

Now starring... Sabra Hayden

On stage, behind the scenes and inspiring children

Christine Gwidt
Staff writer

Slicing apple bread in her kitchen on a sunny morning in September, Sabra Hayden is, for the time being, the picture of domesticity.

She discusses plans with her 13-year-old daughter, Maggie, and her husband, Darryl, before he sets out on a Saturday errand.

"Do I listen when people say I can't do something?" Hayden asks her husband.

"No. Oh no," he responds. "That would be a big-time no."

When he leaves, Hayden shares her formula for a happy marriage, "Have fun and play with each other," she said, smiling. "Play like you're friends. Darryl allows me to have time for me."

Hayden's me-time is divided into as many slices as the bread on her cutting board. For 17 years she has been an active member of Little Traverse Civic Theatre. She acts in, produces and directs plays, and has served as president, treasurer and membership chair. She has also served on the organization's board of directors.

"I've never taken any theater classes," Hayden said. "Everything I've learned, I've learned on the stage. I don't have classical training — I have hands-on training."

Aside from playing trumpet and alto horn in the high school band and singing in her church choir, Hayden didn't have much of a resume when she auditioned for her first play at Little Traverse Civic Theatre.



CHRISTINE GWIDT/NEWS-REVIEW

Sabra Hayden has a particular passion for the stage and children's theater programs.

"I had just started working for a company in Petoskey and one of the owners is very active in the theater and always trying to recruit new blood. He gave me a script and said, 'You should really come and audition.' I'd never done anything like that before, but I went and auditioned and I got a role in 'Brighton Beach Memoirs.' I've been involved ever since," Hayden recalled.

Hayden's favorite roles have included Mrs. Kendall in "The Elephant Man" and the character of "B" — a bitter, middle-aged woman, in Edward Albee's "Three Tall Women."

"It was an intense play about life and death and it was wonderful," she said. "The woman who first cast me is Bev Holden, and I really have to thank God that she did. Being in theater has given me

a connection to the community."

Occasionally during her involvement with Little Traverse Civic Theatre, plays were staged that called for children's roles. Hayden's son, Sam, now 18, was cast in some of these productions. Both Sam and Maggie quizzed their mom about further opportunities to participate.

In 2004, Hayden was instrumental in resurrecting the Children's Theatre program that had been abandoned 30 years earlier. The first production presented was "The Wizard of Oz."

"Right now, my heart is in the children's productions," Hayden said. "I enjoy working with the adults, but I love working with the kids. It is so much fun watching them have fun and expand their boundaries by doing things that they would never imagine doing."

Hayden's belief is that everyone has potential and she works to ensure that the experience is positive for all who are involved.

"I will cast unknowns," she said. "I don't necessarily go for the kids who've been in a bazillion plays, because those kids have been in a bazillion plays. And as an actor, I know what it's like to go up against someone in an audition who is just amazing. I know how defeating it can be."

Hayden is currently mentoring a new director for a Children's Theatre program production of "Charlotte's Web."

"Kids are just an amazing group of people," she said. "We all want to be accepted. It's about being accepted for who you are."

"Wait Until Dark" is the next Little Traverse Civic Theatre production, which opened Oct. 15. Hayden is working on lighting design for that.

"It was one that I would have

loved to have been cast in and I auditioned, but the director cast a new person. And I said 'good.' Because it's not about seeing the same faces, it's about giving someone else that chance. That's how I got in there."

But wait — there's more

Hayden, an East Jordan resident, also works as a report specialist and bookkeeper at Arbor Associates in Petoskey. And she waits tables at Walloon Lake Inn. She is a member of the finance committee and serves on the board of directors of the Char-Em United Way.

She is a vice-chair of the Boyne Country Community Center and has been active in efforts to establish a venue in Boyne City that would include a skate park for area kids.

Among her other interests, Hayden lists reading, photography, cooking and sketching.

"The only thing I can't do is sew," she said with a laugh.

In 2007, Hayden was one of 60 entrants accepted into a juried photography show at Crooked Tree Arts Center. Her photograph of the St. Louis Arch was taken during a family trip with a disposable Kodak camera.

Hayden's mother, Ruby Suter, died in October 2007, but the spirit that she inspired in her daughter remains strong.

"I've never been bored," Hayden said. "I hope I can continue to be like my mom and learn new things. She went back to school when I was 13 to become a nurse. She started painting in her late 50s — and she was good. She was my biggest influence, and she always said, 'If you want to do it, do it.' Age is no reason not to try something new."

Casie Parker inspires students

Rachel Brougham
Staff writer

For many people, illness can put a halt on life. But Casie Parker, of Petoskey, wasn't going to let a diagnosis get in the way of what she loves — her students and athletes.

Parker, who teaches computers at Boyne City Middle School, also serves as the high school's varsity volleyball coach. "I love what I do, each day is different and my students and players are so much fun," said Parker.

An athlete herself, Parker grew up in Detroit and later graduated from Lake Superior State University with a degree in business management. She played both volleyball and softball while in college.

After graduation, she spent some time working in group homes with mentally disabled children. "I love working with children, so I decided to go back to school for teaching," explained Parker. "I've loved my job ever since."

In 2004, Parker began having some symptoms she could only describe as "weird."

"My eyes would shake when I got tired. I had numbness in hands, feet and face. I could feel my heart skip beats," explained Parker. "But being an athlete and



RACHEL BROUGHAM/NEWS-REVIEW

Casie Parker, a Boyne City coach and teacher, has overcome cancer and inspired her students.

growing up playing through pain, I passed it off."

But the intensity of the symptoms became too much to dismiss. At the urging of friends and family, Parker went to the doctor. And after

two years of numerous doctors and a misdiagnosis of depression, Parker became frustrated.

"I went to a friend with a background in psychology," said Parker. "I told her what was going on and she said,

'No way, this isn't you. I'd get a second opinion.'"

After meeting with an arthritis doctor two years after her symptoms started, a chest X-ray was ordered.

"Friday, Feb. 17, 2006. It's a day I'll never forget," said Parker. "I got home around 10:30 at night after a volleyball game and a fundraiser. There was a message from my doctor telling me to call no matter what time."

Parker called her doctor and was told she needed to clear her Monday schedule. Doctors found something on the X-ray.

"I told them I couldn't clear Monday out, I had school, I had a volleyball game that night. But they told me I had to," said Parker. "The worst part is that I had to wait all weekend to find out what was going on."

On Monday, doctors told Parker she had cancer. She had a lymph node removed and found out she had Hodgkin's Lymphoma, and she was given a 60 percent survival rate.

After undergoing chemotherapy and radiation, Parker beat the odds. However, she was told she wasn't

going to be able to have children, because of the chemo.

Less than two years after her cancer diagnosis, however, Parker beat the odds for the second time. She and her husband, Mike, were expecting.

"Feb. 16, 2008, I had Katie," said Parker with a smile.

For Parker, a cancer diagnosis also wasn't going to keep her away from teaching and coaching.

"Everyone always asks me how I'm doing. People say I've taken it pretty well because I've stayed so active," explained Parker. "I think if I just sat around it would get on my mind and bother me, so I've kept busy."

Parker's volleyball players and her students know their teacher and coach is a survivor, but Parker doesn't like her cancer story to always be the focus.

"I do talk to my students. They're curious and I don't want them to panic," said Parker. "I just want to continue doing what I love. I don't want other people to worry. I have a good attitude and even though it was hard, I just knew I'd get through it."

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