

Some boys lift weights; these brothers lift girls

By SHARON RICE, *Editor, The Friday Flyer*



Pierce performs in "The Nutcracker." His father says, "Other boys lift weights; my boys lift beautiful girls."

Canyon Lake father Mark Bryant is very proud of his seven children. And he's also aware that having three sons involved in classical ballet is quite unusual. His favorite line to tell others boys' fathers is, "Your boys lift weights, my boys lift beautiful girls." Pierce, 17, currently is attending the American Ballet Theatre at Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School (ABT/JKO School) in New York City on a full, year-round scholarship. He's also attended New York's Ellison Ballet as well as Pittsburg Ballet's Summer Intensives on full scholarships.

Reagan, 15, has been attending the Academy of Ballet Arts in Murrieta for the past three years. Just as he did last summer, Reagan will be heading to the Rock School of Ballet in Philadelphia this summer on full scholarship. Reid, 13, also has been attending the Academy of Ballet Arts in Murrieta for the past three years. Mark notes that Reid has been to the Youth American Grand Prix (YAGP) Ballet finals in New York for the past two years as San Diego's regional 1st place winner. "He was offered a year-round scholarship to Berlin Ballet and Princess Grace Academy in Monte Carlo after last year's final but we chose not to send him as he was only 12," he says. This summer, Reid is heading to Houston Ballet Academy's Summer Intensive Program on full scholarship.

Mark's daughter, Baylee, 20, also has been involved in ballet in the past and was accepted at both Boston Ballet and Ballet West in Salt Lake City, but has since chosen a different path. Currently attending Saddleback College,

Asked if there was something in the family's background that made four of his seven children choose ballet, Mark says, "Not really. With seven kids, we decided early on to move as a 'herd' vs. running all over with different activities. Initially, they all did karate; and then when Baylee started ballet, the boys soon joined her. I, like most dads, would have never of thought of this happening."

The family moved to Canyon Lake in 2011. Mark works for IBM out of his home. Wife, Tammy, does not live with Mark but his 84-year-old father does. Mark says he learned about Canyon Lake 30 years ago while visiting with a friend. Since he loved fishing and water-skiing, he knew this was where he would want to live someday. His father is an avid bass fisherman and loves it here as well.

Mark says his children mostly were home-schooled but the three youngest currently are enrolled at River Springs Charter School in Murrieta. While ballet can be all-consuming, the boys do enjoy fishing and other water sports in Canyon Lake, and they are just getting into golf. Asked about the expense, Mark says, "Ballet is very expensive, especially for girls, due to the intense competition. But fortunately with boys, the demand is so great that many doors have been opened to them – especially as classical ballet dancers."

Each of the Bryant boys aspires to careers in ballet, perhaps with such companies as the Royal Ballet in England, Paris Ballet, Canada's National Ballet and American Ballet Theater in New York. After that they'd like to have their own studios. They offer different thoughts on what they like about the art form. Pierce says, "I love expressing myself on stage just as much as I love working hard in the studio. With ballet, you need to be just as in love with the process as you are with the results." Reagan says, "I love ballet because of all the unique experiences I get to make and all the friends I get to have who live all around the world. Ballet is an experience like no other. The feeling of working really hard in the studio and getting onto the stage to show everyone your work is amazing, and that's what makes me addicted and in love with ballet."

Reid' says, "I really enjoy doing ballet because I've always had a thing for dance . . . I ended up dropping out of karate and focused more on ballet and, next thing I knew, I was performing on stage with my brothers and sister and doing lead parts. It became my lifestyle and I haven't ever regretted it."

Even dad has gotten in on the action, participating with the boys in "The Nutcracker" and "Alice in Wonderland" at Temecula Valley High School.

The Bryants' other children are Beau, 25, on full scholarship at Virginia Law School; Emma, 23, working for Alaska Airlines out of San Diego; and Grace 10, who does not do ballet but enjoys being the baby of the family. In April, the Bryants look forward to hosting a ballet student from Hungary when Pierce and the student return home from New York for spring break.