

1974, October 23

For one dollar

Shoestring Performers present non-commercial theatre

OSHAWA THIS WEEK

**Article features 1 photograph of Jeannine & Madelaine Coward*

There is a determined lady in Oshawa.

She is Jeannine Butler, and she is determined to provide theatre to all the people of Durham Region at inexpensive rates.

"The Shoestring Theatre extends an open invitation to anywhere in Durham Region. We'll go anywhere in Durham and put on a performance but the only condition is that tickets can't cost more than one dollar."

She's so serious about the need for such theatre that she's probably going to lose a little of her own money on this project. The way she tells it, Shoestring Productions is almost a public service.

"This community needs it," the slight but forceful lady claims. "There is a distinct need for non-commercial theatre in this region."

The big-daddy of local theatre, the Oshawa Little Theatre, is not to blame for this need, Butler feels.

"The Little Theatre does big budget things like the upcoming *Camelot* that the area also needs. But it doesn't leave them much time or money to put on non-commercial stuff like we want to."

Non-commercial may be a bit of an understatement. Shoestring Productions is doing three one-acts: "*Don't Touch That Phone*" by Norman Williams, "*Before Breakfast*" by Eugene O'Neill and "*The Still Alarm*" by George S. Kaufman.

O'Neill will be the best known author to Durham residents and anyone superficially acquainted with his work will know that he was never one for light drama. Though Kaufman is best remembered for his Broadway musical-comedy hits, this one-act is among his more serious works.

The three works were selected, according to Butler, "To appeal to three separate sets of theatrical tastes. Even if the audience only likes one of them, it will still be worth a dollar." There are 10 actors from the Oshawa, Whitby, and Bowmanville area in the cast, and some of them will be well known to area theatre-goers.

Joe Mullen has performed and been well received in many Oshawa Little Theatre productions. Nick Labriolla is a new and rising name on the local theatre scene. While he was in high school locally he won all kinds of awards for his acting and this is his first role outside of school.

Performances of the three plays will take place in the Arts Resource Centre from October 23 to 26. There are 122 tickets available for each night and they can be purchased at Lizanne's, Burns Shoe Store, and the Arts Resource Centre.

Curtain time for the Durham Shoestring Productions and its three non-commercial one-acts is 8:30 p.m..

1976, September 15

Durham Shoestring Performers recruit actors for opening plays

OSHAWA THIS WEEK

**Article features 1 photograph*

Two interesting plays by a young Vancouver playwright form the opening show of the Durham Shoestring Performers.

Director-producer Jeannine Butler has put out a casting call for tomorrow night at the McLaughlin Collegiate Theatre Arts room beginning at 8 p.m.. McLaughlin Collegiate is located on Stevenson Road just south of Rossland Road,

“We’re looking for adults, age 18 to 105, to appear in *Babble Rap* and *Chester, You Own My Bird an Apology*,” says Mrs. Butler. The plays are written by John Lazarus.

The productions are scheduled for the third week of October and Mrs. Butler says that everyone interested in theatre is very welcome to come out and try for a part.

For further information on the plays and the Durham Shoestring Performers, call Mrs. Butler at 576-6099.

1976, October 11

IN REVIEW — A TWO YEAR YOUNG THEATRE GROUP

The following is an uncredited draft copy of what would be published October 21 as:

Birth on a shoe string

THIS IS OSHAWA-WHITBY

The story of the birth of Durham Shoestring Performers is typical of many of the early 70s theatre groups all over Ontario — one person with a clear enough vision to invest a few hundred dollars. Add the support and encouragement of a husband and some seriously dedicated friends, and that’s just how Jeannine Butler and friends started DSP in the summer of 1974.

The timing was right; the new company wanted to offer live theatre at the lowest possible cost, so that meant finding a low cost home. The old Oshawa police station had just undergone its transformation into an Arts Resource Centre, with the “courtroom” converted to an “auditorium” able to accommodate 110 chairs. After consulting with Peter Cekuta, who was then with the Recreation Department, and getting estimates on all potential costs, it was found that it would be possible to produce plays in the new centre on a \$400 budget. UREKA! Tickets could sell for \$1.00 and cover the costs of the production.

Intent on trying to accomplish a lot using modest means, Jeannine had investigated alternatives to regular theatre “flats” for sets. She found a design for double-faced canvas screens and while at her summer cottage she enlisted the help of her father and family to build seven screens which would be completely flexible, and fit into a standard station-wagon. By September 9th, 1974, the 3 opening plays had been chosen and cast, the name Durham Shoestring Performers had been printed on letterhead and handbills, and a logo had been designed by Ann Syme, a local artist. Audrey MacLean, the 1st P.R. officer for the new company, hosted a press conference on September 12th. The six basic objectives of the new company were outlined to the press. (see attachment)

The company rehearsed all 3 one-act plays in Jeannine’s recreation room, under her directorship, throughout September and October. There was a marvelous spirit of “pioneering” as the actors helped with the backstage jobs, the crew helped with the publicity, and everyone pitched-in to make it all happen. Carolyn Wilson, as the company’s Stage Manager, had no experience what-so-ever in theatre, but her dedication and natural ability far outweighed her inexperience.

Finally the third week of October arrived, and the company moved into the Arts Resource Centre. Now the handicaps were obvious — fluorescent overhead lights and a pale green wall as a backdrop. Eight theatre lights generously supplied by the Oshawa Little Theatre, three actors with paint brushes and a donation of black paint from Osborne’s Home Decor Centre and the 2nd floor courtroom was quickly converted into a theatre atmosphere.

Opening night arrived October 23rd, 1974. The play bill included a Canadian play "Don't Touch that Phone" by Normal Williams, "Before Breakfast" by Eugene O'Neill, and "The Still Alarm" by George S. Kaufman. The cast of 10 and crew of 13 had seen a dream materialise. The audience filtered in, the house lights dimmed, the "Curtain" went up, and a theatre company was launched.

Four nights in the Arts Resource Centre were followed by a one-night appearance in Port Perry. Total costs, including the Port Perry expenses and the construction of the permanent flats had come to \$550.00 and the income was just over \$400.00.

Jeannine Butler had invested \$500 to start the company, so the bank balance was now at \$350.00, but more than 400 people had seen and enjoyed this first production, and that was more important than the financial loss.

The other productions were mounted during the '74-'75 season: a children's play "The Red Shoes" was presented in December (and also had two private condensed-version showings at church parties), then "2 Plays Plus", an evening combining singing, guitar music, and two plays entitled "Brighten Every Corner" and "Present Day Courtship" were presented in April. This latter production made a one-night appearance in Bowmanville at the invitation of the Bowmanville Drama Workshop.

At the end of its inaugural season, DSP had performed to 1,200 adults and children, but the bank balance was still in the red by \$162.00.

The '75-'76 season started off with a week-end training workshop for actors conducted by John Swindells, a professional actor/director from Toronto. His services were provided by a Theatre Ontario Training Grant.

The opening production for this 2nd season was part of the Oshawa Event celebration of International Women's Year in October. Phil Knibbe from Theatre Aurora was a guest director for "The Bear: by Anton Chekhov, Jeannine directed "The Image" by John Kirkpatrick, and an original collage of poems, prose, and personal statements all written by Whitby's Margery Bird in collaboration with the company.

The production costs were covered by the Event committee's budget, and no admission was charged for the plays. So in spite of the fact that approximately 350 people attended, no income was derived from this production. The company did, however, enjoy the feeling of playing to a "full-house".

Following a number of requests by church groups, DSP decided to try an alternative to its Christmas play. There was obviously a community need for a short children's play which would be suitable for parties, and which could travel to the party. With this in mind, Peter Zednick who was an experienced actor preparing for a career as a writer, Flo Holmes who was a one-year veteran with the company, and Sandy James an actress and ballet teacher, got together to "devise" a play based on an old Japanese Folk Tale. Adding singing, imagination, a cleverly designed set by Ann Syme and two of Sandy's young dance students, the results were a very mobile 25 minute play, produced at a cost of \$39.47.

The play had a total of 9 showings at Sunday School parties, a primary school, a boys' club, a retarded children's centre, and an industrial firm's party. There was a minimal fee charged for some of the presentations, and some of them were public service contributions. A substantial profit was made for the first time, yet the company was only 16 months old. The future looked rosy!

In the meantime, the list of DSP participants was constantly growing. Every casting brought out new faces, the familiar ones kept returning, and the experience level was rising. Carolyn Wilson, Flo Holmes, and Sharon Seamone took stage management courses in Toronto. Knowledgeable performers and back-stage people, some with professional experience, were joining the ranks. A number of Theatre Arts students from McLaughlin, Central, and O'Neill Collegiate were contributing their talents and vitality. But the large part

of the company was, and still remains, made up of people without formal theatre training who heard that DSP was producing good plays, providing basic training, having a lot of fun, and always looking for new people. The last production of the '75-'76 season was presented the 3rd week of April.

Another Canadian play "Dead HEat" by W.R. Chadwick was combined with "Once Upon a Playground" by Jack Frakes. Mr. David Halliday* who reviewed the plays, ended his articles with these words: "Oshawa is much the better for ventures such as this one, and we could do ourselves a favour by supporting their efforts and encouraging their attempts at enriching the local theatre scene". However, due partly to numerous conflicting events, few people did see these April plays, and the company's previous hopes of ending its second year in the black were shattered by the financial loss of this production.

**Mr. Halliday is a teacher of drama at Central Collegiate.*

Disheartened, but not discouraged, the participants finished the second season by holding weekly acting workshops every Thursday evening at McLaughlin's Theatre Arts Room. Cashing in on the expertise of Theatre Arts teachers Nat James and Sharon Seamone, Bowmanville actresses and director Bonnie Morrison, dancer for Sandy James and in fact most of the participants themselves, these weekly workshops were an important contribution to the growth and development of the acting company.

It was at three sessions that company policies, aims and methods were discussed and critically appraised. A number of facts were very obvious. Costs were rising — especially advertising and royalties. More publicity needed to be done in order to fill the houses and cover the expenses. And last of all, ticket prices would have to be increased from the \$1.00 admission the company had maintained through its 2 year existence.

Acutely aware that no one had any expertise in theatre publicity, Flo Holmes and Randy Gough attended an "Audience Development" week-end workshop in September this year conducted by Theatre London's Administrative Director Paul Eek. That same weekend saw 4 other DSP participants taking courses in Voice, Make-Up and Directing offered by the Association of Community Theatres.

With a new publicity committee of two trained people, the 3rd season got underway. Two more Canadian plays, both written by Vancouver playwright John Lasarus, were chosen for the opening production: "Babel Rap" and "Chester, You Owe my Bird an Apology" are now in the final stages of polishing, and will open to the public on October 21, 22, and 23. Advance tickets are \$1.00 for the last time. At the door tickets will be \$2.00, and next spring's production will see an increase in ticket prices.

Changes are always inevitable with growth. The future of the Arts Resource Centre as the groups' performance home may be in jeopardy; the need for a more suitable rehearsal space than a basement recreation room is obvious, and the challenge to increase the audience without increasing the costs remains constant. And new directors are needed. To date Jeannine has directed all but one of the 14 plays the company has presented. Storage space is also becoming a problem; as the company grows, so does its accouterments.

As audiences are increasing, so are the participants. Since its inception, DSP has been fortunate to have a core of extremely dedicated individuals such as the ones previously mentioned, plus Sheila Entsistle, Joe Mullen, Madelaine Coward, Al Hale, and Winnifred Wonnocott, whose talents have been invaluable.

One of the successful and very pleasant aspects of performance nights is the social hour which follows the plays. Members of the cast, crew and audience all join together to discuss the plays informally over a cup of coffee. The company gets feed-back from the audience, and the audience meets the company on a personal basis.

The distant future can never be predicted, but the company is now on a solid foundation. All the 6 objectives have not yet been fulfilled, but the basic one, of providing good theatre on a shoestring, certainly has.

1976, November 24

Oshawa talent is to be featured on Channel 11

No publication info.

Everybody plan to be glued to your television set at 6:30 p.m. on Sunday, Nov. 28 because that's when Oshawa is featured on CHCH's New Faces show.

Seven individuals and groups from the city are on the half-hour show, produced by Vic Vickers of Megamedia Corp. in Whitby.

Mr. Vickers says, "Of the 12 cities that we have done over the past few months, Oshawa's performers are definitely the most polished and professional. We're very pleased with the performances and the people we worked with."

The show is going to feature (not necessarily in order of appearance): The Marion Ukrainian Dancers under the direction of Nick Worobec; singers Kathleen and Julia Eyman; The Oshawa Festival Singers; singer-pianist Laurie Larson; singer Janet Stephenson; singer-guitarists Dan Clancy and Dave Komen; and Durham Shoestring Performers producer-director Jeannine Butler.

Mrs. Butler recalls now with some humor her interview with host Dan McLean.

"At first we were to do a three to four minute interview and so I ran all around town gathering information on all the performing groups. As we neared air time he said that we would only have two minutes.

As we did it, I got to do a 30 second spiel on the Oshawa Little Theatre and then he says, 'time's up'."

Ms. Stephenson, who will probably be remembered best for her performance in Oshawa Little Theatre's Hello Dolly production, is singing When the Parade Passes By with a few dance steps thrown in with partner Jim Renshaw, also of the Oshawa Little Theatre.

Also included in the jam-packed show will be some film footage of Oshawa. Remember, at 6:30 p.m. on channel 11. Don't touch that dial!

1977, June 22

Oshawa's Butler elected to ACTCO

OSHAWA THIS WEEK

**Article features 1 photograph*

Jeannine Butler, producer-director of Durham Shoestring Performers, was elected the new second vice-president of the Association of Community Theatres for Central Ontario (ACTCO).

Mrs. Butler, who previously served the association as an area representative and two terms as the education chairman, was elected during the association's annual meeting on Tuesday, June 14, in the new clubhouse of the Oshawa Little Theatre.

Also elected to the association board was Sidney Lang of the Whitby Theatre Company who will serve as one of the representatives from the east Area. Neville Worsnop of Brampton was elected president of the association, and John Story of Markham was elected first vice-president.

1978, March 01

PREPARATIONS FOR FUN FAIR '78

The Oshawa Times

**Article features 1 photograph*

Jeannine Butler, coordinator of the sixth annual Ontario Theatre Festival, displays one of 10 awards to be presented to a winning theatre group. The festival, to take place in May, is part of a 10-day event called Fun Fair '78, sponsored by the Oshawa and District Council for the Arts. The festival is a competitive event and each group has already won a local festival. Artists in the region were invited to submit award designs and 10 were chosen Sunday. Here, Butler displays a ballerina, designed by Fran Moore, of Pickering.

1978, March 13

Women In The News

Removing 'Barriers' To Live Theatre

By Shelley Gillen

The Oshawa Times

**Article features 1 photograph*

For some people the theatre has always had a stigma attached to it of fancy clothes, high society and lots of money. People who may have enjoyed a night out at a play did not find they fit into "high society" and never gave live theatre even half a chance. Jeannine Butler, producer-director of the Durham Shoestring Performers, is one person who is trying to change all that for would-be Oshawa theatre goers.

Born Dec. 30, 1935 in Timmins, Ont., Butler has travelled extensively throughout Ontario. In 1970 she came to Oshawa. Her mother had been an actress and had been involved in the production side of the theatre and at the age of Butler began her own production experience at the Lindsay theatre. That same year she was to make her acting debut in an Irish musical. At that time she was attending business college but after the completion of her course she left for Ottawa where she took part in her second performance, only this time dancing.

She remained in Ottawa for only a year before returning to Lindsay and taking on the job of traffic controller for CKLY which is Lindsay's first and only radio station. From then on radio and later television became her career but the interest in the theatre was still there.

For the next few years she moved from radio station to radio station throughout the province working as an on-air personality, commercial copy writer and research consultant. Butler also spent six months working in Jamaica, setting up the island's first independent advertising agency.

On arrival in Oshawa, she immediately began searching for a way to get involved with this community. For 1 ½ years she did a show entitled Dates, Deeds and Dialogue for Oshawa cable television. In this program she would interview various personalities within the community. Butler says she enjoyed this job as it gave her a chance to not only meet many people but also make herself a part of Oshawa. Later she worked at the Oshawa Senior Citizens Centre as a creative arts supervisor.

In 1974, she founded the Durham Shoestring Performers, a live theatre group.

Butler was well prepared to become the founder, director-producer of this new company. Her experience included almost every aspect of a performance. She had directed, produced, acted, done publicity work, prop, costuming, set design, set building and had even

swept the floor and washed dishes for the crew. By learning all parts of the theatre Butler says she felt she would be better able to direct.

She is a firm believer in Canadian talent and many of the one-act plays put on by the company are Canadian. Aside from her involvement in the Shoestring Performers, Butler is also vice-president of the Association of Community Theatre, Central Ontario and serves on the community theatre training program for Theatre Ontario which makes decisions on the allocation of grants for theatre training.

Butler is also the co-ordinator for the annual Theatre Ontario summer course and a member of De Notre Dame Catholic Church.

One of her current jobs is co-ordinating the 1978 Ontario Theatre Festival which the Oshawa District Council for the Arts will be the host.

"Fund Fair '78 will mark the first time in Oshawa that all the arts, visual artists, craftsmen, performers and musicians will be combining their efforts on such a large scale and I am glad to be a part of it," says Butler.

For 18 years now the theatre has played a large role in Butler's life and she says that it probably always will. She also says though there is a negative status attached to going to the theatre. Butler says that she would like to provide entertainment where anyone could come dressed as they were.

"The potential for enjoying theatre is in everybody but there are many barriers such as cost and social attitudes," says Butler, "I am trying in my small way to give our community plays that are inexpensive and challenging or entertaining to the audience."

1979, February 16

The producer was 'surprised'

Times Staff

The Oshawa Times

**Article features 1 photograph*

Jeannine Butler thought she was having dinner with her husband and two friends Friday night. When she walked into the banquet hall at the Holiday Inn she was greeted by 100 people singing There's No Business Like Show Business.

The Durham Shoestring Performers marked the theatre company's fifth anniversary with a surprise party to honor Butler, the company's producer.

"One could tell by their (Butler and her husband, John) shocked expressions that this was a complete surprise," said Doreen Astrop of DSP.

"Jeannine's love of theatre and theatre people has been a long-time affair and her friends chose last night to say thanks," said Astrop.

Butler started the theatre company in October, 1974, with the objective of presenting Canadian plays and producing them at "bare minimum" cost so that ticket prices could be kept as low as possible, said Astrop. "She wanted to make her theatre accessible to all members of the community, regardless of their income, and has continued to hold this policy in high priority."

1979, June 16

At Harborfront tonight

Durham Shoestring Players: a happy family affair

By Bob Thompson

OSHAWA THIS WEEKEND

**Article features 1 photograph*

Watching director Jeannine Butler and three members of the *1839: The Farmers' Revolt* cast unload a truck full of props for their Toronto Harborfront Theatre production tonight and Sunday, it is obvious a strong bond has developed.

It's a family, really, and Mrs. Butler admitted Thursday afternoon as she rested in one of the 200 seats at the studio theatre in Toronto, that she'll be a bit depressed when the eight-member group breaks up.

"There is so much of a reliance on everybody else," the Oshawa woman says, "that a family feeling develops. The reliance is very strong in this cast. It's a good one."

Mrs. Butler says she is proud of the Durham Shoestring Performers and the crew of actors. The presentation by the Motor City alternate theatre has improved immensely since its Oshawa run.

"I think their confidence has improved and that goes a long way," she points out.

"We've cleaned up a few things that were shaky." As an afterthought, she adds, "nothing succeeds like success in the head."

For the Shoestringers success meant the invitation to perform at the Harborfront Theatre in the first place. It was a surprising turn of events, especially for an amateur theatre group, and underscored not only Mrs. Butler's status as a professional theatre producer but the fine performances of the actors in the cast.

Inviting the Shoestringers was a precedent-setting move for Oshawa theatre and the Harborfront program. Roy Kiggins, artistic director of the Toronto arts centre, says the Oshawa theatre group has blazed the path for a few more non-professional productions.

For Dennis Rivet, a 32-year-old roofing contractor and *1837* cast member rookie (but not the only one), the Toronto experience has overwhelmed him just a little.

Mr. Rivet's enthusiasm has prompted the father of two children to sign on for a stint at the Laurentian University Theatre Ontario-sponsored acting school in August.

If the 10-day course goes well, he plans to focus on an acting career professionally.

"I'm a salesman by trade," Rivet insists, selling himself the idea in the process, "and to be a salesman you have to be a good actor and have the ability to get points across."

You also have to give it your best shot to less than full houses. But the crowds or critical response are only ego massages.

"Sometimes you say to yourself, 'What the hell am I doing?', but as long as the audience enjoys it and the actors get a certain amount of feedback, that's what it's all about," Mrs. Butler says.

1837 is a gruelling play, physically and emotionally, demanding the eight actors portray 104 characters who made up the drama surrounding the Upper Canada revolt led by William Lyon MacKenzie.

Actually, the production written by Rick Salutin and first performed by Theatre Passe Muraille is a series of historical snapshots about what prompted the poorly conceived rebellion.

The Shoestring family of Doreen Astrop, Randy Gough, Al Hale, Eileen Herd, Mr. Rivet, Andrew Stevens, Jan Tanton, and Carolyn Wilson should be proud of their efforts.

Mrs. Butler certainly is and she should know about theatrical effort. She made the impressive Toronto invitation a reality in the first place, with the fast-paced, sharply tuned direction. A tough but sympathetic father figure, Mrs. Butler made the union work.

1981, June 10

Intermission for Shoestring's Oshawa founder

By Eileen Herd

OSHAWA THIS WEEK

**Article features 1 photograph; of Jeannine & John.*

Oshawa, say au revoir to Jeannine and John Butler.

But let it be a cheerful farewell because the departure of the couple from the Motor City to Winnipeg is merely a temporary move.

As a mathematics instructor at McLaughlin Collegiate, Mr. Butler is the first high school teacher in Ontario to heed Horace Greeley and go west (to Manitoba).

And, in accompanying her husband for the nine-month exchange, Jeannine Butler abdicates her title of artistic director and producer of the Durham Shoestring Performers.

The Butlers are swapping homes and jobs with the family of Betty and Henry Fast as part of the Ministry of Education's interprovincial teacher exchange program, departing in mid-August for the windy streets of Portage and Main.

As much as they like Oshawa, the two are obviously rarin' to go.

"I'm looking forward to being in a community that is dedicated to culture, where there are five professional theatre companies and I don't know how many community groups, plus the ballet and opera and contemporary dance companies," says Mrs. Butler. "Winnipeg is alive with cultural activity and I'm going to get drunk on it all."

Her husband echoes her comments. "I'm very much interested in seeing the cultural events of Winnipeg as a spectator." In his spare time he has been a lighting director with the Oshawa Little Theatre and adds, "we don't know yet what kind of amateur groups they have but I likely won't be able to stay away."

Teaching in Winnipeg will differ from teaching in Oshawa in several ways for Mr. Butler. Like the rest of Canada, Manitoba doesn't offer a Grade 13 and at St. John's High School where he will be working, the classes go from Grade 7 to 12.

"They divide the students into primary school, junior high, and high school in Winnipeg, with St. John's combining junior and high schools," explains Mr. Butler. He doesn't yet know which grades he will have.

Obviously, he will be missed at McLaughlin. His Grade 12 students presented him with a going-away cake on the last day of school, complete with a metre-stick decoration and a sparkler.

The Durham Shoestring Performers are also going to miss the woman who was the founder and guiding light of the seven-year-old company.

"It's a strange thing, but emotionally I'm not worried at all about leaving," says Mrs. Butler. "When I started the company, I wanted to see if theatre could be done without grants, without a formal membership, without relying on someone else for money. After two years we learned it could work. Then I set my sights on five years — there's something magical about the number five.

"But even years later, I'm not aiming at anything. It's time to let it go."

The Shoestring's board has voted to make long-standing member *Carolyn Wilson the new artistic director and producer "and the 1981-1982 season will go on without any changes," says Mrs. Butler.

**Edited Herd's misspelling: "Caroline"*

Knowing their move is going to be only a brief fling in the cultural mecca of Manitoba, the Butlers aren't suffering from any heart-tugs in leaving Oshawa.

“It’s not like when we left North Bay, we knew we wouldn’t see those people in the same context every again,” says Mr. Butler. “This time, we’re just going for nine months so there’s no feeling of loss.

Nonetheless, there are still going to be two vacant spots that a school and a theatre company will keep open.

1980, January 02

It was an active decade for theatre: Butler

By Jeannine Butler

OSHAWA THIS WEEK

“All the world’s a stage...” and the ‘70s in Oshawa certainly took great strides in introducing more and more people to the magic of live theatre.

As the decade started, there was only one amateur theatre company in Oshawa — the 20-year-old Oshawa Little Theatre. But as we approach the ‘80s, there are three new community groups performing in our city, ranging in “age” from six years to two months.

Performing in Eastdale Auditorium since 1966, OLT presented three major productions each season in the early ‘70s, and most years they entered the annual competitive festival of the Association of Community Theatres for Central Ontario. In 1971 *The Lion in Winter* won three awards; in 1973 both *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *There’s a Girl in My Soup* were entered in the festival and each won awards.

If one year in this decade were to be selected as the highlight year for theatre in Oshawa, it would surely be 1974. The year started with OLT’s production of *All My Sons* which won the best visual presentation in the ACT-CO festival. In May, the second annual Ontario Theatre Festival was hosted by the City of Oshawa in conjunction with the city’s 50th anniversary.

In the fall of 1974, OLT presented its first musical, *Camelot* and a new theatre company presented its inaugural production.

Durham Shoestring Performers was formed during the summer of 1974, and chose the newly-converted Arts Resource Centre for its home. Dedicated to producing plays at the lowest possible cost, the new company opened in October with three one-act plays, and at the invitation of the Borilian Theatre Company they also presented these plays in Port Perry in November. DSP brought this busy year to a close with its production of *The Red Shoes*, a play for children.

International Women’s Year (1975) was celebrated by some interesting female lead roles in OLT’s *Abelard and Heloise*, *Cactus Flower*, and their second musical, *Hello, Dolly!* Oshawa’s EVENT committee and Durham Shoestring Performers sponsored a special theatre production as part of its celebration of women.

Three one-act plays by and about women, including *Stages of Women*; an original collaborative work by the company, were presented in October.

OLT entered two plays in the 1976 ACT-CO festival: *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Last of the Red Hot Lovers*. *Streetcar* was chosen as the best play in the festival in London where it won a number of awards. On Nov. 19, OLT saw a 25-year dream become a reality with the official opening of its new home by Lt.-Gov. Pauline McGibbon. During the year, DSP started to feature mainly Canadian plays, and produced *Dead Heat*; *Chester, You Owe My Bird an Apology*, and *Babel Rap* as well as their original children’s production, *The Stolen Tarts*.

The year 1977 saw the start of cabarets in Oshawa. The first local cabaret was presented by DSP in May, and followed by an OLT cabaret as part of Fiesta Week in June.

Both cabarets have now become annual theatre events. DSP also produced its first full-length play, *The Death and Life of Sneaky Fitch* in November.

It was also during 1977 that the Oshawa and District Council for the Arts hired a consultant to do a study on the feasibility of improved arts facilities in Oshawa. A report was received in July, and in December a steering committee was formed to make recommendations on the possible implementation of the Report. That steering committee evolved into the Arts Centre Action (ACA) committee the following year.

The next year, 1978, ushered in another “first” for Oshawa. Under the sponsorship of the Oshawa and District Council for the Arts, the Ontario Theatre Festival was again held in our city. It was the first time a festival returned to a previous host city; the first time all six regions in Ontario were entered in the festival; the first time a local group, rather than a city, played host to the festival; and the first time the awards were all original artifacts produced by local artisans.

During 1978 OLT’s ACT-CO festival entre, *The Miracle Worker*, won a special adjudicator’s award for the Helen Keller role as well as three other nominations. OLT also sponsored a six-week summer workshop for local youths, which culminated in a workshop production of *Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

DSP produced Canadian plays exclusively this year, as well as the annual cabaret and children’s Christmas production.

As 1978 came to an end, a third theatre company arrived in Oshawa. Spotlight Theatre, which had started in Bowmanville, presented three one-act plays in the Durham College foyer in December.

The final year of the decade started with OLT’s *Harvey*, DSP’s *1837: The Farmers’ Revolt*, and *The Browning Version* by Spotlight Theatre which had now moved to the Arts Resource Centre. As summer approached, DSP took its production of *1837* to Toronto Harborfront Studio Theatre for a four-night run, and during the summer eight DSP participants attended the Theatre Ontario Summer Courses at Laurentian University in Sudbury. This was the largest number of participants from one group to ever attend these annual courses.

In the fall this year, a third company, Oshawa City Players, opened in the Arts Resource Centre with the presentation of *Any Wednesday*.

So as the decade ends we can safely say that community theatre is alive and well and thriving in Oshawa.

(Mrs. Butler is the founding member of Durham Shoestring Performers.)

1981, June 30

Oshawa, Winnipeg teachers trade jobs

By Jane McDonald

TORONTO STAR

**Article features 2 photographs; of Jeannine & John, and co.*

OSHAWA — When John and Jeannine Butler were married 20 years ago, they dreamed of travelling as John taught school and Jeannine followed her interest in theatre.

But the arrival of two children, a mortgage and the accompanying need for job security put a damper on the couple’s dream. Until now.

The Butlers are moving to Manitoba this August in a one-year exchange of homes with the Fast family of Winnipeg.

“When we got married,” Jeannine Butler says, “teacher mobility was high and we both like that flexibility. It had been our plan to move around Ontario and, if possible, out of

province. But then there seemed less mobility for teachers and at John's age and salary — well, we just thought we couldn't do it."

In the exchange arranged through the Ontario Ministry of Education's special projects branch, the McLaughlin Collegiate mathematics teacher and his family will head west. The two families — the Butlers and the Fasts — are the first to participate from Ontario and Manitoba.

NO-RISK MOVE

When they first heard of the recently created exchange program, the Butlers hoped to locate in Alberta for the year, but it seems "no math teacher from Alberta wanted to apply here."

The move is a good way of "refreshing the blood," an enthusiastic Butler says.

"We like the idea and the challenges it offers without the risk of John winding up in a junior position or a job that will be redundant in a year."

Even though their first choice of location wasn't possible, the Butlers plan to visit Calgary during the March break and Vancouver at Christmas.

Butler admits that they have so many plans, they will "never be able to do it all," but hope to get involved and "find out all about the community."

The creator of the Durham Shoestring Performers amateur theatre group in Oshawa, Butler says she wants to find out what's comfortable in Winnipeg. She, her husband, and their two sons also hope to brush up on their own French in the context of Manitoba's large French population.

LEAVING THE SHEETS

The Butlers and the Fasts have already exchanged literature about their respective cities. An organization called the Canadian League for Educational Exchange has also helped the families prepare for the move. The league recommended, for example, that they leave their homes with everything in its places, including sheets and dishes.

"Basically all we take are our clothes," Butler says.

"There were all kinds of things that we thought would be nice to do for the Fasts," she says, "like leaving knick-knacks in the living room. We learned that this is the worst thing we could do and that we should get a big box and get rid of it — put it all in the attic. Other people don't care about these things and really want a clutter-free house."

The move will be costly for the Winnipeg family in that Henry Fast must invest in a new wardrobe. In Manitoba, teachers wear jeans and sport shirts to class, but in Oshawa, shirt, tie, and jacket are the norm.

"It's too bad they're (John and Henry) not the same size," Butler says. "They could exchange clothes, too."

Both families will keep up their own mortgage and insurance payments, but they'll pay for the utilities they use in their borrowed home. Butler hopes the oil bill won't be too great a shock for the Fasts when they begin heating the Butler bungalow next winter.

Butler only intended to take two household items from Oshawa — "My electric blanket and coffee pot."

1983, October 08

No more Artful dodging

OSHAWA THIS WEEKEND

Since there's a big meeting Tuesday at City Hall about the future of the Arts Resource Centre, Oshawa This Weekend figure we might as well put our two cents in, too.

There are some 13 groups and individuals interested in what happens to the hulking old police station, which is actually an attractively designed building, with its curving west end and glassed south wall.

To sum up some propositions we know about, the ARC needs to have more space for artists who paint, more space for artists who act, more space for artists who putter with pottery.

It also needs a great big boardroom, lots of office space, room to store anything that needs storing, plus (are you getting all this down?) a “welcome centre to assist immigrants to Canada” if the Oshawa Folk Arts Council gets what it wants.

The community services committee is in an extremely uncomfortable position.

Knowing full well it can't come up with a solution that will make the ARC all things to all people, the committee must come up with recommendations that will turn the ARC into a viable institution.

Oshawa This Weekend likes Audrey MacLean's suggestion. The long-time artist and former gallery owner thinks the City should let someone other than the City manage the ARC, preferably an arts-oriented board.

It's a good idea for two reasons: the building would be dependent on good management for its survival, therefore, those who wanted to use the facility would be more committed to it than those who now merely rent space from the City of Oshawa.

Secondly, the City wouldn't have to bother with the poor little white elephant any more. There are rumors the politicians are reluctant to relinquish their control of the ARC, but why? Simple, because they lose another fiefdom.

Oshawa This Weekend thinks the community services department would be happy to let the ARC go. It has its collective hands full with the new Mary St. school and community centre.

It's a solid building. There's no indication anyone wants it torn down.

What we're looking for, then, are the answers to the questions: what renovations need to be made?; how does the building need to be upgraded?; how much money is there to spend?; whose money is going to be spent?; who will determine who will use the facility?; how much will people be charged to use the facility?

It's an awesome task, but Oshawa This Weekend thinks the community services committee shouldn't be intimidated by it. Oshawa's arts groups need a decision, and they need it now.

1983, October 21

Jeannine did it her way

By Sharon Young

The Oshawa Times

**Article features 2 photographs; of Jeannine, and co.*

After 10 years Jeannine Butler has more than proven that she could do things her own way and be successful.

As the sole head of the Durham Shoestring Performers, she has demonstrated that the job of running a theatre could be accomplished entirely by one person, rather than through the democratic process.

“I had this concept and I wanted to verify its validity,” Jeannine says.

“Theatre people do not want to be business managers or be on the decision-making end of things. People come out to be in a play, not to take on the responsibilities of secretary,

public relations, fund-raising, or whatever. They have always been forced into doing these jobs — jobs that they did not want.

With DSP, the buck stops here. I make all the decisions and I stand behind them. I wanted to take the democracy out of culture. The killer of culture is the democratic process.”

Disenchanted by theatre groups who were constantly fund-raising and applying for grants to keep operational, Jeannine held to the idea that a group could operate through the income it earned from its audience:

“I wanted to prove that a company could budget and the audience would foot the cost. I had the answer to this within two years. You have to be tight with the pennies, but it can be done.”

There are no memberships in DSP. With this arrangement, people have no right to make choices as to what play is done. They are just participants for whatever length of time they want.

Unlike theatre companies that have a reading committee select the plays, then seek out a director, Jeannine maintains that the director is the one who should make this decision.

“I want directors who have a passion to do a play,” she says.

Jeannine began developing this concept back in 1967, but at the time she lived in North Bay and belonged to a group with whom this concept just could not work.

Two years after moving to Oshawa and feeling the atmosphere was right for such a project, she began to develop her ideas.

“The old Police Station (now the Arts Resource Centre) had become vacant and I knew this was the time and the place,” she recalls.

Her intention was to play to small, intimate groups producing Canadian and experimental plays.

Questioned as to the difference between Oshawa Little Theatre and DSP, she claims that there can be no comparison:

“They are two different types of theatre and each serves a purpose. OLT has mass appeal, and they do it well. You just have to remember that the more good theatre we both produce, the more audience we create.”

After launching the Durham Shoestring Performers a decade ago with three one-act plays “Before Breakfast”, “Don’t Touch That Phone”, and “The Still Alarm” — all for the price of \$1, Jeannine proudly talks of the successes, the fun and, mostly, the people — several of whom are still involved. She also points out that four other companies have been patterned — with some variations — after her concept.

Some said that DSP wouldn’t last two years, she remembers, but the group’s survival is no longer in question, even for those who were originally skeptical.

“We have so many dedicated people that we will survive,” she vows.

That survival, however, was put to a strong test when Jeannine went to Winnipeg for one year as part of an exchange program her husband was involved in. But, Carolyn Wilson came forward to keep things going.

On her return to Oshawa, Jeannine picked up where she left off and is well into the operation of the theatre company.

Marking the beginning of the 10th season, DSP will present “What A Glorious Time They Had — Nellie McClung”, Oct. 27, 28, and 29 at the Arts Resource Centre.

Then on Dec. 1, 2, and 3, “Clarence Darrow” will be presented in celebration of General Motors’ 75th anniversary. In addition, 18 performances have been booked for the Children’s Christmas Show; and Carolyn Wilson, the director of the spring performances, is actively searching for a play that is just right for her.

Involved in theatre since high school days, Jeannine has belonged to groups in Lindsay, Ottawa, Guelph, Toronto, North Bay, and Oshawa.

“I started with a musical group,” she says with a laugh, admitting reluctantly that she is tone deaf.

“But it wasn’t until I started taking courses — directing, makeup, sets, props — that I stopped seeing it as a game.”

Further encouragement in the directing field came through the comments made by an adjudicator on a play that had been entered into competition.

But, all that is history. Her efforts are poured into DSP, rehearsing three nights each week at McLaughlin Collegiate and looking after business. In addition, she is a festival chairman for ACT (Association of Community Theatres) and a committee member of Theatre Ontario.

“You know, I have never acted with Shoestring, other than subbing with the children’s play. I don’t like performing in front of an audience. I find it very painful. But I adore rehearsals.”

“I once played Blanch in Street Car (Named Desire). During the first part of the play she is so high-strung that I pulled it off. Otherwise I couldn’t have done it.”

But still, Jeannine awaits what she calls her perfect part.

“I want to play the part of the maid who walks on the stage seven times and makes three short comments. But, I know no one will ever give it to me. They keep offering me major league roles,” she laughs.

1983, November 17

“I’ve met my own expectations”

By Sheenagh Murphy

OSHAWA WOMAN

**Article features 1 photograph*

Vivacious is the word that comes to mind on first meeting Jeannine Butler. Her effervescent personality reaches out to touch everything and everyone around her with a lively curiosity and is reflected in the flashing eyes, the theatrical yet fascinating gestures of arms and hands and with the fervor with which she greets life.

Jeannine is the director and creator of Durham Shoestring Productions, an Oshawa-based theatre company which has been delighting audiences here for the past 10 years.

Shoestring is more than a catchy phrase, Jeannine points out — it’s how she runs this innovative alternative to a community-based theatre company.

“When I decided to go ahead and start my own company in the spring of 1974, I told my husband I was putting \$1,000 in the bank as backup. When that was gone, well, I could say I tried! We actually got through the first season on \$500! And that was losing on the first production!”

The company lost a little on the second production as well but that was the last time it did so.

“We cleared expenses by the first spring and by the end of the second year we’d cleared the deficit. We haven’t lost since and while we may make all of \$17.50 on the show, we always clear it!”

The small, slender figure, clad in a soft green sweatsuit, pulls her legs to her chest and gives a throaty laugh.

“A lot of people thought it couldn’t be done, but I have a 10-year record showing it can. What it comes down to is I hold the pursestrings. Nothing, I mean nothing, gets spent without my approval!”

For those unfamiliar with the logistics of how most community theatre companies are run, Jeannine’s statement may not sound unusual. Yet, as she explains, most community production companies are run along vastly different lines.

“Community theatre companies are usually run democratically. Everyone has a say in what goes on. This usually means a little too much gets spent here, a little too much there. Then I went to a conference in 1967 where one of the speakers pointed out this democratic process can kill a company. I really related to that. I felt, still feel, that any group needs one person and one person only who is really in charge.”

Jeannine’s experience at the time consisted of several years working in and around a number of community theatre groups as well as a varied background in theatre-related courses.

Born in Timmins, she was an early, but as she points out, undedicated initiate of show business.

“My mother got involved in theatre when I was fairly young and would encourage me to join as well. I did. But then again I think I was the only member of the all-girls choir at the convent (where she attended school) who was told to mouth the words! I couldn’t sing at all, but it was fun!”

Despite this less-than-impressive start, Jeannine says she continued to join various groups in a number of capacities ranging from singing and dancing in cabarets to silent impressions on stage.

“It was something I played at. It really didn’t interest me all that much but was another way to have fun. Some people say, let’s have a party and everyone says Yeah! With me, someone says let’s do a play and I go, sure!”

An irrepressible grin lights the gamin face. Pausing, still talking, she darts into the nearby kitchen for a cigarette.

“I keep them in here so I don’t smoke too much,” she explains.

Settling down once again into her comfortable armchair, dark bobbed hair swings forward masking the animated countenance as she lights up. After a satisfying puff, she continues.

“This all happened when we moved to Lindsay. My father opened a business there. Was I ever glad! People talk about how beautiful the North is. Well let me tell you, once you’ve seen rocks and trees and rivers and more rocks and more trees and more damn rivers you get heartily sick of them! When I was 12 years old my dream was to go to Toronto and see the Royal York Hotel. Well I finally got there and let me tell you when I stood in front of that Hotel...well...that was beauty!”

The move to Lindsay was in fact, only one of many for Jeannine who admits cheerfully, “I’m basically a vagabond at heart!”

Her interest in theatre, particularly the business and administrative aspects grew however with her continuing efforts in each new place. A serious interest developed through her involvement with a North Bay community theatre company.

“When I got married in 1961 and moved up there, I spent a lot of time working with them. Then I went to see a man called Richard Howard give a theatre workshop. He was a brilliant, brilliant young man. He caught my imagination. He showed me what could be done with theatre. That was when I realized I loved directing, and really anything concerned with the business end of theatre.”

A return engagement by Mr. Howard later in the year ended with Jeannine acting as assistant director for *Breath of Spring* — an experience she still cherishes. This was followed by her initiation as sole director when she headed the play *Espanole* at another workshop.

“The workshop leader, Robert Christie, paid me the highest compliment by asking me to come forward and tell the other students how I approached the show. I felt invulnerable...that I couldn’t do anything wrong!”

Pausing, Jeannine sweeps back her hair with a graceful gesture.

“That was a real high point of my life, even now I look back and it remains one of my proudest moments.”

Her imagination fired, her interest caught, Jeannine says she returned to North Bay determined to learn as much about directing as she could. Due to a dearth of professional talent in the area she decided to take time off and spent the next year travelling around the country from workshop to workshop.

“At the time I felt if you’re going to direct you have to know everything there is to know about theatre. I don’t feel that way anymore. I’ve learned that a director can put on a brilliant performance if the right people are chosen to support you. The whole point is to communicate to people what is needed, what you, as a director, want...you don’t need to know everything right down to the last makeup test!

“I really worked hard those first few years. I was willing, still am, to do anything that needs doing. That means fixing props, sewing costumes, which I loathe incidentally, or selling tickets. The only thing I didn’t do until recently was stage management. Believe me, a stage manager has the hardest part of the whole business...I mean it’s the stage manager who has to make sure things don’t mess up!”

Thoughtful now, Jeannine leans indolently back into the chair, letting one slender leg dangle to the hardwood floor.

“That’s what it’s all about isn’t it? Getting the show through to the audience. Yet, strangely enough, I love rehearsing a show, once it’s there (on stage) it’s almost over. I know we tend to glorify ourselves (as directors) yet when you think about it, theatre got along without them for 2,000 years. One hundred years ago productions revolved around whoever had the money, or the star quality. The biggest or strongest actor ran the troupe. We’ve gotten away from the star concept today. Theatre is no longer a star show. Instead we’ve chosen to go for visions, concepts, needs, something or someone apart from an individual. We need someone now who can stand back objectively and see how a play comes across.”

Jeannine admits she doesn’t know if the change is for the better but points out everything concerned with theatre has radically changed.

“We don’t control our environment now. You couldn’t do that 500 years ago. Our concept of theatre, our audiences are all different. If you see theatre as a reflection of society then I’d have to say yes, we are getting better. Today’s plays do reflect our society, I think.”

Citing ‘Waiting for the Parade’ — a production presented by Shoestring Productions last year — as an example, Jeannine says it was a play which presented a realistic and compelling portrait of what Canadians experienced during the ‘30s, as well as a uniquely Canadian one.

“Actually, I’ve really learned to respect the rehearsal process. You have to take things one step at a time. Learn your lines, learn your character, you have to go through the process. I really like to see what different actors bring to each production, how I can influence the end product, improve it. I like to initiate challenges to the people involved. Once a play is facing an audience all you can ask is whether the audience is responding the way you anticipated. All the other questions should have been answered before.”

A tireless, even obsessive worker when a play is in progress, Jeannine admits ruefully, "I eat, sleep, and live it 24 hours a day." She also makes copious notes after the first dress rehearsal about everything connected with the production.

"I question myself mostly. I ask if the end product is what I aimed for. Did I achieve what I wanted, if not, why not. I ask if my own personal objectives were met and what did I expect that I didn't get.

"I learn something new every production."

Her intense and single-minded determination to improve, and a belief in trying new methods is a continuation for Jeannine of a journey first attempted due to the imagination of a workshop leader. For her belief that there was an alternative to democracy in running community theatre groups had met more than once with difficulties. She had dropped out of the North Bay group because of their refusal to try a new way and on moving to Oshawa in 1970 discovered the same state of affairs in the group here.

"When we got here I saw the theatre company was run on the same lines as the one in North Bay. Well, I couldn't bring myself to compromise...plus I'd promised my husband, John, I'd stay out of a theatre for a year. I put the idea for my own group on the back burner, resurrecting it from time to time to discuss with friends.

"I really couldn't afford to invest that much time in the beginning. My two sons (Bernard, 19, and D'Arcy, 17) were 6 and 4 at the time and needed me in the evenings."

Instead, Jeannine created and hosted a daily, half-hour television show on the local cable station, meeting friends and contacts in the process. And while the idea of her own company continued to tantalize, it took the advice of a close friend to nudge her into action.

"My friend pointed out I was 38 years old. If I didn't do it now, well, I never would...so I thought, well why not."

To her surprise, and she admits, continuing delight, the idea did work and is continuing to work.

"I've met my own expectations. I've proved that people will come and work without pay, they'll invest their time and energy even when someone else calls the shots. I've also proved it is possible to keep your expenses related to your income. As far as I'm concerned I've done it. I started it, I run it...and I want it to just keep on going."

Durham Shoestring Productions will be presenting 'Clarence Darrow', a one-man show starring Peter Brierley on Dec. 1, 2, and 3.

1984, February 01

Ten years later, Shoestring is still pulling Durham theatre group celebrates decade of plays

By Brenda Larson

This Week Metroland Community Newspaper

**Article features 1 photograph*

Ten years ago a self-proclaimed "arrogant broad" put an unusual concept into action.

That "arrogant broad" is Jeannine Butler and the unusual concept became the foundation of the Durham Shoestring Performers.

Mrs. Butler says she was thinking about establishing a theatre company of her own, a theatre company with a difference that could prove most successful.

She was living in North Bay prior to coming to Oshawa in 1973, and she had had a great deal of experience working with amateur theatre groups.

"I heard a man named Tom Henry speak and he said that democracy kills theatre, that democracy and creativity don't go together because the members outvote the director. I thought, 'Hey, he's right, because he agrees with me'," laughs the vivacious brunette.

DEMOCRACY OUT

"My intent was to get the democracy out of theatre and everyone (in North Bay) would look at me like I was Hitler reincarnated," she adds. "Then I came to Oshawa and I was still thinking about it."

Another thought, she says, was to form a shareholding company, where members would have control through the number of shares they held. Directors would get three shares, producers three shares, actors one share, for example.

Another director, an acquaintance of Mrs. Butler, tried the shareholding formula and it didn't work "because it's still democratic".

The idea of forming a company that would be under one person's control seemed like the best idea.

In 1974 Mrs. Butler began looking for a home for her concept — she found it behind City Hall.

"Peter Cekuta took me through the old police station and said I could rent space for \$50 a week," she explains. "I talked to a few financial advisors and we decided we could do it for a buck a head, so we did. That started the theatre company."

HITLER REINCARNATED

The name for the group came from several different areas. 'Durham' was used to honor the newly formed Durham Region. 'Performers' named those involved in the new group.

'Shoestring' was the philosophy — everything done as professionally as possible on a small budget.

"I really learned how to be cheap, learned not to pay a lot for a little. I was a good general consumer and I'd watch to see which grocery store had the best prices. But I had to start this theatre company to learn how to do it with a passion," she said. "You can be cheap and still have a lot of fun."

Mrs. Butler says many people think she is getting rich from the company, but that is not the case.

The company, she explains, has a good amount of capital if it ever has to cover extraordinary expenses, but "we're committed to the philosophy 'if a play costs \$1,000 to produce, we bring in \$1,000'. You don't touch your capital to run a production," she says.

The plays cover expenses and she says the company will do a cabaret-style show to make money every few years. The idea, however, is not to get rich, but to have fun doing community theatre productions.

The initial idea for the company changed over the years to suit the demands of the public.

"We were going to be mobile. We were going to do one- or two-night stands, all over the Region. The portability has gone out of it except for the children's play at Christmas," she says.

In the first few casts of Shoestring productions, she recalls, the actors and actresses, for the most part, had little or no experience.

"We did three one-act plays to open the first season," she says. "Out of a total of 13 people, only three had previous experience. We had some black paint donated to us and we painted the theatre black," she says. "Oh, there was a real feeling that we were a maverick organization. A real feeling that we were pioneering."

Lights were borrowed from the Oshawa Little Theatre and Mrs. Butler says "it really blows your mind when you think back to what you had to do to do your shows."

FAMILY GROUP

"We were doing what we could. We lit some shows with only four lights, because that's all we could borrow. You work with a visual concept in your head and then when you're moving the set in, with very few exceptions, it's never exactly the way you had planned it," she adds.

Mrs. Butler says the people who come out to work with the Shoestring are generally there simply because they love theatre. They don't care about the money, they just want to "do their thing".

There's a real sense of family in the Shoestring. They welcome newcomers with open arms and big smiles and auditions are as much fun as they are nerve-wracking.

"There are people who absolutely hate me, but like the company so they come out," she says with a smile. "They like being involved."

The high point of the 10 years came at the halfway mark.

As she describes a real-life scene from her career with Shoestring, Mrs. Butler moves across her living room, indicating with a wrist gesture the number of people; illustrating with a cock of the head her utter disbelief; telling, with a trace of a smile, of her sheer joy at the time.

Then there's a tiny chuckle and Mrs. Butler says some people might think she's conceited if she uses the story of the fifth anniversary party as her favourite event.

"All the people who had been involved with the Shoestring filled the Holiday Inn and held a party for me called 'She's A Lady'. It was Feb. 16, 1979.

Mike Astrop had invited the Butlers (Jeannine and husband John) to dinner and he demanded that Jeannine be ready exactly at 6 p.m., coat in hand, one foot out the door.

"I couldn't understand what he was so uptight about," she says.

At 6 p.m. a limousine pulled into the Butler driveway and escorted the couple to the Holiday Inn.

They were met in the lobby by Doreen Astop and escorted to the Guild Hall.

"Doreen knocked three times on the door and I wondered what the hell was going on," says Mrs. Butler. "Then, whoever was on the inside opened the door suddenly and knocked me right in the head.

"They took me into the room and all of a sudden there was a spotlight on me. Do you know what terror is? That's all I could think of. I was terrified. Then I realized there were people all around me and they were singing 'There's No Business Like Show Business'.

FIFTH YEAR FUN

"I finally realized 'Hey, this is some kind of party and I think I'm the guest of honour'," she laughs.

Her company staged a wonderful floor show, she says, with pieces from shows, song and dance numbers and some comedy.

"It was a wonderful evening. I don't think I hit the floor until six hours after I got home," she says.

The Arts Resource Centre has been home to the company for the entire 10 years.

"I started advocating improvements (in the centre) in Year 2," laughs Mrs. Butler. "It was difficult back then because the future of the building was uncertain."

Last year, however, there was "some type of commitment" from Oshawa City Council to keep the building and some improvements have been made to suit all the groups using the building.

"The Shoestring will stay in some form. In two or three years, maybe I'll get on some other kick, say 'this isn't the way to run a theatre company', and I'll try something else," says Mrs. Butler.

PARTY PLANNED

The 10th anniversary celebration is already planned. A major costume party for all Shoestring members, former members, and their escorts, will be held at the Kiev Pavillion, Bloor St., Feb. 18, at 8:30 p.m..

Tickets cost \$1, says Mrs. Butler, because "that's what we first charged for shows."

The tickets are available only at Information Oshawa at City Hall. A guest book must be signed by the person purchasing the tickets, indicating if there will be an escort attending as well.

The ticket includes a dance and a midnight buffet.

1984, February 14

Shoestring players are 10 years old

By Judith Banville

TORONTO STAR

**Article features 1 photograph*

OSHAWA — Jeannine Butler admits it. She's a dictator. But call me a benevolent dictator, pleads the artistic director of the Durham Shoestring Performers. What she does, she does for the cause of better community theatre.

She's enjoying the sweet results of her aggressive individuality. The alternative theatre company she runs on a shoestring celebrates its first decade this week.

Oshawa had a flourishing community theatre group when Butler arrived 13 years ago with husband John, a teacher, and their two sons. But Oshawa Little Theatre was "exactly what I was running away from," she says.

Her experience with other groups had taught her directors and plays shouldn't be selected by an elected board. "I wanted to avoid taking everyone's views and sifting them down to the lowest common denominator. I wanted to take the democracy out of community theatre," she says.

SLIM BUDGET

Directors should find their own plays and make their pitch to the artistic director, she believes. After setting the budget, Butler turns over the reins.

That budget is usually a slim one. Butler believes community groups shouldn't attempt to compete with professional theatres when it comes to sets and costumes. She'd rather see ticket prices reduced, or have the profits spent on training actors and directors.

"I keep my hands tight on the money" to keep ticket prices about half the average community theatres costs, she says. But she'd like to spend a little more to reverse a trend that has prevailed the past three years, during which she's brought in only one professional to help the group.

A former adjudicator and now chairman of the drama category for the Association of Community Theatres of Central Ontario (ACT-CO), she's seen what a little training can do for amateurs.

Although the artistic director has a board that advises the group on business, Butler is determined not to be held accountable to anyone else.

The only grant the group has ever received came from Wintario, to pay half the cost of lighting equipment.

SATURDAY CELEBRATION

"We give to this city through our rent," of the Arts Resource Centre, Butler says.

Her group added an extra play this year, performing *What Glorious Times They Had, Darrow*, and the coming April play, *Buried Child* in addition to the travelling Christmas children's play.

But the highlight of the season is this Saturday's celebration at the Ukrainian National Hall at 68 Bloor St. E., Oshawa. The \$1 ticket for former and present members includes a dance and buffet. Tickets are available at Information Oshawa at City Hall.

1986 (?) nd

SHOESTRING PERFORMERS STILL GOING STRONG

Her 'back to the basics' movement spawned Oshawa's alternative theatre

By Sheila James

The Oshawa Times

**Article features photograph*

There's a dictator at work in Durham.

She is Jeannine Butler, the woman responsible for establishing the Durham Shoestring Performers theatre company, operating out of the Arts Resource Centre.

Twelve years ago, Butler took \$1,000 of her own money and set up an account for a theatre company. She put \$500 in to start, and never had to put in the second \$500 — she's never looked back.

"The company is unique in terms of set-up," she says. "Other people have tried, but we make it work.

"I don't know why, but you can't argue with success."

There can be little doubt that Butler herself has had a great deal to do with the Shoestringers' success. With 20 years of experience in community theatres she knows what she wants and, more importantly, she knows how to get it.

"I started the theatre because I had a lot of frustrations with the way so-called community theatres were run," she says.

Butler didn't want a membership theatre, because everyone would be entitled to an equal say, regardless of their knowledge of the theatre. Naturally enough, she just wanted control over a project she was financing herself.

"I also felt at the time, in the late sixties, that something had gone screwy," says Butler. "The actual presentation of the play had become secondary to the social events...the acting was less important than the frills."

Butler wanted to get back to the basics of theatrical production — to reduce the costs so that "Joe Public" could afford to see a play. The initial ticket cost in 1974 was \$1. Today the price is still very reasonable at \$3 in advance and \$3.50 at the door. The budget for each play is kept under \$1,000. Butler says the 50 to 60 company volunteers have become geniuses at cutting corners and cutting costs.

"We hold our head above water beautifully," says Butler.

When she came to Oshawa in 1970, Butler "watched the lay of the land" and decided that there were enough people to support an alternative theatre. The company has received good audience and volunteer response, and is always looking for people interested in becoming involved with the theatre.

"It was never my intention to do high-profile, commercial plays," says Butler. She is a strong supporter of the Oshawa Little Theatre, but she also believes in the need for an alternative company to present plays which are "not everybody's cup of tea".

Both she and the other director in the company, Carolyn Wilson, are promoters of Canadian plays, although the company has staged such classics as *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *Equus*.

The Durham Shoestring Performers also stage a children's Christmas play each year and present it throughout the month of December. "that's really what supports our theatre," says Butler. The plays are booked into children's parties for \$50 per performance.

The decision to stage one of the three or four major plays each season is based upon the director's desire to direct a certain play.

"We don't plan our seasons because of what's current today may not be valid tomorrow," says Butler, who adds that there is a new Canadian play written every week.

Butler fell into the theatre for purely social reasons, because theatre people were fun people to be with. Eventually, she became committed and finally addicted.

As a director, she says the human element is very important to her — learning people's sensitivities, and the importance of interdependence.

"Every new actor teaches me something," she says.

Currently, the Durham Shoestring Performer's home, the Arts Resource Centre, is being renovated. No dates have been given as to when the construction will be completed, but the Shoestringers hope to be back entertaining Durham sometime in the summer or fall.

1988, October 07

Theatrical success on a Shoestring budget

Theatre-lover Jeannine Butler left the comfortable nest of community theatre 15 years ago to wing it on her own... Today she's flying high

By George Kaufman

The Oshawa Times

**Article features 1 photograph*

Fortunately for those of us who enjoy the theatre, we have plenty of examples here in Durham of the kind of passionately dedicated people who make amateur theatre such a vibrant part of our communities.

It takes people willing to put the rest of their lives on hold for long periods of time, while they spend countless hours piecing together one of those entertaining nights of theatre that we take such pleasure in.

But you'd have to go a ways to find a more dramatic example of that passion for theatre than Oshawa's Jeannine Butler.

Back in 1974 as a relative newcomer in the city, Jeannine gave in to the realization that she just didn't fit in to the structure of community theatre.

She invested \$500 of her own money and started the aptly-named Durham Shoestring Performers. The concept was simple: It was Jeannine's company, but anyone could join in, and everything would be done for the love of theatre, on a... well, on a shoestring.

"I wasn't 100 per cent sure it would work," she remembers today, "But I knew I had to try it. I figured I had enough money for two years, and after that... actually, I wasn't really thinking that far ahead."

It has worked — wonderfully. The two years passed, and so have 12 others.

Today, the Durham Shoestring Performers are preparing for their first play — actually plays — of their 15th season, a prospect Jeannine never dreamed about when she started it.

"It has worked," she concludes in a typically self-effacing assessment. "It's not for everyone but it works for me."

What has "worked" is Jeannine's vision of a theatre company revolving around the vision and leadership of one person. She admits she simply didn't have the patience and tolerance for the committee approach of the typical community theatre organization.

“People making decisions too often aren’t the same people who have the experience in actually producing the plays. That’s not always the case, but it was the case too often for me.”

The key to her company’s success, she insists, boils down to one short phrase: “No memberships.”

She doesn’t sell memberships to DSP, and no one “belongs” to it. Instead, it belongs to Jeannine. She makes all the decisions, from picking plays to choosing the people to direct them, to keeping the books and settling the budgets.

“That way, no one else feels responsible for anything except what they are doing. Our people don’t buy memberships, and they know I run the company. But that’s where it ends. Artistic decisions are completely up to the directors of the plays. As soon as a director is chosen for a play, he’s in charge.

That approach may seem to fly in the face of the democratic communalism of amateur theatre groups, but Jeannine’s DSP has not only thrived, but attracted a loyal core of believers who also thrive under her system. The company has also drawn a number of other local theatre people, who have enjoyed the freedom of moving in and out of the DSP productions as it fits their schedules and interests.

In fact, Jeannine has to laugh at her supposed reputation as a dictatorial theatre renegade.

“Even I call myself dictatorial when it comes to the company,” she chuckles, “but the truth is that the people who have become involved in the company have changed me more than they probably realized.”

More and more of the artistic decisions have passed from her hands over the years, but she’s adamant about one aspect of DSP:

“I know it’s my ability to keep tabs on budgets, and to balance the books, that makes the company survive. If I could just direct plays, that’s what I would do, believe me.”

Catching the theatre bug through her family’s involvement in Lindsay Little Theatre as she was growing up, Jeannine went on to work in amateur theatre groups wherever her life took her — Ottawa, Sudbury, Timmins.

It was in North Bay that she found her true niche, though, when she served as assistant director to Tom Hendry on a play.

“He taught me so much about the theatre. I had the advantage of just following him around for a while and watching, learning. I became so focussed on theatre, for a few years there was really nothing else. As soon as I was an assistant director, I knew that was what I wanted to do.”

Despite the demands of running her Shoestring operation, however, she remains thoroughly involved in the directing side of theatre — her main reason for starting the company in the first place.

“I’d still be just directing if I thought I could,” she muses, then adds with one of those emotional, revealing comments that epitomize amateur theatre devotees: “It’s wonderful that the company has survived, but I’d be directing plays if I had to put them on in my living room.”

Though the company’s survival into a 15th season is a genuine success story, the Shoestring group remains a well-kept secret among too many in this community.

DSP has a number of strikes against it: no memberships, no subscription tickets to guarantee attendance throughout the year, no real stage facilities, and a low media profile.

But the company has attracted a loyal core of followers, and it still has the element of surprise.

I well remember, for instance, my first visit to the drab confines of the Arts Resource Centre for a DSP play. As I entered the small, nearly-bare auditorium that served as the stage, I asked myself once again why I was giving up a Blue Jay game on TV for a tiny-talent play put on by people who actually prided themselves on working on a shoestring budget.

By the end of the evening, though, I was a full-fledged convert, kicking myself for my pre-conceived bias. I had just sat through an intimate and thoroughly enjoyable two hours of theatre that had involved me with the action on the nearby stage as few theatre productions had managed. Though I realized it might have been a fluke of circumstances, I enthusiastically attended the company's next play with high hopes — and I wasn't let down a bit.

It's been the same with virtually every DSP production over the years since then, and I have tried not to miss any. What Shoestring plays lack in a fancy auditorium or a larger budget, they more than make up for in the talent and dedication of their workers, and the shrewd selection of their material.

In fact, that may be the number one secret of DSP's success: it doesn't ever try to compete with the community theatre programs, with their popular Broadway musicals and hit comedies.

As Jeannine puts it: "We generally put on plays the other groups can't or won't do. As much as possible, I like to do Canadian plays, and personally I love the classics, though I've realized we can't do as many of those as I would prefer. I want my actors to be challenged... that's very important when I look at a play."

Her actors — and directors — should find plenty of challenges in the upcoming first production of the season. The 15th season kicks off with an evening of seven one-act plays — appropriately, the same format on which the DSP began 15 years ago.

The first three plays are by John Patrick Shanely, directed by David Millar.

A Lonely Impulse of Delight concerns a young man (Ken Bond) who has fallen in love with a mermaid and decides to introduce her to his best friend (Tony Reines), with humorous results. *Down and Out* features a Poet (Craig Wildman), and his Love (Susan Lowery), who live in abject poverty, hounded by a Spectre (Peter Derry). *Out West* is a takeoff on the classic Western gunfight, complete with the Cowboy (Ken Bond), the bartender (Rick Thomas), the good girl (Linda Boulton), the bad girl (Nina Herman), and the brother (Peter Derry).

A new play by Oshawa writer Eileen Corbet, *Introspection*, will be directed by DSP veteran Carolyn Wilson. It features a young man (Jeff Kellar) alone on a Saturday night, analyzing his life.

Butler will direct two short plays dealing with the problem of the "other woman." In *The Stronger*, by August Strindberg, written and set in 1888, a married woman (Chris Rollo) unravels a puzzle when she confronts her silent — but far from passive — rival (Sharon Walmsley). The companion piece is *Survival Techniques*, by Joyce Johnson of North Bay. Set in 1988, Jenny Wright (Anne Walker) is confronted by Mona Meadows (Dorothy Little) with the indiscreet letters Jenny has sent to Monda's husband.

The seventh play is directed by Lucy Ireland. Written by Frank Moher of Edmonton, *Pause* is a light and snappy absurdist farce which begins when Kurdell (Peter Derry) and Crootoo (Craig Wildman) deliver a red carpet to a mountain top. They are visited there by The Great Whore of Babylon (Roz Michaels) and Buck (David Pallister).

They will be performed Oct. 21-22 and 28-29 at the Arts Resource Centre behind City Hall. Advance tickets are available at \$4 each at Information Oshawa at City Hall and The Key Man in Oshawa Centre. Any tickets remaining the nights of performance will be \$5 at the door.

1988, November 23

The best of community theatre Durham Shoestring Performers

By John Duarte

Oshawa/Whitby This Week

**Article features 3 photographs; Jeannine, Carolyn & Jeff, and co.*

This year marked a coming home, of sorts, for the Durham Shoestring Performers and Jeannine Butler, in particular.

The theatre group celebrated its 15th year of operation by presenting a night of one-act plays. Back to Our Roots, as the 1988 fall production was called, recalled the days when the Shoestringers offered three one-act plays for a dollar.

The days of the one-dollar plays have long since past, but the integrity of the theatre group and its original mandate remains the same. Mrs. Butler's idea was to offer good material and good artists at a price that would make theatre attractive to people who may not have been exposed to live stage performances.

"I had been involved in community theatre for a number of years and had this idea of starting this type of theatre," the founder of the Durham Shoestring Performers says.

Mrs. Butler says she was frustrated by community theatre, in as much as people were constantly changing roles: acting in one production, working on sets the next. She had the idea that one person should look after one area.

"The main reason was to keep continuity in making decisions," Mrs. Butler says. "You should keep people doing the jobs they want to do."

In this way, not only is there continuity, but productivity is greater, since the people are doing things they are interested in and enjoy.

"I don't know how it would work or how it would go over," she says, "I just want to test the system."

When she moved to Oshawa in 1971, Mrs. Butler found the perfect opportunity to try her experiment.

"There was an established theatre company in the city in the Oshawa Little Theatre and it would have been foolish to try to compete with it," she says. "But I thought there may be a way to complement it, and I just wanted to put on plays as cheaply as I could."

Mrs. Butler says she and her father spent the following summer building flats and backdrops for her new theatre company and in the fall of 1974 the Durham Shoestring Performers stepped on the stage for the first time, in *Before Breakfast*, *Don't Touch that Phone*, and *The Still Alarm* — three plays for \$1.

Carolyn Wilson, who started as stage manager and is now one of the company's principal directors, says the Shoestringers were welcomed by the city's theatre community, as a group catering to different styles of production.

"We are well served (by theatres) in this area," Ms Wilson says. "Our theatre is less technical (than the Oshawa Little Theatre or Whitby Courthouse Theatre) and we certainly wouldn't choose a show with lots of special effects."

Mrs. Butler agrees. She said that the Durham Shoestring Performers are primarily concerned with the material and the performance. She hopes that is what people will enjoy and remember.

CENTRE RENOVATED

"We started out saying the emphasis will be on the text (of the play) and the acting and not to spend money on elaborate sets," Mrs. Butler says, "We haven't really changed that much, but our interest in seeing how visually attractive things can be has grown."

She says the group can present things in different ways, since the Arts Resource Centre, where the company rehearses and performs, has been renovated. A better lighting system is one of the major renovations.

"We can create some exciting lighting effects and, therefore, create some exciting sets without vast expense," Mrs. Butler says. "It may seem small, but it has added an extra dimension."

By 1975, one year after the first production, the Durham Shoestring Performers had cleared all investment expenses and “that was the last time we lost money”, Mrs. Butler says, with the exception of 1983, during the 10th year celebration, “but that was intentional. We wanted to put on an excellent show to celebrate our 10th year and we budgeted a loss of \$300 for the year,” the Durham Shoestring Performers founder says. “When we closed the books on the year, we had lost \$35.”

That has been the history of success for the theatre group. In 1974 the company offered the first of its annual Christmas productions, where the Shoestringers take the show on the road to schools or any other community group that wishes to have the group perform.

“We can perform the Christmas play anyplace,” Mrs. Butler says. “Give us a space 10 feet square and we can perform the play. We don’t really need a stage.”

The Christmas play is now a big part of the company’s year, but Mrs. Butler recalls the days when it wasn’t always so well received.

When the idea of a Christmas production was implemented, the group thought the community would welcome it with open arms. “We thought if you put on a play two or three days before Christmas, moms have 1,000 things to do and they will be so grateful that we are taking their children off their hands for an afternoon,” Mrs. Butler says. “Nobody came.”

She says the need was there, but she had chosen the wrong venue for the production. Instead of having the kids come to the theatre, the Durham Shoestring Performers had to take the theatre to the kids. “We had to go out to the audience, not have the audience come to us. This was the need and every year since then we have done just that.”

Another benchmark year in the history of the company came in 1977. That spring, instead of a spring play, Mrs. Butler decided to offer a cabaret. The group rented a hall and was really looking forward to the evening, and were still looking forward, rather than working on it, until the last minute.

At four in the afternoon several members moved into the hall and began the massive process of decorating and getting everything ready for the night. There had been no rehearsal, but by showtime the hall was ready.

‘GREAT SHOW’

“You wouldn’t have recognized the place,” she said. “It was a great show and a great night.”

The following autumn the Durham Shoestring Performers broke tradition and staged their first full-length play, *The Death and Life of Sneaky Fitch*, starring Joe Mullen.

“What an actor,” Mrs. Butler said. “His moments were just spectacular.”

Part of the change over the years was the renovation of the Arts Resource Centre, which has been home to the Durham Shoestring Performers. The complex closed for almost one year in 1985 and 1986, but it was worth the wait, Mrs. Butler says.

“We got everything we wanted,” she says. “We got decent dressing rooms and comfortable chairs for the audience.”

The plays continued through the years, as did the Durham Shoestring Performers. The price of admission has increased — it now sits at \$5 — but the entertainment remains faithful to the founder’s concept — “to provide quality theatre at an affordable price”.

In a lot of ways, the Durham Shoestring Performers have changed vastly. In the beginning, actors used the company as a training ground and moved on to something else. Now the group is an established theatre company.

“We do much better theatre now,” Mrs. Butler says. “We are more committed and get better with every turn up on the stage.”

The mandate for the Durham Shoestring Performers remains the same as it was back in 1974. Mrs. Butler continues to stress Canadian playwrights as much as possible and to

concentrate on “stuff that is not mass-appeal. All we want to do is stuff that is different,” Mrs. Butler says.

But never did she think she would be looking back on 15 years when the idea to start a theatre company entered her head in the early 1970s.

“If somebody had told me I’d be doing it for 15 years, I may never have started the company,” Mrs. Butler says. “I certainly didn’t plan on running the company for 15 years.”

She adds, “Now, I don’t even have to make decisions. It just happens and it just moves on.”

1989, Early Spring, nd

[title missing]

By George Kaufman

The Oshawa Times

When most of us put a homemade art masterpiece on our fridge, that’s the end of it — until it somehow finds its way to the garbage, that is.

But in Ken Bond’s case, that was only the beginning of it. The end... well, we all have a chance to see that, when his musical fantasy play for children, *Wooster Without Wednesday*, plays at the Arts Resource Centre Auditorium May 5-7.

FAMILIAR FIGURE

Ken is a familiar figure for followers of Durham Shoestring Performers, having become a regular part of the DSP acting stable in the six years since he came here from his native Winnipeg. He’s become a popular and versatile member of that highly-respected troupe.

But this is the first time he’s ventured anything theatrical other than acting. In fact, he didn’t purposefully set out to write a play in the first place.

It all started out when his four-year-old daughter, Stefanie, asked him to draw a clown while they were in the kitchen one night. He fulfilled the request, but had a few lines left over, and used them to add a toybox around the clown.

MAGNET ART

The drawing took its rightful place on the fridge door, held by the requisite magnets.

Then, a few days later, she asked him to draw a bear, so he added it to the clown drawing. The next night, without thinking much about it, he took it down, added another character, and put in a line of dialogue. The next day, Stefanie and his son Donovan, 9, saw the change, and asked what happened next.

What happened next was that the drawing, like most such artwork, stayed on the fridge for a couple of months. Then, one night, he noticed it again, took it down, and decided to write a play using the characters and bits of dialogue already there.

THE REAL TEST

He worked on it during lunch breaks and in the evenings until he liked the story. Finally came the real test: he read it to the kids.

“Stef left about halfway through, but Donovan stuck it out and liked it,” the budding playwright recalls of his first brush with the “critics.”

He even added lyrics to a song at the end, as an afterthought, and showed it to his sister, Vivian Lee, who has been an active performer for some time. She told him to add more songs.

After providing some more lyrics, he took the third draft to DSP’s Carolyn Wilson, who had directed him several times. To his surprise, she liked the play immediately, and said she wanted to direct it.

SCHEDULED

Jeannine Butler, DSP's founding light, also liked the idea, and *Wooster Without Wednesday* was scheduled as the final production of the Shoestring's 15th season. But that wasn't the end of it, either.

Vivian led him to Ellen Imrie of Brooklin, who also liked the idea, and wrote the music to complete the play.

"The first time we got together and she played what she'd written, it was exactly what I wanted," says Ken. "It was beyond my expectations, she's very talented. It adds a whole new dimension to the play."

By now, just about everyone Ken knows has been involved in the runaway process: his children, who served as role models for the two children in the play, as well as critics; his wife, Irene, who dispensed advice and provided the support every actor and playwright needs; his sister Vivian, who helped shape the project and will star in the play.

NO HERO'S ROLE

Ken will also appear onstage, but he can't be accused of writing himself a hero's role. He'll be ratso, the mischievous rat who torments the toys in the playbox.

Peter Derry, Lanie Anderson, Rhonda Davies, and Jennifer Maybee will play the toy characters in the toybox; Mike King and Vivian Lee play the parents; and Robbie Coutie, 11, and Tanya Reed, 7, play the children in the play.

FIVE PERFORMANCES

Performances are scheduled for 7:30 p.m. on Friday, May 5; 11 a.m. and 1 and 3 p.m. on Saturday, May 6; and 2 p.m. on Sunday, May 7.

Tickets for the play, recommended for children aged 4-10, are available in advance at Information Oshawa at City Hall, or Merle Norman Cosmetics in the Oshawa Centre. Tickets are \$4 in advance, or \$5 on the dates of performances.

1990, January 13

Butler did it!

There's no mystery behind the success of Oshawa's unique Shoestring Players: it's all Jeannine's show

By George Kaufman

The Oshawa Times

**Article features 2 photographs*

In 1989, Jeannine Butler was quite appropriately named a Woman Of Distinction by the Oshawa YWCA.

It would be hard to make a more distinct mark on a community than Jeannine Butler has made in the Oshawa area. When she retires from the group at the end of this season, Jeannine will leave us with one of the most unique theatre groups in Canada, the Durham Shoestring Players.

She was founder, producer, and director when the DSP staged its first show — "Three Plays for \$1" — in October of 1974, and as the company moves through its 16th season in Oshawa, Jeannine remains pretty much the whole show.

PLENTY OF HELP

That's not to say it's a one-person operation. Quite the opposite: she's picked up plenty of help along the way. The concept of DSP appeals to a wide array of theatre-lovers in the Oshawa area. That's the reason the company will continue, as strong as ever, after Jeannine leaves the scene for quieter times this spring.

But DSP is still very much what Jeannine Butler wants it to be.

She is still founder, producer of every show, and director of most. She is the entire executive board, because there is none. It is her company — period.

In fact, the very things that DSP *doesn't* have are the things that have attracted a number of dedicated, talented theatre people to the Butler Show.

DSP doesn't have a board of directors or elections; that does away with messy theatre politics. DSP doesn't have a play selection committee; that leaves directors free to choose plays they are committed to. She doesn't have a large budget, leaving her free to consider artistic merit first and commercial appeal last when choosing plays.

Director David Millar, one of the many theatre-lovers drawn to Jeannine's light, speaks for many DSPers when he confirms: "It's what she doesn't have that is the important part of what makes DSP special...her objectives are mainly artistic ones, not commercial ones."

SHOESTRING BUDGET

Echoes director Carolyn Wilson: "We know that the buck stops with Jeannine...if someone has to make a decision, she'll do it."

And the "Shoestring" part of the name is still as much a part of the company as it was in the Three Plays for \$1 days — that was no loss-leader special.

"We strip the process of theatre to its barest sense: script, actor, director. It may seem very anarchic, but in another way it's very autocratic," says Carolyn Wilson, another DSP director.

These statements neatly sum up the contradictory nature of DSP —and of its founder.

Jeannine has done a rebellious, unique thing with DSP, yet she's not a maverick and certainly does not possess the prickly personality of most mavericks.

Jeannine has served on the board of the Association of Community Theatres Central Ontario (ACTCO), including two years as president and three years as chairman of the ACTCO festival. In 1984, she became the first recipient of a life membership from the group.

The real irony of that lies in the fact that, while Jeannine was on the ACTCO board, DSP itself couldn't be a member group of ACTCO because it had no membership list to submit. No one "joined" DSP, they simply showed up and kept showing up. (Typical is the comment by Millar: There is no membership list, but I consider myself a member of the group and so do many other people.)

NO AWARDS

And no DSP play has ever been entered into the drama competitions sponsored by ACTCO, because Jeannine doesn't believe in theatrical competition.

The final irony of The Troupe that Jeannine Built is the company's status in this community. While it has drawn a dedicated cadre of followers and enthusiastic boosters, DSP remains a low-profile, mainly unknown group.

Part of that is built into the self-imposed restrictions DSP has set for itself: no awards, no big-budget productions, no subscription series, modest promotion — and then there's the theatre itself, in the Arts Resource Centre.

The plain, functional space serves DSP's purpose exceedingly well. But it is functional, and it remains hidden behind City Hall.

Nevertheless, DSP has succeeded in providing consistent quality theatre, while remaining true to the principles with which Jeannine established it 16 years ago.

"The 'Shoestring' part is to be taken literally," adds Millar. "The small budget actually means more freedom to concentrate on the play itself. Jeannine simply picks a director and then leaves it completely up to the director, although she's totally supportive of whatever happens."

'WADE RIGHT IN'

Adds Wilson: “Jeannine’s best leadership quality lies in the things she doesn’t do. The lack of bureaucracy and politics is wonderful...you don’t have to work your way up the ladder — you wade right in and do what you’re capable of.”

The atmosphere created by that philosophy has resulted in some of the best theatre performed in Durham over the past 15 years. And Jeannine’s self-effacing humility keeps most of the DSP gang coming back for more.

It may seem impossible to run a theatre company with an iron hand, while also giving almost-total freedom to work their own magic. But, like everything associated with DSP, it somehow works.

When it comes to taking bows for the success of the group, Jeannine won’t step forward into the spotlight.

‘NO STARS’

“There are no stars,” explains Millar, who has directed three plays for the group. “Jeannine insists on a curtain call for everyone at once — the crew is considered as important as anyone else in the production. Togetherness is the whole thing.”

Jeannine has a simple explanation for that democratic approach.

“Actors can’t create unless the atmosphere is right, and everyone in the group is responsible for creating that atmosphere.

“A director alone is the most useless thing in the world...” But then she pauses, considers for a moment, and amends: “...no, a producer alone is.”

Sometimes you get a lot *more* than you pay for...

You don’t always get what you pay for.

One of the most dramatic — in every sense of the word — illustrations of the truth to that old cliché came to me the first time I attended a Durham Shoestring Players production. And the lesson’s been confirmed every time since.

It was at the urging of a newspaper colleague a number of years ago that I went to that first play, a satirical comedy called *Gossip*.

I love good theatre, but went mostly out of duty as an entertainment writer. I was expecting something between high school and community theatre, and the parts of the evening leading up to curtain time reinforced that feeling, leaning toward the high school end of the spectrum.

BARE-BONES

DSP plays were held — then as now, notwithstanding a few substantial renovations — in the bare-bones atmosphere of the tiny Arts Resource Centre theatre, hidden away in the austere former city jail behind City Hall. Everything screamed low-budget, from the hard plastic seats and virtually set-less stage to the \$3 ticket price.

All that, though, only served to set me up for the contrast between all that and the quality of what went on when the lights went down on an evening I vividly remember as some of the best fun I’ve had in any theatre.

From the moment the first actor walked onstage, we were transported into that magic area where good theatre always takes an audience.

There was nothing low-budget about the enthusiastic, skilled acting or the obvious behind-the-scenes care and talent that had gone into this production.

That evening was, I was happy to discover later, no fluke. Jeannine Butler’s company has consistently lived up to its mandate to deliver involving, challenging theatre to the Oshawa community.

STILL A SECRET

The only problem — if it is a problem — is that DSP has remained a fairly well-kept secret in Oshawa. Part of that is inevitable, given the lack of a subscription series and the unglamorous venue.

But some of DSP's semi-obscurity is due to the fact that it has kept to Butler's promise that it would remain affordable. Tickets to DSP productions still cost less than half the average charge to attend a little theatre play in southern Ontario communities.

And Butler sometimes worries that some people stay away from the plays *because* of the modest ticket prices.

"There is a 'you-get-what-you-paid-for' mentality in our society, and some people may never bother coming out to give us a chance because of that." She laughs and adds, "Maybe I should charge more money to get in, then people would think the plays are better."

While the core of area theatre-lovers drawn to DSP plays is getting larger all the time, often filling the small ARC auditorium, many of those fans selfishly hope that success won't spoil the group.

SAVOR INTIMACY

They savor the intimate atmosphere, and fear that a larger venue and longer runs would drive the group from its basic objectives of simple, accessible theatre.

The best hope is that DSP will continue to be one of Durham's best-kept, albeit successful, secrets.

1990, April

THE BUTLER DID IT

Durham Shoestring Performers' first lady, Jeannine H. Butler, calls it quits

Focus on Durham — TWENTY QUESTIONS

**Article features small portrait triptych*

Focus on Durham: When you started the Durham Shoestring Performers, did you ever dream it would still be around 16 years later?

Jeannine H. Butler: Certainly not. I started it as an experiment — to test some ideas I had developed about alternate ways of producing live theatre. Experiments are not supposed to last.

FOD: Is your attachment to the theatre company going to make it harder to retire?

Butler: Nope! Why does everyone think that. It is not going to be hard at all. It is something we aimed for. John and I planned this 10 years ago. We had a 10-year plan and we knew that 1990 was going to be it. I knew I was going to leave.

FOD: Who is your favourite playwright?

Butler: The one whose play I'm directing at the time I'm directing it. I may not like him when the play is over, but... Plus there is Ibsen, Chekhov, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Eugene O'Neil and a dozen more whose plays I have never directed. This question is a bit like asking, "Who's your favourite child or sister?" They are each special in their uniqueness and favourites are impossible to identify.

FOD: What is the favourite play that you have been involved with?

Butler: We are back to favourite child here. Each and every play with which I've been involved has had its special meaning for me in different ways and for different reasons.

FOD: Have you ever regretted staging any play?

Butler: Never!

FOD: You are very emphatic in that answer.

Butler: Yes. Because each play has challenged me...taught me something...gave me personal rewards on some level. Even...or perhaps especially the ones which weren't as successful as I would have wished them to be.

FOD: What is your fondest memory of the 16 years you have put into Durham Shoestring Performers?

Butler: All 16 years.

FOD: Are there any things which have happened over the years that you would rather not remember?

Butler: Sure. And I refuse to remember them now.

FOD: Are most actors hard or easy to deal with?

Butler: Dealing with actors is like dealing with people... which they are, you know. They are not puppets or cutouts, which you move about. Each one has thoughts and feelings, insecurities and strengths. Our task, ask directors, is to gain their confidence, free their creativity, prod, challenge, guide, encourage and support them. If you do it right, nearly all actors are easy to deal with.

FOD: What do you enjoy most about being involved in theatre?

Butler: When you see the growth in people, that is magical.

FOD: Is that fulfilling, knowing that you have touched people?

Butler: That's the best part... the best part of everything I've done. I'm not saying I've made anybody's life richer...yeah! I guess I am. People are enriched by the kind of experience they get by being involved in anything. It doesn't have to be theatre.

FOD: Have you ever been on stage instead of behind the scenes?

Butler: Yes. I started on stage and moved on to behind the scenes work.

FOD: Why?

Butler: I have neither the skills nor the disposition to be an actor. The stage actually terrifies me.

FOD: If you had the chance to do it all again, would you and would you do it the same way?

Butler: Absolutely!

FOD: The things that appealed to you 16 years ago, when you started the theatre company, are they the same things that appeal to you now?

Butler: If you mean the fact that we were able to do Canadian plays and do certain things with the staging because of our size, that is still the most important thing to me. If anything, I think we have gotten too fancy with our sets and too elaborate with our staging. We've become too concerned with the technical aspect of things. I almost wish we didn't have the things we have. But, I don't know. I think it is time for me to go.

FOD: You and your husband, John, are both involved in the theatre. Did you meet because of the theatre?

Butler: No. We met because my sister had the good sense to bring him home for a weekend and I had the good luck of coming home the same weekend.

FOD: Has the theatre ever caused a little conflict between the two of you?

Butler: When the boys were small, we tried to take turns at being involved with productions so that one of us could parent while the other one was performing... so, sure, there was some conflict at times.

FOD: How about creatively?

Butler: Creatively, I think we're nearly always in sync. We've never had a problem, yet.

FOD: Who directs at home?

Butler: If you define directing as giving guidance and encouragement, then John is definitely the director at home. He's more logical and stable than I am. But, if you define directing as managing, then I'm the one who directs things like our social life, the day-to-day meal planning, budgeting, etc.. I think we are a great combination.

FOD: Shakespeare said that the play is the thing. Is it?

Butler: Instinctively, I want to say yes... absolutely... because the play is the thing... the catalyst that brings us all together. By us all, I mean all the actors, the crew, and the audience. The play keeps us focused on a very special goal. On the other hand, the individual is always the most important thing. I've known directors to whom the play was the thing to the point of

saying, “To hell with how you feel about it, I don’t care if you are dying. Get up there and do it.” There are things which must be sacrificed in the play if it is going to be detrimental to the people involved. It must never be the other way around. I guess... the bottom line is that people are more important than plays.

1990, May 02

PLAYING AROUND . . .

Butler did it — on a shoestring

By Trudie Zavadovics

WHITBY FREE PRESS

**Article features 3 photographs; Jeannine, Ken Bond & Jeff Kellar, and co.*

For cast and crew, the Durham Shoestring Performers’ upcoming production of “1837: The Farmers’ Revolt” will be a bittersweet one.

Their first production of the Theatre Passe Muraille’s play was in 1979, then the 16th play in what is now a history of more than 60 productions by the Shoestringers. “1837” is the farewell production for Jeannine Butler, the founder and lifeline of the company for the past 16 years.

“I had to have a Canadian play to leave with,” says Butler. “One with a fair number of cast members. I wanted to do something I would have a lot of fun with.”

Recalling the origins of the new theatre group, Butler relates: “I came to Oshawa in 1970 and started the DSP in 1974. Oshawa Little Theatre was 25 years old and well established. Whitby Little Theatre also started at the same time in 1974.”

She says she would never had started the company if there had been quality theatre in the area at that time. Moreover, Butler saw opportunity knocking and grabbed it.

“The big impetus for me to start the company was that the police station was handed over to be used as a centre for the arts.”

Thus began DSP.

Butler’s aim was to “make a difference” in theatre; to have talent soar and tedium disappear; to do quality plays (mostly Canadian) that had soul and spirit.

She wanted plays to not only entertain, but also challenge the audience as well as the company. And she wanted to make it “so damn cheap anyone could go”.

“I wanted to do small plays. This was a way of doing theatre as cheap as possible. I had this plan. I wanted to try and see if one person could run a theatre doing all (tedious, mundane) things, leaving only the creative jobs that people like to do.”

Butler, who had been in theatre for 10 years, didn’t want board meetings, constantly rising admission prices, elaborate sets or costumes. She wanted only the essence of solid theatre.

“I wanted to see if I could make it work. And I wanted, God how I wanted, to promote Canadian plays.”

Initially Butler set her sights for one season. Although the \$1 ticket price didn’t pay all the bills, things were good enough to embark on a second season.

“NO REGRETS”

“I never made a decision to go for 16 years. It was an experiment and here we still are, and we’ll continue.”

For the first few years, the company did one-act plays, often presenting three plays in one production. In each of the past 16 years, the group has presented a children’s Christmas play. They’ve done comedies, tragedies, parodies, biographies, and many issue-oriented plays.

All plays were intended to leave a message, often that audience members were to figure out for themselves.

In November, 1977 they presented their first full-length play, "The Death and Life of Sneaky Fitch," and raised their ticket price to \$2. In 1981 the price rose to \$3 and now stands at \$4 advance and \$5 at the door.

Butler says she doesn't have a favourite play. "Each of them has a favourite spot for a different reason."

She says that although some plays didn't work quite as well as she'd liked, she has no real "nightmares".

"I have no serious regrets about anything."

While saying goodbye to the DSP that she loves so dearly, Butler is also giving herself more free time to pursue other interests that she has missed,

"I do have personal goals," says Butler. "I have not read a novel in 16 years. I hope to read some books — without stage instructions before the dialogue. I play the guitar badly, I plan to play it well. In golf, I plan to break 90 one of these days. And I want to learn square dance calling."

Butler, on the shy side of 40[?], and her husband, who is retiring, plan to spend their summers at their residence in Fenelon Falls, spend their winters in Florida, and to do "lots and lots of travelling."

Butler has loved every bit of her time with the DSP.

"It was a loving thing to do, not a struggle but a joy. It (theatre, or anything) has to be enjoyable or there's no damn reason for doing it."

Butler leaves the Shoestringers in the hands of Carolyn Wilson.

What does she take with her?

"Two hundred plus people who have all had an impact on my life. Those are things so close to you — people (who worked) only in one play hold a spot in my heart, people like Carolyn Wilson who have been so supportive. It's got to be all these people who gave of themselves.

"There's no way of getting across to them how much they've meant to me and how they've affected my life."

For newcomers with the theatre bug, she says, "You're never going to have as much fun, work as hard for no pay, never make as many best friends and lasting ties. Above all," she says, "Do it for the love of it."

Performances of "1837: The Farmers' Revolt" are May 4 and 5, May 11 and 12, at 8 p.m.. Tickets are available at the arts resource centre, Oshawa city hall complex, Merle Norman Cosmetics at the Oshawa Centre, and Information Oshawa, City Hall.

[Note on page: "Jeannine misquoted first column"; however, I do not know which is the misquote.]

1990, May 03

Shoestring Director Ends Era

By Marjorie Green

[Unknown Paper]

The Durham Shoestring Players will present Rick Salutin's *1837: The Farmers' Revolt* at the Arts Resource Centre in Oshawa tomorrow, Saturday and May 11 and 12.

For many, this production will signify the end of an era: Jeannine Butler is directing her last play.

A recipient this year of the Oshawa YWCA's Women of Distinction Award, Butler founded the Shoestring Players in 1974. Since then, she has been the group's guiding light as producer, sole executive, and director.

"I really don't know how I got involved in theatre," Butler says. "Somehow, for the past 16 years, theatre is all we've done."

Jeannine and her husband John, Shoestring's lighting director, are retiring to Fenelon Falls and Florida. Butler's departure won't end the Shoestring Players. Carolyn Wilson, a long-time member and director, will manage the group.

For her final production, Butler is repeating the play which took the Shoestring Players to Toronto's Harbourfront Theatre in 1979.

This "entertaining look at Canadian history" casts 11 actors in 104 roles, through 23 scenes.

"When we first performed it, we had only eight performers; this time, we have 11."

Advance tickets are \$4 (\$5 at the door) and can be purchased at Information Oshawa, City Hall.

1990, August 01

Jeannine H. Butler may have taken Durham Shoestring Performers out of her daily routine, but you can't take her OUT OF THE COMPANY

By Pearl Lake

Arts and Entertainment — Oshawa/Whitby This Week

**Article features photograph*

Ask anyone what Durham Shoestring Players is and the answer will be, "The people."

Over 350 people have volunteered their time and energy in the past 16 years to produce 53 theatrical performances.

The driving force behind the company was Jeannine H. Butler, who in 1974 placed \$500 of her own money into the project. Since then, the company has lost money only once, in 1975.

The members of the troupe can go for years without participating in a show and then they will work on three in a row. Patty Gillhooly, who has lived in Timmins and Haliburton for a total of eight years since 1975, has still managed to work on 16 DSP performances. It's that kind of company.

Marjorie Bird's encounter with DSP had her playing in *Chester, You Owe My Bird An Apology*, in 1976. Bird believes that Butler's sense of humour contributed to her playing the bird part.

Through Butler's influence, Bird developed a passion for the stage. In that particular play she was so enveloped in the role, she says, that, when the bird puppet she operated was murdered by another character, the actor "literally felt he was killing..." her.

Butler also had some influence on Bird as a writer.

When speaking of her involvement in *Stages of Woman*, a collage of poems, prose, and personal statements in celebration of International Women's Year, in 1975, Bird states that Butler, director of this performance, "set a good standard to educate people" while also entertaining them.

With 30 years experience in theatre, long time company member, Mary Vollmer agrees that the company fosters a positive learning environment. She states that her experience with the company and Butler has "...brought out depths, highlights and shadows in myself that I didn't know I had." This learning takes place in a professional and disciplined

atmosphere where “the play’s the thing” and “working together for the play” supersedes egos, stars, and all other personal concerns.

On the other hand, Brenda Fitch at her first audition in 1986, enjoyed the personal touch of the company which “made you feel a part of them. It’s what I still love about it.” Fitch’s participation in every production proves her love. She feels that “everyone in the company pulls together for the whole” and that’s what makes the company “more than the individuals” involved.

A participant in the early DSP days, when yearly cabarets were the norm, Suzanne Cook remembers not only the performances but also the great number of workshops and courses the Durham Shoestring Performers attended. One year, while attending the Theatre Ontario summer school at Laurentian University, she was surprised to hear that Butler—who, in Cook’s estimation, seemed to have a strong dislike of musicals, was taking part in a course on Musicals. When Cook asked Butler why she was taking this course, the DSP founder replied, “I wanted to come again this year and this is the only course I haven’t yet taken.”

The strong dedication to professionalism and discipline has made the transition from community theatre to professional theatre a little smoother for some company members. From 1982 to 1985, Peter Brierley, who took fulltime acting after his retirement from IBM, remembers Butler as the “best director I have ever worked with in community theatre.”

When Brierley portrayed Clarence Darrow, he had a hard time with the pacing of the speeches. After going through the script and determining Clarence’s age changes, Butler would shout the age as he was delivering the lines. This simple technique enabled him to introduce variety in both pace and intonation.

David Kinsman, Janice Tanton, and Susan Lowery all worked with DSP in their teens. Since then, Kinsman has performed at the St. Lawrence Theatre and in other Toronto theatres, while Tanton has acted in Toronto and Windsor. Lowery has finally opted for a teaching career in Theatre Arts. Each of these people recalls the hours Butler spent with them, helping them to prepare their auditions for entrance into university theatre programs.

Tanton’s “fondest memories of the theatre are with DSP” and she was especially impressed with the fact that new, inexperienced, and young members were encouraged and “...treated on an equal basis” with the senior members.

Lowrey shares Tanton’s appreciation of the equality inherent in the company. After directing only three times, Lowery found herself in the same Master Directing course as Butler. In spite of Butler’s many years of experience, Butler made a point of thanking Lowery for treating her as just another classmate.

The sense of equality has helped encourage parents and children to get involved in the company.

Rowly McCord, whose acting career has consisted of two roles in 16 years, has been an active and enthusiastic musical director and advisor for DSP since 1981. His daughter, Deb’s involvement in the 1979 production of *Broken Pieces*, caused Rowley to discover that DSP is “...a good small company which is very approachable and easy to get involved with.”

Jane Wilson got involved through her daughter, Carolyn, who has directed many of the theatre group’s shows. Wilson worked refreshments and tickets for the cabarets in the late 1970’s. Working backstage for 15 plays has given Wilson a chance to “meet many new friends, a few of whom have become very good friends.”

Another mother-daughter team is Dorothy and Susan Little. Susan’s involvement in the 1982 cabaret, *Where Were You in ‘62*, caused Dorothy to try “...everything but stage managing, lighting, and directing.” Dorothy believes that through acting with DSP she has found “...different strings in her character and has learned to play them all.”

Curiously enough, the sense of equality has been maintained without any board of directors or democratic process. Anne Walker, a teacher and professional singer, believes

there is a maximum of respect and a “minimum of conflict in the company because there is one person in charge who knows what she wants and who gets it.”

Butler, the lady who knows what she wants, has a unique way of encouraging actors. The first contact Sharon Walmsley, a veteran DSP member, had with the company began with a question from Butler: “Would you mind being really ugly?”

Since then, Walmsley, like most other members, has realized that when you do a play with the company, “...it’s your whole life because it’s more fun than anything else.”

The fun the company has, the learning which they gain, and the respect the members have for each other makes DSP the community it is.

nd

Television unleashes a new Eileen

By Eileen Herd

No publication info

**Article features 2 photographs; of Jeannine, of Eileen*

The hot lights blazing down on me, the monitor on my left, the microphone at my throat — I was really on television!

Okay, so it was Pine Ridge Cable TV, but my image, my voice, my thoughts and reactions were still being recorded for all posterity to see (she said, mixing her metaphors) on videotape. It can be awesome.

To start at the beginning, which I have been told is an excellent place to start, I’m still playing around with Durham Shoestring Performers, but that wasn’t directly why I was on television.

I was on television because Jeannine Butler asked me, which, for those who know Jeannine, is enough of a reason for me to head pell-mell into the fun world of the little silver screen.

Not that what Jeannine says, goes, but she has sound judgement and wouldn’t lead me into anything she wouldn’t do, which means she’s as devil-may-care as I am.

So, although she is producer-director of a couple of plays I’m in with Durham Shoestring Performers (running Oct. 18, 19, 20 at the Arts Resource Centre), it wasn’t in the capacity of being her staff member that I was asked to appear on television.

It was because I had gone on a Theatre Ontario summer course. Mistake number one, Jeannine.

That week was from Aug. 6 to 11 and I am still buzzing around from it. It was a week that I shall remember until I have another one like it, which (I get the feeling) may be just until next summer.

To say that I got a natural high from that acting course is too blase a statement. Words for once fail me. That week was stupendous; the people were splendiferous; the instructor was God. Aside from learning barrels of things about acting, I learned a lot about people. And I had fun.

Mistake number two, Jeannine, was forgetting how high-strung I am in general and what a ham I am in particular.

To backtrack (inexcusable as it is), Jeannine was hosting some segments of the Oshawa and District Council for the Arts’ television show, called To Oshawa With Love, with Janet Coates as the series host.

Jeannine was really serious about this — everybody was really serious, sitting upright in their chairs, my fellow guest Randy Gough getting severe butterflies (he can go on stage at

Eastdale in front of 750 live people but put him in front of a dead camera and he goes silly), the Pine Ridge people are dead serious, and I'm sitting out there making a total fool of myself.

It could have been because I am very used to the Pine Ridge surroundings, having been a volunteer camera person there, um, a few years ago, knowing the director, the cameramen, and trusting them. I was not particularly uptight.

It could also have been because I was very nervous, not because I was camera-shy, but because I wasn't prepared. Listen, in my job, I do the interviewing, I'm not the interviewee.

Jeannine had told me she wanted to talk about the summer course, but it didn't occur to me to go over my notes on what I had learned. So of course she asked me what I had learned and how I was applying it to my work on stage.

Now that's a winning question, because in *Some Are So Lucky*, what I am basically is just a body on stage. I'm sitting in a bar and all the terrific character development stuff I learned I can't use. Sure I can internalize it all, and do a character while I'm sitting there, but I'm not supposed to be talking (no lines to learn) and any gesture is likely to detract from the main action.

I explained this lucidly I hope. I'm afraid to view the tape.

It occurred to the sensible part of me (it talks to me from the back of my head, just above the spinal cord) to say, "Shut up you're talking too much," and from the look on Jeannine's face I was talking too much.

Welcome to the Eileen Herd talkathon.

She managed to jump in (I don't remember what she asked) and I was off again, explaining about downstage and upstage hands, covering my face to show how wrong upstage hand movements can be, blathering on about proper turns, when Jeannine thankfully leapt in, thanked me oh so politely, and I escaped. And so did she. You can see it today on Cable 10.