

The Toby Show

Submitted by: Adam Stanford

"Hey there, spread the word send it by fish or spread it by bird, travel it up or down, Toby's back in town." For more than one-hundred years Tent shows have entertained millions. The red-headed, freckle-faced Toby was one of the most enduring characters on the American stage. According to Toby, a Toby show is "sorta like a vaudeville show with a plot, but a real thin plot." Surrounding this plot are comedy gags, music, variety acts, and, now and then, serious drama.

Many of you may remember that excitement when the Bisbee's came into town and began to put up their tent, for 42 years they travelled from Memphis through Tennessee and Kentucky. Our particular tent show can be traced back to the Henderson Stock Company from Otsego, Michigan, in 1898. The tent show passed through several hands during the next century, and ended up with Hard Corn Players of Gallatin, TN, in 1997. In November 2006, the Hard Corn Players donated the show to the Parsons Arts Council. Through this The Rivertime Players were born on September 22, 2007, with their production of "How Now White Cow."

I've been a part of the past two Toby Shows by The Rivertime Players. It was by accident that I even got this chance. During last year's performance of "The Return of Aunt Susan" some difficulties arose, and they were in need of another cast member, just three days before opening night. Ten minutes after this occurred, my mother came to help play the piano for the show, and I just tagged along for moral support. When we walked in the cast were frantically pacing about and didn't know what to do. They saw me and asked if I acted. I told them that I could and they recruited me in. (This was just three days before the show remind you). The only requirements they had was to be able to say "Kronkheidts Carburator Company" and "rhododendrons", with a few tries. I got the words out close enough. As they told me, and everyone else that comes into the cast. "Once you become a part of The Rivertime Players, you're a part of us for life." And what a life it has



been. I have been asked numerous times what my favorite part of the Toby shows is. Without much thought, my answer is always, "the cast". Everyone in the cast is amazing, its fun just sitting around the table and listening to them talk before rehearsals (and the 'hearsal) begin.

This year the show was Lead Petunias, not to be confused with (Movie that must not be named), which was written by, directed by, and starring Shane Bridges as Toby. The show was set in a small southern town's local beauty shop, owned by Boovy Smith (Elicia Spain). Boovy's best friend M'liss Eatery (Dottie Hill), was preparing a wedding of her daughter, Belle (Amber Wallace), and a local boy, Henderson (Adam Stanford). Except for Boovy's sharp tongued "friend" Sneezer Thibodeaux (David Taylor), and the economic downturn, all was well in this rural American town. That is, until the wily big city duo of Ida Clairee (Carol Shaw) and Hailey S. Darkhart (Mark Tubbs) move to town and flipped this much-loved story on its ear. Toby must out smart these city slickers and save the day.

Other than a mouse climbing up the curtain-as someone was going off stage, all went well. Although there was never a wedding within the show, on closing night something did happen. As Shane was introducing the new members of the cast, Carol, Amber, and our last minute sound

guy Danny Martin, he began to introduce Amber Wallace, and tell how she was his girlfriend of a year. As he neared the end of his "speech", he reached down into his pocket, pulled out a box, got on one knee, and asked her to be his wife. Everyone was excited. Many of the audience didn't even know it was real for a few days. After everyone left that night the cast was just sitting around talking, nobody wanted to leave, it was especially hard for me, for I knew that this may be my last time to be a part of The Rivertime Players, because it's time for me to start to college. Even though I had to leave The Rivertime Players, it will always be a part of me forever.