

## East Falls Past-- Robert Free Interview

*The Fallser*, June 2009, by Ellen Sheehan

This is the continuation of an oral history interview with Bob Freed, VP of Production and Historian for Old Academy (OA) Playhouse.

***Bob, tell me about your first acting experience at OA.***

I joined OA in January 1957. The first show I was in was in April. It was *"The Torch Bearers"* and was written by George Kelly, Grace's uncle. This was the third time they did it.

***Did you act in any of his other plays?***

No, actually that was the last time they did one of his shows here. They had previously done *"Craig's Wife."* Later they did *"The Fatal Weakness"* which starred Don LeVine, who was Lizanne Kelly's husband. They did *"The Showoff"* several times, the play that won Kelly the Pulitzer Prize (*"The Showoff"* was based on a character Kelly knew here in East Falls.)

***Did you ever act with any of the Kellys?***

Yes, I was in *"The Critic's Choice"* with Lizanne Kelly LeVine. She played my ex-wife.

***Was her husband in the show?***

No, I was never in a show with Don. They acted here quite a bit. Lizanne from early girlhood. She was in *"The Philadelphia Story," "Light Up the Sky," "Mary, Mary"* and others. Don did even more shows than Lizanne. He was in *"A Thousand Clowns," "Sunday in New York," "Come Back Little Sheba"* and *"Bus Stop."*

***Did they meet here?***

No, I'm not sure where they met. When they did *"The Moon is Blue"* together, they were engaged. That was 1955 and that was the last time her sister, Grace was at OA. She came to see them in that show. This was just after she had won the Academy Award. She did take an interest in the club. She donated money and sent us a telegram thanking us for our congratulatory note when she won the Oscar. OA usually is mentioned in her biographies, as she started her career here on our stage at the age of twelve.

***I understand there was another famous actor at OA, Robert Prosky.***

Yes, he just passed away a few months ago. He was at OA for almost ten years. He came when he was still at Roxborough High School. He looked older than he was and they had him playing older parts when he was still in his teens. He was in *"Laura," "Rebecca," "Room Service," "For Love or Money"* and others from 1949-1955. He went into the service and then to Washington D.C. to a famous professional group there. He stayed there for 25 years. He was really a late bloomer as far as national recognition. He then went on a career on Broadway where he had two Tony nominations. He went to Hollywood where he appeared in movies. He was in *"Hoffa"* and the second filming of *"Miracle on 34th Street."* He played a Police Officer in *"Hill Street Blues"* on TV. He came back here and did a benefit a few years ago at OA, showing a retrospect of his career. We all went up to see his last show on Broadway *"Democracy."* He took us backstage, spent some time with us, introducing us to the cast. He spoke to us afterward when we went to see him at the Walnut in *"The Price"* last year. His two sons were in the show, also, and he brought them to the theater one day just to show them where he started. (A tribute to Grace Kelly and Robert Prosky, including the plays in which they acted, is on display at OA).

