

ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

Connecting dancers past, present, and future

News and Features

Teacher Feature

Pearl Magnuson was a Highland Dance instructor from the midwest. Read about her journey and influence in the Scottish arts.

Highland Influence

How has Highland influenced you? Discover the ways Highland Dance has influenced the lives of some long-lasting dancers.

Regional Winners

The results are in! The 2026 reps are ready for Dallas, Texas!

School Spotlight

Tell us about you! What is special about your highland dance school? [Click here to add your awesome school!](#)

Welcome

Welcome back to the latest edition of our alumni newsletter. Here you will find exciting updates and events, but also stories, memories, and achievements of alumni like you.

We would love to hear from you if you have stories, photos, or ideas to share. Let's keep the spirit of Scottish dance alive together.

Contact Info

email: alumni@scotdanceusa.com
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HIGHLAND HISTORY

Excellence, Deeply Rooted



Have you ever sat beneath a magnificent tree, looked up into the sweep of its branches, and wondered “Who planted this here?”

There are trees—as there are people—who are living monuments in our lives. We encounter them every day. They mark our paths and they give light to our seasons. Their seeming permanence is a reassurance and often our inspiration.

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HIGHLAND HISTORY



Margaret "Pearl" Smith had her roots in Glasgow and came to be planted in the Midwest through the bravery and aspiration of her immigrant parents who ventured to the Detroit area just more than one hundred years ago. They arrived at a time when many families were crossing from Europe to the Americas. For the new groups arriving to the Midwestern United States, cultural heritage was full and precious, a source of identity, pride, and affiliation.

Along with the pipes and drums, Highland dance promoted bonds within the Scottish community assembling in America and it secured a bridge to the people and places left behind.



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HIGHLAND HISTORY

Like many of her stock, Margaret prospered in two cultures at once, adapting to American soil but strongly influenced by the ancient and revered culture of her family traditions. The opportunities for gathering and for highland games at that time were far fewer than we currently enjoy. Competitions were circumscribed by the distance that a family could drive on a summer weekend and often took place in small towns dotting the state of Michigan and southern Ontario. Even so, Margaret became known as a particularly beautiful dancer and a frequent champion in competition. Her teacher, Ina Gilmore, saw the potential in this avid young lass. Margaret even managed to earn an affectionate nickname given to her by her mother. She was her “Pearl.”

In the years following the Second World War, Pearl married her sweetheart Herbert Magnuson. She began teaching dance lessons within a growing community of eager young girls and boys. Her dancing school was soon the largest in Michigan and one of the most successful in the Midwest.



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HIGHLAND HISTORY

While competitive dance still largely a regional affair (it took the interstate highway system and economic prosperity of Scottish families to substantially expand), students from the Magnuson school started to show up at Highland games on the eastern seaboard, further extending the reputation of their teacher. She became known for cultivating a devotion to dance among her students, one which was demonstrated with joy, respect, and an absolute insistence for excellence.



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HIGHLAND HISTORY

Winning makes winners! A reputation for winning attracts talent and, in time, numbers. The Pearl Magnuson dancing school continued to grow attracting a company of excellent dancers and winning for Pearl a devoted following. Among her most beloved and independently remarkable legacies was Pearl's own daughter, Sharon, who began asking her mother for lessons at the age of eight years old. In time, Sharon came to be recognized nationally and internationally but initially her mother was reluctant to subject them both to the routine of practices, competitions and the attendant expectations that came along with it. Her protective instincts were soon set aside. From Sharon's 1952 start in local and regional competitions, Sharon Magnuson (Capitani) went on to associate Highland Dance with her own astonishing beauty and earning widespread admiration for the way in which she carried her talents on and off the platform.

**WINNING MAKES
WINNERS**

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HIGHLAND HISTORY



As a teenager she traveled to Scotland to compete with peers from across that country and from around the world, bringing home the British Overseas Championship and the First Runner-Up in the World Highland Dancing Championship in 1964.

She also gained recognition beyond the immediate border of Highland Dance for her work as a model and for success in competing for titles of Miss Michigan and even Miss Universe. Her intelligence and beauty were obvious. Her talent was her skill in perfecting what was becoming an increasingly familiar American art form.



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HIGHLAND HISTORY



Following in her mother's steps Sharon built a highly influential dancing school of her own. Beginning in the 1960s Sharon held the hands of young women (and a few boys) who carried off ribbons, medals and trophies and set off on their own courses of enrichment and success.

From Pearl Magnuson's roots and through Sharon's influence we can trace generations, one after another, that have inspired the growth and popular celebration of Highland Dance for a century.

Many top regional competitors, national and international champions, Hall of Fame inductees, and countless other legendary luminaries have paraded through the Magnuson/Capitani lines. In

fact, the very organization that serves the children, families, teachers, and judges of our unique cultural artform—Scot Dance USA-- was founded and sustained through its vulnerable years by leaders who studied under one or both of the Magnusons. Were you to dig through the list of their names and explore their motivations you would find that they saw their work as an act of love and heritage.

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HIGHLAND HISTORY

This commitment to excellence continues and has spanned yet another generation. Sharon's daughter Kimberly (Capitani) Scobel was herself a national champion and has created another school of outstanding dancers. We can now point to three generations of a family and their combined legacies, with branches that reach out across our dance community.



Recently, Sharon was asked to reflect on her mother's legacy, her own, and the lessons this century of service might offer. She could have mentioned that teachers even now use written notes that have been passed down through generations of students. She might have enumerated the thousands of medals, trophies and awards bestowed on proud young competitors. She could even suggest quite reasonably that Highland Dance, once a tradition carried in the sea-faring baggage of eager immigrants, had over many years been accepted as a gift for joyful popular enjoyment and regarded as part of the musical heritage of a vast new continent.

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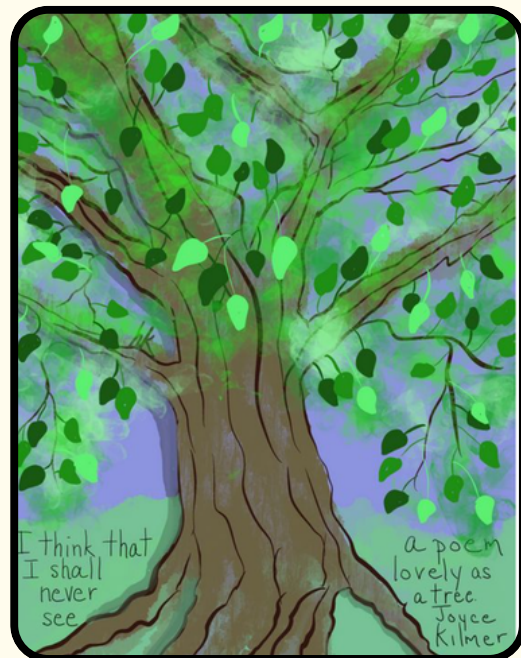
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HIGHLAND HISTORY

~ Relationships ~ Connections ~ Excellence ~ Pride ~

But for Sharon, as for many of us, the words to remember are “relationships,” “connections,” “excellence” and “pride.” Joyce Kilmer famously wrote that nothing is as lovely as a tree. Often lost among the later lines in that verse is her envious observation that a tree is blessed to “look at God all day.”

Whatever your faith may suggest, we know that there are people and things that always have been present in our lives. These are our landmarks. They have guided our paths. They seem to never age. But whether they are cloaked in a kilt of leaves or their branches form pipes against a changing sky, they are always there.



The Pearl Magnuson Teacher Achievement Award is a trophy presented annually at the USIR. It recognizes the teacher(s) whose dancers earn the highest aggregate point total based on awards received during the USIR competition.

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How has Highland Dance Influenced You?

"How has Highland Dance Influenced Your Career, Family or Life?"

We put this question out to dancers in the Highland Dancers Over 30 (or Thereabouts) Facebook Group. The number one response was travel. Many dancers found that dance gave them the opportunity to travel the world, going places they never would have expected. By travelling to different places these dancers were able to meet new friends. It opened up close friendships throughout the Scottish Community with fellow dancers.

Happy Space

Besides friendships, many dancers found a positive "happy space" while dancing. Several enjoyed sharing their love of dance with others whenever possible. Others found dance built or strengthened relationships. And one dancer simply expressed, "Dance is everything to me!"

"Dance is a best friend of mine, it goes through everything with me."

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How has Highland Dance Influenced You?



In addition to friendships, dance has led folks to various social events, such as Highland Games, workshops, ceilidhs, and competitions. Being at those events allowed people to reconnect with family and old friends.

Some enjoyed dance so much they became teachers to carry on the traditions. One dancer convinced her teenage son to dance with her. She expressed that having this unique form of dance as a commonality, they became closer during those difficult teenage years.

For many, dance built up their confidence. The positive environment evidenced in dance brought out skills such as discipline which many used in their careers. It helped others to be more flexible in accepting change.

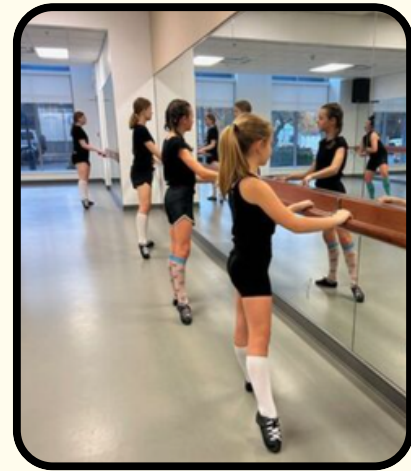


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How has Highland Dance Influenced You?

In day to day life activities, dance has helped with improving fitness. It helped one dancer learn how to smile. Another dancer, who became part of a choir, used her dancing to help with her musicality. Because of dance she was able to count beats in her head as she sang.



Finally, dance was able to help many learn how to win as well as lose graciously. Not something that can be taught in the classroom.

“The difference
in winning and
losing is most
often...*not quitting.*”

Walt Disney

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2026 Regional Winners



East Region



Midwest Region



Northwest Region



Southeast Region



Southwest Region



West Region

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Upcoming Competitions Across the Country

East Region

July 18th - Glasgow Lands Scottish Festival
July 18th - Ligonier Highland Games
August 8th - Central New York Scottish Games
August 29th - Quechee Scottish Games and Festival
September 5th - Capital District Scottish Games
September 12th - Edinboro Highland Games
September 19th - New Hampshire Highland Games

Midwest Region

July 11th - Michigan Celtic Festival
July 18th - Minnesota Scottish Fair & Highland Games
August 1st - Detroit St Andrew's
September 5th - Wisconsin Highland Games
September 12th - Columbus Scottish Festival
September 19th - Celtic Alliance of the Quad Cities

Northwest Region

July 11th - Payson Scottish Festival
July 25th - (NW) Pacific Northwest Scottish Highland Games
August 1st - Spokane Highland Games Dance Competition
September 12th -) Kelso Highlander Festival

Southeast Region

July 11th - Grandfather Mountain Highland Games and Atlantic International Championships
September 5th - Virginia Scottish Games
September 12th - Middle Tennessee (Nashville) Highland Games & Celtic Festival Highland Dance Competition
September 26th - Mountain State Forest Festival Highland Dance Competition

Southwest Region

July 22-26, National Championship, Dallas, TX
August 19th - Oklahoma Scotfest
August 26th - Colorado Highland Games

West Region

July 18th - Flagstaff Highland Dance Competition
September 5th - Western United States Open

Check ScotDanceUSA for additional details.

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Get Featured in our Newsletter

We Want To Spotlight YOU!

The United States has so many amazing Scottish Highland Dance Schools across the country. We'd love to hear from you! Please send information about your dance school so we can feature you in our next newsletter. Share your school's story, achievements, and anything that makes your community special—let's celebrate the rich diversity of Scottish Highland Dance across the country together!

[Click here to add your awesome school!](#)



Send us pictures!

Everyone has a collection of memorable photos from competitions, Burns dinners, festivals, dance classes, and more. Send us your photos—old and new—so we can create a historical archive that showcases our incredible Highland dance legacy!

Email: alumni@scotdanceusa.com
or send on Instagram or Facebook