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Elizabeth Lisa:

LIVING A LIFE OF INFLUENCE

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Elizabeth Lisa: **LIVING A LIFE OF INFLUENCE**

BY BECKIE EVANS, MOUNTAIN NEIGHBOUR | PHOTOS BY DINA YOUNG PHOTOGRAPHY AND SUBMITTED BY MISS ELIZABETH

In the classic Christmas film *It's a Wonderful Life*, George Bailey is given an extraordinary gift: the chance to see what life would have been like without him. As he walks through a world without his influence, George is struck by the bleakness surrounding the people he loves. Without him, their lives lack the warmth, joy, and direction he's always known. Clarence, his guardian angel, delivers the lesson George is meant to learn: "Strange, isn't it? Each man's life touches so many other lives. When he isn't around, he leaves an awful hole, right?"

That timeless message resonates in all corners of life, including dance studios where teachers, like Miss Elizabeth, make a lasting impact on their students—sometimes without even realizing it. Miss Elizabeth's journey as a dancer and teacher illustrates how one life can profoundly shape another, and it serves as a reminder of the ripple effect we all have.

Miss Elizabeth started ballet before her fourth birthday, demonstrating a passion for dance from an early age. By 17, she had completed her Royal Academy of Dance Advanced Ballet Examination and danced professionally with the National Theatre and Dance in Singapore. Her journey included a year-long apprenticeship followed by five years of full-time dancing and four years of part-time work. But behind her achievements is a story of influence, growth and the power of role models.

As a young dancer, Miss Elizabeth had many role models, but one, in particular, stood out. When she was just 10 years old, she was selected to be part of an elite group of performers, a significant accomplishment as she was the youngest member. Another dancer in the group was seven or eight years older than her—a stunning prima ballerina. Miss Elizabeth admired this older dancer, not just for her flawless technique, but for the subtle leadership and influence she had over her.

Looking back, Miss Elizabeth reflects on how that dancer, rather than her teacher, had the greatest impact on her development. The teacher provided instruction and corrections, but the older dancer led by example. Miss Elizabeth noticed that when the teacher gave the older dancer compliments, it was a clue—if she wanted similar praise, she would need to imitate the

grace, poise, and skill of that older dancer. This taught her early on that influence doesn't always come from authority figures; it often comes from peers. The experience left her with a deep understanding of how one life can shape another.

As she grew in her dancing career, Miss Elizabeth experienced another pivotal moment when she was 14. Her teacher selected five students for rigorous, focused training over several years. In the end, two were chosen to become dance teachers: the oldest student and the youngest—Miss Elizabeth. Despite her youth, she had earned a position of influence, teaching others even before she had fully mastered the art herself. This experience underscored for her that influence is not dependent on age or seniority. Instead, it's about commitment, passion, and the ability to lead by example.

Miss Elizabeth's dedication to her new role as a teacher was evident from the start. One day after school, running late for class, she flagged down a boy on a motorcycle and told him, "Do whatever it takes to get me to the studio on time!" She made it to her class, demonstrating her determination and responsibility, qualities that would define her career as a teacher.

By the time she was 17, Miss Elizabeth had become a trusted figure in her community. Her neighbor across the street asked her for help teaching her daughters to dance and even offered to find more students for her. That small, neighborhood ballet class started with 12 kids, the oldest only three years younger than



SHOUTOUT FROM MISS ELIZABETH

For over 2 years now, I've noticed that more students found AzestA Ballet Studio from Mountain Neighbours. I'm beyond grateful to Dana and her wonderful staff. Thank you from the deep of my heart for everything you do to help AzestA Ballet Studio bloom and blossom!
- Miss Elizabeth

Miss Elizabeth herself. The group went on to perform in local churches during Christmas events, spreading joy and holiday spirit through dance.

From this experience, Miss Elizabeth learned a powerful lesson: while everyone exercises influence, the size and strength of that influence depend on effort and discipline. No one leads well without paying the price of hard work. As she pushed herself to grow and learn, her influence grew, too, expanding beyond the dance studio and into the community.

This influence has led Miss Elizabeth to open Azesta Ballet Studio, a place where dancers of all ages—from 3 to 83—come together as a family. The atmosphere is one of mutual respect and collaboration, and the more experienced dancers often learn from the younger students and vice versa.

This unique dynamic fosters camaraderie and humility, as everyone works together to achieve their best. Having seen the impact that relationships have in the community, she is also a proud *Mountain Neighbours* sponsor.

Beyond her work at the studio, Miss Elizabeth is a proud mother of two sons. Her eldest, Ivan Aditya, is a pathologist at BC Cancer in Vancouver, while her younger son, Kevin Adhika, works as a psychologist with the Nanaimo RCMP Major Case Management. Kevin is married to Jennifer, and together they have a two-and-a-half-year-old daughter, Lily. Miss Elizabeth cherishes her role as "Oma," often travelling to spend time with her granddaughter.

If Miss Elizabeth was the lost George Bailey in *It's a Wonderful Life*, the impact on our community would be significant. And what



would her dancers' lives be like without her careful leading? Miss Elizabeth sees the ripple effects of her influence every day.

Miss Elizabeth reflects on how ballet shapes both the mind and body. The discipline, focus, and grace instilled in her students will stay with them long after their final performance. Ballet, much like life, is about more than just technique; it's about perseverance, dedication, and the influence one person can have on another.

Miss Elizabeth has the final word, "I would love to invite *Mountain Neighbours* readers to come to *The Nutcracker*, a delightful Christmas tradition brought to the community by Azesta Ballet Studio." The upcoming performance of *The Nutcracker* is on Saturday, December 21 at 1:00 and 6:00 pm at the Abby Arts Centre.

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