

Notre Dame student longs for the spotlight

By Barbara Ann Homick
Staff writer

ELMIRA — Christine Huddle bombed out when she auditioned for a TV play as a first-grader. But 11 years later, the Notre Dame senior is considered one of the most talented young actresses in the Elmira area.

Huddle remembers those first auditions: "When I was in the first grade, they made all of us kids pretend we were being kidnapped by aliens while we were playing Monopoly. I didn't know how to improvise that so I did horribly," she said.

When Huddle was a child, her parents, Robert and Kathleen, never forced her to audition. "It was just something I wanted to do myself," she said.

It took Huddle a long time to get over stage fright from that first audition. Because she considers herself a shy person, she is still amazed that she finally found the courage to try out for another part while a seventh-grader at Holy Family Junior High. The production that began her acting career that year was "Getting Lindy."

"When I did that play, something just kind of clicked," said the 17-year-old actress.

After that play, Huddle became involved in all her school drama productions. She went on to act in plays at Notre Dame High School — the training ground for her auditions for the 1990 School of Theatre of the New York State Summer School of the Arts. Last fall she heard about the program from Notre Dame director Claire Reidy, who encouraged Huddle to try out for the program. Reidy helped Huddle prepare the pieces she would perform in the auditions, and also helped build her confidence.

Huddle traveled to Liverpool High School in Syracuse last March for the first round of auditions that were intended to weed out the good actors and actresses. For the auditions, she had to perform both a classical and a modern monologue. She chose to do a speech from Helena in Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and one from Maggie, the lead character from the play "Lovers" by Brian Friel. Huddle played Maggie in Notre Dame's production of "Lovers" in 1988.

A week after the Syracuse auditions, and much to her surprise, Huddle learned she was one of the 70 applicants to make it past the first round. Two weeks later it was on to the "Big Apple" for a 10-minute audition in which the students performed the same two pieces. The young actress recalls a conversation with a fellow applicant during the auditions:



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

Senior Christine Huddle will perform this fall in Elmira Notre Dame High School's production of "Little Mary Sunshine."

"She kept telling me not to be surprised if the director kept stopping me during my performance to make comments. I did my piece, and he never said a word," she remembered. "After I finished I asked him if he wanted to say anything and he said no. I never thought I made it after that."

But she did. During Easter vacation this year, Huddle was notified that she was one of 32 students chosen to participate in the summer program at SUNY Buffalo. Half of the class came from New York City, the other 16 were from Buffalo, Utica, Albany and Rochester. Huddle was the only student from the Elmira area to be named to the elite group.

So in late July, Huddle trekked off to Buffalo to begin five weeks of study. She said she was overjoyed to be in the program and looked forward to improving her talents, especially her voice, which has kept her from performing in musicals.

Life at SUNY Buffalo this summer was exciting for the aspiring actors, but also hard work. A typical day began at 9 a.m., when the students met for a movement class, which included aerobics, stretching and stage combat. The lessons in stage combat taught the young actors to punch, kick and sword fight without actually hurt-

ing anyone.

The day continued with classes in voice and speech projection, theater history, singing, Shakespearean scenes and Huddle's favorite — improvisation. In this class, each student got up in front of the class and acted out a role assigned by the teacher.

Classes were taught by members of The Acting Company of New York City, who were also performing two plays for the city of Buffalo, "Romeo and Juliet" and "The Two Men of Verona." Company members taught classes in between their own rehearsals and performances.

The youths finished their day about 6 p.m. when they gathered in their dorm rooms to share experiences. On Saturdays the troupe went into Canada to see various plays, and spent their Sundays memorizing lines or listening to jazz in the park across from the dorms.

"By the third day we were really close," said Huddle. "By the end it felt like we were being torn apart."

In addition to making friends, Huddle learned important lessons during the five weeks, including how to handle herself during an audition.

"You can't let them see you sweat. You have to turn your nervous energy into something good," she said. "Most importantly, you have to be yourself. You have to be honest and not act like a big-time ac-

trix if you're not. They (the directors) can see right through you."

Every actress has her favorite role, and for Huddle it's Maggie from "Lovers." Maggie is a 17-year-old girl who becomes pregnant out of wedlock, and Huddle describes her as an air-headed chatterbox with an Irish brogue, which the actress had to learn for the part.

"I think I liked Maggie so much because she was a character that everyone liked," said the Notre Dame senior.

Huddle will perform this fall in Notre Dame's production of "Little Mary Sunshine" and, unlike many people her age, said she knows exactly what she wants to do after graduation. She hopes to become a film major at Carnegie-Mellon University because of its placement program, which offers seniors the opportunity of performing in front of directors and producers.

If she gets that break, the dark-haired actress plans to run with it. If nothing happens by graduation, however, she wants to attend the graduate theater program at Yale University. And she may have to move out to California and throw herself into the acting world there, she noted.

No matter where she ends up, Christine Huddle is sure to be in the spotlight. "I can't picture having any other job, and I don't care about money or fame. I'm just my happiest when I'm acting."

Magazine drive to benefit BK educational programs

Students at Bishop Kearney High School will be selling subscriptions to more than 655 magazines during their annual magazine drive, which begins Friday, Sept. 14. Among publications for sale are *Good Housekeeping*, *CD Review* and *People* magazines as well as children's publications, and RCA records, cassettes and

discs.

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