

Lohmann: A long way from home, Ukrainian ballerina finds a temporary home in Richmond for 'The Nutcracker'

Back when 2022 started, Kristina Kadashevych surely could not have envisioned ending the year in Richmond, performing as the Sugar Plum Fairy (and two other roles) in [Richmond Ballet's](#) annual holiday extravaganza, ["The Nutcracker."](#)

But then, the Ukrainian ballerina never could have imagined the year would turn out the way it has.

Kadashevych arrived for our interview in a second-floor studio at Richmond Ballet dressed in a leotard, leggings and soft, puffy booties to keep her feet toasty. She started off, apologizing in advance for her English. "My English is not perfect," she said — but it was really good — and then she told her story.

Last February, on the day before she was supposed to fly to Paris to join the Kyiv City Ballet for a tour as a guest principal dancer, Russian troops invaded Ukraine. Instead of boarding a plane for Paris, Kadashevych, her 2-year-old son and her parents had to flee their home in Kharkiv, in the eastern part of Ukraine; crowd onto a train; and evacuate to the presumed safer western reaches of the country.

"It was dangerous," she said, "and we were scared."

What did they take with them?

"Just kid stuff," she said with a smile, "and kid. That's all."

More soberingly, she recalled, how difficult it was to leave home, not knowing when they would be able to return.

“You don’t know where you’re going. You have nothing. It’s a strange feeling.”

They eventually took refuge at the home of another ballet dancer, and Kadashevych, 33, made the difficult decision to leave her family and go ahead and join the ballet company in Paris.

“I needed to work because I have no practice,” she said. “I was just sitting and losing my profession.”

I recalled what artistic director Stoner Winslett told me recently, explaining why Richmond Ballet dancers went to great lengths to keep dancing through the pandemic.

“Dancers are like Olympic athletes; if you lie around your apartment and don’t train, you lose your skill,” she said.

Kadashevych has been dancing since she was 9 and professionally for the past 15 years. She never considered another line of work, saying dance brought her interesting experiences, extensive travel and unmatched joy. “Ballet gives you everything.”

She left her family, thinking she would return soon. A month or two. It didn’t work out that way as the war raged on.

“Everything is so — how to explain — you cannot plan anything.”

Kadashevych and the Kyiv City Ballet went on a tour — France, the Czech Republic, the United Kingdom and later the United States — and were warmly greeted everywhere they went.

“In Europe, our performances were like a charity to help Ukraine,” she said. “Often, a lot of refugees from Ukraine

came to those performances, so we felt we were doing important things and helping our country the way we can.

“Here in the U.S., we also have found huge support all over. Here, I also feel that everybody cares about me a lot, and I appreciate that.”

In between the tours, she went home to Ukraine for a month over the summer to visit her son, who will turn 4 in March. Lev is his name. “It means lion,” she said.

“It was a very happy time,” she said. “I remember the moment when I come. It was early morning, and my son was sleeping, and I just lay next to him and waited until he woke up, and he could not believe it. ‘Really, Mommy, really?!’ He was so happy.”

So, how did Richmond happen?

She shares a common acquaintance with Igor Antonov, another native Ukrainian who was a longtime dancer with Richmond Ballet and now is an artistic associate with the company and director of Richmond Ballet II. He texted Kadashevych and asked if she’d like to join Richmond Ballet on a temporary basis. Her answer: yes.

“It was unexpected and very interesting for me,” said Kadashevych, who came to Richmond while the rest of the Kyiv company returned to Europe.

Kadashevych is temporarily replacing a Richmond Ballet dancer on maternity leave. Winslett said “bringing a ballerina here who is unable to currently dance in her home country would be another way that our organization could further” the ballet’s mission “to awaken, uplift and unite human spirits through the power of dance.”

Kadashevych will remain with the company through February and also will perform in "Firebird with Serenade," Feb. 17-19.

For "The Nutcracker," which [runs through Dec. 23](#) at the Carpenter Theatre at Dominion Energy Center, Kadashevych will dance the roles of the Sugar Plum Fairy, the Snow Queen and Mrs. Silberhaus, though not all in the same performances. Kadashevych said she has danced in several versions of "Nutcracker," but never one quite like Richmond's — "It's absolutely different, so it's a new 'Nutcracker' for me," she said — and never three roles in one production.

"For me, it's unusual ... but it's interesting to try everything because all roles are interesting and beautiful, and I really want to dance them all," she said. "It's a challenge, but it's a good challenge."

And as for being in Richmond, she said, "I love it. I really love it. The city and the company, as well, because they have really nice dancers, as professionals and as humans. So, I enjoy being here."

The future? She does not know. She hopes to return to Ukraine soon, perhaps after Christmas, for a short visit. Beyond that, she's not certain of much of anything, including if the situation will be better at home sooner rather than later.

"We all hope that it will," she said, "but I'm not sure."

Lohmann: A crash, a brain injury and, 40 years later, celebrating a life of 'determination'

"Morning!" Tom Stumm said brightly as he came through the doorway onto the patio of Spring Arbor of Salisbury, an assisted-care community in Midlothian where he lives.

He was seated in a wheelchair as his dad pushed. His speech, halting 15 years ago when we last met, is not as clear today, but his friendly nature is no different. He smiles easily and jokes naturally. The wheelchair is a somewhat recent development.

When I last wrote about Stumm, he was getting around with a cane and the assistance of his service dog, Tony. Later, as his physical strength continued to decline along with his balance, he needed a walker, then a rollator and now a chair.

While he still leans on the resilience, perseverance and optimism that have gotten him this far, he also has had to come to grips with a sometimes harder-won quality: acceptance — as in, knowing what he can do and recognizing there are things he can't, which comprise an ever-growing list and touch most every aspect of his life.

“The loss of independence, that was hard for Tom to accept,” said his father, Thomas A. Stumm. (Young Tom’s middle initial is “W.”)

Over the years, acceptance has become a crucial part of the younger Stumm’s life, which looks very different than he or anyone else who knew him would have anticipated before the accident.

For 40 years, Stumm, now 61, has been living with the effects of what happened that long-ago night. A U-Haul rental truck carrying Stumm along with more than 60 other University of Virginia students on a fraternity road trip swerved and overturned on a sharp curve along U.S. Route 29 near Lynchburg, violently tossing the students loaded in

the cargo section of the truck. A Volkswagen then struck the truck.

Two students were killed and numerous others were injured, none more seriously than Stumm, who suffered a life-altering brain injury.

I first wrote about Stumm in 2007 on the 25th anniversary of the crash, alerted by his family that he had moved to Richmond two years earlier. That year, the Stumms held a get-together for family and friends who gathered to mark the anniversary, the same as they will do this year for the 40th. (The wreck occurred on Oct. 6, 1982.)

As painful as the memory is of the incident itself, his family recognizes it as the beginning of a journey they have all traveled together.

"Our intent is to bring people together in a celebration of Tom's survivorship over these 40 years," said his sister Kathy Stumm, noting the family has invited friends, neighbors and members of the brain-injury advocacy community. As a backdrop to the occasion, a slideshow of photos spanning her brother's life will play on a loop. "Our goal is to make Tom feel as special as he is and to allow people to express how he has inspired them."

His sister Sharry Stumm Maddux described that October day 40 years ago as "horrible, upsetting and heartbreaking." But in the 40 years since, she has marveled at the path of "determination, perseverance and incredible patience" her brother has traveled.

"It's brought us all closer as a family," she said. "It's a family journey."

Every morning, soon after he wakes up, one of the first things Tom Stumm does is check his blood-sugar level — something he has to do six to 10 times a day after developing severe diabetes following the accident. (He used to administer his own insulin shots, but now requires assistance from the staff of the facility where he has lived for most of the past two years. In fact, he needs help with most activities of daily living except for eating.)

Stumm's family has remained by his side and in his corner through the years. Though he has lived independently to the extent he could, his parents and sisters have overseen his care, advocated for brain-injury patients and generally paid for his living expenses. He received a small settlement from U-Haul. The family filed a suit against the university, but a circuit court found the university was not liable. He also qualifies for disability benefits from Social Security.

After the 1982 wreck in which he also suffered a broken shoulder, Stumm was in a coma that lasted 2 ½ months. He spent an additional eight months in the hospital, followed by five years of intense physical therapy.

"We assumed it was like a broken arm that would heal and he would go on with his life," his mother, Gloria, told me for the 2007 story. The Stumms — Gloria and the Toms -- had moved from Northern Virginia to Richmond in 2005 to be closer to Maddux. "We didn't know that was a life-altering experience for him and things would never be exactly the same."

Stumm had to learn to talk and walk again, though neither his fine nor gross motor skills fully returned. For a while, he communicated by looking at an alphabet board and tapping his foot. During his recuperation, he also endured hallucinations and nightmares.

His intelligence is “mostly intact,” Kathy Stumm said, but “his memory and judgment are challenges in his cognitive abilities.”

Stumm remembers nothing of the accident and little from his time at Charlottesville, though he proudly wears his UVa cap and refers to it as “my school.” (He does mention Ralph Sampson and the stellar basketball teams during his college days, but when asked if he remembers attending any games, he says no.)

He can carry on a conversation about current events — he watches a lot of news and sports on television — but his short-term memory is poor. He cannot recall what he and his sister did when she visited two days before our interview (“I cut your hair so you would look good,” Maddux said), but memories from his childhood come much more easily. Stumm, who has always loved dogs, can quickly recall the names of the family’s dogs from when he was a kid.

While he lived in Northern Virginia, Stumm worked for 10 years in a federal clerical job for the disabled, even drove himself to work in those days, but the stress became too much, largely because it takes him considerable time to do the simplest of tasks and he had to retire.

After moving to Richmond, he became a regular at The Mill House, a “clubhouse” for survivors of brain injuries that is operated by Community Brain Injury Services, a nonprofit that helps those it serves “reclaim independence and function in their daily lives.”

Through The Mill House, Stumm volunteered for Meals on Wheels, making deliveries, and was part of a team that cleaned a church and then would plan a social activity with the money they earned. But COVID and his reduced mobility

made it impossible for him to participate in those tasks any longer.

Stumm suffered a big loss in 2013 when his mother died — “Mom was perhaps Tom’s biggest cheerleader,” says Kathy Stumm — and Maddux has largely filled the day-to-day role of their mother in keeping track of the logistics of Stumm’s care: doctors’ appointments, medications and a binder full of notes, records and contacts.

She is often the point of contact when her brother falls, which happened about a dozen times in 2021, and must be taken to a hospital’s emergency. He’s fallen fewer times this year as he more often is heeding his family’s admonition to call for help before doing something he used to be able to do with ease, such as picking up something he’s dropped on the floor, but now represents a danger.

Much of the research and advocacy work falls to Kathy, who cannot be involved in as much of her brother’s day-to-day care. She also is an attorney. All three serve as Stumm’s co-guardians.

Maddux and the elder Stumm, who each live about a 15-minute drive from Tom, visit him several times a week, often play his favorite games (backgammon, cribbage and Yahtzee) and sometimes take him on outings. He used to attend church with his father on Sundays, but COVID stopped that practice and now it has become no longer physically feasible for Tom to go to church with his father so he attends services at Spring Arbor.

Among his favorite remaining outings? Fishing at a private lake in New Kent County (though the wheelchair makes it impossible for him to get in a small boat) and going on what his father calls “country rides.”

“Just get in the car and go out and see the country,” said the elder Stumm, who is now 93. “We have places we like to go, particularly in the fall when the waterfowl are migrating. We go down to the Swift Creek Reservoir ... and I test Tom on his ability to identify the different species.”

This, of course, is not how Tom Stumm expected his life to play out. He was a fourth-year honors student in civil engineering from Alexandria and a member of Sigma Chi fraternity. He was among the members and prospective members of the fraternity who were in the U-Haul bound for a party at Randolph-Macon Woman’s College on Oct. 6, 1982. He does not remember climbing into the truck.

Such road trips were not uncommon among student groups at the time.

“Totally warped thinking in hindsight, but at the time it seemed to be better to have two responsible, non-drinking members driving a truck” instead of having numerous cars and many drivers making the trip to a late-night party, said Tom Cricchi, who was president of the fraternity at the time. He did not make the trip because of an evening class.

Soon after the wreck, the use of non-passenger vehicles for such trips was banned by UVa fraternities.

Over the years, Cricchi and other fraternity brothers have remained steadfast friends with Stumm, staying in touch, taking him to lunches regularly and raising money when the need arises. The group purchased new furniture for Stumm when he moved into Spring Arbor almost two years ago.

“The family does the heavy lifting,” Cricchi said. “All we do is come in and have some fun and cheer Tom up.”

And the cheer flows both ways.

“Zero whining, zero woe-as-me,” Cricchi said. “It’s just positivity after positivity. Making jokes. No feeling sorry for himself. Just enjoying the moment.

“When he’s around us, he’s just trying to be one of the guys, and that’s inspiring.”

Through her years of advocating for her brother, Kathy Stumm has sometimes become exasperated navigating Virginia’s institutional bureaucracy — even as an attorney — in her efforts to help her brother get needed services. One thing she’s learned for sure is that individuals with brain injuries often fall through the cracks of public policy.

Her family’s goal in keeping Stumm’s story in the public eye is to give hope to others with brain injuries that they can lead a meaningful life after an injury and also to bring awareness to the brain-injury community and the need for additional funding for services that specifically support survivors of brain injuries.

Though she has often encountered roadblocks in her efforts to get assistance for her brother, Kathy Stumm said, “I have not given up on helping in the advocacy community for the future, for other people like Tommy.”

“When you look at our situation, we were so fortunate,” said Stumm, who has been invited to speak in late October at a meeting of the Virginia Brain Injury Council, a panel that promotes services for Virginians with brain injury by advising the state Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services. “We’re not destitute; we’re not at a breaking point. We’ve had the benefit of education and love and a good family. But

there are so many people ... I don't know how they make it through the system to get service."

Indeed, the brain-injury population is "tremendously underserved," said Jason Young, executive director of Community Brain Injury Services, the designated safety-net service provider for individuals with brain injury in 18 localities, including Richmond and Hampton Roads. Among its services is The Mill House, which Stumm has been attending several days a week for most of the past 17 years.

The Mill House has been a great social outlet for Stumm, he and his family say, as he has found purpose and friendship there. ("Tom is a beloved member," Young said.) But he must stop going in the coming months. He is being "retired" because he no longer meets the admission criteria due to a variety of issues including his physical and cognitive decline, requiring more assistance than the limited staff at The Mill House can provide.

It's heartbreaking but understandable, his family says, but making matters worse is a search for a replacement program for Stumm has been fruitless as his family has found no other program in the area designed specifically for brain-injury survivors.

Advocates say there are generally a dearth of appropriate options for individuals with brain injuries when it comes to day programs, housing, almost any facet of daily living — in part because brain-injury survivors get lumped into systems and services designed for people with other types of needs and disabilities.

There are an estimated 302,000 Virginians disabled by brain injury, according to the Brain Injury Association of Virginia, using figures from the Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention and the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service. But their access to services might be limited for a number of reasons: They might not qualify for a developmental-disability waiver if their injury occurred after age 22, if their injury wasn't properly documented or if they are severely impaired cognitively but remain ambulatory, said Anne McDonnell, BIAV's executive director.

Getting help for a loved one can be complicated and frustrating, she said, all the while noting "we're all just a banana peel away from disaster."

"I don't know how families that get thrown into this world in a phone call — like the Stumms did — try to navigate not only a brain injury but also health care and managed care and outpatient visits for occupational and physical therapy," McDonnell said. "Then you've got the whole rest of their lives to support them until they can stand on their own two feet — *if* they can stand on their own two feet again."

There is cause for optimism, however, as earlier this year the General Assembly approved measures that could improve access to services for individuals with brain injuries. The legislature allocated \$570,000 in new funds for case-management services in areas of the state that were unserved by such organizations as CBI Services. It also voted to allow Medicaid to pay for case-management services for adults with brain injury, which expands services and allows the state to bring in additional funds from the federal government.

Additionally, the assembly authorized a study implementing a brain-injury waiver, which, if implemented, would provide benefits that could help individuals with brain injuries receive services while remaining in their homes and communities.

The study work group's report is due to be delivered to the Department of Medical Assistance Services in November.

"That would help to start fill in the gaps in services," said Chris Miller, director of the brain injury services coordination unit in the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services.

A waiver would benefit Stumm, who is not currently eligible for any financial assistance with his housing as long as he lives in an assisted-living setting, which his family believes is a better option for him than a skilled-nursing facility where, his family says, he would lose any sense of independence.

Meantime, Stumm presses on, with the help of his family and staff where he lives, as well as additional services the family pays for, including a case-manager from Jewish Family Services and companion care from Naborforce, a service that, by its own description, provides "light support for older adults who just need a friendly hand from time to time."

Once a week, someone from Naborforce visits Stumm and takes him for walks or merely sits and talks with him.

The friendly Stumm is a popular figure in his assisted-living community. Maddux said that when she's pushing him down the hall, other residents are always stopping to say, "Hi, Tom!" He brightens their days, and they his.

When asked if he'd like to say something about his 40-year journey, Stumm spoke of how "supporters have done a whole lot to help me."

How about a message to others with brain injuries?

"You're never alone," he said.

And one more thing, Stumm said, for those who have not experienced brain injury.

“Never think it can’t happen to you.”

Lohmann: Throughout her long, sometimes sorrowful life, letters kept Frances Nunnally in touch

Some people paint, some sculpt. Frances Nunnally wrote letters. Sweet, thoughtful, meaningful letters. Handwritten letters. To loved ones, friends, the editors of newspapers. Me.

Nunnally, who died last week at age 101 after a brief illness, grew up in an era when letter-writing was pretty much the only means of long-distance communication. But for her, the medium was even more personal and poignant.

Frances (Franziska) Huppert Nunnally, who grew up in Vienna, Austria, survived the Holocaust because her parents, soon after Hitler annexed Austria, sent her to England as a teen to work as an au pair for a British family. She never saw them or her only sibling, her brother, again, but before their deaths — her father died of a heart condition shortly before he was to be deported, her mother was herded onto a train with other Jews, taken into a forest and shot by a firing squad, and her brother was captured and never heard from again after being sent to a series of Nazi concentration camps — she kept in touch with them by letters. Each correspondence was a precious gift, a fragile, fleeting lifeline to her family, and later, treasured keepsakes.

It seemed appropriate then that a few years ago I received a letter from Nunnally about a Christmas column I wrote about a child’s letter to Santa that had been written in the 1940s

and had resurfaced 70 years later in a coins-and-collectibles shop and was reunited with its author.

Nunnally wrote that my column inspired her to dig into boxes of her own letters and reread ones that meant so much to her — letters her mother had written to her in England around the same time, in 1940, and smuggled out of Nazi-occupied Vienna, letting her know what their days were like and how much she loved her.

Nunnally's letter was accompanied by a second letter written on the most delicate and thinnest, almost transparent, paper. The words were in German.

It was one of the letters from her mother.

I was astounded and touched — and, most of all, knew I shouldn't have it. So, I got in touch with Nunnally and made arrangements to stop by and return the letter.

I knew of Nunnally, having read many of her letters over the years that had appeared on the editorial page of *The Times-Dispatch* (she was frequently honored as "Correspondent of the Day"). Her letters often served as mini history lessons, educating and enlightening, frequently from her vantage point as a survivor of the Holocaust who had known great loss and great sadness, sharing her hard-earned wisdom.

But this was the first time I would meet her.

We had a [lovely visit](#) in March 2020, just before COVID-19 hit and sent us all into our respective corners. I learned, among other things, that after working as an au pair, she joined the British Army, serving in the Auxiliary Territorial Service during World War II, later decoded telephone calls in Germany for the U.S. Army, arrived in the United States on St. Patrick's Day in 1950, met Aubrey Nunnally at a Saturday

night dance and later married him, had three children and worked as an editorial assistant at Christian Children's Fund (now ChildFund).

She recalled what happened in November 1938 during what has become known as Kristallnacht.

Synagogues were burned, windows smashed, houses ransacked. She watched from her family's apartment as Nazi storm troopers trashed the Jewish-owned grocery across the street and dragged the proprietors from their home. Nunnally's mother was cooking lunch when the men wearing swastika armbands knocked on their door, rousting her family from their apartment. Her family fled to the homes of a grandmother and an aunt, where they stayed for a few weeks before they were able to return home, which had been looted in their absence. Everything of value was gone, but there on the table were the dumplings her mother had prepared for lunch weeks earlier, untouched and "hard as rocks," Nunnally said.

I did not conduct another in-person interview until more than a year later, in the spring of 2021, when I went back to see Nunnally as she neared her 100th birthday. That afternoon proved to be the first assignment photographer Bob Brown and I collaborated on in-person since early 2020, and we couldn't have picked a more enjoyable subject. [As I wrote then](#), Nunnally was delightful and insightful yet incredibly humble.

Because she had been through so much in her life, I asked if she could offer advice to generations who can only imagine such experiences. She hesitated, saying not everyone welcomes such advice, but she offered some anyway:

“Just live each day and be thankful [to be] alive,” she said. “There are situations in life that are beyond what some people can even envision. I know the world is full of danger and full of things that we wish would never occur. However, just try and make the best of it.”

She also talked about how things had recently changed “radically” in her life because of her fading vision.

“I can see your face, but the pictures on the wall are very blurry,” she said. “And I cannot read the newspaper, and that’s a blow.”

She had learned she had a condition that affected the optic nerve. Despite that, she continued to write letters. I know because I received some in the months that followed.

“I have this vision of her sitting at the table in her chair, with her pen and paper, and writing her letters,” said her youngest child, Heidi, who was her mother’s caregiver in the final years of her life. “She would put a lot of thought into them. Sometimes [the letter] would sit there, and she would pick it back up the next day and finish it.”

(And she didn’t just write letters. Years ago, she wrote an essay that was included in a book: “100 Wonderful Women: 100 Stories of Women’s Service in the British Army Since 1917.”)

Toward the end, it took her longer to write, and Heidi would read behind her and help her out, but it remained an important part of her life.

“I think that was what connected her,” Heidi said of her mother’s lifelong letter-writing.

And her collection of old letters kept her connected to the family she lost so long ago.

She spoke particularly about letters from her brother, Heidi said, in part because there were so few. In one, he wrote from an internment camp, describing the harsh conditions and asking her to send him food because they had nothing. After the internment camp, he was sent to the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz. Decades later, Nunnally shared the letter with an Austrian professor writing a contribution for a book to be used by teachers to educate children about the history of Austria.

“It was one of his last letters, and it was so dear to her,” Heidi said. “To not be able to reach out and touch your brother, and you just have these pieces of paper that they’ve put ink on, and it just develops into this ... it’s almost like a love letter, in a way, between siblings. I’m sure she felt pretty helpless not being able to do anything.”

Among the correspondence smuggled out from Vienna to Nunnally were [postcards](#) from her mother. Nunnally donated three of the postcards to the [U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum](#), along with a copy of her brother’s last letter.

There are other letters that in recent times Heidi had her mother help translate for her before her vision became so poor she could hardly make out the writing at all. Heidi also has journals her mother kept while she was in England, and she looks forward to going through everything and “getting to know my mother again when she was a young woman.”

Even toward the end, Heidi said, her mother loved keeping up her daily routine: hearing what was in the newspaper,

doing her laundry, drying dishes in the kitchen after dinner as Heidi washed.

"Then we'd have a little cup of tea when we sat down to watch TV," Heidi said. Her mother often would doze in her recliner and then wake up with a start, her eyes unable to clearly focus in the evening light, and say, "Is anybody there?" Heidi would wave and say, "I'm here," and a relieved look would cross her face.

"Then she would take a sip of her tea," Heidi said, "and say, 'Good tea!'"

Reaching an advanced age is certainly a cause for joy, but it often requires enduring a heavy weight of grief and sorrow. Nunnally not only had her parents and brother taken from her early in life, but in recent years she also lost Aubrey, her husband of 64 years, and one of her two sons, and a sense of loneliness set in.

At the end, Heidi said, she whispered in her mother's ear that she would soon be playing again with her best friend from her childhood in Vienna, riding on the back of her brother's motorcycle and hugging her mama and papa.

"Instead of feeling sadness for her leaving me, I was feeling happiness for her," Heidi said. "That helped me get through it a little bit. I was just happy with tears that she was finally going to be with them again."

