

Floyd's Blog: Did I ever tell you.....

I spent many happy years performing with the Downey Civic Light Opera Association. Although most of my efforts were in the productions I got involved with other organizations tasks such as fund raisers, selling refreshments at the concession stand, set strike, and yes at the consternation of everyone off the stage...."crew". While having many close friends on the crew as well as on state, my stints assisting the crew were far and few between and usually a result of emergency staff requirement. One such time was during the 1980's production of "GYPSY". Although in the show as a performer, I was helping out backstage due to a shortage of manpower back stage. Having a reputation as "King of the Klutzes", I had tripped over set pieces, put my head through set walls, and in general appeared to be in a constant mode of "set strike" whenever I help out while on crew.

There I was standing next to the Stage Manager's panel with my hands on the rope for the Grand Drape. Now the Grand Drape can be open and closed in two ways. The first is called "Flying the Grand Drape" where the curtain goes up into the grid, and "Travelling the Grand Drape" where the curtain pulls to the sides of the stage. "Gypsy" was designed for the latter method of "Travelling". The OVATURE ends, the cue comes from the Stage Manager, and I pull the rope. The rope immediately breaks. I look out on the main stage where the opening actors are to watch helplessly of the Grand Drape plummeting to the floor, missing thankfully the actors, followed by lights, polls, and miscellaneous theatrical hardware crashing to the stage like bombs in a WW-II Air Raid.

.....then I sat bolt upright in bed, trying to catch my breath. It was a night mare, terrifying, but only a night mare. One of those times where the brain runs amuck, and puts together a drama that could never happen. The stage mechanisms are not that interactive and this could never happen in a million years....it was just a nightmare. You just lay back down, and go to sleep. I did as much never relating the dream to a soul.

Well rehearsals ended and opening night finally arrived. Its 8pm, and I am standing next to the stage manager's panel with the Newly Hired stage manager "Steve Smith". Steve and I had formed a friendship since his hire consisting of numerous cups of coffee, one liners, and efforts to crack the other one up. Dr. Warren Marsh was completing the overture to "Gypsy", and Steve throws me the cue to "Travel" the Grand Drape. Just as in rehearsals, the giant-red Grand Drape parts at center stage and travels apart to each proscenium. Just as the curtain came to its stopping point, and the opening number is in its first seconds of the show, I feel all tension leave the rope. The rope broke and falls down into my hands. "Oh my God, this is not a dream! This is really happening!"

Now there are certain things that I have always been good at. One such item is "PANIC". My nightmare was really happening! Within the first 5 seconds of the show, I moved quickly toward the stage stopping within an inch of entering the view of the audience, watching for falling debris, then turning to Steve and the rail crew for direction. What do I see, Steve the stage manager, and 3 crew members out of control with Laughter. Now although they knew nothing of my past nightmare, my reaction to the broken rope on the Grand Drape and look of terror on my face, broke them up.

Once a show starts, the busiest members of the production are the crew, so they quickly regained control and went to their next effort while I stood there, mouth open holding the broken rope. With a little more than an hour before the Grand Drape needed to be closed again, efforts began at trying to make a temporary repair while I, still shaking, went to my next position to enter the stage as a character in the show. It was not until after that performance, over coffee, was I able to explain my "over-reaction" to a resurgence of laughter at my expense.

This was one of the last opportunities I was given to play "crew member" at the Downey Theatre. Later that night as I was assisting in the positioning of a flat, I nearly knocked myself out as I stepped through what I thought was an entry way head first into a solid piece of the set. For the run of Gypsy, I was relegated to the least critical aspects of the running crew and replaced on the Grand Drape.

I continued to hold a position of "HONORARY MEMBER OF THE CREW", but had it suggested to me that my best contribution on crew would be contribute at a different theatre.