

Patricia Lousada obituary

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My friend Patricia Lousada, who has died aged 89, was a pioneering ballet dancer in postwar New York. She was immortalised in a photograph in *The Family of Man* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and found a third wave of fame in the UK with a series of popular and prescient cookery books.

Born in Manhattan, to Marie (nee Camera), an Italian opera singer turned seamstress, and Charles McBride, an Irish stockbroker who worked as a building manager after the 1929 crash, Pat dropped out of Bronxville high school after her talent was spotted by the choreographer George Balanchine.

Along with her best friend (and Balanchine's bride-to-be), Tanaquil Le Clercq, they helped to found the Ballet Society, later to become New York City Ballet. Pat danced in landmark productions of Balanchine's best known collaborations with Igor Stravinsky, including *Orpheus* and *Apollo*.

In 1950, she was captured emerging from the sea after swimming at Fire Island, New York, by a passing photographer, Paul Himmel. The snap, which showcased Pat's natural beauty, earned the nickname "Botticelli Girl" and found its way into the 1955 Family of Man exhibition, MoMa's blockbuster show of 503 portraits.

At 22, Pat married the theatre director Carmen Capalbo, with whom she had a daughter, Carla, and a son, Marco. She remained with Balanchine until the mid-1950s, also dancing as part of Merce Cunningham's modern dance company, and on Broadway in productions such as Silk Stockings.

She and her children moved for two years to Paris, where Pat modelled, studied at the Cordon Bleu cookery school and worked as a representative for photographers including Gordon Parks and Henri Cartier-Bresson. Her magnetism and curiosity – as well as her keen eye – meant she, too, was a terrific informal portrait photographer.

In 1961, her marriage having ended in divorce, Pat married the lawyer Anthony Lousada and moved with her children to London, to a house on the banks of the Thames in Chiswick. With her second husband, she had another son, Sebastian, and a daughter, Isabelle. Anthony further widened Pat's artistic circle: he was chair of the Tate gallery and acted as solicitor for the artists Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson.

Pat ran a dress company from their basement for a spell in the 60s before starting to write recipes, introducing British audiences to American cuisine at a time when the burger was still an exotic oddity. Later works, such as Pasta Italian Style (1991), were sold by Sainsbury's and became bestselling staples. More sophisticated volumes – about game, and dinner parties – radiated her warmth.

After Anthony died in 1994, Pat reconnected with an old flame, my uncle the lawyer turned cellist John Lowenthal, with whom she lived until his death in 2003. She took piano lessons for the past decade and became highly accomplished: she was someone who seemed to do everything well.

On the board of the Royal Ballet for many years, Pat was quite the most elegant woman I have met. Undiminished by age, she died of a heart attack while cycling – a fitting end for a woman in perpetual, effortless motion.

She is survived by her children, five grandchildren and a great-grandson.