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photo courtesy of Carol Lansill



Linda Kenyon as Eleanor Roosevelt

Linda Kenyon is a striking, statuesque woman with a warm smile and shining blue eyes whose presence fills a room. Her effusive personality, animated, expressive face and tendency to speak with her hands is tempered by careful word choices and a deliberate manner of delivering those words, much like the woman she has portrayed more than 150 times in her one-woman show, "A Life of My Own: Meeting Eleanor Roosevelt".

Linda slips into her Eleanor voice—high-pitched, nasal, and starched-sounding, as if she were a member of the British upper class. "Eleanor spoke in a measured way," she intones slowly. "She had a deep emotional life, but she knew what it was to hide her feelings, and to always act like a lady." Linda visited the Library of Congress to listen to recordings of the former first lady's voice and watched documentaries to get her demeanor down pat.

The show, written by Stephen LaRocque and directed by Ed Starr, is based on an encounter Linda had with Mrs. Roosevelt while traveling on a train, as a college student in New York.

"I was just sitting there and she came over to talk to me," Linda exclaims, still surprised by this act after nearly 50 years. "She was so interested in me, I would have told her anything!"

Linda wears seamed stockings, sensible black "Eleanor" shoes with a print dress, and sometimes an overcoat and

One Woman Show

gloves. She dyes her auburn hair gray, sets it in a finger wave around her face, and pulls it back, creating a startling resemblance. Two straight-backed chairs represent the train's seats, a suitcase sits next to her, and the audience hears her inner thoughts.

Audience members often tell personal stories of their own or family members' encounters with Mrs. Roosevelt that make their way into subsequent performances.

"Eleanor was an amazing woman, with lots of energy and sense of duty—brilliant and multifaceted," Linda says as if describing a friend. "Something new always comes out—new nuances that I discover. Although she was self-righteous and overbearing, she was also giving, loving and understanding." Yet for all Eleanor's fame and popularity, Linda describes her as lonely, withdrawn and in need of love.

The theater runs in Linda's blood. She's the daughter of an actress mother—Margaret Mullen performed in many Broadway plays—and an actor-turned-set designer father. She and her brother used to put on plays, using sets designed by their dad. She then graduated to plays, movies and voiceover work. One of her earlier memories is dressing up in a "shabby" dress as Eliza Doolittle (from "My Fair Lady") for a Halloween parade, and finding every chance to practice her Cockney accent.

Born in New York City, Linda was raised in central Bucks County, attending Buckingham Friends School and George School before going off to the University of Rochester (NY) where she earned a Bachelor's degree in Philosophy. She and her mathematician husband, Hewitt, settled in Washington, D.C., where he was a math professor at George Washington University and she raised five children, four girls and a boy. She missed one chance to audition for Washington's Arena Stage because, pregnant with her third child, she declined their offer of a tryout. "They never asked me again," she says with a trace of regret.

The stage's loss was WPFW's gain, when Linda joined the radio station to perform live radio theater. "My voice is my best asset," she says. "I read stories for Morning Reading Theater and sometimes worked with a producer to create a 'produced' show that included other actors, sound effects and music." One of her radio highlights was reading "1984" by George Orwell in 1984, in one-hour segments on live radio. Her initial volunteer efforts turned into paid, commercial voiceover work, which she still does.

Mimicry and creating offbeat and fun voices is one of her passions. She's acted as a witch for a car advertisement, has done three voices in two different Star Trek video games, and

created the character of the Dark Elf in the video game series *Morrowind*—which she calls the “most fun” work she’s ever had.

Linda’s home—a beautiful stone barn c. 1823, converted by her parents in the 1960s—has been a part of the Audubon Society’s barn tour. Linda is a member of that committee and serves with several other groups. She is a board member of the Concordia



Chamber Players, whose musicians she calls “wonderful, generous and full of (musical) surprises”. She also works with the American Association of University Women, and she sings in the choir, serves as a lector, and does other work for Trinity Episcopal Church, Solebury. The Encores Group of Doylestown also is a beneficiary of her energies. With them, she raises money and other donations for worthy local causes.

Although Linda has called Bucks County home again since 2003, her links to the capitol are still strong. With work, friends and three children who live there, she makes regular trips back to the place she lived in for more than 40 years. And as a self-described “peacenik”, she even went back to join peace protests several times over the past few years.

By Brenda Lange
Doylestown, PA