What Previous Sponsors of Coya Comes Back Say

University of Minnesota - Crookston
Pam Holsinger, Student Activities
218-281-6510

"The play was just great and we had the best attendance by the community for any program so far."

Thief River Falls Library
Heidi Hoks - Head Librarian
218-681-4325

"Actor/playwright Kathy Ray received rave reviews from those who enjoyed her one-woman play, "Coya Comes Back," at the Thief River Falls Public Library's 100th birthday kick-off event."

Pope County Historical Society
Merlin Peterson, Curator
320-634-3293

"Coya Comes Back was absolutely fantastic. Kathy was Coya. She brought this woman back to life for us and we learned so much about how important she was to our own state's history."

Sue Anderson, Audience Member
Prairie Wind Players Community Theater
218-736-2713

"I was so impressed with the different techniques used to tell Coya's story, the visuals, the voices from beyond and the "visitors". I learned so much. Thanks."

Technical Needs
- A playing space of at least 12'x24' (preferably raised)
- A TV monitor and VCR with a remote control
- A sound system
The performance runs one hour

Program Costs
Performance fee is $500 (Subject to change)
Plus round trip mileage @ $.33/mi
Plus overnight accommodations if the distance warrants

Helpful Ideas for Sponsors
- Co-sponsor a performance with your local Community Education, Historical Society, Library Club or college campus.
- Contact your local arts council for information about grant funding. Call 651-251-0868 for your county's Regional Arts Council contact information.

To Book a Performance, contact

Kathy Ray
Playing On Purpose Productions
18680 130th Ave
Barrett, Minnesota 56311
320-986-2822
raypopp@runestone.net

Coya Comes Back
A one woman play about Minnesota's first Congresswoman
Coya Knutson

Written and Performed by
Kathy Ray
Playing On Purpose Productions
Barrett, Minnesota
About the Play

Coya Comes Back, written and performed by playwright/actor Kathy Ray, shows Coya Knutson coming back from "the other side of time" to meet with and advise the current US Representative Betty McCollum, who is the only other Minnesota woman to be elected to the US Congress since Coya. As the story unfolds we learn about Coya's background and the events that inspired her to run for political office. While she is conversing with Betty, she is interrupted by phone calls and visits from people in her past, including her dead alcoholic husband, newspaper reporters and two of her political enemies.

The play celebrates Coya Knutson's significant legislative achievements, her feisty nature and the courage she showed in standing up for what she believed was right for her constituents. In the end, we see how political intrigue, dirty tricks and the social attitudes of the times played a part in her election defeat for a third term.

The play includes technical elements that enhance the story, including video clips of the real Coya Knutson, voice overs and sound effects designed by Tim Ray.

The play is humorous, dramatic and serves as an interesting lesson in Minnesota's political history. But importantly, Coya's life story also serves as an inspiration to women of all ages to get involved in public service.

Learn the "rest of the story", by booking a performance of Coya Comes Back.

About the Politician

Coya Knutson of Oklee, a small town in Red Lake County in Northwestern Minnesota, was the first woman in Minnesota history to be elected to the United States Congress. After serving two terms in the Minnesota State Legislature, she surprised everyone by winning the election to the US Congress in 1954 and served until 1958.

Coya grew up on a farm in North Dakota and attended Concordia College in Moorhead, graduating with a teaching degree.

She married Andy Knutson, a farmhand on her father's farm, although her family warned her against the union. But Coya was a strong willed woman. During the 2nd World War, while listening to Eleanor Roosevelt on the radio she was inspired to get involved in public service. She became active in the Red Lake County DFL, ran for the State Legislature and then decided she wanted to go into national politics, although the men in the state DFL party wanted her to stay where she was.

Coya served two very successful terms as Minnesota's 9th District Congresswoman authoring bills such as the National Student Loan Bill, federal funding for Cystic Fibrosis medical research and campaign finance reform. She was the first woman in history to serve the powerful Agriculture Committee, and was one of the strongest voices on the Hill for farm legislation that served her predominately agricultural district. But political intrigue, the social attitudes of the times and Coya's own strength of character, led to an unjust end to her political career.

About the Performer

Kathy Ray is a graduate of the University of Minnesota and has been doing theater for 25 years, including playwriting, acting, directing and producing plays for schools and community theater in her hometown of Barrett. In 1994, she and her husband Tim started an issue-oriented theater business called Playing On Purpose Productions. They work with community groups to create original plays that explore contemporary social concerns such as violence prevention, generational issues and diversity.

After reading Coya Come Home, a biography of former Congresswoman Coya Knutson, by Gretchen Urnes Belto of Thief River Falls, she decided to create a theatrical piece about this remarkable woman.

Kathy received a Career Development grant from the Lake Region Arts Council to research, write and perform this play. Besides reading the biography, she interviewed people in Coya's home town of Oklee, she visited with her surviving son, Terry Knutson of Bloomington and she spent a lot of time going through Representative Knutson's personal papers and archival material on file at the Minnesota History Center in St. Paul.

The Rays have been presenting Coya Comes Back throughout Minnesota for Historical Societies, Library clubs, Chautauquas and on college campuses to celebrate Women's History Month.
Cast Biographies

Kathy Ray - Playwright/Producer for Playing On Purpose Productions. Happy to be making a living as a theater artist in a rural area. "I remember in college during the late 1960's, I felt lucky to be female and not subject to being drafted and sent to Vietnam. Never really heard or thought about any women that might be there. But this play shows how wrong I was."

Barbara Daily - Makes her home on Lake Pomme de Terre with her husband Don. After moving to Minnesota in the fall of '97. She states that "doing this play has given me a greater appreciation for women serving their country as professionals and volunteers. Currently I have a niece in the Armed Forces serving as a pilot in Kuwait. This play haunts me. What these women went through is no less than what any of our men experienced and, as such, they have my total admiration. I salute them all."

Cheryl Petersen - A music and theater lover since a very young age. Home is San Jose, CA where she once dreamed she would live in New York City. But is happier to be here in central MN where she can pursue her music and theater interests actively. Married to Tim and mom to Kaitlyn and Todd. In her "spare" time she teaches piano and is the organist/choir director at her church. "My daughter (7) asked me if Vietnam was real. If nothing else, this play reminds us of the reality of that time and place in our history and of all the people affected. A piece of my heart goes out..."

Liza Goergen - From Elbow Lake. An Assistant Librarian at the Elbow Lake Public Library working with the greatest people in the world. Also the Worship Leader at her church and a Youth Director. Enjoys reading, watching movies and singing. Her first introduction to theatre was the PWP Playing with Memories in the summer of 2002. "I feel very privileged to be included in "A Piece of My Heart" and to be portraying one of the many heroic women that served our great country."

Danni Nelson - Teaches classes for Community Support Personnel at Alex Tech. She has performed in a local rock band for years. She and her husband Todd and their 4 children make their home in Hoffman.

Lindsey Kloos - A Junior at WCA High School. Has participated in One Act, and other Playing On Purpose productions. At age 17, she is currently the same age as many of the women who volunteered to serve in Vietnam were over 30 years ago.

Dany Pederson - Co-owner of a CASE-IH Farm Equipment business in Herman. An avid hunter and participant in outdoor sports. Has been in many Prairie Wind Players productions over the last 20 years.

Tim Ray - Co-Owner/Director for Playing On Purpose Productions. Involved in both local and state wide Community Theater. By day, an electronics technician at the University of Minnesota-Morris... for a while at least.

Playing On Purpose Productions
Barrett, Minnesota 56311
320-986-2822
raypopp@runestone.net

ST. Cloud State University
Women's Center
Presents

A Piece Of My Heart

By
Shirley Lauro

Directed & Designed by Tim Ray

Produced and Performed
By
Playing On Purpose Productions

Wed. March 20th 7:00pm

Ritsche Auditorium

Produced by Special Arrangement with Samuel French
Notes

Playing On Purpose Productions is a rural based theater company committed to creating and performing theatrical works that explore contemporary social issues. We chose to tour this production of Shirley Lauro’s A Piece of My Heart because, besides being a good play, we want to honor the untold numbers of women who volunteered to serve in the Vietnam War. Without them, there would likely have been more than 58,000 names on The Wall in Washington. Our profound thanks to Pat Thielman and the SCSU Women’s Center for the opportunity to perform this play for you, especially at this moment in American History, on the eve of war.

Kathy Ray, Producer

The Settings: Opening: The Wall in Washington D.C.
The Republic of South Vietnam - 1968
The United States of America - 1970’s

Cast of Characters
(In Order of Appearance)

Martha...............................Kathy Ray
Mary Jo..................................Danni Nelson
Sissy..................................Liza Goergen
Whitney...............................Cheryl Petersen
Leanne..................................Lindsey Kloos
Steele..................................Barbara Dally
Soldier..................................Dany Pederson

Production Credits
Artistic/Technical Director......................Tim Ray
SCSU Technician............................Udeesh Millathe
SCSU/Women’s Center Graduate Asst......Tamara Hennes-Vix

Acknowledgments

Jeff Johnson
Ritsche Hall Personell
Morris National Guard
SCSU Women’s Center

SHE WAS THERE FOR US

There on the campus, a young girl, very bright.
Stepping into a world of promise, a world of light.
Pre-med biology, morphology; tough courses galore.
Genetics and cytology, then a low chemistry score.
Physiology and pathology, she was ‘ology-ized.
And a medical term dictionary to be memorized,
Seventy percent failed to make it past the first year,
But RN graduation with commission awaited our dear.

Across the melting tarmac, through the noise she ran.
Lugging her duffel, her nursing tour in Vietnam began.
Put on-call to work in O.R. she had no time to adjust.
The new girl had to perform her new job, that was a must.
Her compassion tore her apart, hearing their cries of pain.
Mangled limbs, a missing face, burns, it was all so insane.
The young men came in and too often, the bodies went out.
The first man she lost, touched her forever, without a doubt.

Clean, crisply starched sheets for the boys who survived.
A moment of false peace for her, mostly alcohol inspired.
Their recovery reassured her, these men in their prime.
Her goal became to send them all home, one at a time.
Alone in her hooch, late at night, it was her turn to cry.
Valiant men dying, such a waste, she asked herself; Why?
Then finally, it was all over, she rotated back to the states.
She took a job in a city hospital, lost in a world of ingrates.

It was spring, April last year, when I saw her there at our Wall.
She couldn’t save them, but she loved them, each one and all.
She wasn’t my girl, not my mom, or even my wife,
But, at the time, she was the only woman in my life.
She said it was WE who made her whole life worthwhile,
And she did it for US she said, and that made her smile
I hope happiness finds her, and her peace she has met,
Because each and every Vietnam nurse is truly a vet.

- A Jungle Vet-