

ACTING UP!

By Candy Porter

What do the quiet art of meditation and the histrionic art of acting have in common? A lot, actually, according to Nan Colton, our Suncoast savant when it comes to struttin' one's stuff on stage. "Acting skills contribute to our everyday lives, you see," states Nan. "They help us to keep sharp. They help us to rediscover our playfulness. They keep us excited for tomorrow." And, according to Nan, the meditation term "mindfulness" applies wholeheartedly when it comes to the world of theater performance.

To begin, let's break it down per my favorite online resource: Dictionary.com: "Mindfulness is a mental state maintained by the use of a technique in which one focuses one's full attention only on the present, experiencing thoughts, feelings and sensation, but not judging them. *The practice of mindfulness can reduce stress and physical pain*" (italics added).

Succinctly put, mindfulness is razor-sharp mental focus on only the here and now—the goal of meditation, the goal of actors. The only difference between mindfulness and meditation is that an actor's "here and now" may actually be in the past or future—traversing a muddy, mucky London street in 1826 (in a long skirt, no less!) or piloting a careening, out-of-control starship while fighting off three armed-to-the-teeth alien villains.

What other common denominators are shared by these two disciplines? Awareness (of ourselves, others, or our surroundings) is another crossover skill

sharpened by both meditation and acting. Listening (to silence, your own breathing, or the lines delivered by your stage mate) is also a shared skill. Agile thinking. Observation. Control. Confidence. And the list goes on.



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All of these powerful life skills are, unfortunately, human strengths that tend to fade away as we age. Yet if we do not settle for age-related decline or that even-worse personal state of stagnation, then our minds, bodies, and souls will continue to rekindle and regenerate.



As one of Nan's Suncoast thespians, I have enjoyed the benefits of her Acting UP! classroom since my arrival on campus three years ago. I've rediscovered the glow of my inner child; I've learned to express myself in new—and highly unusual—ways; I've allowed myself to become vulnerable to audience scrutiny; and I have emerged exhilarated.

So please keep all this in mind as at holiday time you watch me preen and prance

across the stage as that petulant Foolish Fir Tree; I am in my total Zen moment.

Wouldn't you like to focus your energy, stretch your mind, invigorate your senses, and stir your soul? Well, I posit, you have nothing to lose and so very much to gain. Take that rewarding leap of spirit and join me up on the Suncoast stage! ■

*The way the world is,
I think a silly evening in the theatre is a good thing,
to take our minds off terror.*

~Tim Curry