Photo/artistic illustration - Mackenzie Govier

Artist’s statement

To begin this photo illustration of Kylie Krajicek, who has been a part of “The Nutcracker” production since 2018, I created an 11 inch x 5 inch blank document on Canva. From there, I gathered photos of her from the years 2018 to 2025. Next, I used the element tool on Canva and looked for a textured background. I settled on a white textured background and changed the color to a subtle pink to resemble the color of a pointe shoe. To follow, I looked on Google for a pair of pointe shoes similar to the ones she owns. Then, I downloaded that image into Canva, where I then removed the background using the background remover. I then erased the extra ribbon from the shoes, using the magic eraser in Canva, to then turn the ribbon horizontally and make it extend across the page. I then copied that same ribbon and pasted it below the top one, making it even spacing between the two. Next, I created a text bar with

her name in it with the font Anton and font size 72.1. I changed the color using the color wheel in Canva so that it would be a different shade of the background. Then, I layered another text box on top and wrote “The final stage call,” which is the same name of the story in the font Le Jour Script and font size 27.6. Next, I created a white box by adding another text box and filling it with the color white. From there, I inserted my photos and created two copies of the same photo. For one copy, I changed the filter color on Canva to Slate, which made the image appear to be black and white. For the second copy, I used the background remover on Canva and then later went in with the eraser tool to clean up the edges of the photos. From there, I layered the first copy onto the white box and cropped it so that the white box looked like a photo frame. I then layered the second photo over the first copy, making sure that everything lined up perfectly. I repeated this process seven other times. I then created another text box with the years that each photo was from and placed it at the bottom right of the photos. Lastly, I found an image on Google of a Nutcracker that matched the colors of my page and then uploaded that photo into Canva. I then used the tool background remover and turned it at an angle. In the end, I was really happy with how this photo illustration turned out.

The final stage call

Krajicek overcomes injury to perform in 'The Nutcracker'

Kenzie Govier

"The Nutcracker" is one of the most popular ballets in the world and is a holiday tradition for many, and for those dancers who get to take part, it's even more special. For senior Kylie Krajicek, this season marked the final time she would take the stage, a performance that would challenge her physically and mentally.

"I've been in 'The Nutcracker' since 2018, but the whole thing started before that," Krajicek said. "I grew up watching 'The Nutcracker' with my mom every year, and it was a tradition, so I knew I wanted to be a part of it."

Kylie's mom, Amy Krajicek, remembers those days.

"'The Nutcracker' ballet was something that my mom took me to see when I was growing up. It wasn't something we did every year, but it left enough of a lasting impression that I wanted to start a similar tradition and take my girls to see it when they were old enough," Amy said. "Kylie's studio in Elkhorn didn't have a current tradition of performing the Nutcracker each year when we first joined…Kylie asked her dance teacher if it was okay for her to audition, and that is actually what led to her teacher and choreographer ultimately deciding to create her own production of the ballet within the dance company."

Senior Kylie Krajicek poses for a photo during her last performance of "The Nutcracker." Krajicek had three different roles for her last year. (Courtesy Photo)

In 2018, Kylie started the tradition at Rennae's School of Dance and Acrobatics in Elkhorn and landed her first few roles as the ballerina doll, ice princess, bon bon and winter rose. Every year since, she has been a part of "The Nutcracker."

"It's a tradition that feels like home," Krajicek said. "Every August, Nutcracker auditions roll around, and by December, it's just part of the routine. It's always been a part of my holiday season."

Kylie started with smaller roles, eventually working her way up to more demanding ones like the Snow Queen and Sugar Plum Fairy, though her favorite role was Clara, which she played in 2019.

"It's a role that every girl wants to play when they are younger," Krajicek said. "So just getting that experience and being the main character was very special."

As Kylie grew with the program, she eventually had a greater responsibility not just as a dancer but also as a leader.

"Your roles start out small, but as you get older, you get more leadership opportunities," Krajicek said. "It's not just about the dancing; it's also about setting an example for the younger dancers."

Junior Lexi Engel, who has danced with Kylie since they were both little, remembers looking up to her as a role model.

Senior Kylie Krajicek hops on one leg as solider doll in the 2025 production of “The Nutcracker.” Krajicek has played over 20 roles. (Courtesy Photo)

“She’s been so consistent, and every year she gets better,” Engel said. “I’ve always looked up to her, especially because she’s so good at balancing everything, like choreography, leadership and the pressure of performing.”

This year’s performance didn’t come without setbacks, however. Just two months before her final Nutcracker, Kylie sprained her ankle during volleyball practice, leaving her to wonder what this all might mean.

“I remember sitting with my coach after the injury, and the first thing I said was, ‘But ‘The Nutcracker’ is in two months.’ That’s how much it meant to me,” Krajicek said. “I was scared I wouldn’t be able to dance, especially for my senior year. It was hard to accept.”

Amy also shared her concern, admitting the uncertainty she had about Kylie’s injury.

“It was really hard to think about facing a possible reality that she might not dance in her senior year Nutcracker,” Amy said. “Once we learned the extent of damage she sustained, our first question was, ‘What does this mean for Nutcracker and will she be healed enough to dance at all, much less en pointe?’ Watching your child try to process such big emotions and being told she’d have to ‘wait and see’ before an answer can be given is such a helpless feeling.”

Despite the odds, Kylie remained focused on recovery, working hard with her physical therapist to later return to the pointe shoes that she would need for her role as Snow Queen and Sugar Plum Fairy, showing her perseverance and dedication.

“Going back to pointe was scary at first, but once I felt stronger, I was able to do it,” Krajicek said. “I wasn’t sure if I could do all the roles, but I tried.”

Engel saw the strength Kylie showed during this time.

“Watching her push through the pain and still make it to the performance was very cool,” Engel said. “She was so dedicated to ‘The Nutcracker,’ and even though it hurt, she still made it work.”

When Kylie took the stage for her final performance, the emotions were high.

“It was definitely bittersweet,” Krajicek said. “I’ve danced in so many roles, but this was the last time I’d ever get to do it with these people. It didn’t hit me right away, but I know I’ll never forget this year.”

Amy couldn’t help but feel these same emotions as well.

“Watching her on stage at rehearsal was a feeling unlike any other year of Nutcracker because I could see how grateful she was to be doing what she loved and how proud she was of herself for getting there,” Amy said. “Knowing that it almost didn’t happen is where the gratitude comes into play.”

Senior Kylie Krajicek leaps into the air as the Arabian princess. Krajicek played two other roles in the 2025 production of “The Nutcracker.” (Courtesy Photo)

As her senior year comes to an end and she prepares to pursue dance in college, Kylie is ready to embrace the next chapter, knowing “The Nutcracker” will always hold a special place in her heart.

“It’s been an incredible experience, but I’m excited to see where next year takes me,” Krajicek said. “I’ve learned so much from this, and I’ll carry that with me.”

Photo Illustration by Mackenzie Govier