

*Mackenzie Bayne Nicholas  
Parents: Stephen and Darcy Nicholas  
Dance Studio: Miss Lore's Dance Rage*

*Dance is me. I dance because it gives me a way to be the fullest possible me. It allows me a way to show emotion and to connect with people in a way that I wouldn't be able to do without dance. If it weren't for my parent's constant support and endless love, I wouldn't have the opportunity to do what I love. My parents are the greatest people I know, they are constantly giving all they have to my sister and me, and sadly, I admit, I do not thank them enough. I have a hard time showing my feelings through words (which is why dance is perfect for me), and regardless of how many times my mom tells me I lack empathy for others, I hope she realizes how much I truly appreciate her and my dad.*

*A tribute to my beautiful Mother: thank you for finding Miss Lore's and sending me there for ballet and tumbling at age two. Before I leap into my first example of how awesome my mom is, I'd like to point out that all dance moms are not as crazy as they are on TV! She's grown so much as a dance mom over the years: from attempting to rhinestone costumes for both my sister and me the night before the competition, to helping all the other moms with eyelashes because she's now a pro. When I was in third grade, we lived in DeWitt (fifteen minutes outside of East Lansing) and she drove my sister and I back to Miss Lore's two to three times a week, which was an hour and forty-five minute drive each way. She would make us dinners and warm them up at our grandparent's house while we danced, so we never missed a home cooked meal. She would always turn the radio to Delilah on the drives home; It's the small memories such as these that I will forever*

cherish. It's not the fact that my mom is a good dance mom that I'm writing this paper, she's given me so much more, and I don't know how I'll ever be able to thank her enough. My mother is the most selfless person I know. She is always putting the rest of the family before herself, even when she has so much work to do, she's always making sure everyone else is satisfied. I honestly couldn't even say the last time she did something for herself- and although I feel bad for saying that- it just shows how she gives and gives. She's supported every decision I've ever made, and she lets me attempt whatever it is that I set my heart too. She's said before that she doesn't think I realize sometimes all the things she does. I do though. This is my opportunity to let her know that I do realize. I know that she's always there for me, and I know that she loves me more than anything.

*A tribute to my Dad: thank you for being the biggest support system a girl could ask for. He has attended every competition and recital I've ever danced in. He's not like a lot of dads who just sit in the back corner though; I can tell he really enjoys watching me, and I know it makes him proud when I dance. Every year for our dance recital he does the daddy-daughter dance, and he is always willing to do whatever it is that I ask of him. I'm specifically talking about the year I wanted to do ballet and wear tutus and he did. Or last year, we decided to dance to Beyonce, and he went out and bought us rings to wear while we did Single Ladies. I was never into sports, but I don't think that bothered him much. He simply learned to get into dance! Last year he was deployed on a special mission to Kyrgyzstan and missed a whole year of dance. I know that it hurt him inside to have to miss everything. My mom also showed me how strong she was that year. She managed to do it all- both the mom and dad role- and she did them well! She worked, she cared for my*

sister and me; she was always there for support and advice- whatever it was we needed, she found a way to get it done. I believe my dad, truly enjoys watching me dance, and not being there to watch me do what I love, was really hard on him. My dad has taught me to always go after my dreams, and to never give up on something I really want. It is because of him that I've stayed in dance all these years. I'll admit, I'm not the most perfect dancer, but I've improved A TON from where I started when I joined the team at age seven and where I am at now at eighteen. It took hard work, dedication, and constant support, but I've finally made it. I've made it to where I want to be, and I couldn't be happier.

My parents love me so much, and I know that to be true. I know I've let them down before, but I wish they could realize how much they truly mean to me. I want the chance to thank them for all they have sacrificed in order for me to dance. I DO know that money doesn't grow on trees, and I do know how hard you work for it, but thank you so much for allowing me to do what I love. I can't imagine my life without dancing. The feeling of being on stage and opening up to all the people in the audience, makes showing my true emotions effortless when I'm dancing. I don't have to force anything while on stage- my smile is my smile, the connections between me and the songs are real. I wish I could give the world to my parents, because they have given the world to me by allowing me to dance. I'm forever grateful- I love you guys so much.