

Press Office  
106 South Street  
Easton, MD 21601  
410-822-ARTS (2787)  
asteward@goeaston.net

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Academy Art Museum Scholarships Open Doors to “What Can Be”

When Katina Emory of Easton was approached by a Secret Santa in 2006 to help provide gifts for her family at Christmas time, she had no idea how the gift of ballet lessons would profoundly affect her daughter, Alaleya’s life. Katina recalls the day she got the call about the Secret Santa, “It came into our life at a perfect time. I had five children, was a single mom, and I was working full-time. Times were tough.”

The Secret Santa who had approached Katina and her family wanted to carry forward her own mother’s giving spirit following her recent death and asked Katina to identify something special that each of the children liked to do. In struggling to decide on an activity for her five-year old, the Secret Santa asked her whether her daughter might like to take ballet classes at the Museum. Katina comments, “It was not something I thought of initially, but Alaleya took to ballet right away. She was a shy child and ballet really helped her with her self confidence and even helped her in school.”

Unfortunately, after the Secret Santa’s donated classes were finished at the Museum, Alaleya had to withdraw due to the family’s financial constraints. Katina remembers trying cheerleading in the two years her daughter was away from ballet, but the sport failed to bring the smile that ballet put on her daughter’s face. Finally, Katina came back to the Museum in 2008 and talked with Museum staff member Janet Hendricks about scholarship possibilities for Alaleya. Through Janet’s help, Alaleya qualified for the Museum’s financial assistance program and was able to return to ballet classes over the last two years.

Katina exudes, “Just asking opened the door for Alaleya to come back and she loves it. The class gives her the motivation to dance to whatever she hears inside. There is a physical difference in her since she has come back. She is confident around people and has made friends in the class.” She adds, “Over the past few years, the Museum has become a part of our lives. We have had the opportunity to experience the arts even more. Alaleya even took a sewing class here. The portrait she did of a ballerina with her mentor was even on display at the Museum this past spring.”

Alaleya quips, “Ballet makes me feel happy. By practicing, I am getting better at it. It surprises me what I can do.” Her mother adds, “Seeing her dance in June at her first ballet recital, ‘Petipa, Ballet Russes and Beyond’ with the Ballet Theatre of Maryland in Annapolis, was amazing for all of us. I will never forget the gift of my Secret Santa. It’s been such a blessing in Alaleya’s life.”

Scholarships are available for many of the Museum's classes or programs. Applications are available at the Museum's front desk or by calling the Museum at 410-822-2787.

**CUTLINE: Pictured left to right are Katina Emory of Easton and her daughters, A'Branda Emory; Alaleyra Emory; and ballet instructor Monica Biener of the Ballet Theatre of Maryland.**

