

Local playwright draws on Kansas roots for stories

By BD Tharp

Wichita playwright Joyce Markley hit a memorable milestone this year: she finished writing her thirty-third play. Her farming roots—she grew up in Caldwell, south of Wichita on the Oklahoma border—have given her a wonderful crop of memories to draw from and incorporate into her writing.

“There were six of us kids and we all worked outside. It was an easy way to grow up – playing in the dirt, feeding the chickens, driving the tractor. We took turns milking. It was a well-rounded education on how to put meat and vegetables on the table,” Joyce said.

“I really admire my mother, she was the most intuitive, knowledgeable, kind person. She was my first teacher and was even-keeled and fair.” Her father made an impression with his special effort to make life better for others in the community. “He once told me that ‘in the end all that really matters is the love of family,’” she said.

Joyce was 20 when she married and began teaching kindergarten. She later taught first and second grades in Wichita schools. She’d write plays for the classroom, making sure that every student had a part. “I love little kids, they are generally the best people,” she said.

“When I was a child I always wanted to be a teacher. I had the kindest and fairest first grade teacher who let me help.”

When her daughters were born Joyce quit teaching to stay home with them, volunteering often in the community. It was after she attended a writer’s seminar that she started writing plays. She likes to write plays that zero in on everyday heroes, the challenges of environment and



Joyce Markley

survival, families and relationships.

The Apartment of Many Windows is a musical she wrote with Michael Chriss and Rudy Love. “There were at least 14 actors, but we expanded it to fill a large stage.” She’s currently writing a musical with a lawyer who is also a “wonderful musician.”

About half of her plays have been staged in Wichita and surrounding areas. Being able to see them on the stage and the actors who make the play come alive is a great joy.

Several of her plays are set in the Ko-

rean War era and have been directed by Community Theater’s Phil Speary. “He identified with my stories, the feeling, the characters and the era.”

Her latest completed work is called *Mind Scripted*, and is about cell phones and how they have control over us. “It’s in four vignettes, the before and then the after – with a twist,” she said. Signature Exploratory Theater & Arts, Inc. (SETA) and patron Deametrice Eyster will present *Mind Scripted* in August at Wichita Community Theatre under the direction of Mary Lou Phipps-Winfrey.

Markley founded and has directed SETA, a small non-profit, created for the main purpose of showcasing local talent and has introduced many new acts, actors, musicians and visual artists during its first decade. “It has donated those artists money and opportunity toward their needs and dreams of performing,” she said. Joyce is also a member of the Dramatists Guild of America, the Fine Arts Advisory Board at Wichita State University and the Kansas Writers Association.

An avid reader, Joyce finds that books have a way of becoming friends and she likes to keep them around. She enjoys reading non-fiction and biographies and thinks that she learns immeasurable things from all sorts of people.

“Every life has a story,” she said. “They are all interesting but some people keep them hidden. I truly hope that mature people will write their own stories, it is so important.”

When Joyce isn’t writing or attending plays, she enjoys spending time with her family.

Joyce is proud of her family. “The best compliment I’ve ever received was that

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my girls are as nice as they are beautiful,” she said. “My oldest daughter Carrie Moore is a teacher at St. Thomas Aquinas school. She teaches 7th grade and loves to create thought in her children and see it in their work,” she said. “The youngest, Audrey Heiland is an out of the box thinker. She’s very creative and does interior design. They complement each other, help each other, and appreciate each other’s talents.”

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