

At 82, Joyce Falkenbury emerges as star on local stages

By Cathy DeDe

Chronicle Managing Editor

I'll put up against any performance I've seen anywhere what Joyce Falkenbury, 82, did two months ago in the lead role in *Foxfire*, the drama made famous by the husband-wife acting duo Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn.

Yet Joyce only took up acting 10 years ago, when she signed up for the Glens Falls Community Theatre's Senior Seminar, "because that looked like fun."

Turns out, she's a natural on stage — but maybe not exactly by accident. There's an openness to Joyce's performances, a transparency but also something solid.

Maybe it's in part because "I enjoy learning new things," Joyce says.

It was in the Senior Seminar second year, when Joyce employed such dry, straight, understated humor in the Estelle Geddes part from *The Golden Girls* that I still remember thinking, who is this woman?

She was also memorable in the Katharine Hepburn role in Neil Akins' Wright-Stage production of *On Golden Pond*. Then there was her life-changing performance in *Foxfire*.

Joyce is the quintessential Senior Seminar success story, graduating from student-observer to busy actress and behind-the-scenes contributor for Wrightstage, the Community Theatre and other companies.

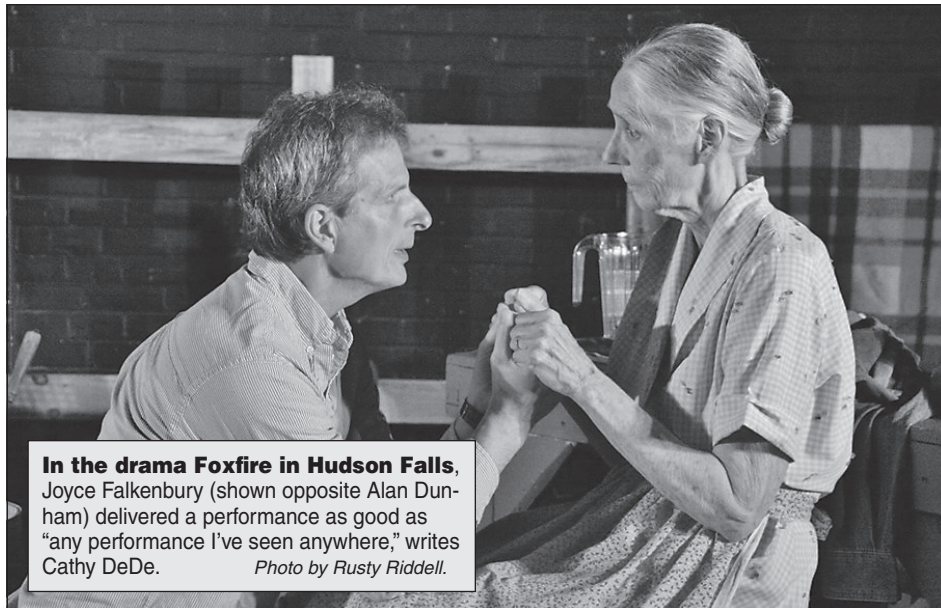
Where'd she get those chops — and who is this person, anyway?

Joyce graduated from Glens Falls High School in 1950 and grew up on Sheridan Street, the daughter of Glens Falls dentist Irving Falkenbury.

Found college in 1950s too confining

She went to Jackson College for Women in Boston, affiliated with Tufts, but left af-

'Learning is an always thing for me'; her spiritual & personal quest



In the drama *Foxfire* in Hudson Falls, Joyce Falkenbury (shown opposite Alan Dunham) delivered a performance as good as "any performance I've seen anywhere," writes Cathy DeDe. Photo by Rusty Riddell.

ter two years. "I didn't know what I wanted to major in. I thought you could only be a teacher, a nurse or a secretary. I didn't want to be a teacher or a nurse, so after two years I left and went to Katharine Gibbs Secretarial School in Boston."

She came back to Glens Falls in 1999, to care for her then-ailing father.

Joyce, twice married and twice divorced, has three children and six grandchildren. When her youngest child went to college, she went back to school, too, completing

her degree in Business Administration, with a concentration on women in management, at the College of Saint Rose in 1986.

At the time she headed the grants department in oncology at Albany Medical Center. But "after graduation, I decided I wanted to move."

Seeking direction, she spent three-and-a-half months at the Kripalu Institute in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, in its SLT — Spiritual Lifestyle Training program.

"But back then," says Joyce, "the monks

believed women and men were not allowed to socialize. It wasn't natural to me."

She pursued other spiritual paths. "I got interested in Polarity, which is something like Reiki, but there were no schools in Albany so I decided to move to the Boston area. My daughter was living there."

Joyce says Polarity training is about "working with the energy in the body."

"It can get stuck in different places because of beliefs or injury. You find ways to help people release whatever is stuck. That can include direct touch, exercises, communication. Sometimes I do it combined with massage, something like healing touch."

Mixing the spiritual with the practical, Joyce said she set about finding work. "That was the middle of September 1986. By the first of November, I got a job as executive assistant to the president and head of finance at a new high-tech firm called Interleaf, in Cambridge. I was working at Interleaf and taking classes in Polarity on the weekends."

She laughs that her sister complained that Joyce moved around so much that she was taking up too much space in her sister's address book.

Joyce has worked extensively with Richard Moss, a medical doctor who offers "deep work for essential change, tools to meet whatever life brings with strength and grace," his Website says.

Joyce has done lengthy seminars with

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Joyce Falkenbury

From previous page

Dr. Moss in California and Sedona, Arizona, and a three-year mentoring program with him in the early 2000s. She says the goal "is to live more consciously, and hopefully that shines on other people."

'Wasn't the person I wanted to be'

"After I went through my second divorce," says Joyce, "I realized I wasn't being the person I wanted. I always wanted to learn how to love, not knowing what that meant. But I didn't feel that I was the mother I wanted to be, the person I wanted."

Over the years, Joyce also became a Polarity therapist and was licensed locally and nationally as a massage therapist when she lived in Newburyport, Mass.

Now that she's acting, she says, "People ask me, how do you remember all those lines? I find, anything I want to do, I can do it. Not that it's perfect or as good as someone else, but I do it. I know, learning how to be centered and maybe have these feelings, yet work through them, just wanting to share with others — it helps."

Joyce remarks, "I've learned to love myself and life and just being, being who I am, for better or worse. I know, I am constantly growing." This, an age when some others would be aiming simply to slow down.

Joyce has discovered a new mentor at a retreat at the Omega Institute, a young Indian man named Panache Desai, from London, who wrote a book called *Discovering Your Soul Signature*.

"He just speaks to me," she says. "It's just helping me to get closer and closer to who I want to be, to become, to be more loving."

"Learning is an always thing for me," she says. "Growing up, I felt like I had to be a good girl, to do what other people wanted me to do to be loved."

"It took me quite a while to figure out I didn't want that. I realized, here I was trying to please other people, and I didn't know who I was. So then began a quest to find out who I was, and it still is my quest. When I love myself, I can love others."

Stays incredibly busy

Since moving back to Glens Falls in 1999, Joyce says, "I've really gotten involved. I take classes at the YMCA, and also do yoga at the Queensbury Senior Center."

She belongs to all three local senior centers. She's gone on trips to places ranging from New York City to Costa Rica. She's

a member of Glens Falls women's College Club and gave a presentation last year on lighthouses of Maine and has another program scheduled next year.

She volunteers with the Adirondack Theatre Festival and through RSVP, the Retired Seniors Volunteer Program. She's in a monthly book club that meets at the Glen at Hiland Meadows. She knits.

"I realized," Joyce says, "if I am going to live on my own, I had better like myself. That's the key."

She says, too, "If I want to do things, like going to California for those seminars, I'll do it by myself. If that's what I want, I do it."

As for acting, "I just love it. It really resonated with me. It's funny. I never thought of doing it at any other time in my life."

She laughs, "It's not entirely true I was never on stage before. In the first grade, we did a little play, probably 15 minutes long, and I was the mother. I was always tall."

"I was in Drama Club in high school, but always backstage. I didn't have an interest in acting. Strangely, our guidance teacher, Mr. Happy — you had to write a paper about what career you wanted and for some reason, I wrote about the theater. I don't know whether it was he picked the

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Joyce Falkenbury
Chronicle photo/Cathy DeDe

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