



SPOTLIGHT STORY

Jean Burgess



"FAA was a home away from home and deserves a ton of credit as a major influence and foundation in my work as a theatre artist and educator." - Jean Burgess

A Reflection by Jean Burgess

My memories and emotions about both the Spaulding building and the current FAA building are so dear and ingrained in my psyche. The fun, the creative impulses, the sensory experiences, the love, and the care are still so vivid.

For example, Louise Savage's concern about vocal strain in the lead actors of the musicals – so much as that she would give us private vocal coaching – free of charge – to make sure we were protecting our vocal cords; or the excellent role model Gwen Yarnell provided as she worked with novice actors and youth as illustrated in my book; or the wonderful, fun atmosphere Tim Ryan created for our group of gawky teenagers; and so much more.

To me, and please pardon the corny cliché, FAA was a home away from home and deserves a ton of credit as a major influence and foundation in my work as a theatre artist and educator. I am one of many students, I'm sure, who have been touched by the magic of the place and are indebted to Jim and Louise Savage's vision.

Timeline of FAA Journey by Jean Burgess

- **1962 (age 5)** Creative Arts Program - Three-Part program: Creative movement, singing, art (Spaulding Bldg.)
- 1964/65 (age 8)** Creative Drama Class - Taught by Mrs. Ruth Winters – Was also asked to play an elf and reindeer in Mrs. Winters holiday plays, presented for clients of Sunny Lane School over the old Hough Bakery in downtown Willoughby.
- 1970/71 (age 15)** Theatre Class - Taught by Julianne Schick, resulted in a production of *Lost Horizons*. Performed at Andrews School auditorium (Founders' children, Stewart and Bonnie Savage, were also in this production).
- 1972 (age 16)** Theatre Class - Taught by Tim Ryan, resulted in a play written by Tim and toured to playgrounds in the county. This summer, we often had classes in the new FAA building (before it was officially opened to the public), sitting on a rolled-up carpet in the theatre auditorium before it was laid. We even had a Friday Night Coffee House in the basement.
- **1972/73 (age 17)** *A Christmas Carol* - Director: Tim Ryan, musical director: Jim Savage. I played Mrs. Cratchit in this youth production.
- 1975 (age 19)** *Oliver!* Director: Gwen Yarnell. I was in the chorus and had the Flower Girl solo.
- **1978 (age 22)** *Camelot* Director: Gwen Yarnell. I played Guinevere. Stewart Savage played Lancelot.
- 1982 (age 26)** *Brigadoon* Director: Gwen Yarnell. I played Meg Brockie. I was also on the staff for the summer theatre camp and choreographed movement for *Sleeping Beauty*, the youth camp production was directed by Gwen Yarnell that year.



Jean's Theatre Bio/Summary

After graduating from Ursuline College with a B.A. in Theatre/Communication Arts in 1978, I went on tour as a singer and dancer with the Buddy Young Swing Orchestra and Show. When I returned to the Cleveland area, I landed a role at Carousel Dinner Theatre, leading me to a season at summer stock in New England as both an actor and director of children's theatre productions.

Craving additional acting training, I was accepted at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York City where I lived for 2 years. When I received an offer at my alma mater to direct my first full-length musical with adults, I jumped at the opportunity and returned to Cleveland in 1982.

In the fall of 1982, I was accepted to Northwestern University's Masters in Theatre program so I packed up and moved to Evanston, Illinois to further my education with a specialty in creative drama and children's theatre.

The following 30 years were filled with teaching drama to kids ages 3 - 18 at a variety of institutions including The Kennedy Center, The Smithsonian Institution's Discovery Theatre, and a variety of art centers, afterschool programs, and rec programs. I continued to perform at dinner theatres and summer stocks, including 8 seasons with Theatre on the Hill in Maryland. And I built a large directing resume on academic and professional stages with productions including musical theatre, opera, and youth/educational theatre. In 2002 I received my Ph.D. in Educational Theatre from NYU and taught theatre and public speaking courses on both the college and secondary levels (including graduate school) for 23 years. Theatre courses included Acting, Directing, Introduction to Theatre, World Drama, Methods of Teaching Secondary Theatre, and Teaching Theatre in the Classroom.

In 2015 I began writing and workshopping short plays, preferring the 10-minute play format. I co-founded a playwright's group at a local arts center in Westminster, MD to encourage others to write as well.

I wrote a guide about directing entitled, Collaborative Stage Directing: A Guide to Creating and Managing a Positive Theatre Environment. This guide, geared to theatre instructors and directing students primarily, included three of my short plays presented as directing exercises. Happily, Collaborative Stage Directing was published by Routledge/Taylor & Francis in June 2019.

Currently, I am transitioning my writing into the world of fiction, however, I continue to teach theatre and playwriting workshops to teens and adults. I also freelance as a digital content writer and editor.