

Maria and Marjorie Tallchief danced professionally all over the world. In 1970, Marjorie and Maria went to Chicago. They were directors at the Chicago Ballet, an important American ballet studio. The sisters worked together for many years.

In 2013, Marjorie said goodbye to her sister. Maria Tallchief died, and the ballet world lost a star.

Maria and Marjorie are two of the greatest Native American artists of all time.

Maria and Marjorie

In simple English

Based on a true story

Written by Emily Reel



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Dear Maria,

Today I got a letter. We are invited to a special celebration. The Osage nation is organizing the celebration in our honor. They are calling us the “Osage dancers.” They are proud of our work.

Maria, I know you do not like a lot of attention. But please go to the celebration. People need to see you get this honor. You are an example for our people.

You were the first to go all over Europe and dance professionally. Because you were first, more artists will go after you. You helped me, and now, I get to be a professional dancer too.

I hope you decide to go to the celebration. I hope to see you soon!

Your sister,
Marjorie

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Dear Marjorie,

I wish you were here. Today was terrible. My feet hurt so much! They hurt so much that I can not dance.

Mom says, "You can be a great dancer, Maria. But you need to practice." I want to practice, but it hurts. What do I do? I do not want Mom to be mad. Mom is serious about ballet.

I wish you were in class with me today. I love it when we dance together. Ballet is so much fun.

But not today. I can not dance with these shoes. My shoes are too small! I asked Mom for new shoes, but she said *no*. She is worried about money.

But don't worry. We will have more money if Dad gets the job in California. What is California like? Please write soon.

Love,
Maria

Dear Marjorie,

That is good news! Mom and Dad so very happy. Mom is especially proud. Now, they are two dancers in the family.

Will leave for New York soon? I am going to go to New York soon. I will stop and see you.

I am so proud of our ballet company. I love dancing with the new director, Mr. Balanchine. He says I will be the lead dancer and he has made a solo just for me.

We are doing very modern, new techniques. We go to Paris, Rome, and soon New York. People see the new style of ballet and they are amazed.

People are changing. The newspapers used to call me a "redskin" but now they call me a "star." I think ballet is changing.

The American Ballet Theater will love you. Soon they will call you a star too.

Love,
Maria



Dear Maria,

Amazing news! I am going to be a professional dancer! I get to dance in New York City. I was so scared at the audition. There were so many dancers.

At first, I had a hard time with the jumps. My legs were getting tired. But I remembered a technique you showed me. I used my legs the way you showed me, and I got it! Now, I am officially a dancer with American Ballet Theater. I'm so excited!

-Marjorie





Dear Marjorie,

I am so happy! I get to dance with a famous director. His name is George Balanchine.

Mr. Balanchine is very creative. He says I do not need to look “traditional.” Many artists are different. Being different helps the creative process.

Now, Mr. Balanchine is helping me with my technique. He says that I will be the lead dancer. But it takes time.

He says, “You can be a great dancer, but you need to practice.” Mom said that too.

Every day, I get up at 7:00 AM. I practice all day. Most of the time, I dance. But sometimes, I just listen to the music.

I finish practice by 10:00 PM. I work so hard, my feet hurt. But I am so excited!

Please tell Mom and Dad about this good news. I will write soon and tell you more.

Love,
Maria

Dear Maria,

Just one week and we will be together. You will like California. Oklahoma is so small. In California, we will live in a big city. Dad says we have more opportunities. And we will go to the BEST ballet studio.

Today I got to see the studio. It is beautiful! You will love it. Dad says it is world-famous.

The instructor is a famous dancer. But he is very serious. I danced my best, but the instructor was not happy. He says we did not learn correct technique. We have to go to the beginner class. It’s a little sad.

But don’t worry. One day, we will be famous dancers. The ballet instructor says the most important dancer is the “lead.” The lead dancer gets lots of solos.

You will love it here! I can’t wait to dance with my sister again.

See you soon,
Marjorie

Dear Marjorie,

Happy Birthday. Are you happy to be 15? I miss the days when we were little. I loved it when we danced just for fun. Now I am a professional and there is so much pressure.

But I love it. I dance with the best ballet studio, the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. We go to big cities like New York and Mexico City. But I have to practice every day.

I work hard every day, but I don't know if I will get a solo. But I do not have an important role. I am just one of 100 dancers. All the dancers are very good.

The dancers came from Europe. Some say they had to run away. They are all talking about Hitler. They say a director, Monsieur Blum, disappeared. They say the Nazis took him. We are all so scared. But we can't give up. I miss you, Mom, and Dad. But I love ballet so much, so I will just keep dancing.

Your sister,
Maria

Dear Maria,

I am sorry. It is very hard to be different. People can be cruel. Don't worry. One day, history books will write about you. They will say that you were the first. You are the first great Native American dancer.

You are an example for our nation, the Osage Nation. And you are a good example for me too! You inspire me, and I love you.

Don't give up. Just keep dancing.

Your Sister,
Marjorie

Dear Marjorie,

After you left, something terrible happened. People liked the ballet and my solo. They say I danced well. But one journalist said I do not “look like a dancer.” He made fun of me and my skin color.

This morning, the director gave me white makeup and white tights. He says I will look more “traditional.” He means I will look more white. I am so hurt, I could cry.

But I have to do what the director says. I have a solo for now, but it is temporary. I am nervous. What if I can not be a lead dancer because I am a not white?

I wish I could visit Oklahoma again. I wish I could see you, Mom, and Dad. I wish I did not look and feel so different.

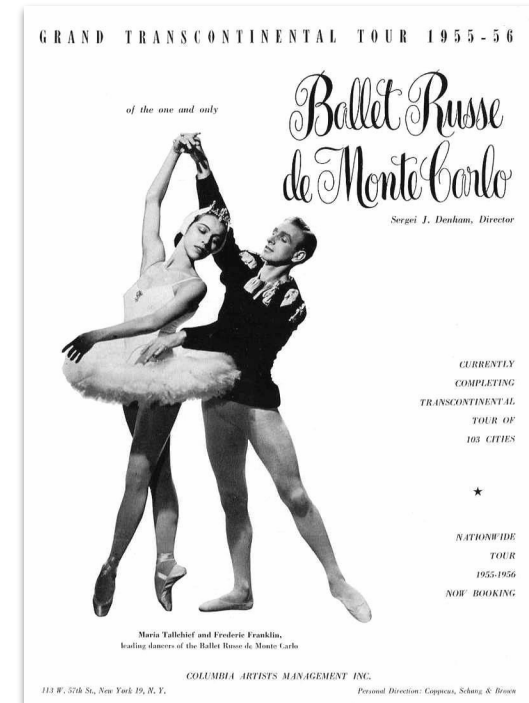
Please write soon. I miss you, Marjorie.

Love,
Maria

Marjorie,

Big news! I am the new lead dancer. The director says the other lead dancer got hurt and I need to dance her solo. This is my big chance! I am so nervous but so excited. Please tell Mom and Dad the good news!

-Maria





Dear Maria,

I got your letter and I am so happy for you. I am coming to see you now.

Finally, I can see my sister dance the lead. I am so proud. You worked so hard. Now this is your big chance. All of Paris will see you dance, and they will love you! I will see you too, and I love you. !

Love,

Marjorie

Marjorie,

You came! You came all the way to Europe to see my solo. What a surprise! You are the best sister. Thank you!

-Maria

