



One of the Actors in *Murder On The Last Train To Clarksville*

Suspect, Darrin (Hooch) McCoy played by Greg Pipan, is a retired corn whiskey maker who got involved with NASCAR. He has a good car and driver, but his baggage includes one of his partners who was needed to finance the venture. One of these partners is the victim Johnny Wunder who is killed on the train, and a strong motive for Darrin is that this partner warned he might be pulling out of the deal, which would mean Darrin's car couldn't race in the Daytona 500 - leaving him in financial crisis. Having gone bankrupt once before, this development is most distressing.

Actor Greg Pipan has performed in the Double Nickel murder mysteries before – his first foray into this group was acting in *Chaos At The Clarksville Bicentennial* dinner theatre where he also played a murder suspect. With a preference for backstage work, Greg has also been roped into onstage roles in the past. For CCP's production of *Calendar Girls*, he played the character who dies in the first act. As Greg puts it, "That worked out well for me." Not one to embrace memorizing a lot of lines, Greg appreciates that the murder mystery productions offer improvisation for the suspects involved. He especially finds it intriguing that he gets to portray a sinister character who may be a criminal. He enjoys playing the "bad guy," because it's a chance to be someone else, and it amuses him that the audience "could see me as a bad person, because I'm such a 'goody two shoes!'" CCP and DNP were lucky to have him step in as technical director for lights and sound in the spring musical *South Pacific* and for the DNP *Sunday Funnies*, and we love having him be able to perform both under and behind the lights.

Greg grew up in Fairview, NJ one of seven children whose father was a mechanical engineer. Some of his dad's skills rubbed off on Greg who learned to read blueprints at the age of seven. After high school, Greg spent his career in metalworking. One of the companies he worked for bought a theatrical rigging company, and there Greg learned about counterweight systems, and electric winch systems. While he was shop manager there, he developed a counterweight system for which he applied and received a US patent. While living in NC with his wife Leslie (*Murder On The Last Train To Clarksville's* Director), he spent fifteen years teaching metal working to high school students and working on the school theatrical productions rigging effects, including flying a hot air balloon across the stage. His skills also include blacksmithing and carpentry work – handy skills for the work he's done with Habitat for Humanity as well as working on his lake properties over the years.

What he loves about being a part of the DNP is a combination of the people involved and watching the evolution of a production. "We have a lot of laughs in the Double Nickels, because that group's funny." And the group also affords him a chance to challenge himself. "Once you do it, it becomes a challenge. And It's nice to go from a script and endure the process of getting it to a final production – being able to work with people and see how they improve as time goes on." ~ Written by Holly Stadler



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Karon Runyon is a founding member of the Double Nickel Players (DNP) and, in the twelve years since its inception, has appeared in or worked behind the scenes in nearly every production, including the dinner theater murder mysteries. Karon plays one of the suspected murderers, Lily Rae Springman, in *Murder On The Last Train To Clarksville*. Karon says, "I love playing, Lily! I have been working on her character because it is complicated. She grew up quite poor and now is fabulously wealthy. She has a bit of a southern accent because she came from Danville, grew up right next to the mountains; and putting together her costume, shopping for her jewelry and shoes has been quite fun."

Karon says old classmates and friends are surprised by her involvement with theater. She had never done anything like it in school—she was always so quiet. "I have been quiet and shy my whole life, but when it comes to acting, I know that who the audience is seeing is not me, it is somebody completely different, and I can say and do things I would not normally say—and nobody watching knows if I am saying the right thing or not! We are not being judged for who we are—and I like that. And improv, like in the murder mysteries, is wonderful fun, like having a conversation, you don't have to memorize lines."

Karon and her husband, Danny, moved to Clarksville in 2006. They had purchased land on the lake in anticipation of retirement and, when Karon retired from her position as a lab technician for Honeywell, they decided to go ahead and build. During the construction of the house, Danny's back went out and so he retired, too. It was the second house that he had built for them, and it was fabulous. They moved from Chester, VA in October, and by the first of the year Karon was looking for a way to meet people and get involved in the community. She answered an ad in the paper—the Clarksville Community Players were looking for people interested in volunteering for the theater. "I wasn't an actor and had never done anything in the theater, but I thought it would be fun to come down and meet people and maybe do props or something."

That's how it started, doing props and volunteering her husband to work on set and lights. She points especially, to meeting Nancy Barden and Diana Pate who were big influences in those early days with CCP. "I think Nancy is one of the most wonderful people on this earth, and she is so helpful to everybody. She stepped in to help me when I was asked to write an article for the newspaper—not my thing. And Diana taught me so much about theater, helped me be a producer, gave me a chance to work with costumes, and helped me understand the stage." Gradually, Karon went from little bit parts where you didn't really have lines but you got to be on stage with a line here and there, and now her credits are numerous with CCP and DNP productions.

Karon has returned to Chester to be nearer family, but she and Danny make it a point to make the drive and stay very involved in this group, this community, with these 'wonderful people.' "I think the Double Nickel Players are wonderful for the community and for the folks that participate in it. I think it is something that every place that has a community theater needs." ~ Written by Patricia Jutz.



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Walter “Buck” Smyre has become quite a fixture in Double Nickel Players (DNP) productions and has appeared in several Clarksville Community Players productions since he and his wife Anne moved to Clarksville from the Charleston suburb of Mount Pleasant, SC in 2016. Buck may not be his given name, but come to find out, Buck is actually a family name. Both his maternal grandfather and uncle’s given

name is Buck, and when his grandfather, bouncing young Walter on his knee, started calling him Bucky, it stuck—Bucky became Buck in high school and most people never realize that his name is actually Walter.

In *Murder On The Last Train To Clarksville*, Buck plays one of the suspected murderers, Basil Holiday, a strongly religious man and someone that never liked the victim. Buck shares, “It is fun being somebody else; when you put on that makeup and zip up that costume, it opens up a whole avenue to be able to think like the person that you are envisioning—just put yourself aside and think as that person thinks. He invites you to come see whether you think “he did the dastardly deed.”

Buck is enjoying playing Basil Holiday, but Buck is foremost a singer. He has been a singer all his life and still performs with the Virginia Commonwealth Chorale, sings with the Clarksville Community Chorus, and in the Clarksville Presbyterian Church choir. Even before he started participating in organized music in first grade, he recalls music just flowing through his mind and he would be singing away as he played. “So, between school, church, and choral groups, it has just been a way of life. To me life without music is not living.” He grew up in the era of Johnny Mathis and his smooth style of music, and then along came Pavarotti - his two major influences. He has gracefully moved from boy soprano, to tenor, and now second tenor or baritone. “I think it [my voice] is a God given gift, and I’m using it to the best of my ability, when and wherever, and as often as I can.”

If you ask him about his stage experience or why he decided to join DNP, he is quick to point his finger at Anne and say, “It’s all her fault.” His wife Anne built and ran a children’s drama program for over 10 years in Mount Pleasant; she started it to help children speak clearly and to sing for an audience; and then she began to write plays. Buck built the sets and did behind-the-scenes things to help out. Then the local Crab Pot Players was looking for a grandfather image for *Gypsy* and Anne encouraged him to try out. That was his front-of-the-stage introduction.

Being one of the few men in the DNP, Buck has gotten quite a workout both in front of and behind the curtain since coming to Clarksville. In one *Sunday Funnies* production, he played five different roles, changed scenery, and moved props! That was a bit much! But he loves being part of the Double Nickels. “It’s the event and it’s the people—the camaraderie—that makes these things special; working close together and trusting each other on stage—you build close relationships with each other.” ~ Written by Patricia Jutz



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Anne Smyre got started performing at a very young age, as a singer as she recalls singing “April Showers” while dressed up in crepe paper tulips. She has been singing most of her life including in the North Charleston and Charleston Chorus where she sang with the symphony. Yet, her interest in acting was peaked in high school when she joined the Drama Club.

Anne took a break from the stage when she married and raised her children, but once they were grown, she went to the historic Dock Street Theater in Charleston, SC and took theater classes and acting seminars. When the theater was producing, *Christmas 1861*, an adaption of *Little Women*, Anne was cast as

Marmee. She enjoyed the role, and especially liked working with the other actors and wearing those big hoop skirts! It was there that one of her teachers stated that in drama, “you can’t go wrong with children.” So, with that in mind she partnered with her church’s musical director and started a children’s drama program in Charleston. The group would perform Christmas shows and have an annual springtime “talent share” where each child could dance, sing a song, or do some acting; this group grew from seven-eight members to over thirty.

In Charleston, Anne worked as an assistant to a newspaper owner who lived in a historic home on King Street. The house was undergoing a complete renovation, and Anne was delighted to meet artisans from around the world. Anne had an office in the house and was fascinated by the beauty and history of the home and the friendship she developed with her boss and his wife.

Although Anne loved living in Charleston, as the city was expanding and getting “overcrowded,” Anne and her husband were looking to move to a new community. One option was Hawaii, where Anne’s daughters lived with their families. But, as luck would have it, Anne’s brother lived in Clarksville and invited them to the July 4th parade. There, Anne fell in love with the kazoo bands, tractors, and firetrucks and immediately began trying to find a home here. Hawaii’s loss was Clarksville’s gain!

One of the first things she and her husband Buck did when they moved to Clarksville seven years ago was to join the Double Nickel Players. Anne said that “almost before we knew anyone in town, we were having so much fun with the Double Nickel group.” She acknowledges Nancy Barden as being “extremely talented and a pillar of strength and experience” who was one of the reasons she and Buck keep coming back for each production. Anne has joined in several CCP productions and was one of the *Calendar Girls* and says she had the “best lines in the script.” Another fun role she played was as the sweet wife of the mayor who was secretly a Mafia Don, in *Unnecessary Farce*. If she had a dream role to play it would be either one of the sweet murderess’s in *Arsenic And Old Lace*, or as Quiser (Wheezy) in *Steel Magnolias*.

Anne enjoys being in shows because it is so much fun. “From the time you sit down for the read through, until you see it all come together...It’s just magic. She enjoyed several small roles in *South Pacific*, which turned out to be one of the best shows she seen in Clarksville.

Anne is playing one of the suspects, Roberta ‘Bobbi’ Knuckles in *Murder On The Last Train To Clarksville*. She describes her character as one of resilience, having been bullied for her brains throughout high school. Anne likes that her character is haughty and has come to the reunion to flaunt her success now that she has her own accounting firm. But did she seek revenge for all the high school harassment by killing her main tormenter? It will be up to the audience to decide if Roberta is “guilty.” -- Written by Monica Walter



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Lorna Martinez is playing one of the suspects in this year's Double Nickel Players production of *Murder on the Last Train to Clarksville*. Her character, Mary Gross, is in commercial real estate, arriving on the train from Washington, D.C. with all the Clarksville reunion folks, including the victim, John Paul Wunder. Lorna imagines Mary as a no-nonsense woman who had to work extra hard to push against

the low glass ceiling of the 1960's. Mary has a seething resentment towards the victim, since he has stolen business deals from her, and caused her much embarrassment in the D.C. community. Maybe she wants to make sure John Paul Wunder doesn't "kill" the deal she came to Clarksville to make!

Actress Lorna was born in New Jersey and describes her childhood as "idyllic." She grew up in the town where they make M & M's, and she swears she can still smell those peanuts roasting at the factory in the summer. Lorna was in a play, every year in school, and vividly recalls perfectly delivering a comic line during a show which had the entire auditorium laughing. That sealed the deal for her, and since then Lorna has been trying to make people laugh, not just at the theater, but in life as well. If you have ever met Lorna, you will agree with her when she says, "I have been performing Stand Up my whole life...every day I want to make people laugh... It's the Jersey Girl in me."

Lorna grew up in a family that paid attention to fashion, guided by her father, a "dapper" man, who would direct her mother to sew outfits that were right in style for the times. Many of her family members were builders and engineers, but Lorna didn't think that career path was open to her at the time, as a female. She is now proud of her daughter who is an engineer! So, after high school, Lorna attended the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City to study fashion design. She found herself getting immersed in sewing, fashion and art history and even joined the drama club. However, she married and raised her family and put her love of theater aside for some years.

About seven years ago, Lorna and her husband were looking for a great place to retire. After doing some research, they found Clarksville, with the lake, woods, farms, and a feeling that reminded Lorna of where she grew up in New Jersey. Within a week's time, Lorna and Ray found a house in Buffalo Junction, that suited them beautifully. Although she would like to be closer to her children and grandchildren who still live in the New Jersey area, she is happy in her house and the community. Lorna confesses for the first two years of living in the area, she barely spoke to anyone, except the cashier at Food Lion. But one day, she was driving by the Clarksville Fine Arts Center, and saw an advertisement for "Annie Get Your Gun" auditions. Lorna immediately thought, "I can do that," which led to her first role for CCP.

Since then, Lorna has been in several productions and named her favorite role so far as that of Lady Cravenshire in *Calendar Girls*. She thoroughly enjoyed using an English accent.

Lorna is excited about getting a chance to be on stage this year for the murder mystery theater, but she also is serving double duty as one of the costume managers for this year's show. Lorna feels at home in the costume room and enjoyed going through the hundreds of outfits to find just the right period pieces and accessories to dress everyone for 1965.

Hope you will enjoy Lorna's performance this year in *Murder on the Last Train to Clarksville* which opens Friday night at the Community Center. Come discover if Mary Gross is the one who got the ultimate revenge for her squashed business deals!