4 additional dance competitions as well as dance pageants, championships, and workshops to keep dancers learning and working towards their hearts desires to share their passions with others. She has served each company whole heartedly and with more integrity and hard work than anyone I ever witnessed. She is a woman of integrity like no one I have ever met. She is honest, faithful, full of love, kind and hilarious. She still travels to all of the Nationals back to back for 8 weeks straight in the summer, works many regional competitions and continues to book venues for all of the shows! She works harder than any person I have ever met. The amount of people she has helped get jobs in the dance industry would be too time consuming and impossible to even try counting. She blesses everyone she meets and always tries to make them smile and be happy.

She has inspired me to live a righteous life and has inspired me to be a godly woman. I am so thankful to have her in my life and so grateful that God chose to bless me by giving me to her. She has loved me since I was in the womb. I began dancing at her dance studio at 1 and a half years old and continued for 14 years. My first work experience was selling t-shirts for Dance Educators of America (DEA) when I was 8 years old at the Waldorf Astoria while my grandma ran the show! She loved my gramps whole heartedly and has definitely inspired a faith based love for God and for my future spouse by the way she remained faithful to one man her entire life and continued to remain faithful these past 14 years even after he went to be with the Lord. There are very few women like her. Whether it be dancing at the USO for the troops (where she met my grandpa, Richard, a merchant marine), choreographing shows, or traveling the world with the talent competitions helping dancers express their talents and finding them work and encouraging them, she did it all with every ounce of her being. It has been my honor and privilege to work with and be in the presence of such an amazing and inspiring woman. The Lord totally had me in mind when He made her and placed me in her life. Very few people are more dedicated, loyal and faithful than this woman. Very few people care about others the way she does. Being able to talk to her almost every day of my life, work with her since I was a child and spend the majority of my life in her presence has been such a blessing to me and is only surpassed by my walk and journey in The Lord's presence. I am thankful every day for this woman and I am blessed to be a part of her life. I love her with my whole heart and there really aren't adequate words to express my thanks and my gratitude for all she has done for me. I'm never really good at saying how I feel about people. I'm more of a doer. And all I can do is continue to follow in her footsteps and serve the staff with my whole heart expressing my thankfulness for all she has created in this world and the beauty she has brought to the lives of every child who dances on those stages. While kids are out there doing all sorts of crazy things, she created a family friendly environment where they could work toward their dreams and dance their hearts out for their families and friends. Grace is truly amazing and I adore her.

As a tribute to Grace and my grandfather, Richard, I founded Rich in Grace Ministries to honor God and serve the least of these in the United States and all over the world. We have been feeding the homeless and needy families in North Carolina for over 4 years, provided 50 businesses for 50 widows in need of food in Uganda this year, provided education for students in Africa, provided cars for homeless men and pastors, provided a home for a widow this Christmas in Kenya and continue to do all that the Lord leads us to so that we may bless those who truly need it. Our Facebook page is www.facebook.com/RichInGraceMinistries and our website is www.richingraceministries.org.... Kelly Marie Gordon