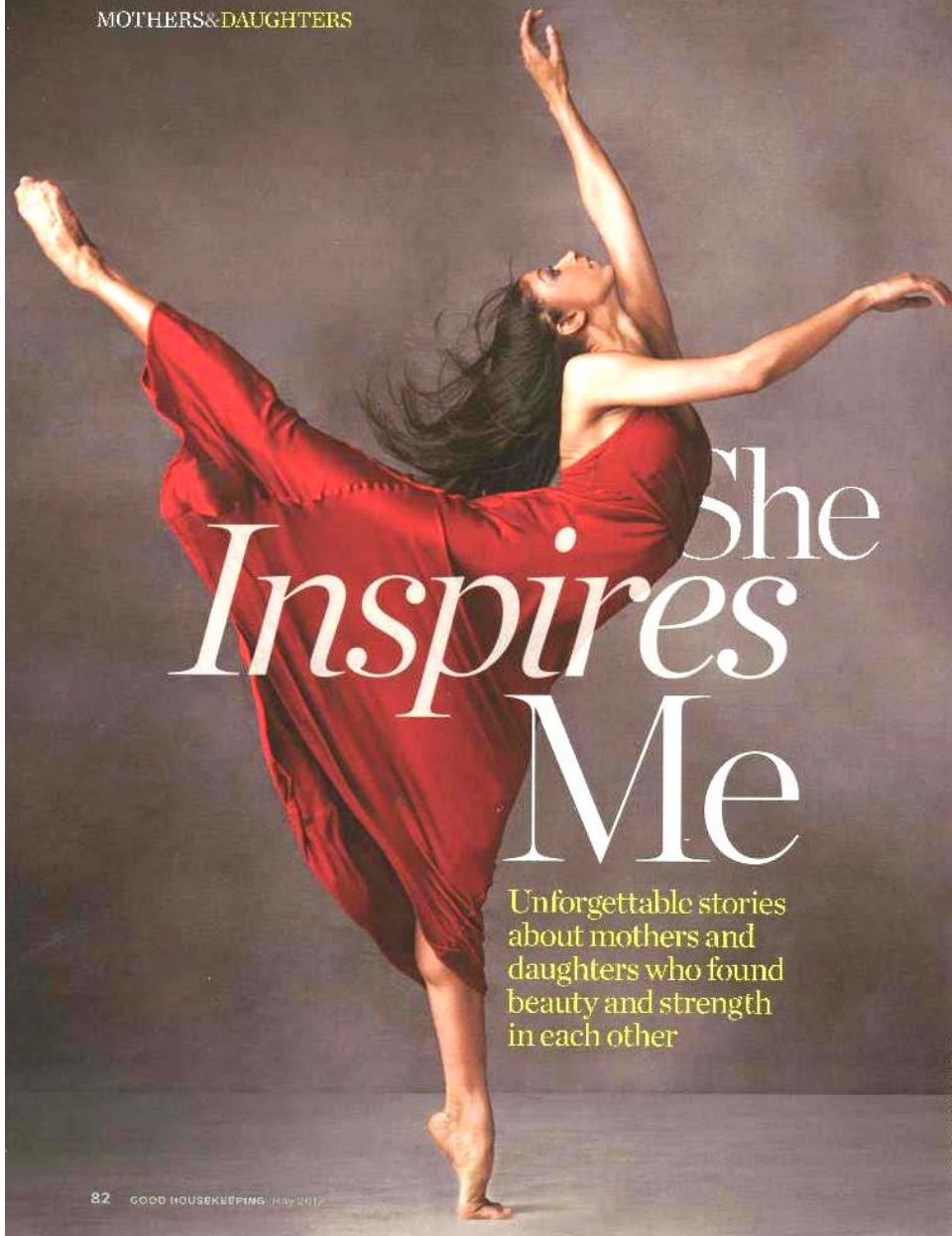


MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS



She Inspires Me

Unforgettable stories about mothers and daughters who found beauty and strength in each other

Photograph by Sergio Kurhaje

MARTHA GRAF, 64

Ellicott City, MD

Mom of Alicia Graf Mack, 33, dancer,
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

In July 2008, I suffered what I thought was a career-ending injury—a cartilage tear in my knee,” says Alicia, who’s danced with Alvin Ailey since 2005. “I was devastated. But my mom reassured me that whether or not I came back as a dancer, anything I decided to do next would be brilliant.” Alicia moved to St. Louis to get a master’s degree in nonprofit management and teach dance on the side. She also married her long-term boyfriend. “My mom saw the possibilities in me beyond the stage—my health and happiness were paramount,” she says. “Her unconditional support motivated me to get back to doing what I love most: dancing. I knew the steps I had to take physically, but my mom was the one who helped me most emotionally. She would constantly reassure me and say, ‘Do your best; God will take care of the rest.’”

In 2011, Alicia returned to the stage to rave reviews. “It took immense courage for Alicia to make her comeback,” Martha says. “At that point, people were familiar with her career, so she had to return at the highest level. Yet she was able to keep her dance style fresh and evolving; that’s difficult to do, as it involves retraining your body and your brain.”

Alicia’s comeback stirred a change in Martha as well. “Inspired by my daughter, I underwent a personal reinvention,” says Martha, whose résumé already included jobs as a professor of social work, talk show host, model, and creator of a hotline for cancer survivors. “I switched gears away from work and started to create my own art. I began painting interpretations of Alicia and other dancers from Alvin Ailey and Dance Theater of Harlem. Expressing myself through painting has given me a sense of peace that I’ve never felt before, and I’m grateful for my daughter, who’s given me images that are beautiful enough to put on canvas. Dancing is Alicia’s expression of beauty; painting is mine.”

“I discovered my artistic side”



Photographs by Sergio Kurhaje