

Your form "North Campus Restoration Story Submission" has received the following response:

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Q. Your Story:

R. I first encountered Hunt Hall in the spring of 1983, sort of. My fiancé and I were on a hunt, that Easter week, for a new place to live, and La Grande was on our list. I was very interested in going back to school, and so EOSC, as it was called then, was also on the list. One of my other interests was community theatre, and looking through a college brochure I noticed the presence of a little theatre in the basement of one of the residence halls, that is, Hunt Hall.

The campus was pretty much abandoned during that vacation week. We liked the campus, with its mix of old and new buildings, and all the trees and broad lawns. We were quite taken with the setting, in the Grande Ronde Valley, though, remember, this was in springtime. When we parked, in front of Inlow, and wandered around, I couldn't help but notice that Hunt Hall was quite nearby, and I wanted to see the theatre. We walked over to the building, honestly, not very impressive, and into the front door we went. We quickly found the stairs leading to the basement, and half-expecting to run into some residents, or security, even, followed them down. We met with no one, and had the place to ourselves.

I don't remember exactly, but we must've found a light switch, and as we walked around the front of the house, the audience seating and onto the stage, I fell in love. With the No Name Theatre. It was a ¾ round theatre, with about a hundred seats, that came right down to the edge of the stage, making it as intimate a space as I'd ever acted in before. So close was the audience, people in the front row would often rest their feet on the edge of the stage. We spent half an hour or so exploring the backstage area, walking the stage, moving from seat to seat. There were posters up on the walls, and I liked the titles I saw there. I loved the space and its intimacy. Right then and there, although we visited a few others towns and campuses, I made up my mind that I wanted La Grande, EOSC, Hunt Hall, and the No Name, not necessarily in that order, in my future.

We did move to La Grande, my wife went to work at Grande Ronde Hospital, and I enrolled at Eastern in the teacher prep program. (I graduated, got my certificate, and taught 4th grade for many years.) About the first thing I did was audition for Lyle Schwarz for a play called "Deathtrap", and, much to my surprise, was cast in a lead part. I met Lyle, with whom I worked for several years, onstage and in the set shop, and we became friends. I remember how he'd rub his beard when he was making a decision, and how he'd try things until we found what worked. With Lyle, theatre was collaboration. And I met the lovely and talented Sarah Bohnenkamp. We did a couple of plays together, but we were also friends, and I always admired her comedic timing and courage, onstage. Later on, I worked with Kevin Cahill, a very smart and very insightful actor. I acted with him in "A Thousand Clowns", and it was my good fortune to direct him in "Lonestar", both in the No Name. In the second play the characters drink Lonestar beer, so we ordered a case of the stuff, for the authentic bottles and labels, and the cast and I spent a day emptying them into ourselves. We refilled them with water, and recapped them for the play. I thought it was important to have authentic props. The play was a hit, not so much for the beer bottles, but for the talented cast and crew. And that little No Name theatre, so small and close-up it invited the audience into the lives of the characters.

I think I worked in the No Name for at least four plays during my years at Eastern, did a few more on the main stage at Inlow Hall, plus "Wild Oats", one of the traveling shows we used to do when we'd pack the set, costumes, props, and everything, into a U-Haul truck and tour the outlands. I remember an ancient, rickety theatre in John Day with maybe 200 seats, which were packed that night. What a treat.

But the No Name was my favorite performance space. In a larger venue, like the theatre at Inlow, there's some space between the actors and audience. Not so at the No Name. The whole audience is visible; the actors are eyeball to eyeball with the audience. Both sides can see every single thing the other side does. And you could hear them, too. A gasp, a laugh, the subtle movement, or a cough, from someone bored or tired. I was shot dead at the end of act 2 of a play, and had to play dead for a few minutes while the scene wrapped up. I was trying my hardest to act dead, barely breathing, no twitching, but I could hear someone in the audience nearby, comment in a whisper, that "that guy isn't really dead, see, he's breathing". Thank god.

I, like everyone else who's worked with Lyle Schwarz, was inspired by him. He trusted his actors, and he trusted me to direct—something I will always treasure. I don't think I let him down. The black box in the new theatre building is named after him, and deserves to be, because I think he did some of his best work in the No Name, the father, as it were, for the little theatre in Loso Hall. The No Name is where I believe I came of age as an actor. The No Name wouldn't have existed without Hunt Hall. So let's raise a beer, a Lonestar beer, to the memory of Hunt Hall, the place that gave us the No Name Theatre.