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Exclusive

DEBBIE ALLEN

THE DANCE
LEGEND ON HER
NEW YEAR'S
GOALS

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The Year of**

YOU!



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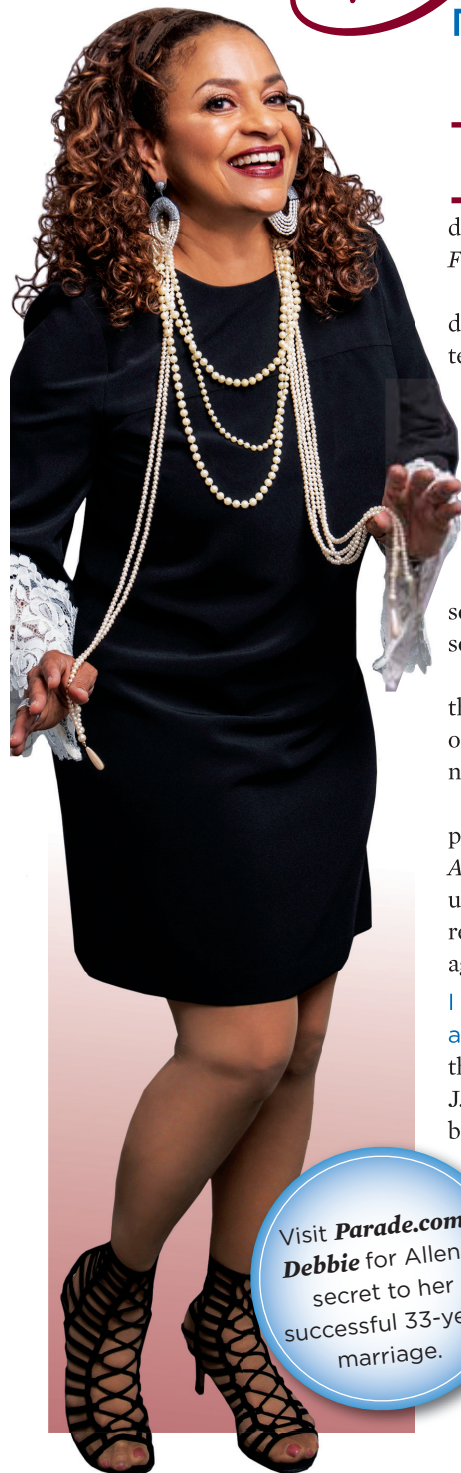


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Dancing Through Life

DEBBIE ALLEN ON *FAME*,
GREY'S ANATOMY AND
HER MISSION TO BRING
THE ARTS TO THE MASSES.

By Nicole Pajer



Debbie Allen is a show business legend, having choreographed the Academy Awards, danced on Broadway, and directed, produced and starred in TV mainstays *Fame*, *A Different World* and *Grey's Anatomy*.

But the Houston, Texas, native's dreams were almost dashed in her teens when a prominent arts school rejected her for having the "wrong body type."

"My mom didn't let me feel sorry for myself," she remembers. "She said, 'You can't let somebody else tell you what you are going to do.' That's something that I teach my kids: 'You can't let somebody kill your joy.'"

Allen ultimately received a scholarship to the Houston Ballet Foundation, a life-changing opportunity that inspired her to create the nonprofit Debbie Allen Dance Academy in 2001.

Allen, 67, gained a new generation of fans playing urologist Catherine Avery on *Grey's Anatomy*. She talked to *Spry Living* about using dance to help cancer survivors, her 2018 resolutions and whether we'll see *Fame* on TV again.

I love using dance to inspire people of all ages. Teaching ages 4 to 94 is so rewarding. At the Dance Academy, we have a program called J.O.Y. for cancer patients/survivors and that has been amazing. We help seniors stay in shape with our Colibri Arts Program. And I love giving young people a chance to experience the arts. When I see those kids dancing, all ethnicities, all ages, sizes, body types, everybody all together, it makes me feel that I am doing something good.

I started a lunchtime dance class at *Grey's Anatomy*. I teach it, and everyone from [star] Ellen Pompeo to the makeup artists

and writers show up. We try to do it twice a week. When I get too busy to teach, my daughter will step in for me.

I love playing Catherine. She loves her son, Jackson, more than she loves herself. That's how I love my children. She wants to be a part of Jackson's life, but sometimes she has to step back—and I have to do that as well!



On the set of *Grey's* with actor Kevin McKidd (Owen)

I'm looking forward to turning 68 this month. I don't look at aging as something I have to come to terms with; I'm glad I'm still here! This is what everybody hopes for, that they

will be healthy and still energized by their work as the years go by. My mother is 94 and she's a poet and is still writing. The blessing of life is to be mature.

I would do a *Fame* reboot in a heartbeat, and I would be the one to make it happen. I've actually had some conversations about it. We'll see what happens, but there's a really good chance.

My favorite way to ring in the New Year is with family and friends, champagne and music. I fill my living room with balloons and it makes my whole house look like a club. I make a big pot of gumbo on New Year's Eve and we eat it while watching football the next day.

My New Year's resolution is to have more inner peace. My mother, Vivian Ayers, once wrote, "The inner beauty creates the outer reality" and that really moved me. I live close to the ocean and I want to do more long walks there. And I like sitting out under the stars at night. Those are things that help you find inner peace so you can start to hear yourself think again.

In 2018, I'm also vowing to sneak in some quality time with myself. I never put myself first. It's hard, but I gotta put myself somewhere close. I'll strive for somewhere in the top five! ●

Visit Parade.com/Debbie for Allen's secret to her successful 33-year marriage.