

## A CHAUTAUQUAN ON CHAUTAUQUA

by Mary Ann Jung

I am a professional actress and an historical re-enactor. The name of my program and company is History Alive! I am delighted to be performing this summer as Amelia Earhart in my fourth Maryland Chautauqua.

When Judy Dobbs of the **Maryland Humanities Council** asked me in 2002 if I would do my Clara Barton show for Chautauqua, I wasn't sure what Chautauqua was, but trusted Judy from having worked with her through the Speakers' Bureau and was happy to try a new performing venue. I mentioned it to a friend who assured me that performing at Chautauqua is "impressive and prestigious." After looking up its history, I realized what an honor it was and became even more excited and nervous. But it seemed like a natural fit for my History Alive! shows.

Bringing amazing women in history to life through acting is about making connections as well teaching history. Making someone long-dead like Clara Barton or Rosalie Calvert of Riversdale be relevant, fun, and surprising—especially to children—is a challenge. The beauty of drama is that I can use strong emotions in a very personal way to involve people in the lives and attitudes of people who lived hundreds of years ago.

When I play Rosalie Calvert of Riversdale, who lived close to the Battle of Bladensburg during the War of 1812, I divide the audience into British and American sides and have them cheer heartily throughout the show. This puts them right into the action and the passionate feelings the War of 1812 engendered. I always perform in the authentic costume, accent, and attitude for each character and then put some audience members into costume as well. This makes the entire story immediate and exciting, not something that happened to someone else long ago. By the time I get to the creation of the *Star-Spangled Banner*, after the Americans were trounced at both Bladensburg and Washington, the audience is genuinely thrilled that we have finally won a battle. When they sing our National Anthem as the finale, it is with a new understanding and appreciation of all that song represents.

Drama is a marvelous way to inspire audiences precisely because it creates strong emotions and gives us terrific role models of people who struggled against incredible odds but managed not just to succeed but to triumph. I put my characters in their historical context so as to impart bigger lessons about equality and fairness. All of them had to battle society's restrictive rules, written or otherwise, of what a woman should do and her proper place. Some of my heroines, like Elizabeth Cady Stanton or Margaret Brent, fought unfair laws and practices not just for themselves but for other minority groups. Amelia Earhart tried to prove women are just as capable as men in aviation and helped promote education for females and more freedom in clothing. Clara Barton literally dodged bullets on battlefields in the Civil War, where she often wasn't welcome, in order to save the lives of her beloved wounded soldiers. The stories of these amazing women show that anything is possible with hard work and perseverance.

Chautauqua stretches the minds and broadens the horizons of all participants, whether the performers or attendees. Participation over the years has made me really step up my game since it often required an article, bibliography, and recommended sources for the audience beyond my usual teachers' guide material. In 2006 Judy asked me if I'd do a show about Julia Child and I flat out said no; no interest, she's too modern. Judy eventually prevailed and although I can't cook and am allergic to wine, I created a spirited overview and tribute to the Queen of Cuisine which I still love doing. It's a bit harder to surprise folks with new or unusual information about a woman all over the television, but I still manage and am glad Judy made me get out of my comfort zone.

Another wonderful aspect of Chautauqua is that I'm always learning fresh new anecdotes or perspectives on my subjects from audience members. These enrich my performances and understanding and help me live up to the high standards of the Chautauqua experience. So please go out and support your local Chautauquas. They're a gift from the past to inspire our present and futures!