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Kathy Piercy Oral History Interview

Kourtnee Brenner, Interviewer

Dunham Hall, SIUE, Edwardsville, Illinois

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Kourtnee Brenner (KB): This is Kourtnee Brenner interviewing Kathy Piercy on October 8th in Edwardsville, Illinois at SIUE. Hi Kathy.

Kathy Piercy (KP): Hello

KB: So, basically I want to get started with a general "who are you, where are you from, what is your background" so can you tell me where you were born?

KP: I was actually born in St. Louis Missouri, um when I was a baby, my dad was in the Air Force. And so, we immediately started traveling all over the place and um I ended up going to 8 different schools from the time I was a kindergartener till the time I got to college.

KB: Alright, um any ones that particularly stand out?

KP: Um, I actually got involved in, I got to do my first theater production um when I was living in the state of New York. We lived in Mahopac, New York at the time and um I saw an audition for a show uh for Gypsy and they needed kids, and um it was at Chappaqua, New York which some people may realize what that is, that's were Hillary [Clinton] lives. [Laugh] but that was the first show I tried out for.

KB: And you got in?

KP: I got in actually, I got baby Louise.

KB: Excellent

KP: Um, yes and my sister actually wasn't even going to audition, but she came along with me and because we were very similar in height, um they gave her the role of baby June, which broke my heart a little bit, but then again I came to find out that my character went on to the end of show, and was the star so, it appeased me. [Laugh] yes, both my parents also were in theater in fact they meet on the stage.

KB: Excellent, that sounds amazing

KP: Yeah, so it runs in my family.

KB: Good, um so, once you settled down, what high school do you actually graduate from?

KP: Oh, I actually finished uh high school, we ended up coming back to St. Louis um and I graduated for Bishop DuBuorg High School. I was very involved in um their theater department, The Guild Players, and in fact I have done a few productions with the Guild Players alumni, in the last couple of years, so all these years later I'm still involved with that.

KB: Good! Good, so when you were a child did you always want to be an actor?

KP: Um, to a certain extent yes, because my mom and dad had been involved both of them, my father has his degree in Musical Education from Washington University um and then my mother um was just a singer and stuff and then she ended up with five kids and so she didn't do, she just sang around the house, but um our theater library, our library of music back then, the albums around our house were almost all um musical theater and one of the very first albums I was so enamored with I remember in high school was Jesus Christ Superstar and I was fascinated by the fact that they had actually made a play you know a stage play out of that. But um all the all the old Broadway shows my dad had albums of and that's how I and then the other thing about it is being an Air Force brat I moved around so much and it's sort of when you're constantly making new friends every time we moved it's sink or swim and I had to learn how to be outgoing, I'm basically not [Laugh] a true outgoing person, but I have had to learn how to be because I was always changing locations and friends and things like that so it sort of feed um that that same drive and the theater seemed a natural progression after that.

KB: I can see that gaining that coping skill of "this is itchy because it's new so"

KP: Yes, yes, and coping is a good word for it because yeah like I said, it's sink or swim, um I remember there was one location when I first got there I was very small for my age as well, very short um I went to a school, we lived in Cape Girardeau, Missouri at the time, which was kind of odd but um I remember they used to do uh, I went to Catholic school were they did the Mary uh, um, oh gosh, it was the thing for Mary [Laugh] whatever, I haven't gone to church in a while but um, they would put us in line sized order and I was with the third graders when I was in seventh grade, so it makes a diff[Laugh] because of my size so that was also another reason it was like "ok, I have to find ways to make myself stand out and to seem taller than I really am" and personality seemed like the way to go.

KB: You have to elevate your personality in order to elevate you and your confidence.

KP: I did, exactly.

KB: OK

KP: That's exactly right.

KB: Sounds familiar

KP: [Laugh] yeah

KB: Alright, so, um... besides your parents being within the theater, um was there anybody in particular that kind of pushed you or um had a really positive influence in your life that you can remember?

KP: This is going to sound kind of crazy um but was actually kind of the opposite I had a high school teacher who was a um the director who hardly ever cast me in shows and he, he would say things to me like "you've got a lot of spunk but you really don't have a lot of talent" which fascinated me first of all, that a teacher would say something like that, but it was sort of like that and so it was like "alright, you've thrown down the gauntlet, I am going to prove to you that I do have talent." and it wasn't truly until after high school when I got to college, I mean I suddenly just blossomed and it made such a difference so it's like from, it's funny, most people say, "Oh yeah know who was the person that gave you the most inspiration," and it wasn't, it was actually a vengeance [Laugh] I am going to prove to you that I can do this.

KB: You had true grit, you did.

KP: I did. I did [Laugh]

KB: That is excellent. [Laugh] Alright, um let's see, um so, moving on to one um, where do you work now?

KP: Well right now, I work for KPMG which is one of the big four public accounting firms, um I have been at this, this coming May, will be my 30th year with that firm, um.

KB: You must like it then.

KP: I do. I like the company as a whole. I have had different jobs throughout the years, um right now I am, and this is the job I have been in the longest, it about almost 10 years I am a proposal writer for them, so I um help production, engagement teams propose anything from audit, tax, or advisory consulting services and I help them from the RFP process all the way to when they get the piece of paper in their hands and send it out the door. So, that's what I do.

KB: Ok

KP: It's an interesting job and it's extremely deadline driven.

KB: I bet so.

KP: Very deadline driven.

KB: So how did you move from theater to accounting?

KP: It's amazing actually I did it because I needed a job at the time. I ended up starting there many many, well 30, almost 30, well it was more than 30 years ago because I actually left the firm once for about 18 months [Laugh] like I had to get back, but when I first started there I was an administrative staff, I was a secretary um and um it I got once I got into the firm, I started noticing things and believe it or not I have actually like threaded my experience in theater at things and events, I have written uh corporate productions for them based on some TV programs we did one that was based on *Seinfeld* we did the first one I did for them was based on *Cheers* um I did another on that was *Saturday Night Live* and we had everybody from Rosanne Rosanna Danna, all the way through Hans and Franz and um

KB: I bet that was amazing.

KP: yeah we did, it was really fun to do, um and it was kind of fun to find out that the company paid me for the research so they paid me, back then I thought it was an exorbitant amount, \$25 an hour to sit there and watch *Saturday Night Live* videos.

KB: I would take that today. [Laugh]

KP: [Laugh] I know, so um it was interesting to find out that I could do that and what I would do is actually twist then the scripts that I would write to meet a theme, um that the firm was, like maybe they were rolling out a quality service initiative, or things like that and that's how, how we got involved in those things, and you just sort of twist and you know I took scripts and just kind of plugged together the certain themes

KB: [inaudible]

KP: Exactly and then um, I would also then, then I would [Laugh] have the actors would be actual people that worked at the firm, which people thought was hilarious to have them play those parts um and then it was really a lot of fun and I loved doing it because also because I am just so type A personality that I wanted to be the director, the writer, the producer and everything. So, it's just sort of me [Laugh] in a nut shell.

KB: That sounds like a good opportunity to do everything.

KP: Absolutely, absolutely, and over the years I have talked to, and I've discussed this with some of my other actors in different productions who have said to me "you know, how do you do this? Why don't you just stay in theater? Yada, yada, yada." and I am like "To be truthful, you guys, you could also kind of be doing this and corporate productions are worth a lot of money [Laugh] you guys could, it would be a nice way to make a living if you really want to do it.

KB: A new untapped market.

KP: It is an untapped market, um and I've thought about that and I have thought well you know if I ever really wanted to retire I could kind of keep my hand in the game by going that direction too so.

KB: But you'll never retire from the stage?

KP: uh, not from the stage never, oh no, no, no I meant retire from the accounting job. [Laugh]

KB: The actual job. [Laugh]

KP: [Laugh] It is too bad to, I am so far from an accountant. I can't even balance a checkbook. [Laugh] So, it's funny I work at that kind of company, but um, but what I do for them is totally different, and the fact that um my proposals what is also, and advantage, I get to use my creativity throughout a proposal um it's just a twist on you know the theater stuff but it's like thinking of a unique way of presenting us

and I also in the midst of my job, I also coach the teams on their oral presentations and so my stage experience comes in very very handy.

KB: So, you're teaching?

KP: I am teaching, I do and acting yes.

KB: [Laugh]

KP: yeah at an accounting firm, yes I know. [Laugh]

KB: That is amazing to me. Okay, so beyond work, you're actively with community theater and when you first kind of settled in this area, got your job, what was the theater scene like?

KP: It was pretty non-existent, I have to admit the only, the way I got involved with Curtain's Up was kind of unique. I was actually in jeopardy of being let go from my job at the time and I was struggling with what to do. And I had a severance package coming to me and everything and I my husband and I had a long talk and I said, "I'm totally burnt out from working so much." and he said "why don't you take the summer off, the 3 months, and then after 3 months you can go and start looking for a job again?" so I was, I actually tried out for a show, Curtain's Up show, theater company show, *Bye Bye Birdie*, in the, with the thought in mind that I was losing my job, job. And so, I got the show and the next thing I know I didn't lose my job I ending up changing departments and was able to stay, in the midst of doing the show. But it's funny what motivated me to get into it, but I remember at the time thinking "gosh, there's not a lot to choose from, I had not even heard about Alton Little Theater I had not heard about Looking Glass I don't know how long those productions had been in the area, but I mean I had never even heard about them, now I lived in Collinsville for, I am trying to think how many years I've lived there before, it was like I never heard of these productions, so one of the biggest things I think is changed is the amount of media coverage that community theaters are getting now. It's so much different, and I found that when I first joined Curtain's Up, it was just basically a little group of people that kind of stayed to themselves and then when I started hearing about Alton Little Theater and Looking Glass and some other groups it was like they kind of stayed to themselves, well, since then it's expanded and especially the actors like to move around especially. so, it's changes quite a bit.

KB: Ok, well how did you find that audition for *Bye Bye Birdie*?

KP: you know I was trying to think about that, how did I find that? I saw it, where did I see it? It may have been a flyer like up at Shunucks. I'm trying to remember exactly how I heard about it, um and I had not been on stage except for helping write the corporate productions at work I had not been on stage for 19 years. It had been that long and I was, gosh, I wanted, I had gotten married and we'd bought a house you know the usual stuff happens in your life and the next thing you know it's 19 years later. and yeah and then the job thing happened, it was like "you're losing your job" and so yeah I was looking for something to do and

KB: Why not do something you love?

KP: and I thought "oh well you know it will be great I'll try out for a show and if I get in the chorus that will be fun." I got the lead. [Laugh]

KB: Underestimated yourself huh?

KP: I did, I did, I underestimated myself so it's funny how things turn out, it really is. boy, for the life of me though I cannot remember how I found out about that audition. but I think it was something like seeing a flyer at Shunucks, I'm pretty sure. It was something like that so...

KB: Well, it's very different now, you get texts and..

KP: Well, yeah you don't, well there wasn't anything, I don't even think I had a cell phone, I don't think cell phones were out at that time, that's how long ago this was. or if it was, I had a cell phone but you barely used it because every moment was like "cha-ching, cha-ching, cha-ching" yeah and they were big and clunky and so it was a long time ago, and yeah Facebook wasn't around I am trying to remember how long Facebook's been around, but it wasn't around back then and you didn't have texting, you didn't have any of that, so yeah.

KB: Actors now just look on Facebook, or look on line.

KP: I know yeah. Well there's now, I mean Arts for life is one of those newsletter-y type organizations and they keep everybody connected together and somebody can post all their auditions

KB: I mean even STL Auditions.

KP: Yeah STL Auditions has got a bunch of auditions up there too now. I mean it's amazing how things have evolved. [Laugh] You've got the paperwork right. I can go online and look up something where as back in the old days you couldn't, you had to get it by word of mouth or hopefully you saw it in the newspaper. That was pretty much it.

KB: So, it was, it was, chance that you..

KP: It was, it was by chance back then, but I was looking for something, I knew, I had thought about going to a library in the area to see if they wanted me to maybe, I thought about doing so kind of like teaching kids, that was one of my other things, that I had thought about doing I just thought "you know, maybe I could take them and was could read a play and act out scenes or something just to kind of get them involved, that is where my head was going at the time I was looking for something and I happened upon Curtain's Up Theater Company.

KB: Oh, so, working with children and kind of making sure arts stays alive is really something very dear to my heart, so why did your thought immediately go to "We have to talk to children, and get them involved in plays."?

KP: It's funny, well some, another side of my background was I also was a dancer. I used to, besides the normal tap, jazz, ballet dancing that I used in musical theater when I was younger, I also then did some professional work and then when my few professional jobs kind of dried up, I went to ballroom dancing

and became a ballroom dance instructor. I enjoyed very, very much. I suddenly came to the realization to me that I would go to weddings and stuff like that and nobody knew how to dance, and it made me crazy. So, I had thought that that was another side of it is that I love to teach kids and teenagers especially the importance of, "This is really something you guys should hold on to." Dancing, I always tell the boys, I'm like "and I hate tell yea, but if you can dance, girls will like you." [Laugh] but I just love doing it and I love then from there it expands out into I love coaching kids through scenes and it just seems like a natural progression. I grew up in musical theater so that's why music and theater kind of go hand in hand in my life at least.

KB: I think that is a very, very important stepping stone for any child.

KP: Absolutely, Absolutely I think it's so important and one of my biggest things in everything I do that is associated with Curtain's Up is like I want to make sure that somebody, at least one kid, you can't touch all kids, any teacher knows that but at least one kid walks away from it with the most amazing feeling and the fact that they've learned something and they're going to take something with them down the road, I want them to know that. it's just too important of development in their lives not to have that happen, so that's why it's so important to me.

KB: You want them to get bit by the theater bug.

KP: Absolutely, well it's not just being bit by the theater bug, I want them, well maybe I was a little bit bullied as a kid because I was so small, but it's one of those things to put that confidence in them. it's about helping them develop their personality being that I was, I basically a shy person, and it's like getting that personality, giving them the confidence to open their mouth and do something on stage in front of people maybe it also is a little bit I can do performances in front of, I could do a 100 thousand people but if my close friends and my family are in the audience I become a blithering mess. And it's the people closest to you make me the most nervous. So, and I see kids, you know I want them to develop that same confidence to do things.

KB: that nervousness is a good feeling

KP: Sure, keeps you sharp, keeps you sharp, but it also makes me, there have been times where I just want to throw up right before I go on stage. [Laugh]

KB: Goodness

KP: And I've always told people like "yeah you know what if I ever lose that edge, then it is time to quit." because, then it won't mean anything to me. but it does, as long as I keep doing that. [Laugh] I'm good to go.

KB: So, what was your favorite show that you've done with Curtain's Up?

KP: With Curtain's Up? Wow, um Chicago was fabulous, I, that was a dream come true and I know that was last year and I worried when I got cast in that, "How can he cast somebody at my age in the role, but I thought, I did, it was one of those there I walked away, and I did a pretty darn good job, when you feel like, "I did it" and I did some physical things that I didn't think I could ever do, I was like "I did it."

KB: Being Velma is very physical.

KP: it's an extremely physical role, um I have had some other roles that I have absolutely loved, I was the queen in *Once Upon a Mattress* [Laugh] I loved being the devil. [Laugh] it was.

KB: Which is so strange because your personality is so sweet.

KP: yeah [Laugh] I loved that part, I was rotten, it's like getting to be Jekyll and Hyde it is so fun to do a role like that, um I've done, I've been very, very, very lucky to do some marvelous roles, Miss Pennywise in *Urinetown*, another really cool, cool part, and um Nancy in *Oliver* I got to die on stage, I love that.

KB: Is that on your bucket list?

KP: It is on my bucket list. I died on stage now twice, twice, three times. I got shot in *Ruthless* so yeah it's fun [Laugh] I love to die on stage. [Laugh] It's so much fun so yeah.

KB: It's ok, it's playing and acting.

KP: absolutely, absolutely but yeah, in *Oliver* I got beat to death so I got to really flop around and use my acting skills. [Laugh] yeah, that was good, so. Yeah I've been extremely fortunate to have some really, really fun fun roles even the first show, *Bye Bye Birdie* I was Rosey and that's also a real really big part and I adored that show, it's a really delightful show and it's a great marrying, when you're talking about a production team, marrying a bunch of teens and adults in one production that's it's a great show for that, in fact we have been talking about bringing that one back because there are so many kids out there, especially girls that want to do theater and there's some shows just don't have enough parts in them, they just don't so, you hate to not cast some and it's heartbreaking because you know they all want the part.

KB: I mean, going off of that, how do you first decide the shows you're going to do, and then how do you approach the audition process and the callback process?

KP: As of right now, I serve in the role as Artistic Director and I have an artistic team of people, but the things that help us determine which shows we are going to do we go through phases, it's kind of interesting because a few years ago we had done some successful productions and we had some money in the bank, so we were like, "hey we want to step outside the genres every once in a while." I know that we are considered very much a family community theater group but that was the year I think we decided to do *To Kill a Mockingbird* which is extremely edgy and it end up being very successful for us, but it was, it's one of those, but there were so many of us that were like "we want to do something different for a change." You can't keep doing *Cinderella* and *Annie* over and over again.

KB: I mean they're money makers

KP: They are money makers

KB: but you still have to get out of that

KP: Exactly, you have to once in a while, you have to do things different, you don't want to be a one note group, so we tried to do some other things, so you know, we did *Urinetown* we didn't make as much money on that, I'll tell you what though the people that were in that cast, we had a blast doing that show, and it was different, and I was so happy to see us step out of the box and try something new and different for a change. Let's see, now that last couple years we've had to kind of think about how we, the machine that runs a community theater group is like running a business it is difficult. our treasurer is always worried about money, [Laugh] because we are spending it as fast as we get it.

KB: It's very difficult.

KP: It is, it's very difficult so it's the last year, last two years, we've tried to do shows that are more money makers to bring some more money back in because we ebb and flow, and you are not able to see my arms going up and down, we barely have any money in the bank and then sometimes we have a bunch of money in the bank like we got done with *Beauty and the Beast* we sold out every show, *Cinderella* sells out every show, *Annie* sells out every show,

KB: *Chicago* sold out every show?

KP: Just about every show sold out, so those shows that bring in the cash, is great. Now you also have to understand, *Curtain's Up* doesn't have... it's a house, it's like we have to go to different venues and we pay. and there's some venues that are more expensive than others, we love working at SIUE, but is isn't cheap for us. We have to figure out if we are going be able to make enough money to sustain, being in the theater, or not. So, we've worked at The Wildey before we've worked at the Alfresco in Granite City before, we've found out, we've learned through different productions the first couple years The Wildey was open, the had exorbitant fees to be in there, but then we learned that later to, ok let's try to work out a better deal, because we are community theater and they have, they are much easier to work with now because it gets to the point where it wouldn't even be worth to, we would fill out every audience, sold out and we still wouldn't have enough money to break even. Even if we did that, so that's how expensive it is sometimes. We'd love to go to other venues and things, and we find other ways to raise money throughout the year we've done what we call the library shows. A lot of times, well we do FOTAD. FOTAD's productions in the spring which we love doing. I love doing that part, because it is for kids, kids performing for kids. I love that aspect of that because we want to inspire kids.

KB: Can you tell me a little bit more about the FOTAD show?

KP: Sure, Sure, you know this morning when you asked me to do this, I was trying to remember how far back we started, but um the Friends of Theater and Dance have four productions that they do every year, that they sponsor and they ask groups to come in to perform for kids, I would say that the average age is 6-7 to years of age of the audience. We try, we in years past we've done, one year I think we did two so they do one, it's like the seasons, the spring, the summer, the winter and then the fall, is the four productions. Our slot is usually the spring slot up in March it seems to work out for our schedule because were a group were the board members usually end up being the set builders and doing all the work.

KB: it's the community of community theater

KP: Community theater is everybody has to do the work. If we have our spring show usually around may around Mother's Day we have another usually around Labor Day and then sometimes we do a Christmas production, a holiday production. Those wipe us out, you know the physical laborers need a break. [Laugh] So trying to fit in another FOTAD show is very hard so we usually do the March-ish show. It's a production it's usually an hour or a little bit less in length so that we keep the attention of those little 6 and 7 year olds. It's usually, and obviously, we've picked productions that are focused for kids. We have a tendency to sometimes do fairytales with a twist, which are a lot of fun, like *Cinderella and The Story of Bigfoot* was a cutie, but they all seem to have some sort of a theme and most of the time it's themes that run along like "you're not really different than anybody else" and/ or we also, its themes like "its ok to speak you mind, its ok to be a part of something and to be creative, it's ok. So all these shows have some sort of a theme, so they're really fun to do and we get a stipend from the Friends of Theater and Dance that help us to maintain our, we have to find ways to raise money to keep going, so that's one of our fundraisers as well it to do that.

KB: To do that show?

KP: To so that show and then a lot of the times what we'll do is we take that show and then, maybe it would be a month or two weeks or a month later we'll do it at another location we've done it the last two years at The Wildey up in Edwardsville, we've worked out a deal with him, since it is just a little matinee, just a little one hour matinee for kids we'll do just a spilt the house kind of arrangement, which is really helpful for us we usually get pretty good audiences even these little show, like *Cinderella and the Story of Bigfoot* you know, they sold out. So, I mean it's just those kinds of things where, if we split the house, we actually can, we can make a little money that way to so, we try and do that we haven't done it, we are also getting ready to put together an audition workshop for kids. We did that two years ago we haven't done it since and that is to just have a, sort of like from 10 till 3 a day and we give the kids, usually we have one or two directors that come in and actually have them do little mock auditions so that they understand what it feels like, cause some kids have no idea what to do when they get to an audition and I did a dance session with the kids, I just taught them like "If you were going to an audition for *Annie* you are going to have to learn a dance." and they look at you like deer's in headlights and they're like "What?!" "Yes now I'm going to show you what it's going to be like to be at an audition like that, and they give you [Clapping in time] this amount of time to learn it, ok go away, let me see an if you learned it and then come back and do it for me like your auditioning." It kind of, some of them freak out, and some of them have it, and some of them stumble around. I'm like "This is what it's like, we want you to feel what it's like."

KB: That a necessary part of the process.

KP: It is a necessary part of the process, being prepared is a big part of the process. So, we also give them, so they have a little brief monologue, they do the audition, I know there was a third aspect, I can't remember, oh the music. They did music auditions yeah so we had a musical director in there and she would give them a part of a song and they had to come up and each sing it. And some of the kids were [Gasp] [Laugh] freaking out but it's a part of auditioning, if you want to be a part of it. It's also just to give them a little bit of confidence cause when, some kids walk into the situation and they see what's going on and they see 50 kids and they like "Oh wow." it can be extremely overwhelming, so at least if they know in advance what to expect, they don't have that much anxiety which is why that whole process is there for them.

KB: We do that in college we have an audition workshop so that even college kids don't get the big bright eyes and,

KP: It is, It's extremely daunting I know, I've done it for years and I still can't stand doing it because you walk in 90% of the time you walk into a room and there are two or three people sitting at a table, it's just you and them, and [Gasp] they can see every flaw, they can see everything, at least in a big show you've got other people behind ya, or with you, [Laugh] you're sharing the disaster, as opposed to being all alone you're the only one there. [Laugh]

KB: Well, I mean, it sounds to me that Curtain's Up is doing community theater, but they are also doing community outreach and really are focused on getting kids, not groomed, but accustomed to being on stage or even being public speaking, that kind of thing, confidence booster. Is that part of your main goals?

KP: It's kind of like our mission statement. It is, it's a part of that. Yes, and I have to be truthful, like you said before, it is not just strictly little kids, it's teens and college people and in fact we just recently had a woman try out for one of our shows who she had never been on stage before, and she is like "I just wanted to try it" and it's just like, someone who is in her mid-fifties you know, it's really great and to have them come and be a part of something new to the area, like she said "I'm new here, I don't know anybody, trying to find a way to make friends and stuff" so I'm like "join, you may not like any of us but hey come on in." [Laugh]

KB: You have the opportunity to make friends.

KP: You have the opportunity to meet friends, I love seeing also, I remember years ago when we [Groan] *Beauty and the Beast* I was co-director on that and that show had over 70 people in the cast it was massive and there were tons of kids, lots and lots of parts. To the point the where we had to split them up into groups. It was sort of like, just the way we split them up, group A was the shorter kids that were below this certain height and group B were the kids that were this height, and yada, yada. I have a young man who went to school with the taller kids but he was so short he ended up in the shorter group we he wanted to quit. He was so upset that he was with the smaller group, and he kept thinking that he wasn't going to be able to be with his friends or, eventually evolved "You have to understand you're all going to be there together in rehearsals, just because you're in group A doesn't mean you can't be with your friends and you can't be a part of the whole show." and I talked him into staying and I'm going to tell you right now, that this kid now is one of the most outgoing, and he also had such anxiety back then too he had [Goan] horrible anxiety of being on stage. He has evolved into a charming, handsome, talented and he's in college right now and now he's done some professional work and he's done some commercials and I mean he's moved on, and I remember that day especially when he said, [Laugh] he was just crying, I begged him I said "Please come, just come to one more rehearsal, just come to one more..."

KB: Give us another chance

KP: Just one more chance and it's like making that difference on one kids, to see the difference in him, years later, I mean its... and his mom still is like the difference was amazing. I hope I do that for every kid that I see and touch in these productions. I hope every single one of them

KB: Is that why you keep doing it?

KP: I think so, I think so. That's a big part of it. It's also just saying "we did that, we created that."

KB: That's your baby.

KP: It's not only just the set, it's the whole thing and it's the applause at the end is always that, we did it, we got it, and they loved it. Cause I want to make sure the audience has a wonderful experience. It goes through all parts of it, you know from the day we decide what show we are going to pick to the final performance and we have to break down the set and it's sad. [Laugh]

KB: Yeah here we call that "killing our baby."

KP: Yeah

KB: That's a little harsh but that's...

KP: But I agree, it is. It's like your heart and soul when into something

KB: You build something for 3 weeks, and then it's gone

KP: yeah, yeah exactly, well like *Chicago* we rehearsed 9 weeks, something like 9 weeks and when you give that much time and energy in something, and I mean even though I was 3 to 4 times a week, the other days I was rehearsing at home, so I was consumed by it for 9 weeks and then it's over in four performances. That just seems just

KB: That Sunday here just...

KP: It does, it depresses me. It depresses me some times, yeah and the day after I sit there and go "What am I going to, I don't even like watching TV." [Laugh] "What and I going to do?!?!"

KB: Get in another show.

KP: Get in another show, get started on another show.

KB: Alright, so can we move to the actual board members and...

KP Sure, Sure...

KB so can you kind of briefly describe, you said you were the artistic director

KP: I'm artistic director right now.

KB: can you briefly describe what other roles there are and you don't have to give names and just like how those people handle those and...

KP: Sure, absolutely, well we have a president and we had someone whose, when I can into Curtain's Up theater company the president, he had been in there for a long time until just two years ago, he decided to

go 'you know what guys I've been doing this for like 15 years [Laugh] I need a break." so he just stepped back, he is still a member of our board and then another woman stepped into the role as president and she's doing a fabulous job. The role of president, obviously that person just sort of oversees the operations they're like the CEO of the company if you want to call it. They do not have a voting, uh they don't have a vote but they just, they kind of run the meetings, we have official board meetings and then they try and keep everybody on track as to what's going on what they need to do. We also had a vice president who sort of just fills in when the president is not around or just offer opinions and things like that. And then we have a secretary that person basically just keeps track of all the board meeting minutes and tasks that people are all on. Then there's the artistic director, that's my role and I have to pick out what shows we are going to do I kind of help out with the contracts too, not only licensing contracts for the productions but because we move around so much were dealing with contracts with all the different venues as well and then, let's see, who else, I have a team of people who are on the artistic committee and they help out which just their opinions and certain productions and you know, we put in together a list every year of things we might consider to do what shows we might do. Oh, gosh, let's see. I know there's several other committees that I am trying to remember all of them now, there's a [Groan] what's the group that she takes care of the... I am trying to remember the name of the other department; I should have brought a set of the minutes [Laugh] it's hard to remember all the different departments... see if she's got it on this one. [Papers rustling] give me a quick second, I don't know if you want to pause me for a second.

KB: No, no pausing.

KP: I know I had a, I am looking for one of my outlines from one of my board meetings because it has all the different committees listed on it. Cause there's like a ways and means committee, which, oh here we go, oh sorry, oh so and there's a treasurer too I forgot about him. Yeah the treasurer, God love him, he takes care of not only keeping track of all the money and tickets, but he and his wife usually are the ones that deal with tickets, God love'em, I know I won't want that job, and keeps track of what we've got in the bank and any kind of monies coming in or going out as well as taxes, he takes care of all the taxes, see I would never want that job. We have a nominating committee which, they basically are to just make sure that every year, you have to up whether you're going to stay on the board or not, or you're going to stay in the role you're in or not, and so there is one person, she usually kind of just keeps track, it's usually towards the end of the year. We're normal fiscal year, December year end. So, we have that committee, we have a marketing person and I don't know if that is part of a specific committee, or not. Advertising? Public, you know, whatever. Publicity, she's fabulous she's got a ton of experience in that area and she really good at getting grants...

KB: That's important

KP: Yes. and does the, she knows how to reach all the right media sources and so, she writes up all the press releases and things and gets us interviews and stuff like that so she's she does a great job on that. And then we also have a couple people that work on our website and our Facebook pages that's also really important because that's the way it is in this day in age, that's how people notice who we are, um, trying to remember what else we've got, I thought there was like a hospitality or something [Laugh] but I don't have that on here but I know that we have a, you know there is always a group of people helping out if we do special events every once in a while we might do a, I'm trying to think, I know the hospitality team helped us when we had the workshop, the audition workshop for the kids, they kind of like took care of

all the food that day. [Laugh] so it was good, to have those people to take care of those little things, because there were other people that were taking care of logistics and things like that so, but there are roles, every person in the board seems to have slid into a specific role. There is one gal who she is always the prop mistress on every show. She just sort of has slid into that spot she doesn't mind doing to and I always ask her "Do you want somebody else to do that for you once in a while?" she goes "No, I'm good." I mean her daughter was little when they first started, and her daughter is now long since married with a kid, she's long gone, her daughter doesn't even participate with the shows, but it's great that this gal, she loves to the props..

KB: She found her place.

KP: She does, she found her place. It seems like everybody on the group has found their place.

KB: How big is your board, how many people?

KP: [Groan] I knew you were going to ask me that. I'm trying to, um 12? I think there's 12 people.

KB: That is the official employee number that I found.

KP: Is that what it is? 12? Yeah, that's what is it...1...2...3...4... [inaudible]... artistic... nominations... let me count these guys. 1.2.3.4.5.6.7.8.9.10.11.12, yeah 12, yeah 12. [Laugh] That's right. And all of our board meetings, the reason I was counting was because my notes here have extra people on them, but our board meeting are always open so a lot of times spouses will come to meetings.

KB: Now why did you do that?

KP: Um, I don't know I think, to be truthful, I never really voted on that. It's just, it's always been that way. Now there has been occasion where we have had something sensitive to discuss and we will do a closed session. It may be part of a board meeting, and we'll just say "those that are not board members can you please leave the room while we discuss this particular topic?" It's been...

KB: And it works out.

KP: And it works out that way, so but most of the time, we usually, our board meetings are wide open, we don't really have anything to hide. And we, a lot of times, if we are in the midst of a production or we have a director who is, who would like to do a production and would like to come, and like pitch their idea

KB: Propose it?

KP: their proposal, we will have them sit in, so we liked having, it we are in the midst of a production we like to have the director come and hang out and just tell us what's going on

KB: Like an update, production meeting

KP: Yeah keep us up to date on things, now as Artistic director I have tried to make our production, [Laugh] I'm a project manager,

KB: You defiantly are.

KP: So, I've tried to put a lot of information into particular documentation and to let the director know that they should have their who production team pulled together instead of "Hey I think I'd like to do a show." and then they get into it and go "Oh wow, I need a musical director, oh I need a choreographer, oh I need."

KB: That just makes it more complicated.

KP: it's so much more complicated, so we're trying to make sure that those things are taken care of in advance.

KB: So, that influences your choice of show?

KP: Absolutely, it does, it does. Like I said, the biggest influencer is money, the second is, we get a little bit, and I don't want to say child fatigue, but sometimes, it is not particularly that, it's just that we don't want to do the same shows all the time. We want to get out and get a little more creative cause it helps us, as a board member, you don't want to get burnt out, and so that's why sometimes want to go outside the box and do something different. So, that's why we do shows like *To Kill a Mockingbird* or um, let's see, we are getting ready to do *The Odd Couple* so it's just something that is just not the same usual musical theater.

KB: So, along those lines, are there any shows or topics or things that you absolutely would not consider doing a show on?

KP: There are, we tout ourselves as a family oriented musical theater, there have been some productions that in the past we have not put on, *Putnam County Spelling Bee* is one of them. [Laugh] I wanted to do that show.

KB: Which reason was that?

KP: And it was because of especially the one song in the show, that, darn it the name escapes me. The name of the song.

KB: "My Unfortunate Erection."

KP: That's it, that's the one, although I have heard that they now have a junior, well I guess, there is a difference in junior versions, also had heard a group you can actually do it without that song, you could actually cut the song form the show and do it with adult, I would rather do it with adults it's the kind of a show, it's funnier with adults. [Laugh]

KB: It is.

KP: It's better with adults. But that it's we try not to do something that is so controversial, sexually, or...

KB: Is that for fear of not being able to sell it? Or...

KP: Yes, partially.

KB: Or for not wanting to...

KP: We also don't want to get, how is it, we want to stay politically correct and we don't want to alienate families it's a very big part of it, and if families think that we are exposing their kids to sexually explicit indecent material, then they are going to say "You're never going back to that group." so We even have a clause in our audition form that says if you have got any kind of, if you've been convicted of any crimes, or deviant behavior, sorry, we are not going to let you be with us. Yeah we can't allow you to be part of our production, because we want to make sure our kids are safe and then we also want to make sure that families feel like we are giving, we are letting these kids have good material and they're not teaching them bad things. [Laugh]

KB: And, it's about the experience of the child too.

KP: Absolutely, gosh we don't want to traumatize 'em. [Laugh] Oh Lord.

KB: Because they won't be back.

KP: Exactly, Exactly, yeah so it's important that we pick wholesome stuff and so, I mean we've had a few things, I mean they just got done doing *Damn Yankees*. Which I know people were like "Oh my gosh do we have to change the name?"

I'm like "No" [Laugh] we don't have to change the name. But you have to just be careful, when we did the auditions for I think *Damn Yankees* He is think was 18 and above. The director has that prerogative. If he or she wants to have a restriction on age range we feel that, if you are 18 or older you are old enough to know, if you don't know the show well enough, at least look it up and make sure you understand that there is slightly sexually explicit material in this production, so we do do that, we make sure they know..

KB: They know what they are getting into.

KP: They know exactly what they are getting into, same thing with *Chicago*, it had some pretty racy stuff going on in it, but we had a big disclaimer in the program, we had, big disclaimer with the people who auditioned for the show, and I mean I will tell you that, I give a lot of credit to the actors who try out for these things most of them do their homework. Most of them know what's going on, every now in them you find somebody who says "Oh I've never seen this show." Every once in a while, you find somebody. Most of them know and, but the other side of it too, we have to make sure we pick material that people what to come see. And then, like I don't know if *Curtain's Up* would ever do a show like *Spring Awakening*. That's a toughie.

KB: It is.

KP: There is a ton of sexually explicit material in something like that.

KB: There is suicide, there is some many things.

KP: Yeah I'm sorry, yeah sex, suicide, yeah it's a tough one. That's just not quite what they are. The beauty of that situation though, and somebody would say "oh that really restricts your actors." I'm like "the actors go elsewhere."

KB: Umhum, it's community theater.

KP: It's Community Theater where they go up to Alton or they go to Looking Glass, or they go to Granite

KB: Or Here?

KP: Or here, or they come to SIU exactly, I am always telling people about SIU's productions.

KB: We tend to do some that are...

KP: They're a little more edgy. Yeah and it's nice, it's nice to be able to do that as an actor I like to be able to learn and expand my repertoire as well. So, that's what makes it so nice to have that. Yeah, it's so nice to be able to have that many options in this area, so...

KB: And that's changed over the course of you being here from reading about a first audition on a flyer to auditioning 4, 5 6 different places?

KP: Oh, yeah, Exactly, Exactly. Yeah, and the caliber is different at every location I mean there's some people who have the hardest time, like we said earlier, Curtain's Up does not have a home, a home theater and we do not get to move into our theater usually until the week before.

KB: Or sometimes the day.

KP: Yeah it depends, sometimes the day before. FOTAD we move in the day of. [Laugh] You have your tech rehearsal that morning, everybody eats lunch and then we do the performance and then we usually do a matinee and then we do an evening performance. Yeah, you don't have that luxury and in some ways, some people have a really hard time transitioning like that, but other people are like "Hey you know what, it's the life of a gypsy." That's what it is. They have learned to just think on their feet. [Laugh] It's interesting. I know I had another point I was going to make there, now I can't remember what it was, but it's about moving and being able to transition from different locations to different locations, and being able to build a set in one day, we're very lucky to have a guy who does most of our sets who kind of builds them in his garage and then he disassembles them and sticks them in a storage locker..

KB: That's amazing.

KP: And then we go to the storage locker a couple of weeks before the show opens and everybody helps paint, and then we move in, move in day we drag it all over here, or to wherever we are going and we put it all together.

KB: It's very satisfying to see that.

KP: Yes, Yes, and we drag our husbands and our wives and our kids, we are always asking if anybody has any strong backed teenaged sons. [Laugh] Bring 'em! Because we need them to carry stairs.

KB: All the help you can get.

KP: Yes, so.

KB: Alright so I just have one more question, is there anything else that you wanted to talk about today regarding theater, Curtain's Up, community, kids?

KP: No, this has actually been really kind of fun, very interesting, I kind of wish the group in Collinsville was back I know that they had to disband because their theater kind of went under. So, I am wishing that they were...

KB: Financially?

KP: I don't know exactly, well the theater Miner's Theater closed because it became in such disrepair. They're in the midst of trying to get that renovated but it's going to take quite a few years, there's not a lot of money so. As many groups that have come out have, I wish there were even a couple more, so that you can do more things throughout the year. There was another point I was going to make; I hate that when I do that.

KB: You wish that Collinsville...

KP: Yeah, I know Collinsville, yeah I want that, but there was something else I was going to talk about. Darn it, well. I had another thought in my head, now I can remember what it was. About productions, different groups, oh well I can't remember what it is. [Laugh] Darn it, you know me, I'll think of it as soon as I get outside. "Oh yeah that's right I was going to tell her about this. I was going to tell her about that." Oh, well.

KB: So, that's all the questions I have today, thank you for illuminating me about Curtain's Up, and I was familiar with you guys and I have worked with you for a while, but I was not aware of all the community things that you do.

KP: Oh, sure.

KB: All the outreach...

KP: We actually even sing for some of the assisted living centers, usually at Christmas time, we take the kids out and we'll sing and we, they're getting ready to do the Edwardsville Parade, Halloween parade, and you know, they do all this stuff too. You know, it's fun. The FOTAD show, when we take them out to the libraries those are fun too because they did one summer where they did 12 different libraries over a summer.

KB: Wow.

KP: and they took the productions out

KB: Just into the basement of the library?

KP: Well it depends, every library, one of the ladies that is in our group, actually has a connection, she's with the Madison county library district or something, I forget exactly which library district she's a part of, but the libraries actually have like an audition process and I forget what they call the day but I remember we went out and did the audition and these library groups they have a stipend of money and they will hire different groups to do different things, that day of auditions, we saw magicians, we saw groups that came in and just read, did reading material, they did an art class they did crafts, they did different things, well we were one of the theater groups.

KB: All of these are outreach programs?

KP: It's like outreach programs right, and so we came in and what happened was we did our little skit for them and then we had like, like I said I think there were 10 or 12 different libraries said "we want to hire you are this date, this date, this date, this date" They gave, it was like 100 bucks, 200 bucks per performance something like that.

KB: As long as it covers, gas.

KP: It kind of did, had a little bit of money that went in the bank but most of it was to teach kind of kids "If you every get in a summer stock, if you get in, running production.."

KB: Summer Stock, it's a whole different thing.

KP: It is and you've got to be like invested and you've got to put a lot of time into it, it's a little bit different that just going to rehearsals, I mean you are actually performing, you've rehearsed, now you're taking your show on the road. And you also, have to be, you know you have a little simple set, you have to drag everything with you, you have to have all the props, you know, everything has to be set up, every time, you got to get the group there, so it's a whole different kind of animal and it can be a lot of fatigue on a family. [Laugh]

KB: Especially when they're all in it.

KP: Moms and dads have to drag them around, a lot of times they're during the day so they have to take off work. Yeah, it's kind of a pain, but anyway that's another part of one of the things that we do.

KB: That reminds me of a question that I didn't have written down but the technical side of theater is something that is dear to me

KP: Of of course yeah.

KB: because, it what I have my degree in, do you guys ever have a kid say "I don't want to be an actor, I want to do this?"

KP: Absolutely.

KB: Ok, and how do you handle that?

KP: Well we try, I have to admit, and I wish we did a little bit more nurturing of the technical side, it's one of the things that I think we need to do more of, because when we hire in at SIU, we come with a technical team, you guys have one in house and we hire you, but when we go to like the Alfresco, in Granite City, we have to bring all our own people, we have to make sure we have somebody that knows how to run the sound board, that knows run the light board, knows how to do, now grated, we have a guy that kind of builds set for us and that's about the most technical person we have, we had for a while there a guy who was our sound guy, and then he had to leave, he move out of the area, so I mean we have a guy who has all the sound equipment, the microphones and everything, but I don't know if he could ever sit down and actually run board, I don't think he could, just like I don't think I could. And we rely on those people and a lot of times that's really something that we've talked about it in our board meetings, but we don't even know how to go about teaching somebody something of that, because we don't physically have the equipment, we usually go into a place.

KB: I see.

KP: So, it's, that is actually a hurdle that we have not been able to overcome yet. I would like to; I would actually like to overcome. Oh, I know something else we were going to talk about, you got people in all these roles and they all seem to be doing the same things as board members. I have been talking to my group about this, we are going to have to eventually figure out how to do each others jobs. Because we had somebody pass away and she was a massive force on this board.

KB: You are speaking of Karen?

KP: I am speaking of our friend Karen Perry. And, um when she passed away suddenly there was this huge whole, she was a musical director, she was the treasurer, obviously, she was one of the founding members of the board, and she was getting ready to direct a show so it wasn't, and on top of it, we lost a friend. But it was devastating, people, we were paralyzed for a week or so, and then everybody has to sit down and go "Ok, ok, ok, we have to figure out what to do about this" because we had a production that lost their director, and their musical director, we had a board that lost its treasurer, we had, so all these things that we're so entwined together and we rely on each other so much and when one piece falls away we all were, "Wow what are we going to do?" and it took a while to recover from that, and that's another part of this is that not only getting a technical person in there, or technical find a way to teach some of the up incoming kids how to do the technical side of theater, it's also just having people to cover for board, and the different roles that we play. Like what if one day the one guy who's always building our sets suddenly, they have to move, our marketing gal who's so good, her husband now works out of Washington D.C. and she's been saying "We may have to move" and we are all going "Uh oh" [Laugh] "Uh oh what are we going to do?" so it's funny how as a theater group, as a family, everybody has their role but we have to start learning how to cover for each other because there's going to be days when somebody's not going to be there. Who's going to take up the slack? And it's daunting to think about that, it's a big machine to move a big production in.

KB: Yeah it is.

KP: I mean it's a big machine, I'll never forget *Beauty and the Beast* I think was our monster beast show and that show, just moving around 75 people and then just the staff behind all of it was massive,

costumes, you know and all that stuff. It is a machine. And making sure the tickets get sold, and making sure the tickets get ordered.

KB: Yeah.

KP: [Laugh] All those little things that most people take for granted when their part of a, you know like a set theater group.

KB: It's like "You did that right."

KP: Who takes care of all those little administrative tasks? You know.

KB: And I can understand that when a cog in that machine is missing or broken in some way, it is real valuable to be able to kind of step in and give it a little grease and figure out how to handle that so, since you brought up Karen, how has, we talked a little bit about how it has effected the board, but as far as the like the actors, the children, I remember when she passed, and I remember the very next production you had a beautiful picture of her in a seat and you saved it so how has that effected, I mean you work with little children, so tell me a little about that if you would.

KP: That was, it was very difficult. But, it is also a part of life, as so we tried to, some of... most of the kids in that production didn't know who Karen was, they didn't know her. Just, you know, the difficulties of talking about death are just they are what they are and we had a long conversation with parents when we first cast the show and we talked about what the show was going to be about, and it was going to be a tribute to her.

KB: What show was it? I'm sorry.

KP: It was *Big Bad Musical*.

KB: Yes, it was.

KP: It was our FOTAD show, and she was so excited to do that one too. When we found that she had said "I can't wait to do this show!"

KB: It was a very cute show.

KP: It was really really cute and just talking to parents about that production and letting them kind of know what was happening and we did let them know from the very beginning and we're a spiritual group, but we are not the kind of group where we pray, but we do try, because I don't want to cross those boundaries, know it's really kind of hard to separate church and state, kind of thing, but it, there is absolutely nothing wrong with saying" you know what guys, we are doing this show for Karen."

KB: It's a respect thing.

KP: It's out of complete respect, she's looking down at us and she's, I think, I hope she likes what I did in the way of choreography for you guys, and what do you guys think you know and you try and make it as

interactive as possible and the kids thought it was really nice to have her face in the front row actually, her family ended up moving it up, because the front row seats don't have that great of sound. [Laugh]

KB: Yeah, they don't.

KP: But, they said that they thought it was really really nice, in fact we actually did that for every show that year. We did *Big Bad Musical*...

KB: I remember seeing it a couple times.

KP: Yeah, and I'm trying to remember the other two productions that year, now I can't remember. [Laugh] we do so many shows, now I can't remember. But yeah it's we dedicated an entire year to her, you know and her family was appreciative of it they've come to every production too, and we also dedicated a tree to her when we did a festival of trees, so we dedicated a tree to her and it ended up, her husband ended up, he was in such a good mood about it that he bought the tree, festival of trees. [Laugh] it's just, it's been nice. We didn't want that family to feel like they were just like she's gone.

KB: Yeah.

KP: Out of site out of mind, we wanted them to know that we still think about her all the time, we still think about the impact that she and her daughters, well even her son, I forget, her son also was in a couple productions when he was young, Matthew, they were all in the shows, they were choreographers, they played some, I know her one daughter played the piano, so and Karen was a really good musical director too, played the piano.

KB: I remember seeing her in a couple shows, and her directing.

KP: yeah, yeah she was good, Super type A personality. [Laugh] we both, yeah. We've had our differences of opinions over the years, but I do miss her, I miss her a lot, so, but it's one of those things where you think about it, and she made us all better for what we are today I mean just knowing her and her ethic, she was one of those people, she worked harder than most people that I know. I have never seen a woman who had her hand into more projects of things than that lady so, yeah absolutely. And she would come down, her last couple of years, I cannot remember the name of the school district she was working in, but she would drive down, it was close to Chicago I thought, but I mean she would drive down and come to meetings, and come to, be a part of productions and I was really shocked that she'd spent that much time driving on the road but that's her dedication. She loved this group, she loves the group.

KB: It sounds like you guys did a really good job filling in for her and...

KP: Yeah, we picked up the pieces as best we could, yeah.

KB: And you're successful.

KP: I think we are. I think we are, we still got money in the bank, may not be a whole lot this year but, we got money in the bank and we do what we can to keep things rolling signing up to become a not-for-profit 501c3 is a pain in the butt, and I know our treasurer wants to just [Laugh] sometimes strangle

somebody but he takes care of it and it's amazing. I love this group for what they do, and I'm hoping that we can get more kids to stick around it's funny that they do the shows and they kind of grow up with us, and then they go off, and they do you know, we got kids now they're doing Muny, and we got kids that are off in Broadway.

KB: That is successful.

KP: That's successful, however there is a few of them, "Why don't you guys stick around and like help us out?" [Laugh] Is what I am trying to get them to do...

KB: Roll them back into the fold.

KP: And roll them back into the fold, that's part, we are still not quite, we're so glad that they're successful but come back and help us. [Laugh]

KB: Give us a hand.

KP: Come back and direct or you know produce a show or whatever.

KB: Build a set or paint something.

KP: yes, yes, so that is the one thing, so but yeah it's a very successful group.

KB: Good, Good, that's all the questions I had, anything you want to say?

KP: No, no this is great, I enjoyed talking about it.

KB: Thank you very much.

KP: You are very welcome.