

Postcards from the Stage

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SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA, 1973 After watching my performance in a high school play, my father tells me I should give up acting, that I can't act my way out of a paper bag. Two weeks later, at age sixteen, I get my first professional theatre job. My father and mother never see me act again.

SANTA MARIA, CALIFORNIA, 1980 I am dancing in the line chorus of *Mame*, and my boot gets caught on the stage. I take the whole line of dancers down with me like dominoes, with the exception of one small dancer at the end of the line. She weighs 100 pounds soaking wet and pulls the line back up, like Weebles who wobbled. The audience bursts into applause. I stop dancing after that and focus on acting.

SAN LUIS OBISPO, CALIFORNIA, 1981 The theatre gives free tickets to the show to the local farmers and migrant workers. To show their gratitude they bring us baskets of fruit. I eat a strawberry as large as my hand.

ODESSA, TEXAS, 1982 A group of five of us go to a diner after finishing a show in El Paso. The diner is filled with oil riggers. They stare at us. One of my friends starts singing a show tune and dancing. An oil rigger walks up to us, looks at me and says, "I think you and your faggot friends should leave if you know what's good for you." A waitress with a beehive hairdo looks at me sadly and says, "I would do as he says, honey." We leave the diner.

TUCSON, ARIZONA, 1981 I am driving with two cast members of *My Fair Lady* when our car breaks down in the desert at night. A pickup truck, with a dead and bleeding deer strapped to the front end, pulls up. Two guys in camouflage suits drinking beer step out, look us over and say, "You boys in trouble? You need a ride?" We cram in the truck, and they offer us some beer. When we tell them we're singers, they start singing campfire songs and we join in, all the way back to our motel.

HYANNIS, MASSACHUSETTS, 1985 I am cast in a Marx Brothers musical. We are halfway through rehearsals when we are told the producer ran off with all the money and we have to go home. Since no one is paid, the people in town donate cash so we can get bus tickets.

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA, 1998 My brother is off his medications and manic. He shows up to one of my performances and begins shouting during the play. The police come and arrest him. No one knows who he is, and I am too ashamed to tell them he's my brother.

NEW YORK, NEW YORK, 1987 I call my mother to tell her that I have been cast in my first television role. She listens in silence, then tells me that they are remodeling their kitchen.

PORTLAND, MAINE 1984 I leave a cast party to get some air and walk around the block. I meet a cat the size of Labrador retriever. The cat is affectionate and rubs against my leg purring. I look for an owner but can't find one. I go back to the party and tell everyone about the cat. They tell me I smoke too much weed.

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY, 2000 I am performing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* outdoors and it begins to rain. The director tells the audience we will stop the play and refund the tickets. The audience does not want to leave, and we go on with the play in the rain. Later, fireflies come out in droves and light up the stage.

BAYONNE, NEW JERSEY, 1996 I exaggerate my horseback riding skills on my resume and am cast as a cowboy in a Miller Lite commercial. The white stallion I am riding takes off, with me clutching the side of the horse in terror. The director and crew nickname me Roy Rogers. We are losing the light, so they tell me just to take the horse by the reins and walk him through the shot. For the next week, I am bowlegged and in pain. I take horseback riding off my resume.

FORT ORD MILITARY BASE, CALIFORNIA, 1978 I am performing in a USO tour of *The Fantasticks* in room filled with 300 soldiers. Just as I finish the last note of my song, one of the soldiers farts loudly. It gets the best laugh in the show.

NEW YORK, NEW YORK, 2001 In mid-November, after 9/11, the Off-Broadway theatre company I belong to does a free musical show on Reade Street, a few blocks from the World Trade Center. The audience is filled with young mothers, children, firemen, restaurant workers. We get a standing ovation every night, and people wait outside to thank us for bringing them together.

ENCINO, CALIFORNIA, 1981 I am dressed as Count Dracula at a large gas station/minimart opening. While I'm giving out candy to children in their cars, two masked men go into the mini mart and rob the cashier. The police question me to see if might be an accomplice.

JERSEY CITY, NEW JERSEY, 1987 To make extra money, I play Father Christmas at a shopping mall. While I'm walking through the mall, a man exposes himself to me. The police question me as to why someone would expose himself to Father Christmas. I tell them he was feeling the holiday spirit.

DENVER, COLORADO, 1983 I am rehearsing a fight scene from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. I am working out the moves with another actor. Just as we step back, a 30-pound curtain weight comes crashing down, missing us by inches. The weight penetrates into the wooden floor of the stage two inches. A second earlier and a little closer, it would have put an end to our fight scene and our lives.

NEW YORK, NEW YORK, 1999 I am working on the set of a soap opera. A group of us go to lunch, asking an older actor, Abe, if he wants to join us. Abe declines, says he wants to stay in the dressing room and read. We return after lunch, and I start talking to Abe, who is sitting in front of the makeup mirror. After a while I realize he's dead. Later, I speak to his widow, who tells me that he secured his pension for her with that last job.

NEW YORK, NEW YORK, 1986 I am a dancing clown in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. As we come to Columbus Circle, the center is filled with disabled and blind children in wheelchairs. Our group of dancing clowns goes up to them, dancing, saying hello and shaking their hands. Their heads and bodies are bent and twisted in their wheelchairs, but their faces are filled with joy and happiness at watching us dance. To this day, I think of those faces filled with light and my heart breaks. □