

Anzia Memorial Service  
May 10, 2009

Remarks by: Keith Arsenault

Good afternoon friends,

And thank you for being here.

It's fitting and proper that we're here today in the David Falk Theatre. Although mom did performances in every major venue in the bay area, none hosted as many productions as this theatre.

I'd like to thank my dad, for all his love and for his far too often unsung hard work and devotion over the years.

When I was younger I watched him on this stage in "Oklahoma!", "South Pacific" and on very short notice as Caesar in "Julius Caesar".

The first shows I ever directed were on this stage. Just as you heard dad talk about Provincetown Playhouse earlier, Falk Theatre holds a very special place in our family history.

It's also fitting that as we sit here today, in her garden, vigorously blooming is an orchid, it's appropriately named "dancing lady."

Bobbie Anne Pontius, yes, it's the orchid you gave her.

I'd like to take a moment now to read a note from my cousin Wendie, the closest thing I have to a sister. Some of you old timers will remember her, those of you who came by the house in the days after mom's passing met her then.

She writes:

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Probably most everyone here knows her as "Anzia" or "Miss Anzia", but to me she is my Aunt Anzia and I love her like my second "mom". When I look back at the most influential people in my life, she is up there in the top three.

Although she tried, I wasn't born to dance, but this didn't mean that I wasn't able to learn from and be inspired by all of her many other talents. I remember the house and studio on Gandy Blvd. She taught art classes there and of course, I was a willing student. I had to be pretty young then and to me I seemed light years younger than the other students. She taught us all about perspective,

proportion and how to "see" in 3D. My mom saved all those sketches and after many years she showed me this portfolio of things I had done over the years. I was amazed at how good my drawings were and I have Aunt Anzia's patient teaching to thank for it. She always set very high standards for her students regardless of what the medium might be, yet she encouraged me to just jump right into to any art form and experiment without fear of failure. This love of experimentation led me into math and science, but I never steered away from the arts.

Words cannot express how much I learned from her and how much she means to me. She always willingly and lovingly shared all of her talents with everyone she brought into her fold. Her presence will be sorely missed but I know that her spirit will soar in the hearts and minds of everyone here at this tribute to her life as well as in all of us spread out around the world whose souls she touched but cannot be here to share the tears and the joy.

Thank God I had my Aunt Anzia to help make me the person I am today.

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That's from my cousin, Wendie Smith, who wishes she could be here today. She now lives in Edisto Island, South Carolina and could not be here today.

It's hard for me to say "mom" in this theatre.

She and I worked together so many years on productions in this space and tried (not always successfully) to keep it on a purely professional basis. When I stepped into this building she was "Miss Anzia" to me just like everyone else. "Miss Anzia," not "mom."

But forgive me. From here on out it's going to be "mom" today.

It's two months ago today that we lost her.

Susan, Robin, my cousin Wendie, and I were all there at her side.

I assure you, she wasn't ready to go. Even in the ICU she assured me that she only wanted to get better and get home and get back to work.

There were so many things that she still wanted to accomplish, so many projects that were left unfinished on her desk and sewing table. There are lists of things that she intended to do.

She wasn't finished.

She was tireless in her pursuits, although in recent years she was certainly weak of body, but she was never weak in heart or spirit.

She loved dance of all kinds, no ballet snob was she, she loved music, she loved painting, sculpture, photography, theatre, nature, and the outdoors.

She was all inclusive.

She opened her arms she opened her studio, she opened her home to everyone. No one was ever turned away. If you had a need be it artistic, professional or personal, she was there for you.

She was all inclusive.

She encouraged everyone to reach out for every educational experience they could get to expand their knowledge and understanding. She encouraged dancers to study elsewhere and always welcomed them back. She escorted students to New York City for summer study and of course to regional ballet festivals.

She never thought she was the "be all / end all" but knew that when you left her care you would be prepared for that next step.

She believed in hard work, in putting in what ever hours were needed to accomplish the task at hand, the euphemism "good enough for regional ballet" was not in her vocabulary.

There was much to learn from her, in how she created, how she effortlessly managed, how she organized and how she produced. Most of the ground work for what I know about theatre and the arts didn't come from formal study. I assure you it came from her.

She never pushed herself to the foreground. Self promotion was the one thing she didn't know and either didn't care for or just didn't understand.

She was never "in it for the money", and found it hard to understand sometimes how others were. We've all heard the rumors of mom and dad personally making the Tampa Ballet payroll when funds weren't available. They're true, and of all those involved with they were certainly the least financially able to afford it.

There are so many lessons to be learned from her life. Many that you have heard about from others here today:

Focus

Hard work

Generosity

Love

And to never, ever, ever give up.

There is also continuity. So many of you here today that studied with her continue her work and legacy as dance teachers and advocates. She lives on in you

As I said before, mom wasn't ready to go. There was much still on her plate.

To that end and to help continue her work today we are establishing what we are calling the Anzia Fund.

A scholarship and grant fund for young, Tampa Bay area, pre-professional, dancers, musical theatre performers and actors.

Those that need that boost to get the extra training they need, be it a summer in NYC, workshops, travel, tuition.

Grant amounts will be based on the needs of the individual and the availability of funds.

It's my hope that we can create events through out the year that will continue to generate funds for this account. We don't want to see it be a "one and done" situation. From whatever we raise we will never grant more than 60% of the current balance. We will appreciate ideas and comments from everyone as to how we can continue to replenish this fund from year to year so that this can be an on going source of funding for aspiring young Tampa Bay area performing artists.

There are forms and envelopes for those who would like to contribute to the fund, recognition of gifts will be made on [www.anzia.org](http://www.anzia.org) and yes you can remain anonymous.

I need to thank Kat Wildish and one of her students, Taylor Gordon, for creating and maintaining the website. The videos you've seen today will be available on the website as well in the weeks to come.

We have seen today a lot of images from her work, classical ballets such as "Pas

de Sept" and "Dances and Variations".

Folk inspired work such as "Polovetsian Dances" and "Village Wedding".

Full length story ballets such "The Fantastic Toyshop" and "Hansel and Gretel".  
But one sticks in my mind today in a way that none of those do.

"Apparitions."

Performed to the Richard Strauss tone poem, "Death and Transfigurations," it's a classic good vs. evil and of course, good prevails. After all it's mom's ballet...

The finale is perhaps the simplest choreography she ever created but also perhaps the most moving. It was almost certainly inspired both by her work with Gluck Sandor but also by the religious pageants she staged at Washington Temple in New York City.

One by one, candle bearing acolytes process to a central candelabra, each placing their candle before bowing in prayer, finally, the initiate, enters, places her candle in the central position as radiant light streams down from the heavens above, (I assure you, mom was the original lighting designer, not me).

The ballet ends simply with this tableau, to some of the most glorious music ever written and also what could arguably be said was mom's favorite music.

We would like to recreate that moment here today, without candles. But with flowers, and we invite former cast members, dancers, friends and colleagues to come, pick up a carnation, and place it accordingly.

I'd particularly like those who performed in the piece to get us going "on the right foot."

Thank you all for being here today. Please keep her in your hearts as you go about your work, be it in the arts or in every day life. And as you come across difficulties or issues try to remember how she did things.

Embrace everyone in your work.

Yes be all inclusive in your work, in your life.

And most importantly with your love.

Thank you, and god bless you all.