



## Donnette Heath Gaicochea

July 21, 1968 - April 4, 2020

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Donnette Lee Heath entered this world on July 21st, 1968 as the second child of her father, Don Lee Heath, and her mother, Yvonna Mae Galloway Heath, and as younger sister to David Scott Heath. From that moment forward, she danced into everyone's hearts. That gift of dance became a passion that led her to pursue many of her life dreams and spread her light and grace to all. As a youth and young adult, she was a cherished member of the Lumberton High School Raiderettes, Kilgore Junior College Rangerettes, and the Sam Houston State University Modern Dance Department. During her time in each of these organizations, not only did she shine on stage and connect instantly with her audience, but she also made many lifelong connections and friendships. Those who have known her since those days have recounted many times when she provided them love, encouragement, and inspiration. This ability to give a part of her heart in every relationship was one of her innate gifts.

After college she moved to Salt Lake City and later to San Francisco to pursue her dream of a career in dance. Ultimately, she started her own dance company, Dance Repertory ([dancerepertory.org](http://dancerepertory.org)). Through her experiences dancing and directing, she discovered her greater life's passion of empowering young people through dance education to love themselves in

their own journey. Dance Repertory became her outlet to inspire thousands of lives, both young and old, over nearly two decades through her beloved Vision Series program.

In the midst of pursuing her dance dreams, Donnette met and married Josh Gaicochea. The two of them made a home in New York City and soon found great joy as they brought their son, Noah, into the world. Noah became the light of her life. He was her constant sidekick. All who knew Donnette, knew Noah, too, because she utterly beamed when she spoke of him. Being the best mother she could be became her greatest passion in life.

As a young family, Donnette, Josh, and Noah moved to Tarrytown, NY. There Donnette devoted herself to caring for her family and continuing to expand her circle of friends through involvement in the community and her work at New York Life, all while striving to continue her dance work in San Francisco.

All of these earthly experiences nearly ended for her in January 2013 when she had her first massive stroke. Donnette showed the world at that time that she was a fighter and wouldn't let the damage to her brain hold her down. Despite losing much of the mobility on her left side, and with support from her family, and most of all, her son, Noah, Donnette proved her strength to the world and embarked to use her God-given talents to spread her message of loving and caring for oneself, cherishing moments as they come, and counting the blessings all around us. She did so by inspiring others to use dance to become beacons of light to all around them.

Just over seven years later, her loved ones were devastated to learn she had once again suffered a massive stroke. This one proved to be a call home from our Father in Heaven. On April 4, 2020, Donnette left this mortal world and was healed of her earthly burdens by His great power. No doubt she entered heaven dancing, just as she had danced into this earthly world almost 52

years earlier.

United in loving Donnette, we know that her impact will not end if each of us continues to dance strong for Donnette and spread her message of love to all we meet. In this way, her light will continue to shine.

We know Donnette will be looking over those of her family and friends still living - her beloved son, Noah Gaicochea, his father, Josh Gaicochea, her older brother, David Heath, her younger sister, Sharon (Robert) White, her step-mother, Theresa Heath, many nieces and nephews, and countless cherished friends. We feel assured Donnette has rejoiced as she has joined those of her family already departed from this life, including her mother, Yvonna Galloway, and her father, Don Heath.

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Friends, your expressions of love have brought a measure of peace to our souls. We cannot have a fitting memorial service at this time due to COVID-19. There may be something planned in the future. In lieu of this, we ask you to please share stories, cherished memories, or pictures of Donnette. You can post them on this tribute page, on the Dancing Strong for Donnette Facebook Group (link below), or send them to [sharonrhwhite@gmail.com](mailto:sharonrhwhite@gmail.com).

In this way we can all share the ways our lives were impacted by Donnette and rejoice together that we were blessed to feel her love and light. These stories, thoughts, and images will be compiled into a book for Noah and the family.

Also, in lieu of flowers, please consider contributing in honor of Donnette to the American Stroke Association, which was an organization she valued.

The American Stroke Association

[https://www2.heart.org/site/SPageNavigator/donatenow\\_stroke.html?s\\_src=20U2W1UEMG&s\\_subsrc=stroke\\_top\\_nav\\_button](https://www2.heart.org/site/SPageNavigator/donatenow_stroke.html?s_src=20U2W1UEMG&s_subsrc=stroke_top_nav_button)

# Tribute Wall



“ I am just hearing this sad news. Donette was a mentor to me at Sam Houston while I was a dance major and she returned to help organize the Dance Alumni concert. She was so vibrant and full of ideas and her laugh filled the building. Her support of me continued after i graduated and we grew into good friends. My heart is heavy for Noah and the rest of her family, she will be missed.

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**Danyale Williams** - July 25, 2020 at 04:36 PM



“ I am so shocked. I first met Donnette in the fall of 1995. I was in a period of my life where I wanted to run away from everything that reminded me of Texas. And who do I meet at a dance class in San Francisco? The most Texan girl you could ever run into in California. At the time I had no place to live and hardly a job. I was just running on the fumes of pursuing a dream. She let me stay with her in her tiny apartment in the Sunset district and in return I danced in a duet with her that she had choreographed in Texas. I remember she was working her tail off at McCormick and Schmick (I think?) in the Embarcadero. We were both in our mid to late twenties wanting to shed the old and take on the new. I remember she wanted to start a repertory company. I eventually got a job at a metaphysical bookstore in the Castro and met a man there that became my boyfriend. His name was Bart and he owned his own chiropractic clinic across from Cafe Flore. I introduced Donnette to Bart and she eventually became a client. Then I moved in with Bart, however Donnette and I continued to dance together in her piece. We performed it in a small venue that showcased other up and coming dance talent. It was a deeply passionate work and she brought out emotions in me that I was not dealing with at the time. I remember that period of her life in San Francisco was very emotionally convulsive for her. The times she came to the clinic after dancing together she shared some incredibly intimate moments about her life with me and Bart. A few months later Bart died tragically of AIDS and during that period of transition for me I lost touch with Donette until I recently found her on FB back in January. I left SF in 96 and moved down to Santa Barbara to dance, then eventually back to NYC in 2001. I am so incredibly sad to find out that she has passed and especially that it was way before her time. She had so much to give that I was always amazed that such a little body could produce such energy, emotion and movement. She was a well-trained dancer and so pure in her technique. She mentioned how much she respected her teachers at Sam Houston and understood the power of other legendary dancers that shaped some of her tutelage like Martha Graham. She was truly clear in her vision and deeply invested in the idea of dance as a healing art form. Over two decades now the sheer force of her personality and determination to

*make her life into an act of art speaks to me. If there was anyone who could make those words 'to thine own self be true' into physical form it was Donnette. I will miss her, and she saved me from homelessness for a brief moment. But more than that she gave me focus in a time when I was all over the place. I am sure she is still doing her work above dancing with the angels. Thank You, Daryl Fowkes.*

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**Daryl Fowkes** - July 05, 2020 at 12:05 AM

SG

“ Dear Noah,  
*We are holding you close in our hearts, thoughts and prayers. I pray that as you continue to live life, you will find your mom's loving presence surrounds you in all good things and people. Your mom will always remain with you in the joyful memories that, in time, will overshadow the sadness and grief from this unbearable loss. She was the best of us and always found the best in others. Donnette was a beautiful person inside and out and when we were together her eyes sparkled simply from being around you. She was the gem of moms who radiated joy, love and pride for you. As the mystery of death surrounds us, may you feel comfort from the love of family and friends who care so deeply about you.*  
*Love, Sue, David, Adam and Simon Geisker*

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**Sue Geisker** - April 23, 2020 at 02:45 PM

 KaTe Wong

“ *To a wonderful person with the biggest heart to help anyone she can for the good of the world. You'll be missed and will always be remembered as a great spirit who's generosity is contagious and admirable.*  
*<3 Dr. Kate Wong*

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**KaTe Wong** - April 10, 2020 at 11:47 PM

FS

“ To the family I send heartfelt condolences. I was lucky to have her as a friend and she is with me now in spirit. I will always remember her vibrancy and keep it with me. She was the friend who would listen, and be open and honest. Consistently supportive and someone who always made time for you, she was genuine in the things she did and with the people she cared about. I miss her very much.

*Frengiz Surty*

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**Frengiz Surty** - April 10, 2020 at 08:11 PM



“ My heart is heavy as I say goodbye to a bright light of this world. Though in the 9 years of our relationship Donnette played many professional roles in my life; from teacher, to mentor and finally boss, somehow what she taught me most was about how to ferociously bring love into the world. I, like many, couldn't help but admire her ability to always rise up to challenges and feed pain with love. A motivational speaker that I've seen firsthand ignite passion in children through dance. Dance Repertory was never about the dancing so much as it was about teaching these kids to live passionately, and dance could be the vehicle to do so. Though Donnette had a undeniably fierce love for her dance community it came only second to her gushing adoration for her son Noah. A colleague and a boss, but moreover a friend, we worked tirelessly as a two-women-team for Dance Repertory. Memories of long hours, late nights, and plenty of red wine as we organized applications and show orders. An inspiring teacher, entrepreneur, motivational speaker, & mother that dances on in our hearts now. That women knew how to love deeply and unapologetically, and that spirit will certainly dance on in her stead.

Love Always,  
Francesca



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Francesca Dominguez - April 09, 2020 at 11:17 PM

AB

“ My memory of Donnette was her contagious & genuine loving smile & spirit. Her love for her Noah was unmeasurable as her face would absolutely light up whenever his name was mentioned...he was & will always be her shining light....RIP my Dear, Dear Friend as I will Think of You everytime I dance....

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**Annette Brown** - April 08, 2020 at 07:59 PM

KM

“ Noah, I knew Donnette very well while she attended Kilgore junior college. When I shipped out overseas in the army we kinda grew apart. Our lives just took different directions. I am so grateful to have known her. She was a wonderful, caring woman and the world is a lesser place without her in it. I will never forget her.

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**Kevin Martin** - April 08, 2020 at 02:31 PM

CA

“ Kyle and I only knew Donnette for a short period of time, but do you ever meet someone and know right away they're someone special? Donnette always gave off such a love for life and interaction. Each time we spoke to her she always made us feel welcome and as if it was the highlight of her day. Her text messages always filled with such excitement. She certainly made us feel special, and always made us smile, we especially loved the batch of cookies she made us.

We only wish we got to know her more, and reading all of these tributes know we truly were blessed to have known her even such a short period of time <3

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**Carey** - April 07, 2020 at 11:56 PM

ML

“ My Dearest Noah,

*I'm so, so incredibly sorry for your loss. I know that many people have said it, but I also know that your mother would want me to say this to you, too. You meant EVERYTHING to her. Of course, she loved your father, and family and friends, but her bond with you was pretty indescribable. You were, at once, Donnette Heath's star in the east and the twinkle in her eye. As you may or may not remember, I had the incredible pleasure of working with your mother (who has been one of my best friends for 30 years) to create the story of Peony Mae (for D'Ants In Your Pants). Your mother sparkled when we were creating it, and even as we worked on the story, I was certain that Peony Mae, was really your mother's beautiful soul, with its dazzling optimism and contagious love of life, brought to life again in the pages of a children's book. I'm so grateful for that now. When my memories fail me, I'll always know I can return to the story and visit her. I hope you can, too. It's part of the legacy she left you.*

*Noah, the truth of the matter is that there are no words I, or anyone else for that matter, could say that could lessen the pain you're feeling, right at this moment. Oh, God, I wish there were. But nothing could make it suck less TODAY. But that's today. I think I can safely speak for almost anyone leaving messages for you, when I say that time will, in its own slow-crawling way, eventually dampen some of the pain. And that, there will be a day, there WILL BE a tomorrow, and I say this from personal experience, there will be a day when you are suddenly able to also remember the happy, carefree moments with your beautiful Mom. Not just the sadness and loss. And that's my prayer for you. I pray that day comes sooner than later for you and for your father, and for the rest of your family.*

*Noah, there's much more that I could say, but more than anything, I want you to know that I count myself as one of the many, many people (as seen from the incredible Facebook outpouring) who will always love you and your mother, and want what's best for you. And that, if you ever need a friend, I'm one of the many, many, many friends that you are inheriting from your beloved mother. We all*

*loved your mother, and we all love you.*

*I'm so incredibly sorry for your loss...*

*Michael*

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**Michael Leleux** - April 07, 2020 at 11:32 PM

SS

“ *When I tried out for Raiderettes in 1986, she helped me learn the routine. She was so patient, kind and really encouraged me. She was such a beautiful person inside and out. Not to mention a talented dancer. She will be missed by many. Prayers to her family and friends.*

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**Shelia Smith** - April 07, 2020 at 06:18 PM

DF

“ *Donnette was my student in Lumberton High School. She was very smart, cooperative, and fun in class. I was the Raiderette Director when she became a Raiderette. She was a beautiful dancer and an officer. Upon high school graduation, Donnette followed some other Raiderettes (including me) to go on to become a Kilgore Rangerette. Miss Gussie Nell Davis was the director of Rangerettes and thanked me profusely for encouraging Donnette to become a Rangerette- which she did. My heart breaks for her family and friends. Donnette was one in a million and I loved her.*

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**Danese Fondren** - April 07, 2020 at 03:07 PM

“Donnette and I went to high school together just one year apart, she was in the LHS class of 1986 and I was right behind her in the class of 1987. I remember her most for beautifully representing our school as one of our Raiderettes. I was in the band so we were in the stands and on the football field together at the games.

*With the technology of Facebook, I was fortunate enough to reconnect with Donnette several years ago online. Knowing that she had gone on to become a Kilgore Rangerette and then dedicated her career and her life to dance, I was saddened to find that she had suffered a stroke and could no longer dance. However, it was clear to me that she had taken this horrible situation and used it to go on encouraging and uplifting others.*

*Later in my life, at the age of 44, I found the joy of dance and started learning and performing a number of different dance styles. I became a competitive country dancer in the ProAm circuit and have enjoyed success with a number of wins that I share with my dance pro partner. I always post about my performances and competitions on Facebook and Donnette always took the time to react and comment on my posts. She always had something positive to say encouraging me to continue on my dance journey.*

*In spite of the fact that we pursued different dance styles and I will never be half the dancer/performer that she was, I am so fortunate to have had that connection with her, to share a passion for something so magical as dance, and to be inspired by her life. I will never forget the huge positive impact that Donnette had and will continue to have on my life and many others.*

*I am so deeply sorry for Donnette's family as they suffer this tremendous loss. However, you all are so lucky to have been so close to and loved by such a remarkable person. I wish for you now peace and comfort knowing how much joy Donnette brought into this world.*

DF

*Well said, Melanie! Thank you. I am so proud of you, too!*

**Danese Fondren** - April 07, 2020 at 03:09 PM



“ *Noah, we are so sorry for your loss. Your mother was an amazing woman. She was strong and loving. She loves you very much! Our prayers and thoughts go out to you and your family during this tragic time. May your mother continue to be your guardian angel forever!*

*Love*

*Mr and Mrs Gianni, Emily, Brandan and Kyle*

**Fatima Gianni** - April 07, 2020 at 09:20 AM

CL

“ *Noah: Know you are in our hearts right now. Your mother was a beautiful woman inside and out and the few times we met I was always impressed by her warmth and graciousness. Sending you a big virtual hug - may your memories of your mom sustain you through this difficult time.*

*God bless you and may your mother rest in peace.*

*Craig Lis*

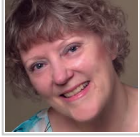
**Craig Lis** - April 07, 2020 at 08:27 AM

P(

“ Donnette i was blessed to have known you all these years. It was an honor to not only have you as my client, or my friend, but also my sister in the Lord. I will always treasure the times we had together in the shop, at my place and let's not forget in your new home in Sleepy Hollow. I thank you for the generous cooked shared meals you provided for me after work. I will always treasure the awesome time we spent together in good conversations. Nor, will I ever forget the laughter you brought me when we went to karaoke, or at any of the other different activities we shared together. I promise you that I will always be here for Noah if he ever did need a shoulder to cry on, or if he just needed a simple hug. And, in any of his tears that he may shed, I promise you that I will give him the ear he needs, or the reminders that your still here with him. I will remind him that your love continues within himself and around him. Well, my friend till we meet again in heaven, continue to dance with that new glorious body for our Lord and keep smiling. And I ask one last thing, look for my mother, my child Josiah and my sister Joyce; and give them all a big hug for me. Oh, before I forget, you can borrow my Qtip till I get up there (lol), give him many pets and don't forget to rub his belly for me (lol), and remind him that his mommy loves and misses him too. Well, my friend I'll never say goodbye, but I will say I'll see you later. Love you much my friend and my spiritual sister. Till we meet again 🥰💋💋. And to the family & friends of Donnette remember life is eternal, Donnette still lives. She may not be physically here as we once knew, but she is with us and is smiling at each and every one of us. Her acts and memories she left behind for us to remember and to remind us never to take any thing in life for granted, never to give up, and never to leave a curse of hatred to someone that may have hurt or disappointed you. And finally to raise above any disappointment & to listen to your body for good health.

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Patricia Estatico (Patti) - April 07, 2020 at 12:39 AM



“ I will never forget her smile and her laugh, which I can still hear. She was a true gift wrapped in gumption, creativity and shine. Dance, dance away sweet friend. You are even more beautiful now.

Lynn Reynolds

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Lynn Reynolds - April 06, 2020 at 11:06 PM

AF

“ . She is dancing with the angels now 🙏 our hearts are breaking in two . She was very talented , driven , beautiful and the kindest soul you could ever meet . Rachel Byrd and I have so many fond memories of her during our high school years together . Her little body and her beautiful big hair wrapped up with that little bandana in every color and that aqua net addiction we all had lol She was always dancing and helping others learn as well . I remember in high school she worked with me for days teaching me a dance routine and never gave up on me and had so much patience for my non existent dance skills lol I remember she encouraged me to join Drama Club with her ( probably because she knew I couldn't dance and it would be more fitting for me lol ) where we had so much fun 😊 she loved the spotlight and the stage ❤️ And oh what fun Rachel and I had getting her to dress up in these gosh awful punk rock outfits we use to wear to school and she totally rocked it lol Rachel Byrd and I will never forget a sleep over we had just the three of us one night watching her practice dance moves lol She has definitely left her mark and will not be forgotten . Please, again , praying for her family and young son Noah and for all of us who loved her dearly . Heaven is a real place and I have no doubt she is dancing with our lord 🙏🙏🙏🙏🙏❤️ Fly high beautiful 🦋

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adana Frazier - April 06, 2020 at 09:55 PM

AK

“ I spent some time with Donnette at Sam Houston State in the dance department. I remember her smile and enthusiasm most. Even in her passing she is still bringing friends together. Noah you will always have her with you; a bond that strong never ends.

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**Angela Kropik** - April 06, 2020 at 08:52 PM

BC

“ Donnette was a beautiful person whose heart was very large with love for everyone. I will miss her friendship. We were working on a book to help others overcome their disabilities. May her soul rest peacefully.

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**Barbara Cerf** - April 06, 2020 at 05:17 PM