

VOICES

Getting the nudge I really needed

By ANN DUDLEY
Special to The Observer

I was a shy child, almost painfully so. But when I was 10, my mother came into my room one Saturday morning and announced that she thought it would be a good idea if I took some acting classes at the Portland Civic Theater.

The first class started in half an hour, so I better get hopping if I was going to do it. I had to factor in the 10-minute travel time, the getting there a few minutes early time, etc. That meant there were only a few minutes left for me to throw on some clothes and get in the car.

But before I jumped into high gear, I had a flashback of the last time I was in a show at the Firehouse Theater. I was 4, perhaps 5. I don't remember the play, but I do recall wanting to play the fairy. That role went to the pretty girl with long blond hair. Me? With the pixie cut? Got the role of alligator and I had to crawl around on my belly. I hated it.

I had a feeling that I didn't really have a choice about this offer. I'm not sure now whether it was my mom trying to get me out of my shell or assuaging her love of acting, theater and movies.

That was the start of eight years of acting lessons. Oh, and there was also ballet, tap and singing lessons on top of it. Turns out, while I may not have been very good at it (I was horrible at learning lines), a part of me really loved it. I made a lifelong friend and am FB friends with a few of my fellow childhood thespians and one of our acting coaches.

There are a few priceless moments from that era of my life that always come to mind when reminiscing about it.

In one production, I played a chorus girl in a western show. The costume didn't allow me to wear a bra (which I needed). During a change of costume from townsperson to chorus girl, my bra that I had worn as Townsperson Number One got caught up in the dress for Chorus Girl Number Five. While I was doing the can-can on stage, I looked down and saw my bra flapping along with me. I danced off stage, yanked the offending appendage off, and rejoined the line-up, red-faced with embarrassment and my friend and fellow chorus girl laughing her head off.

I always hated wearing coats as a child, and I still am prone to not wearing them. In late grammar school, there was one that I particularly loathed. It was blue and made of a material that produced the sensation of being steamed alive.

When horsing around with some friends after school, one of the boys got a hold of my sleeve and there was a loud ripping sound. The sleeve was torn largely from its socket. For some reason, my mother decided to repair it using black electrical tape.

On the outside. So now, not only was I wearing a coat I hated, but a coat ungracefully patched. Along the way, the coat disappeared. I had no idea what had happened to it. Five years later, I am in the audience for a production of "The Glass Menagerie." The girl playing Laura entered the stage. (A girl none of us particularly cared for. Perhaps we were jealous she got the coveted role or maybe because she was a snotty snob.)

ANYONE CAN WRITE

Nearly 40 years in the business have taught me that readers are bombarded and overwhelmed with facts. What we long for, though, is meaning and a connection at a deeper and more universal level. And that's why The Observer will be running, from time to time, stories from students who are in my writing class, which I've been teaching for the past 10 years in Portland. I take great satisfaction in helping so-called nonwriters find and write stories from their lives and experiences. They walk into my room believing they don't have what it takes to be a writer. I remind them if they follow their hearts, they will discover they are storytellers. As we all are at our core. Some of these stories have nothing to do with La Grande or Union County. They do, however, have everything to do with life. If you are interested in contacting me to tell me your story, I'd like to hear from you.

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I sank lower in my seat. "It couldn't be," I thought. But as Laura turned, I saw the tale-tell electrical tape patch job. My quiet humiliation and the thought that the girl who was playing Laura must never find out that that had once been my honest-to-goodness coat. The family in that play were supposed to be poor. From the wrong side of the tracks. The situation also played out in my head as to how it had come into the costume mistress' hands. I had most likely left it behind long ago during a class or rehearsal. I never claimed it. The costumer tucked it away, only to be brought out, perfect for the role it was in.

And yet, the most poignant and most significant of my memories, is also one of pain and personal triumph. To set the scene as it were, I had gotten a bit mouthy to my dad. This was in the late '70s, so think women's lib. My father was old-fashioned. Once he sat down at the table, he wasn't getting up until he was through. That meant that my mom and I were the ones who were getting up when he deemed he wanted salt, seconds, a napkin, fill in xyz.

One night I had had enough and most likely said he could get up and get it too, you know, or he could do more like help with the dishes. The next night he came home from work and announced that I would no longer be taking acting classes because my mom needed help around the house. My punishment for speaking up was to

have the thing I loved taken away. I spent the next year after school and on weekends ironing. Ironing sheets, dish towels, his shirts, T-shirts and boxers, along with my own clothes. This was in addition to having always helped with the dishes and other housework as needed from a young age.

That is, until I got the call. It was the theater. The director of the children's production was calling. Someone in the cast had broken their arm and couldn't perform that afternoon. Could I replace her? I would need to go to the theater that morning, learn the lines and blocking and perform two shows that afternoon.

My fate was in my dad's hands. He relented and let me perform. I knew, though, that the only reason why I was permitted to fill in was because someone who was an authority, the director and the head of the acting school, thought I was good enough to do it.

So it was that I returned to the theater after a year's hiatus. I was able to take pride in the fact that I had been thought of, out of the blue, to step into a role, and then complete the run of the show the following two Saturdays.

I learned so much from those eight years. Most importantly, I learned about (and accepted without question) different lifestyles, personalities, friendship and camaraderie.

Thank you, Mom, for giving me the nudge I so desperately needed.

Josh Abbott Band to headline Wheatstock

Music festival returns to wheat country in August

By TAMMY MALGESINI
East Oregonian

HELIX — Wheatstock Music Festival board member DeWayne Dunlap said this summer's show is shaping up to be the best yet. The event is Aug. 20 at Quantum 9 Arena in Helix.

"We're trying to step it up every year," he said. "We have some great bands coming — it's going to be a great lineup."

Dunlap called the Josh Abbott Band "one of the hottest groups out of Texas right now." Playing country red dirt music, he said the event's headliner is raking in the hits on the music charts in the Lone Star State.

"They might be the best band we've ever had," Dunlap boasted.

That said, Dunlap and the Wheatstock board still are courting another top group. Because they are in negotiations, he couldn't release the name.

"If we get 'em it's going to be fantastic," Dunlap said. "Even without them, the show's still going to be stellar."

With five acts already confirmed, Dunlap said presale general admission tickets, which are \$49, are soaring. Also, VIP presale tickets are \$139, which includes a general admission ticket, a limited backstage pass, a meet-and-greet with the Josh Abbott Band and a signed event poster. Tickets prices increase March 14.



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian, File

Jef Farley and Shaner Applegate of Imperial Twang entertain the crowd on Aug. 17, 2019, at the Wheatstock Music Festival in Helix. The local band again will perform at this year's event, on Saturday, Aug. 20, 2022, at Quantum 9 Arena.

The other confirmed traveling acts include Giovannie & The Hired Guns and Carson Jeffrey, both hailing from Texas, and Oklahoma-based group Ragland.

In addition, local alt-folk-country band Imperial Twang will take the stage. Known to go months or more between live performances, the proverbial party band knows how to ratchet up a raucous and rowdy good time — drawing from their fanbase, known as "The Merry Twangsters."

"We're just really excited about the whole lineup," Dunlap said.

Wheatstock was founded with the purpose

of raising money for the Helix School District. It will continue to support that effort by providing a pair of scholarships to graduating seniors. In addition, Wheatstock donates proceeds to Cross the Divide. Formerly known as Divide Camp, the program offers a wilderness retreat for combat veterans in the Wallowa Mountains.

The event includes food vendors, free camping, a beer garden, bouncy castles for the kids and merchandise sales. Admission is free for active military personnel and kids 12 and younger. For tickets or more information, visit www.wheatstock.org.

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