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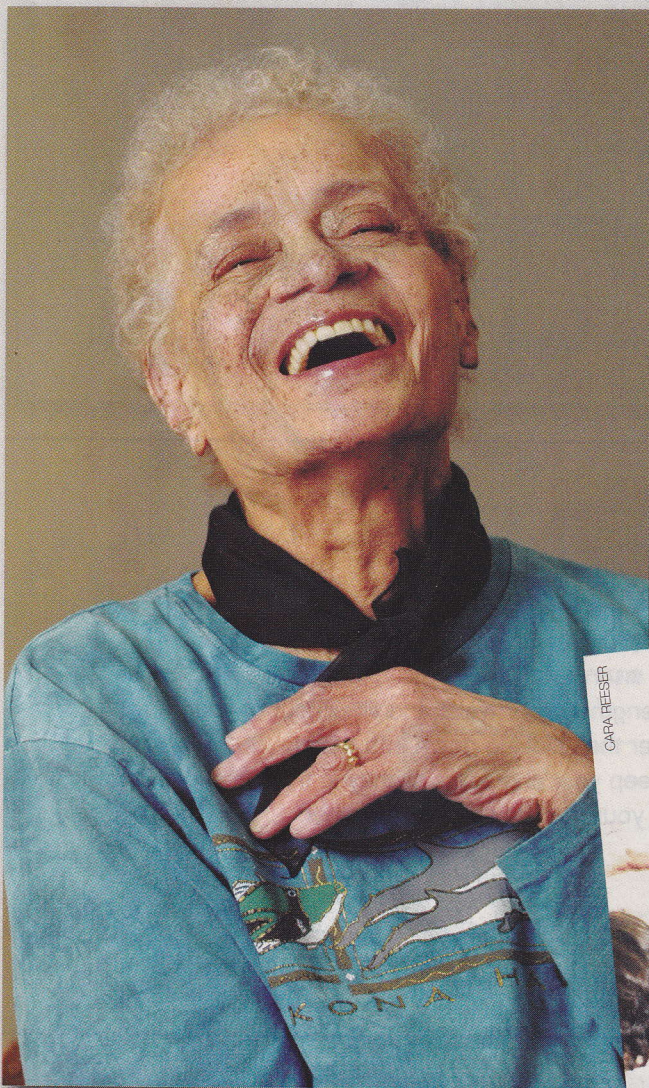
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# KATHLEEN STANFORD GRANT

## 1921-2010

friends, colleagues and students share their memories of a beloved mentor

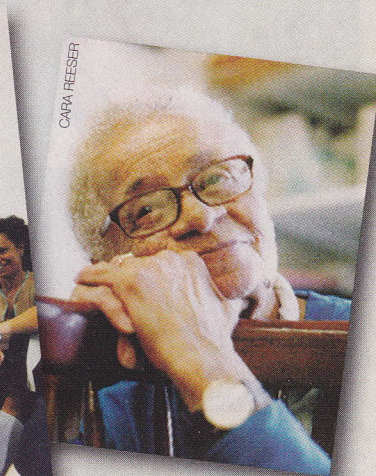
EDITED BY SUZANNE GERBER



ARTHUR COHEN



CARA REESER



CARA REESER

## The Woman, the Legend

Kathy Grant was born in 1921 and grew up in Roxbury, MA. In the mid-20s she became the first African-American girl accepted into the Boston Conservatory of Music's prestigious dance program.

Struggling against pre-civil rights era discrimination, Kathy moved to New York City in the '40s to pursue a career as a dancer. The sad truth is that there was no place for black dancers in the classical ballet world. But Kathy was determined to dance, so she sought out work as a nightclub dancer.

She landed a job in 1945 as a chorus girl in

Manhattan's Zanzibar Club, which was open to white patrons only. Later she landed an ensemble role in Broadway's first integrated musical,

*Finian's Rainbow*. She went on to dance and choreograph both on Broadway and off, and she toured internationally with legendary artists like Cab Calloway, Pearl Bailey, Donald McKayle, Arthur Mitchell and Claude Merchant.

After a knee injury sidelined her, Kathy expanded her contributions to black American dance

by working in arts administration for such organizations as the YWCA, the Clark Center and Dance



From left: Blossom L. Crawford, Keith Sabado, Kathy Grant, Cara Reeser

# To Kathy with Love

## Part One: 1984, 7:30 a.m., Henri Bendel

What is that? It makes no sense.  
A closed store. Go to the top floor,  
Step off the elevator, make a left.  
Small studio, no windows, lite FM,  
Full room, everyone knows what to do.  
“Honey, that is not the exercise!”  
I think, *Hey, no pressure!* I am told,  
“Everyone is booked on the 15 minute,  
Be on time, know your given workout  
And I can work with you. Welcome!”

And so began my rewiring. Kathy led our interaction, and I tried to follow. Then one day: *a-ha!* And I let go. That was the moment I received her teaching.

## Part Two: Years Later

Elisa Monte hired me as a Pilates instructor and suggested I work with Kathy. Thank you, Elisa. You knew it would inform my movement and translate into useable and sustainable technique. So I saw Kathy a lot, and when I wasn't dancing, I sometimes worked for Kathy, be it construction projects or painting her equipment. Just chatting, laughing and working was so simple and fun. Her laugh and her frankness were so infectious and her teaching so generous. I thank her for that. Her process in Pilates informs me every day, and I am grateful to have shared so much time with her. — *Peter Roel*

## SIDE BY SIDE

I spent a decade as the teaching assistant in Kathy's morning mat class at the dance department at the Tisch School. It was an amazing opportunity to witness her teaching over a long period of time. If you ever had a session with Kathy, you are aware of her critical eye, stern tongue and, ultimately, her kind heart. It didn't matter if you were 18 or 80, a freshman dance student or a famous actress: Kathy would tell you precisely what she thought.

Even I wasn't exempt. I remember one time when she was trying to teach me a very simple movement, a head lift, in a way I had never done before. Each time I did it wrong, she would sharply ask why I was doing it that way, or she would say, “What was that?” When I did it right, she said, “What are you waiting for? Applause?”

Years later, on the way home from a conference, I worked up the courage to talk to her about how rough she could be. She told me that she had to be stern so that people would remember her voice in their heads when they were exercising on their own. I remembered all of those times that I thought she was just being mean when she pushed me to the edge. And I laughed out loud, because only then did I realize that she knew all along exactly what she was doing. — *Blossom Leilani Crawford*

Theatre of Harlem. She sat on the dance panel of the National Endowment for the Arts and various New York State arts councils, where, often as the only black member on the board, she advocated for minority dancers.

In the mid-'50s, Kathy met Joseph H. Pilates, who helped her heal her injuries and eventually certified her to teach his work (she and Lolita San Miguel were the only people Joe himself certified). Kathy began teaching Pilates in 1957 as an assistant to Carola Trier, to whom she attributed much of her early learning of the method. Sixteen years later Kathy took over the Pilates Gym at Henri Bendel's department store, where she worked with stern generosity to rehabilitate injured dancers and inspire ordinary men and women to move and strengthen. In 1988 she relocated the studio to the top floor of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, which her students lovingly referred to as the pent-

house. Toward the end of her life, Kathy became a world-renowned master teacher, presenting workshops throughout the United States and abroad.

Kathy's other love was James Lloyd Grant, to whom she was married for nearly 50 years and with whom she adopted a son. She loved her family, her grandson, nieces and nephews dearly. Over the many decades that Kathy taught dance and Pilates, she took under her wing and mentored many young dancers and students (myself included). She always referred to us as her kids. Kathy was a testament to strength and determination, overcoming hardships and succeeding brilliantly where others would have wilted and given up. She continued to teach until last winter, when she was 88. It was a tremendous loss to her family, many friends and students, and the entire Pilates community, when she passed away on May 27, 2010. — *Cara Reeser*

## Sisterhood

## On &amp; On

Kathy had the rare intuitive gift of truly seeing each of her students—body, mind and spirit together as a whole. She knew how to adjust any exercise to suit the individual needs of each client, and this is what she did as a matter of course. She had a gift, and we in the Pilates community are so lucky she was able to share her knowledge with us for so long. Kathy, I will miss you, but every single day that I teach, your legacy lives on in a link I hope to pass on to the next generation of Pilates teachers and students. —*Jillian Hessel*

My husband, Hiram Cintron, and Kathy's husband, Jim Lloyd Grant, shared a love of jazz, and we used to go to Blue Note in Greenwich Village together and have a lovely time. But when I sent Hiram, who was taking my mat classes at Clark Center, to Kathy at Bendel's, although she was very fond of him, she intimidated him totally, saying things like, "What you doing there?" and "Is that the way you're going to do it?" Later Kathy told me, "He's very stiff!"

I followed Hiram when he was transferred to Puerto Rico in 1977, and we liked it so much we stayed for 26 years. There I founded Ballet Concierto de Puerto Rico, in 1978. My company toured New York every year, and wherever we performed—Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Bronx, New Jersey or Long Island—Kathy would come to see us.

Our last get-togethers were at the Pilates Method Alliance conferences, where we attended each other's classes. We also did a workshop at Alycea Ungaro's studio in New York with Kathy Corey and had a good time. We loved working and sharing a glass of wine together, and we always laughed a lot at our many memories of Clara, Joe and Carola.

Last May we spoke on the phone for almost an hour. She was not well and was in a rehabilitation center. She said she felt very confined and bored because she wasn't allowed to walk unattended since they were afraid she would fall.

"They take me to the gym, where they give these stupid exercises for old people," she said. I asked her if the trainers knew who she was. She said no. I told her to give them her résumé and demand they give her the most advanced moves.

As our conversation ended, I told her I was on my way to do a conference for Pilates on Tour. She told me to say hello to all and to tell them one thing: "I'm still here." —*Lolita San Miguel*

## IN HER SHOES

Kathy Grant, through her long history as a Pilates protégé, benefited—saved the lives of—so many dancers through her meticulous and passionate instruction. But how many know the key role she played in the early days of Dance Theatre of Harlem? As administrative director, she worked both in the office and in the studio, where we started each day on the floor with Kathy doing our Hundreds.

I was one of the lucky few whom she invited down to Bendel's in the early morning before the store opened to get the full benefit of the training on the machines. Twice a week it was Pilates for an hour in the mornings, then a quick ride uptown on the A train to start again with everyone else.

As valuable and important as the physical education and character-building aspects may have been, Kathy's main impact on me came from an offhand comment she made one day after a studio performance. She said, "If you're going to dance in those things"—meaning my pointe shoes—"you have to wear them all the time. They have to become a part of you." A few simple words packed with meaning. As I understood it, this was the dancer Kathy Grant—the one with the lovely lines and feet who didn't get the chance to dance in a ballet company—saying to the fledgling, aspiring dancer: "You have the chance I didn't have, so go the extra mile." How lucky I was to have been in that first generation of DTH

dancers who had Kathy Grant holding our feet to the fire, helping us fulfill *her* dream. How fortunate to have been the recipient of her generous spirit, and how clear it is that passing it forward is the best way to honor her life and work. —*Virginia Johnson, Dance Theatre of Harlem*



## ∞ LIFE LESSONS ∞

I met Mrs. Grant in 1973, at the Dance Theatre of Harlem, where I danced for 22 years before going on to direct the Oakland Ballet. She introduced me to Pilates through a DTH class called Special Exercises. Injuries sustained in a car accident in the late '80s kept me off the stage for eight months. I went to Mrs. Grant to heal. I believed she could help me resume my career, and she did.

She was teaching at Bendel's, and she knew that on my dancer's salary, I couldn't afford private lessons. However, she said if I'd come in before her other clients, she'd work with me at a drastically reduced rate. So three mornings a week, I'd show up at 7:30, and she was always there waiting for me. The space was tiny, and she insisted that everyone follow the rules of order: the way to store your dance bag, to work methodically and efficiently, to clean the surfaces when you finish, to concentrate. The work to her was about subtlety,

she taught us, not brute force. She was extremely particular about the proper care of the Pilates machines and the equipment, which were most sacred to her. After a few months, sure enough, I was able to return to the stage.

Years later she told me that the day I arrived, after the car accident, she had to really work at not reacting to the gnarled condition my body was in. She said had I known how "jacked up" I was, my journey might have been fraught with frustration and doubt about a full recovery.

I retired from DTH in 1995 and resumed performing in 2008. I know that the Pilates exercises and concepts that she taught me starting in 1973 and which I utilize to this day are the reason that I was able to return to the stage and go on to have a rewarding career. I am so blessed to have learned from the master named Kathy Grant.

—Karen Brown

### *And She'll Never Tell...*

I didn't have the privilege of knowing Kathy for very long; in fact, we met on only a few occasions and for a few hours each time, but she is indelibly marked in my mind as smart, sassy and passionate about her work. During a chair workshop at my re:AB studio, when trying to get me to engage more pelvic floor, she came and whispered something in my ear that made me blush—and that's no easy feat. She was funny and real and a character to boot. To know her, even for a short time, was to love her. She will be very missed.

—Brooke Siler



From left:  
Brooke Siler,  
Kathy Corey,  
Michael Fritzke,  
Kathy Grant,  
Ton Voogt

## Cheeky Monkey

Kathy always loved to leave you with a lasting impression, something to ponder, to improve your practice and your life. She was especially successful with me in that way. On my fourth visit, she put me in a reverse Monkey with no springs. I had no idea what she was doing, but I noticed this twinkle in her eye. There I was, feet on the bar, legs and arms extended, and my hands outside my feet on the bar. I couldn't move. She walked away and told me to bend my knees and shift to the high Teaser-Monkey position. That's when I actually yelled at her: "Hey you! Come back here! I can't move this thing! Don't just leave me!" She sat down in her little chair and smiled as she watched me struggle. It took me a minute, but I figured it out. She seemed very pleased with herself in having me go where I didn't think I could go. Every time we saw each other after that, we laughed about it. All kidding aside, it was a real lesson in learning to accept challenges and have faith in yourself that you can go where you think you can't. Love you, Kathy: You are in my heart forever.

—Mari Winsor

## A LIFESAVER

I was 17 when I was introduced to Kathy Grant in 1977 by an Alvin Ailey dancer named Coco. She encouraged me to come to Kathy's gym because my back was crooked. So I followed Coco into the tiny gym on the 6th floor of Bendel's, and she guided me to a lean, light-skinned black woman with an abundance of freckles and a short red afro wearing a satiny floral jumpsuit. Busy with paperwork, she sat at a little desk tucked into the corner near the High Barrel. Coco spoke quietly to the woman, then turned and motioned to me. I smiled shyly, ready to say hello but was cut off.

"Never mind that, love," Kathy barked. "Turn around, stand parallel, bend your knees slightly and roll down your spine." I did as I was told, and she said, "Okay, you can stand up now." As I stood again, Kathy turned back to her desk and asked, "What time do your classes start?"

"9:30 a.m.," I said.

She studied her book. "Can you be here at 8 on Tuesday?"

"Yes," I replied without thinking.

"I'll see you then. Lessons are \$15, and for your condition, I'd recommend you come in twice a week." She looked up and stared at me over her glasses: "That is, if I can fit you in."

"What is my 'condition'?" I asked nervously.

"You have scoliosis. I'll tell you more after I start working with you." She went back to her paperwork and dismissed us with a brusque "Now I'm busy. Run along, and Coco, get to work."

That day altered my life.

I knew nothing about Pilates, but like a good little dancer, I followed directions, though at first not as efficiently as Kathy would have liked. With her strong, knobby fingers, Kathy would poke my stomach, trying to waken my weak abdominals. She'd quickly lose patience and snap, "Not like that, little one: Pull them in, scoop and hollow. No, not on the inhale; on the *exhale*." It took time but gradually I began to grasp the notion that I could use my breath to help move small, intrinsic muscles. From Kathy I was learning the key to Pilates: working from the inside out.

Those first few weeks, Kathy didn't even address the scoliosis, but as we continued to work together, she began to address the weakness and tightness of the curve. With subtle manipulation of the breath into certain areas of the body, I began to move with more ease and better alignment.

Eventually I retired as a dancer and began to teach full-time. Kathy had such a good eye and such a keen kinesthetic intuition about the body that those of us who had the good fortune of working with her also developed the potential to become good instructors. If it wasn't for Kathy's ultimate patience with me as I studied with her, I never would have had the opportunity to share the magic of Pilates in such a profound way. —Cheryl Montelle



Cheryl and Kathy

# Do You Know *Your* Pilates?

I met Kathy Grant in 1983, and the bond that we formed was both professional and personal. She was my friend, my mentor, my teacher and, at times, my student. Sometimes she'd appear at a workshop where I was teaching and say, "Teach me something. I just want to be a student."

Kathy was always seeking knowledge. One of her favorite questions was "Do you know your Pilates?" I knew the answer she always wanted to hear: "No, I do not know my Pilates." "Good," she would say. "Because when you think you know Pilates, you should stop teaching. It means you are not present with the person in front of you, that you are presupposing what that body needs. How can you be a good teacher if you are not present and in the moment? How can you be a good teacher if you are not continuing to learn something every time you teach?"

One time she caught me off-guard and asked me something different: "Do you know what Pilates is for?" Having been a Pilates teacher for more than a quarter of a century, I uttered something that I thought was appropriate. But

then she said, "It is for the unexpected."

She went on to explain that she had been at a concert and was taking the subway home. It was rather late, and as she stood on the subway platform, a group of teenagers rushed by and she fell.

"Let me tell you what did *not* happen," she continued. "I did not break my hip or my arm. I did not hurt my knee. What I did was get up and get on the subway and go home, because when I fell, my Pilates was there for me. It was in my body and helped me to fall correctly. I was able to avoid serious injury. Pilates helped me through the unexpected that life throws at us. So if you live in your Pilates body, constantly and correctly and you stay present in that body, that is what Pilates is, and what it is for—the unexpected."

Kathy's passing was not unexpected. But I am still shaken that I cannot pick up the phone or go to her studio to listen to her wisdom and share more moments both joyous and sad. And though she is not here, she is ever-present in the teachings of anyone who was fortunate enough to know her.

—Kathy Corey



The two Kathys

## A Note of Thanks

Dear Kathy,

How fortunate was I to have met you at the infancy of my career. I remember coming to New York all starry-eyed, a black ballerina with a full scholarship with the Dance Theatre of Harlem and dreams of sugarplums dancing in my head. But soon I found myself on the floor doing weird and painful things and saying to myself, "This isn't ballet." Fast-forward to a torn cartilage and me determined to heal and return to New York. I arrived in pain, but like most driven, foolish youngsters, I was convinced that I could will the pain away.

Fast-forward again to successful microsurgery, after which I was miraculously led back to you. Because I had no family or friends to speak to, you became everything to me. You were my cheerleader who never let me give up on a dream that seemed to die before it began. I thank you for the endless hours of work you did with me, hours that turned into a lifetime. I expect if one looked up *tough love* in the dictionary, they'd find your picture there. I thank for turning my body into a killer machine that could and did withstand grueling

international tours. You allowed me to dance at the great pyramids at Giza, beneath David's Wall in Jerusalem, the Herod Atticus Theater at the base of the Acropolis.... The list is endless.

Kathy, you were my secret weapon. Thank you for always stressing the fact that one had to be extra strong in order to have longevity. Thank you for keeping me humble by having me clean the machines the day after I received a 20-minute standing ovation. Throughout my teaching career, you are always in my head. To say you taught me everything I know is a grave understatement.

I vow to try to keep up the high standards that you instilled in me, first and foremost among them to take the utmost care of anyone who puts their body into my hands. I always remember your precise care and attention to every detail of the human being—even the baby finger requires attention, you taught me. Most of my own students feel as if they know you because I refer to you constantly. And the ones who have become teachers are continuing your amazing legacy.

— Love always, Sarita Allen