



Jeralyn Pinsky

Born: 1938

Death: N/A

In 1938, Jeralyn Pinsky was born in Youngstown, OH. Her family lived “in the country,” but Jeralyn and her older sister went to a “city school” for 12 years. When Jeralyn was only about seven-years-old, her sister took her to an audition for a children’s play, “The Elf and the Shoemaker.” Her older sister failed to win a part, but Jeralyn was casted as one of the elves. Her sister helped her learn her lines, and Jeralyn remembered that she was a “big hit.” The play’s local playwright asked her to work in a live children’s program on a local radio station. Jeralyn eventually worked at both local radio stations for several years. When she was ten-years-old, she started going to New York theater with her paternal grandmother. “My grandmothers were the greatest influences in my life, particularly the grandmother who loved theater.”

After she graduated from high school, Jeralyn went to Cornell University in Ithaca, NY. Both her parents and her grandfather had attended the school before her. She majored in English Literature and minored in American Government. She also produced an annual musical and worked in the theater department. After she graduated from Cornell, Jeralyn traveled around the world for 6 months and then moved to San Francisco, CA. There she worked as an assistant fashion coordinator and then as Sunday staff of the *San Francisco Examiner*. She became a member of the Newspaper Guild.

After 2 years in San Francisco, Jeralyn went back home to Youngstown and tried out in local theater. Then she met her future husband, Rhett, in Washington, DC. Her college roommate, who had moved to the U.S. capital to go to law school, had introduced them. On their first date, Rhett took Jeralyn to Shakespearian play.

With Rhett’s law degree completed, in 1965, the couple moved to Grand Rapids, MI, to live and work. They had two children. At the time of the interview, Jeralyn had “one set of grandchildren” living in Seattle, WA, and another “set” living in Chicago, IL.

By 1966, Jeralyn was involved in local theater. Her first part was only a walk on in Circle Theater’s “Mary, Mary.” Then she was casted as Blache in “Streetcar Named Desire.” According to Jeralyn, David Nicolette, a *Grand Rapids Press* theater reviewer for over 30 years, “. . . wrote [a] review of the first leading part I had in the city and overnight I was famous.”

Although she had no formal training in theater, Jeralyn said that she had read a lot of biographies about actors talking about acting and about theater in general. She had also seen a lot of good

theater, starting in her childhood with her grandmother and continuing with visits to New York twice a year as an adult. Moreover, she had attended several workshops on acting or directing. For those workshops Jeralyn had travelled to such places as Columbia University, University of Wisconsin, University of Washington, and the Russian Theater Conference.

For 25 years Jeralyn was associated with the Civic Theater as an actor, volunteer, or director. She said that she earned “. . . the first dollar for the building.” After directing two children’s plays for the Civic Theater, in 1972, she directed her first adult play, “Restaurant,” for East Grand Rapids Theater. She also worked as a free lance director for the Actor’s Theater and the Jewish Theater Grand Rapids.

For the last 6 years of her tenure at the Civic Theater, Jeralyn was on the staff. During that time, she started a summer arts program for children, helped get the first education director hired, and “[put] the school on a status that gave it some respect and attention from the board.”

In order to stay strong and energetic for acting or directing, Jeralyn said that she had always exercised at home. Then about the time Jane Fonda came out with her “first [exercise] tape,” she started teaching group exercise classes. She was “constantly going to workshops or other people’s classes and reading.” She was “also interested in nutrition and holistic things.”

In conclusion, reflecting on her many decades of community service, Jeralyn said, “. . . I . . . believe in pouring the wine back. No matter what I’m doing, there’s enough of me that is involved in helping and doing.” At the time of this interview, Jeralyn was volunteering at the Literacy Council, helping people learn English.

Synopsis by Falinda Geerling: January 18, 2016

Other Resources:

Play delivers a deluge of drama in 'A Steady Rain' at Actors' Theatre:

[http://www.mlive.com/entertainment/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2013/01/gritty\\_cop\\_drama\\_to\\_deliver\\_a.html](http://www.mlive.com/entertainment/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2013/01/gritty_cop_drama_to_deliver_a.html)