Gothenburg native and actress goes on to direct, teach children in Helena's summer, after-school programs.

Marianne (Peterson) Adams always liked pretending to be something or someone other than herself.

During her early years of growing up in Gothenburg, she began a theatrical journey by doing just that.

"I was usually a horse," said Adams, a 1977 graduate of Gothenburg High School.

Adams said her parents—Thelma Peterson of Gothenburg and the late Bill Peterson—watched the plays she performed in her bedroom or backyard.

"My mother always had lots of dress-up trunks with shoes, dresses, hats and jewelry," she said.

Although she's never lost her love for acting, her path has changed direction somewhat.

Last July, Adams was featured in the Helena Independent Record for her long-time role in teaching and directing the Grandstreet Theatre's summer camp and after-school theatre programs.

Adams received a theatre arts degree, including an independent study on children's theatre

from then Kearney State College, and later moved with husband and Kearney native Charlie Adams to Helena, MT.

She was in the right place at the right time when a summer theatre school camp started in Helena in 1987. That year, there were 67 kids from third through 12th grade enrolled.

By 2009, the camp had grown to 220 students with an additional 50 kids in the 4-year-old through second grade half-day camp.

“That’s our maximum,” Adams said. “We have to turn kids away.”

During the school year, Adams directs and teaches an after-school drama program.

The after-school program is for youngsters K-12 who put on several productions throughout the year.

Adams said the summer camp is a two-week program in mid-July where enrollees take classes in such things as acting, musical theatre, movement, dance, stage combat and improvisation.

Students come from all over the United States and stay with relatives or homes in the community.

An additional audition-only “Summer Conservatory” is six weeks for young actors 12 years of age through college who produce a main stage production that runs for three weeks.

Actors for this program are sought from the Midwest Theatre Auditions in St. Louis, MO, The Rocky Mountain Theatre Festival, the Montana Summer Auditions, Dramatics magazine and by DVD submissions.

In 2010, the main stage production is “Guys and Dolls.”

“ I would love to see some kids from Gothenburg audition because the summer program is magical,” Adams said.

Adams said she thinks the safety and challenge of being someone else drew her to the stage.

“I can’t say that I am ever comfortable with it which is what makes it so wonderful,” she explained. “As an actor the moment you become comfortable with it is the moment you become a boring performer.

“As a director, the second you are comfortable with a project is the moment you have lost your spark and your work becomes less creative.”

Living in a small community like Gothenburg prepared Adams for theatre because she did a lot of “free play” in the neighborhood.

“This type of play is the best for developing imagination and I wish kids had more opportunity for that now instead of all the organized activities that we have,” she said. “I’m not against organized activities because that’s how I make my living but I do believe we over schedule our children now.”

While in high school, she credits Gothenburg High School's drama program and the community's strong community theatre as having a big influence on her career.

"Those are such valuable assets to a community," Adams said.

She still acts occasionally but not as often as she would like. Most recently, she played Aunt Em in The Wizard of Oz.

Her favorite role of all time was Babe in Crimes of the Heart in 1986.

"It was a wonderful cast—the director had been in the show on Broadway and playwright Beth Henley came to Helena to see our production," Adams said.

Her most-liked role in high school was playing Helen Keller in The Miracle Worker.

Adams considers kids involved in theatre as lucky.

"These are skills you can use all your life," she explained, noting that Helena's theatre programs try to teach kids more about life than acting skills. "They must accept responsibility for coming to rehearsal on time, learning their lines, building the set and being a team player."

All of those skills are valuable, she said, no matter what they choose to do in life.

The theatre also gives kids a safe, fun place where "they will not or shouldn't be judged," Adams said.

Adams and her husband, who's an attorney in Helena, have two daughters. Both are in theatre. Anne Adams works as a stage/event manager in Las Vegas, NV, and Josie Adams is a musical theatre major in St. Louis, MO.

Asked whether or not the kids she's worked with have changed through the years, Adams said they mature physically much quicker now.

"They are also very tech savvy which makes them a little more–worldly wise if you will," she said. "This can play in their favor if they are taught how to handle it properly."

However Adams said she's noticed that young people today still have the same willingness to work hard and succeed as they did 20 years ago.

Adams is president of the Rocky Mountain Theatre Association and has recently been invited to adjudicate at the Youth Theater Conference at the Southeast Theatre Conference in Lexington, KY.

She said she's excited about the involvement of Gothenburg's youth in community theatre and hopes the community understands how wonderful it is to have a such facility and the wonderful group of people running it.

"Please support it and never underestimate what your donation means to them," Adams said. "Even $5 will make a difference—of course so would $500."

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