



**FOUNDING MEMBER DNP & One of Team of Writers for
*Murder on the Last Train to Clarksville***

Nancy Barden is known to many in the community for her roles on stage and behind the scenes in productions of the Clarksville Community Players, Halifax County Little Theater, and the Double Nickel Players. She left her mark as a performer, a director, and a teacher everywhere she lived and continues to inspire us with her love of theater.

While you will not see Nancy on stage during the production of “Murder on the Last Train to Clarksville,” she was the driving force behind the committee of writers that produced the scenario and script for the dinner theater murder mystery. She shares with us that meeting with the other writers was her favorite part of working on the script. “It certainly did not feel like work...just a creative effort that was great fun. Ideas came from everybody, some we didn’t use, but then, every once in awhile, something wonderful would pop out of somebody’s mouth and we couldn’t stop laughing.”

It was Nancy’s passion for the stage that led 12 years ago to the creation of the Double Nickel Players, a theatrical group for those 55-years and older. “There are not that many acting roles for older people in stage productions, especially for older women, and I discovered that there were others, just like me, wanting that personal enjoyment to continue by actively participating in theater or maybe wanting to be on stage for the very first time...DNPs has meant everything to me in terms of just keeping me interested, trying to improve my craft, and having a lot of fun.”

Born in nearby Amelia, Virginia, married life took her on a journey that led through New Jersey, Florida, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and Georgia, as well as more than decades in South Boston, before settling at long last in Clarksville. While packing and unpacking, raising a family, and returning to college for her teaching degree, Nancy found opportunities to pursue her passion for acting; including answering an ad in the Atlanta paper, finding an agent, and enjoying a five-year period putting her love of theater to professional use in front of the camera during her time in Georgia—even making a “horror of a movie” she wishes would be forever forgotten.

If you ask Nancy about her longevity on stage over the decades, she will tell you that being on stage has been a life-long hobby, starting with the role of Witch in a seventh-grade production of *Hansel and Gretel*. “When I was growing up, I really didn’t have playmates my age around, but I did see about every movie that came to the local theater and then I would act out all the parts when I got home—so when I started being in plays it was an extension of that, you know, being a star.”

Her genuine love of performing on stage is apparent in every role large or small, but her favorite roles have been that of the Reverend Mother Regina in three productions of *Nunsense*, Reno Sweeney in *Anything Goes*, and Miss Daisy Werthan in *Driving Miss Daisy*.

If you have the time, seek her out and let her tell you stories of her foray into Musical Comedy, learning to work in front of a camera, and the creation of Double Nickel Players. ~ Written by Patricia Jutz



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Patricia Jutz has always loved music and at an early age was introduced to opera and show music when her older brother would take her to the cinema. Watching Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy, she was enthralled with the impressive voices and beautiful costumes and knew she wanted to be part of that world. Patricia started singing at age 11 as a soloist at church and, later, acting in high school plays. Patricia stated, “There is something that takes over, that’s beyond me, when I start to sing—like something else comes through me from somewhere else and I love it. I think it was probably high school, where I really started to feel

like you can escape into a character and can be anything you want to be and you don’t have to be you.”

When it came time to prepare for college, Patricia had to choose between becoming a doctor and studying vocal music. Although she had the aptitude for medical school, she did not have the support or resources at that time to take that path. Instead, she started out as a vocal music major, but within a few weeks, she switched to the Theater Department and received her Bachelor of Arts in Theater.

After graduating in the state of Washington, many of Patricia’s colleagues in college were excited to head to Hollywood, but Patricia dreamed of going to Broadway. She admitted she had never been to NYC or knew little about Broadway or off-Broadway, but she felt she had the talent and ambition to succeed, but...”Growing up in Nebraska, I didn’t have the courage to even think about how to get there or what do you do? How do you get started?” And, times were different back then, especially for women, so she returned to college to get her Master of Arts in communication and took singing lessons along the way. There, she met her husband Gary, and just like many of us, she took a break from the theater while raising kids, working, and making frequent moves with her family due to her husband’s career in hotel and restaurant management. Patricia says she chose her husband and family life ahead of a career on the stage, adding, “I don’t regret it. It was quite an adventure and an incredible love story.”

Patricia sadly lost her husband shortly after they moved to Clarksville for retirement. Patricia, who didn’t know anyone in the area, but knew that theater was a way for her to get out and meet people, joined CCP in 2011 when Nancy Barden cast her in *Oklahoma* and asked her to be assistant director. “Nancy has such great talent and love of the theater. She has become a dear friend and mentor.” And, in 2012, she was one of the founding members of Double Nickel Players. Since then, she has participated in CCP and DNP productions as an actor, writer, or director.

Patricia has played lead and support roles in countless musical and dramatic production, with her favorite role as Anna in *The King and I* in Michigan at the Wayne County Regional Theater. Decades later, another favorite role was playing 90-year-old Grace in a the two-women show *Grace and Glorie*, presented by the Halifax County Little Theater at the Prizery in 2017. Patricia’s dream role that never came about was as Eliza in *My Fair Lady*; and she still would love to play Ethel in *On Golden Pond*. Several years ago, then in her mid-sixties, she had auditioned for the role but was told she was too young—ironically, she ended up playing Ethel’s daughter, Chelsea, in that production.

In our upcoming DNP production, *Murder on the Last Train to Clarksville*, Patricia plays the nosy reporter, Anita Scoop. Patricia loves that Anita can be pushy, but still insecure, and is just focused on getting a good story. Patricia was also on the writing team for this year’s show and has enjoyed watching all the characters come to life from the conceptualized ideas they developed in the script. You can catch Patricia along with all The DNP Players at our upcoming Murder Mystery Dinner at the Clarksville Community Center. ~ Written by Monica Walter



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Carolyn Leach was looking for a way to meet people when she returned to the area in 1980 (after growing up in Skipwith). She accepted a part with one line in *South Pacific* – one of CCP’s earliest musicals and made friends with whom she is still close. Her son Robin also was interested in theatre growing up and even coached her when they shared the stage in CCP’s *The Girls Of The Garden Club* – telling her to “always stay in character!” Many years ago Carolyn took on the direction of teenagers in Chase City Players’ productions of *Little Shop Of Horrors*, *Grease*, and *Joseph And The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. She no longer desires directing but said the teen agers were easier to direct than adults.

She has performed in many Double Nickel Players’ (DNP) shows and says she enjoys acting because “I love to pretend and dress up. I just love not having to be myself, and I also have a tendency to be a little bit of a clown.”

In *Murder On The Last Train To Clarksville*, Carolyn plays one of the suspects: Amy Merriweather Bedwell. Amy was nerdy in high school and caught up in being asked out by the most popular guy. Amy suddenly left school when her father (a local minister) sent her to stay with an aunt in Roanoke “for exhaustion.” Her classmates couldn’t help but wonder why she would leave Clarksville since she had seemed so happy dating handsome Johnny Wonder. When she returned for her senior year, she was greatly changed. This mystery is set 40 years after high school graduation, and Amy is returning for the reunion and will be staying at the Grace Hotel. This is a hotel that sat on the hilltop in Clarksville by the lake but is now replaced by the closed Wells Fargo branch. Ironically, as a young girl in Skipwith, Carolyn dreamed of staying there when she was a young girl. She grew up on a tobacco farm with her parents and four siblings, and she remembers as young as 6-7 years old driving the tractor and moving the mules up the road to her grandfather’s farm. She also remembers walking down the rows of tobacco singing to the plants – replacements for childhood friends, since they had no close neighbors.

One of the oldest children, Carolyn was responsible and obedient, especially listening to her mother who forbade her to smoke. It wasn’t until she was an adult under stress at a hospital job in the operating room that she picked up the habit – one she is in the process of quitting. When Carolyn’s two children, Robin and Samantha went off to college, Carolyn decided to take her profession on the road as a traveling nurse practitioner. She spent time in Connecticut and in North Dakota. She had never been to ND, nor thought much about it since she learned her state capitals in middle school, and she arrived there in October of 2010. She loved it even though she didn’t see the ground until April, and surprisingly to her, she ended up staying three years. Luckily for DNP, Carolyn has retired back “home” and not only is she acting in the murder mystery, but she is one of the writing team of five and has this to say about the process: “I certainly enjoyed being on the creative part – the group, I so enjoyed – they were really good at throwing ideas out, and I learned a lot.” ~ Written by Holly Stadler



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Jean Casey is one of five DNP writers who collaborated on *Murder On The Last Train To Clarksville*. As a retired worker in Purchasing/Logistics/Accounting for Old Dominion Footwear Jean says: "I didn't do much writing at all before this, but I enjoyed putting my thoughts down on paper and then having people to bounce ideas off and expand on them was actually fun for me." She particularly enjoyed putting humor into

the script.

Recently Jean played one of the three pigs in a skit for the DNP Sunday Funnies, and for the upcoming show she plays the mayor's wife – a character who's a bit bossy, supportive of her husband, a good Christian woman and positive example for the townsfolk. New to acting, Jean's stage debut was as one of the *Calendar Girls* in the CCP production in 2021. She found the cast and director delightful, and said she got so much positive feedback at a time when she needed positive feedback. Her husband, Tom Casey, was sick with cancer and in the end stages, and Jean found community and support from women on stage portraying a story where "the subject matter was actually being reflected in my life." Jean's husband Tom died in April, and she is grateful they built a life in Clarksville while also having a home in Lynchburg. Avid sailors, she and Tom visited friends who grew up on Buggs Island Lake and in 2014 decided to bring their shallow draft sailboat here where Jean remarks, "there is a lot of room to sail," unlike smaller lakes that are crowded with motor boats. Jean has three children, a son and two daughters. She grew up in a bi-coastal family. Every 2-3 years her family moved from California to the Washington, DC area since her dad was a west coast sailor. When he wasn't on a six-month deployment, he worked at the Pentagon and at one point was in charge of electronic warfare. Later he was promoted to Admiral, and the ship he last commanded is the USS Sterett, a guided missile cruiser. In proud tradition, Jean's daughter Samantha became a Naval Academy graduate (like Jean's father, grandfather, and father-in-law) with a degree as a Nuclear Engineer, and she currently teaches English at the Academy.

Jean is fond of Clarksville for many reasons that include the fact that people come from all over to live here, and they are very accepting. Since her husband's death, she has tried to keep busy with the joys of needlepoint, gardening, the book club, acting, going to concerts and is "attempting to do online dating and having way too much fun." ~ Written by Holly Stadler



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Linda Jurczyk and her husband, Glenn, moved to Clarksville after living for five years on their 40-foot sailboat, the *Catmandu*; sailing along the Pacific coast, through the Panama Canal, and then north, finally mooring in Florida. We are fortunate their circuitous route looking for a permanent berth took them through Clarksville in 2004 and met with their approval. Her

husband, Glenn had spent eight years on the Clarksville town council and, when he left the council, Linda found she had more time to get involved in the community, so she went looking for something to do. Linda joined the Double Nickel Players in January 2017 and has brought her great enthusiasm and love of historical research into every performance. She has been the costumer for several murder mysteries and Sunday Funnies performances. She is glad she found the Double Nickels. “It actually feels like a family now—these are like my people. I just love this group of people. It is awesome.”

In April, Linda joined the writing committee working on *Murder on the Last Train to Clarksville* and helped create some of the wonderful characters you will see on stage—especially intriguing is the stranger that just shows up with his guitar over his shoulder. She gathered history about the Clarksville train station and Grace hotel to create staging ideas, the playbill, and centerpiece ideas for the show. And, you won’t want to miss her delightful cameo as Denise, the aging Prom Queen at the 40th reunion of the class of 1925 who wouldn’t mind reliving some of the good times she had when the victim was Prom King. “I love the character! She’s kind of the little hot flirty type, and I really wanted to play that—and she must certainly have had a ‘thing’ with the victim.”

Linda loved growing up in California close to Pismo Beach and in a community that was safe, where kids could be out exploring and playing until the streetlights came on and they knew it was time to scamper home. “I think like most kids of that era, we ran wild. We had a big old, abandoned trailer park on our street and the kids would run around in there, make up games, and create their own entertainment.” And that is where Linda and her younger sister, Suzanne, would put on shows to entertain the neighborhood kids—selling penny candy for two cents and putting together performances full of singing and dancing. “Everyone loved Suzanne because she was so CUTE! Our parents thought we were aliens with all the musical theater stuff, but we loved it.”

But Hollywood never beckoned. “The only theater experience I had before now was a fluke. I was just out of high school and I got involved with a Pismo Beach theater group for something to do. They were doing *Come Blow Your Horn* and the girl playing Peggy Evans had to drop out—I had to move in. I was 18-years-old and they wanted me to be this big sexy thing—embarrassing—padding my bra, etc. No great reviews, but I had fun. That was my big theater experience.”

Linda moved to San Francisco around 1970, just missing all the flower child, Haight Ashbury days. She met her husband when they were both working in the Bay area. When they left San Francisco, they moved back down the coast to the Pismo Beach area. After owning at least three sailboats, each one a little bigger than the last, in 1999 they threw caution to the wind and sailed out under the Golden Gate Bridge with no particular plan in mind. Maybe we will have a chance to learn more if Linda turns her ship logs into a book. ~ Written by Patricia Jutz

