

How did the Gorenz family become involved in theater programming at PAC? Where do we begin? Since the current trend in movies is to add sequels and prequels, shall we start with the prequel?

In 1993, Shelley and I decided to move to Princeton, Shelley's hometown. When we told our daughters, Emily and Rachel, about the move, 9 year old Emily said that she would move IF we started a Children's Choir at St. Louis Church like the one she was in at Holy Cross Parish in Mendota. Since we already knew the pastor at the time, Father Harkrader, we approached him, and within a few months we were directing a children's choir in Princeton. Neither of us has much formal musical training, but we both play guitar and sing, and I was in band growing up. Shelley has a BS in Elementary Education and a Masters in Counseling and I am a Social Worker, and we both had extensive experience in child welfare. So with a little knowledge of music and a strong knowledge of children we stumbled our way through the creation our parish Children's Choir, which we eventually named the "Quarter Notes and Half Pints."

So that is the prequel. Now, as Paul Harvey would say, "for the rest of the story." One Sunday after the choir sang, two lovely ladies approached us. The late Evie Farley was a parishioner and had heard our choir sing; she brought Kay Telfer along to hear the choir. The two of them approached Shelley and me and asked us to direct a children's show for Act IV, the now-defunct community theater in Princeton. Evie and Kay had a vision that children's theater programming might revitalize community theater in Princeton. I approached Deb (Puetz) Young, who was the president of the Prairie Arts Council at the time, and suggested that we perform the children's show at PAC; she supported the concept, and the rest, as they say, is history. Although Act IV is no more, Kay and Evie's vision remains alive in children's theater programming at the Prairie Arts Council; we fondly refer to them as the "godmothers" of children's theater in Princeton. Evie's family continues to donate scholarships for the children's summer drama camps, so theater lives on in many ways through her original vision.

From that first production of the musical, *Tumbleweeds*, in 1998, children's theater programming has flourished and expanded. PAC has produced many Christmas shows featuring child actors, and, since 2004, the plays have all been written by Rachel (*The Magic of Christmas*, *Wonderland*, *The Meaning of the Star*, *Finding Christmas*, *Christmas Banished*, *A Winterhaven Christmas*, *The One, the Only*, *Christmas Fairy Queen*, and *The Santa Fraud*) and directed by some combination of Shelley, David, and Rachel. Hundreds of area children have had the opportunity to act, sing, dance, and even choreograph children's shows at PAC through these productions. Rachel also founded the Summer Drama Camp at the PAC in 2003, writing and directing original plays, teaching set design, stage makeup, costuming, and set painting to from 10 to 36 children in two-week camps each summer. Rachel also performed in our first children's shows, including *Time and Time Again*.

The Gorenz clan has also encouraged and supported others to try their hand at directing, including high school student Sheridan Ernst directing the first PAC summer teen show, *Godspell*, in 2002 and Pete Hamilton directing *Godspell* in the 2012 10th anniversary reprise production, as well as Amy Fischer directing *Beauty and the Beast*, Chad Brokaw directing *Seussical the Musical* in 2010, and seasoned director Mary (Anderson) Kieffer with *The Magic Pebble* in 2003.

Theater at PAC became a family affair for the Gorenzes from the very beginning. Emily was the stage manager for *Tumbleweeds* and Rachel portrayed Hildegard Hamhocker. Emily went on to be stage manager for *Godspell* in 2002 and perform as the Queen in *Cinderella*, directed by Shelley the following year. In 2006 Emily portrayed Rose in *The Secret Garden*, a production featuring both adult and child actors that was directed by her father. And we cannot forget the stage debut of one-year-old granddaughter, Ella, who portrayed the head of the horse, Epic, in the 2018 production of *Tumbleweeds* (we like to start them out young in the theater!).

Distant cousin Dylan Carlson mentioned during a family reunion 10 years ago that he was involved in technical theater at Princeton High School, and David quite literally told him, "I own you," and roped poor Dylan into designing, building, and painting sets (most notably the Wizard's Mask for *The Wiz*), creating graphic design for program covers, and, eventually, providing the color palette and majority of the labor to repaint the interior of the PAC theater (a monumental task, to be sure!). Dylan's artistic vision has left his creative mark not only on our theater productions, but on the theater space itself. Dylan just graduated from the College for Creative Studies in Detroit with a degree in Transportation Design.

Shelley continued directing summer youth musicals, including *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*, *the Sound of Music*, *Bye Bye Birdie*, and *Urinetown* and assisting with *Beauty and the Beast* and *Seussical*. Rachel performed in all of those productions as, respectively, Lucy, Maria, Rose, Hope, Mrs. Potts, and The Cat in the Hat, and directed the summer youth production of *The Wiz* (2011).

In addition to children's and youth programming, our family has directed, produced, performed in, or otherwise supported PAC theater featuring adult actors, including *Eleemosynary* and *Little Women*, directed by Dave Roden, *California Suite* directed by Dixie Schroeder, *Oliver!*, directed by David, and *Steel Magnolias*, directed by Shelley. Our apologies if we omitted any directors or productions in which we were involved; 20 years is a long time to keep track of everything!

Shelley and I first became involved with PAC when we read an article in the paper about the formation of the Prairie Arts Council. We saw that Ron McCutchan, who had first invited us to perform in the Homestead musicals, was involved, so we knew that this was an arts organization that we would want to support; we sent our small donation in, later to discover that we would be considered "founding donors!" Although Shelley and I have each served on the board of PAC at different times, even before we were official board members we were very involved at PAC. We

spearheaded, along with Julie McCutchan, a successful drive to keep PAC alive by raising funds to restructure the PAC mortgage so that much of the principal could be paid down and our monthly mortgage payments could become more manageable. The fruits of that endeavor will go up in smoke (in the most positive way) this year!

With the 20th anniversary production of *Tumbleweeds*, Shelley and David bring their long career of promoting community theater at PAC to ... not a close, but a denouement (as they say in theater!). We will no longer be actively organizing and directing theater programming (a role that board member Tammy Tieman has capably taken on; Tammy came to the PAC board through the involvement of her children in our children's productions and summer drama camps), but we will continue to share the expertise and knowledge gleaned through our many years of experience on and about the PAC stage. Rachel will continue with the summer drama camps, and she is currently dusting off her performing skills in preparation for the PAC Homestead production of *Barefoot in the Park*, directed by Larry Kelsey, in which she plays opposite her husband, Eric Johnson.

It is with great fondness that we look back upon these two decades in which PAC community theater has consumed much of our lives. Although we have been responsible for all aspects of PAC theater programming for many of those years, our hearts will always be first and foremost with children's theater and the many children and young adults with whom we have been privileged to work in our time here. To each and every one of you, please know that you have touched us deeply and that we would not be the people we are today without you. We hope that, in some small way, you can say the same about us.

David and Shelley Gorenz