



## 8th Grade Graduate Scholarship Recipient 2023 - Grace Cheatham

Prompt: Who has been your biggest inspiration, and how has that shaped your Irish dance journey?

My biggest inspiration throughout my life has always been my grandma. She was always there for me and truly understood me. When I was in kindergarten, my best friends, Charlotte and Eileen, performed Irish dance. I wasn't exactly sure what it was, but it looked so fun and I knew that I wanted to do it too. I used to have dinner at my grandma's house every night and she had these big mirrors in her living room. I would always dance around in front of them "Irish dancing." "You have to put Grace into Irish dancing," my grandma would always say to my mom. After some convincing, I finally began Irish dance in second grade. It was one of the best decisions I have made in my life.

Aside from Irish dance, my grandma played a huge part in my life. She often babysat me and I went to her apartment everyday to see her, Grandpa, and my Uncle Steve. My grandma and I had a lot in common. We both loved the beach and the Jersey Shore. My entire family (grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins) and I rent a house together every year in Long Beach Island, and always look forward to it. One of my favorite things was to sit on the beach with my grandma, soak in the sunlight and feel the beach breeze. It was our favorite place to be together. She also introduced me to my love of cooking. My grandma cooked the best meals and she taught me how to make many of them. I loved to sit down with my grandma and watch The Food Network. Every time there was something Irish dancing related on tv, my Grandma and Grandpa would tape it, and insist on watching it with me. I also was inspired by my grandma because she had the greatest capacity to love I had ever seen. The most important thing to her was family. We were always together and my grandma took care of everyone. My grandma was a retired nurse so she had a way of charming us and taking care of any bruises or scrapes. She was the head of our family and gave special attention to her 11 grandchildren.

My grandma loved coming to my dance competitions. She loved watching me dance with a bright smile on stage, proud of what I had just danced. Every time I walked off stage, I could see my grandma clapping for me with the biggest and proudest smile I have ever seen. Whether I came home that day with trophies or not, I still felt like a winner. My grandma had a way of making everyone feel special, loved, and the star of the show. My dance school, Aherne Sheehan School of Irish Dance, has a St. Patrick's Day breakfast every year. My grandma's favorite thing was to come and watch me dance, as well as have a delicious breakfast of course!

During the summer of 2021, my grandma was diagnosed with cancer. I did not want to believe it, but it was reality. The cancer made her feel tired, but regardless she wanted to watch me dance. My grandma came to the US Open of 2022 in Atlantic City along with my Grandpa. Along with dancing, we ate at many restaurants there together as a family. The day I danced, I placed fourth and took home a trophy almost as tall as me. I remember Grandma's smile when I was up on the podium, and I felt like a million bucks. Afterwards, my Grandma, Grandpa, sister, mom, dad, and I went on to celebrate. It was the best feeling in the world.

My grandma was my best friend, and favorite person in the whole world. I love her so much and her hugs always brightened my day. I wish to be just like my grandma. Unfortunately, my Grandpa passed away suddenly last Thanksgiving of 2022 and earlier this year in February, my Grandma passed away too. I was devastated and did not want to believe that my best friend was gone, but it was the truth. As she (and my grandpa) would want, my family and I are spending time together and leaning on each other. I think of my grandma every day and words do not describe how much I love and miss her. At the US Open of 2023, I will be dedicating my dance to her. She means the world to me and has always been my biggest inspiration.