

Kristin Robinson

The Secret World of Teenagers

Kristin was very apologetic when I asked her to share her memories of Muriel Sharon. “I don’t remember much,” she said.

OK. Here goes.

Kristin studied with Muriel for two years starting in the 8th grade, because Margie Gruen, a classmate of hers in Junior High School (yours truly, the Editor) told her about the classes. “Let’s go,” Margie said.

When talking about Muriel, Kristen back-tracked to her own origin story of living in various countries, states and cities, having a jumble of identities, coming up against other ethnicities and religions in different schools and neighborhoods where she never quite fit in, until finally going to the 92nd St. Y where she felt at home. “I was welcomed.

“It was the work, and only the work that Muriel was devoted to. She was egalitarian, professional in a fun way, she got us to be good and she always was impeccably dressed and groomed. I remember her trying to keep a straight face, but just breaking out in laughter.”

To this day, she can recite the prologue to Henry the Fifth, ‘*O for a Muse of fire that would ascend, The brightest heaven of invention*’, which she learned in the Tuesday class. Then there was the hilarious time Muriel had her crawl into the ceiling above the stage and simulating a snake, lower a belt onto Simi Horwitz, who was playing Sherlock Holmes in *The Speckled Band* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Although her stepfather nixed the idea of her performing in The Production Workshops, “I pleaded with him”, she ended up being the sound and make-up person for *The Servant of Two Masters*. “Muriel wanted me to exaggerate the makeup so that it would read across the footlights, but I was an artist and knew what to do!

“It was always such an adventure going to the Y. Sometimes Margie and I walked across the park from our school on West 76th Street, sometimes we took the crosstown bus on 79th or 86th Street and once we went across on 96th Street! It was all so magical, getting out of our neighborhood into a different world.” Kristen especially remembers a wooden house on 92nd Street and an apothecary near the Y that sold samples of individual flower essences. “If only I had more time to explore.”

At about that time, Kristen’s stepfather gave her a leather-bound desktop diary from The Saturday Review, where, among other entries, she recently found these nuggets:

- “Margie and I went to mime and acting. We went over *The Glass Slipper* in acting. We both played Cinderella”.
- “Finished reading *The Glass Slipper* that Margie borrowed from Muriel”.
- “We went to the YWHA and had a ball. Abby thinks I’ll become a great mimist or whatever”.

And then they took matters into their own hands, acting as teenage matchmakers, à la *The World of Henry Orient*, “We (Margie and ... me) asked Mr. Kotok (the math teacher) if he would love to come to mime with us soon and he said he would. We are matching him up with Abby at MIME. He is 29 years old. Abby is 27 years old.”

She remembers the time, she and Margie thought they saw Abby on the crosstown bus and it turned out to be Abby’s twin. For two little innocent kids, it was memorable.

Muriel’s influence? Well, Kristen married an actor! And together, they started a community theater in Maine called *The Maskers*. Her love of theater and appreciation of fine acting It was Muriel.

Fun facts: Jeffrey Friedman’s (Emil in *Emil and the Detectives*) mother knew Kristin’s biological father very well. He had a 75th birthday party that Jeffrey and Jeffrey’s mother attended. Her father (who was a psychologist) had the identical apartment in the same building that Margie lived in with her father (who also was a psychologist) at the time she went to Muriel’s class.

Giddy as could be, we spent about an hour going over hill and dale, with Kristin telling stories that I barely remembered, but laughing delightedly nonetheless. Thirteen- year-old matchmakers? Our mime teacher and our math teacher? Whoa!

Those were the days

Thank you, Kristen!