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Elmhurst Biographies -
Marlene Freundt

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'Real Need' Produces Nurse-Actress Career

A Good Listener, Marlene Freundt Seeks Expression

by BOB SELTZNER

SHE WAS SURPRISED AT THE OBSERVATION SHE has a distinct resemblance to actress Lee Remick, but then 22-year old Marlene Anne Freundt of Elmhurst is involved in local theater groups for the sheer enjoyment of it.

The tall (she's 5 foot 7), blue-eyed blonde may be most recently remembered as Gigi in the Lombard Park Players' production in early November. In it, however, she wore a brunette wig.

First and foremost, however, Marlene is a DuPage county public health nurse, and commenting on this she said, "I was either going to be a musician or an actress — so I became a nurse."

SHE IS A MEMBER of both the Lombard Park Players and Elmhurst Community Theater, and at the moment her theatrical endeavor is a 15-night (three hours each) Elmhurst Community Theater workshop series by resident director Edward Elbert. The workshop series has attracted a larger attendance than expected.

"When I really want something, I really go gung-ho," she grinned during a description of her busy slate of activities which have occupied her time since her days in school.

She was born in Chicago in March, 1942 shortly after the United States entered World War II, and is the oldest of four Freundt children — Kent 20, Kirk 15, and Annemarie 3.

Mom and dad, Clifford and Frances Freundt, have made their home at 170 Columbia, Elmhurst, for the last 20 years.

Marlene attended Immaculate Conception school in Elmhurst and went on to St. Xavier, a liberal arts college on Chicago's south side where she majored and minored in nursing. She graduated in June with bachelor of science and registered nurse degrees, and a public health nurse certificate. Her internship was served at Mercy hospital.



MARLENE Freundt in wig and costume is shown rehearsing for role of Gigi in Lombard Park Players' production.

(Press Publications Photo)

Her performance as Gigi on the Glenbard East high school theater stage Nov. 6 and 7 was witnessed by audiences numbering more than 700 persons. To the Lombard Park Players the two-day run was a financial success.

Tryouts for the two male and six female parts in Gigi were in early September and rehearsals for the hour and 45 minute, two act, six-scene production ran seven weeks, three nights per week and more.

Marlene-estimated that she spent "several hundred hours, ah, but maybe not that much" with the 122-page script in which "I had a good share of the lines, and was in every scene."

In the final weeks, with lines memorized, she joined in-working on the set, and with her mother prepared her costumes. One thing she didn't do was seek a member of her family to help her with her lines, because "I didn't want to spoil it for them."

HER LINES in the play, she said, came easy, and she added, "My mother says I had all the nursery rhymes memorized when I was 3½"

She joined the Elmhurst and Lombard groups a short time before the Gigi tryouts under the direction of John Lamon, a Lombard resident who is a speech and drama teacher at Marshall high school in Chicago. Lamon and his wife Midge cooperated in direction of Gigi.

The tryouts under Lamon required Marlene to display her talent in pantomime and improvisations, a task with which she heartily agreed. Another girl, 18, and "physically more Gigi than I," appeared to Marlene to have the part, but a week later Marlene became Gigi.

"I was so surprised. I was elated," she said, and one of the reasons was that "we didn't try out for any particular part."

The brunette wig became necessary because Marlene's hair is so light — bright blonde — and "I refused to dye my hair."

Lamon ordered a limitation of two weeks for the cast to "get-off the script" for the first act, and three weeks for the second. The last two weeks of rehearsals Marlene did not refer back to the document.

She recalled first night of the production, describing her position alone on the stage at opening curtain: "I was first on stage, alone, waiting for the curtain to open . . . you could get butterflies. But, I had no butterflies. I loved the part. I wanted the people in the audience to enjoy it as much as I did.

"BUT, TO BE REAL honest, when I was on that that stage I forgot about the audience."

After a little more than four months as a health nurse, Marlene has a case load of 50. Her supervisor is Geraldine Hempelman of Villa Park. "She goes along occasionally to evaluate my work," the nurse said. Explaining the distribution of her time, she added, "I used to be on a schedule more than I am now . . . I had to fill out an itinerary each day," but she said that once into the daily project she has found meeting the schedule more difficult, a situation she believed to be normal; she is now spending more time with some individual cases where she feels it is required.

In summary, her theatrical career has not been extravagant. She recalled a fourth grade experience called "Down Among the Fairies," an operetta in which

she had the role of "Elma," a "little girl who wanted to be a fairy." Afterward, she recalled, "the kids called me Elmer Fudd," derived from the "Elma."

SHE RECALLED numerous piano recitals, dance recitals, talent shows, acrobatic exhibitions, and ballet, an outgrowth of private dancing lessons. She was also in Horizon club, "the highest echelon of the Camp Fire girls." In eighth grade she was in a Childrens theater production of "The Five Little Peppers," in which she was Mrs. Pepper, put on at Sandburg junior high school in Elmhurst.

"In high school I was in many recitals," for example, "Pickles," a production at IC in which she portrayed June Pennington. It was a musical comedy, and "they made me a soprano, and I don't have a soprano voice. I am a contralto. Almost the whole senior class (80) was in that play."

At St. Xavier there wasn't time for theater in acting parts, she said, "but I worked on costumes and took part in an occasional talent show." Her college education was supported by two separate scholarships the first three years and a public health scholarship as a senior.

IN BACK OF HER are parents, both of whom "give me great support." Her father, for example, an amateur photographer and home carpenter, also helped on the Gigi sets, and her mother, currently confined to a wheel chair with a broken leg suffered in a fall, has provided her with that invaluable moral support.

Marlene will probably skip the tryouts for the planned production of "Alice in Wonderland," and concentrate on the Elmhurst Community Theater workshops — which she learned will offer her a new and unique experience . . . and unquestionably something of value with built-in enjoyment.