

ARTS

Big opportunity in the Big Apple

Teen dancer to train with famed Radio City Rockettes

By Stephanie Thiessen
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

If only she were three inches taller.

It's something local dancer Brianna Fitzsimmons, 15, who measures a mere five-foot-three, can only wish for — although she hasn't given up hope she might have a bit more growing left to do.

"We've got our fingers crossed," said her mother, Wendy.

Several months ago, Brianna saw the world-famous Radio City Rockettes perform for the first time at their Christmas show in Toronto. Now there was something she could see herself doing, she thought.

But in order to even audition for the precision dance troupe, women must be between five-foot-six and five-foot-10-and-a-half to maintain a consistent look — which means that, unless nature intervenes, Brianna's out of luck no matter how talented a dancer she is.

"I could never be a Rockette unless I get taller," Brianna said.

But she's not getting too hung up on that fact. Especially considering her upcoming opportunity to train with the Rockettes, known for their style, grace and brilliant

smiles as well as their seemingly mile-long legs.

On July 23, Brianna and her mom will travel to New York City so Brianna can take part in a week-long summer training program taught by the Radio City Rockettes. Although not likely to open the door to becoming a Rockette, Brianna said the experience will provide invaluable training, not to mention look impressive on her resumé.

At the end of the week, she'll take part in a recital at Radio City Music Hall.

Brianna found out about the program at the Rockettes' Christmas show and quickly jumped at the chance, sending in a videotaped audition.

Out of 600 girls who tried out, Brianna was one of only 72 chosen. And she's planning on making the most of such a coveted opportunity.

Not that it'll be easy.

"They said I should bring Band-Aids and they'll provide the ice packs," she said, adding, "They're not kidding."

Dancing seven hours a day, she's bound to find good use for both. Fortunately, the upcoming trip won't be all work and no play.

"I've never been to New York before, so I'd really like to see the city when I have time off — just experience it, really," she said.

Brianna has been dancing at Dance Elite since she was five years old, focusing on jazz, ballet, tap, musical theatre, acro and modern dance. She has great hopes of being a choreographer when she's older, and working toward a dance degree in university.

Being a competitive dancer requires staunch commitment, which isn't a problem for the teen.

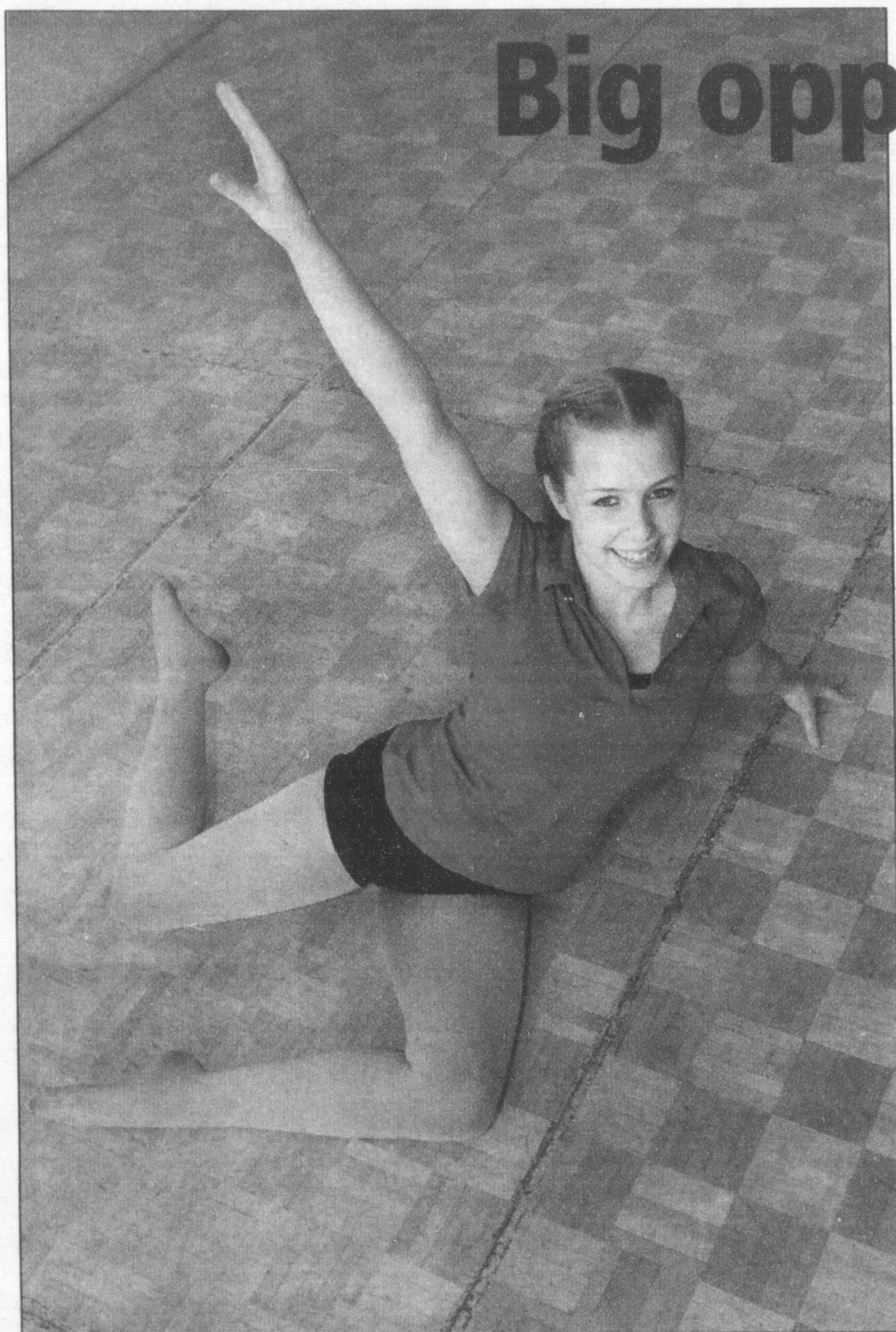
"If you want to be a dancer, you have to be a dancer. You can't have another life," Brianna explained, adding, "I've picked dance as my life."

It was her mom who first encouraged her, being a former dancer herself.

Now, Wendy's almost as excited as her daughter about the upcoming opportunity. The last time she was in New York City, she too was a teenager who'd arrived at the Big Apple to dance her heart out. The fact her daughter is following in her footsteps fills her with pride, she said.

Unfortunately, and to her disappointment, Wendy will be relegated

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