

## **“The Miracle Worker” At CDC Theatre: A Family Affair**

*Source: CDC Theatre*

*Dated: Feb. 20, 2013*

*Corinne Chandler (Annie Sullivan) looks back at life behind the footlights.*

The Cranford Dramatic Club (CDC) Community Theatre production of “The Miracle Worker” by William Gibson, tells the story of Annie Sullivan and her student, blind and deaf Helen Keller, dramatizing the volatile relationships between the lonely teacher and her charge.

In contrast, the relationships within the cast and crew are quite different, as Corinne Chandler (Annie Sullivan) looks back at life behind the footlights:

In 1994, the Cranford Dramatic Club was putting on The Tales of Hans Christian Anderson for their annual children’s theater production. My father, a second generation member of the theater, figured that since he was auditioning, he might as well take me with him and let me give it a shot. After a disastrous first audition where all I did was cry for my Daddy, I was given another shot, and was cast in the show as a villager named Gretel, a gosling, and the girl who held the Emperor’s cape. I didn’t have any lines, but I still took my roles very seriously. After all, I had a family legacy to uphold.

My grandparents moved to Cranford from Cape Elizabeth, Maine in 1966. Some of the first friends that they made in the area were members of CDC. My grandmother had been a dancer as a girl, and my grandfather was a natural ham, so it didn’t take much coercing to get them to join the club. My father spent most of his high school years watching my grandparents in various performances and club events, and after returning from college in 1976, he became a member as well. In addition to performing, both he and my grandfather helped out at the theater, building sets at night and on the weekends. In the 90s, my father began designing sets as well. This gave him some unique opportunities, such as performing on a set that he designed and helped build, or, in the case of last season’s production of *The Mousetrap*, designing the set for the production of a show that he appeared in when the theater first produced it 35 years prior.

It has been nineteen years since my first appearance on the CDC stage as Gretel Gosling Capeholder, as it has become affectionately known in my family. I have spent most of those nineteen years at the theater, either rehearsing, performing, watching and helping my father and grandfather work, and helping out everywhere from backstage to the concession stand to the ticket window. I know where all of the props are kept, since I spent most of my childhood playing house with them. I can’t take five steps into the costume loft without recognizing something that I’ve worn on the stage. I’m as familiar with the theater as I am with my own home. In fact, I think of the theater as a second home.

This February, I am stepping onto the stage once again, this time to play Annie Sullivan in CDC’s winter production, *The Miracle Worker*. For me, the past two months have been spent watching films, reading biographies, and rehearsing and memorizing lines, so that I can portray a young woman who, in my opinion, is one of the most inspirational who ever lived. Many people know the story of Helen Keller, the struggles she overcame, and the amazing things she accomplished in her lifetime. But in remembering Helen, people often overlook her teacher; the woman who first opened her mind, then remained by her side every day until her [Sullivan’s] death. For me, this is an opportunity to bring Annie’s story to light, and give her the attention and respect that she deserves. It is an opportunity that I have wanted for years, and one that I do not plan on wasting.

To say that CDC has given me a lot is an understatement. At a very early age, it gave me a passion for

every aspect of theater. Being an extremely shy child, performing on stage gave me confidence. The shows that I have done have given me friendships that I still cherish to this day. When my grandfather passed away, it gave me a place to go to feel close to him. When I was going through a very difficult time in my life, it gave me back my drive and motivation. It gave me a place to perform on stage with my father, mother, and younger sister. It is where I met my future husband. And now, it is giving me the opportunity to play one of my dream roles, on a set that my father designed and built, carrying the suitcase that my grandmother took with her to college. This production really is a family affair, and to me, that makes it even more special.

The CDC Theatre production of “The Miracle Worker” runs through February 23. The February 22 and February 23 performances will be sign language interpreted for the deaf and hard of hearing.

Performance calendar:

February 22, 2013 - 8:00 PM

February 23, 2013 - 8:00 PM

THE MIRACLE WORKER is produced by special arrangement with Samuel French, Inc. New York City.

Tickets to all performances are on sale now online at [www.cdctheatre.org](http://www.cdctheatre.org), or by stopping by the Box Office at 78 Winans Avenue, Cranford, during a performance.

The 2012-13 Season is made possible in part by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts through grants administered by the Union County Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs.

CDC Theatre is a non-profit, all volunteer, community theatre offering award-winning plays and musicals since 1919. One of the longest continuously producing theatre groups in New Jersey, it reaches out to all audiences, offering senior rates, family oriented theatre, and is handicap accessible.

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