

Voices of Dixon: Holly Haas

From the book
Voices of Dixon:
Oral Histories from the Embudo Valley
Interviews and Editing by Harvey Frauenglass
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Holly Haas

(b. 1942)

Artist, producer-director of Dixon Players,
Proprietor (with husband Will Demaret) of
Rock Pool Gardens Spa, Dixon
Interviewed October 27, 2003

Names and Family

My mother was a nurse and she named me after the lead character in her favorite radio program-- a nurse named Holly. My middle name is Alice, which was my mother's name. My father's original name was Mathew Schmidt. He was an ethnic German born and raised in Hungary. His mother remarried and her second husband didn't want to have all the children. So his aunt adopted my father. Her husband's name was Haas, so that's how we got that name. My father came to America with his stepmother and her husband when he was twelve and they settled in Milwaukee. His stepfather got work on the docks on Lake Michigan, but he couldn't learn English and he and his wife ended up going back to Hungary within a year. My father was left with a cousin and he lived with this cousin

through high school. He graduated valedictorian of his class. In college he studied mechanical engineering, but at the end of his third year he got the calling to go into the ministry. He went to a Lutheran seminary and there he learned Latin, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. So he spoke three languages---Hungarian, German, and English---and could read four others.

My Main Interest Was Theater

My main interests in school were theater, music and art. I grew up in Oshkosh. I got into theater when I was very young. Right on the corner was a stable and across from that was a field that was set up for a carnival every year. My sister, who is eight years older, would take me over and I would watch them set up the carnival. At the age of three or so I was putting on circus shows in our backyard. I remember using rope and safety pins to rig up a curtain that could be pulled open. When I was seven or eight, I remember getting the neighbor kids to put on Snow White in our basement.

We moved to Wauwatosa when I was fifteen. I was in every high school play and I also took a stagecraft class, and I helped build and paint the scenery. I also designed homecoming and prom events, so I was always getting out of classes to do these special things. Since nobody ever knew where I was, I started skipping stagecraft class on Wednesday afternoons to go see matinees in the Milwaukee theaters downtown. Every major brewery had its own theater and each would bring in professional companies throughout the year. There was the Blatz, the Pabst, and the Miller. The Pabst was the biggest. Seeing these professional theater companies was great.

In my senior year I was in a play called *Charlie's Aunt*. I played the aunt. A priest from Marquette University's drama department came to see the play because our high school speech teacher used to be in some Marquette productions. The priest came backstage after the play and invited the other lead and myself to come down to Marquette University on weekends and take drama classes with them. So three quarters of my senior year every weekend I would go

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way downtown and take dance, voice, and, on Sundays, acting classes. It was an amazing experience. Father Walsh, the head of the theater department, taught us how to be professional in whatever we were doing. There were incredible expectations. He would say this is what you have to do and if you don't do it, get out and I never want to see you again.

In and Out Of Marquette

When I graduated from high school in January—I was second in my class of 56—I told Father Walsh I was going to Northwestern University. He said why. I said I had gotten a scholarship. He walked me down to the registrar and said give this girl a half scholarship and enroll her in classes. So I never got to Chicago. In the second semester I moved into an apartment with three other girls who were in the Marquette players. Then in my sophomore year Father Walsh threw me out. I never knew why. He just walked by me one day and said “Get the hell out of here and don't come back. I'll give you a recommendation to anywhere else you want to go.”

I was crushed. I loved this man. He was my mentor. He was only my height, but he was powerful, a fiery Irishman. He did that. He would throw people out and they would sit around long enough and wait. But I didn't have that time. I tried to talk to him. He would climb out his window and go down the fire escape so he wouldn't have to talk to me. Finally, after two weeks, I called my mom and dad and said I was going to New York. Dad decided to take one week's vacation and he and Mom drove me to New York to make sure I had a place to stay. I was nineteen.

I had gone to New York the summer before to visit friends. Some of my former roommates went there after they graduated. I had met a designer and was offered a job assisting him at no pay at an off-Broadway theater. I assisted him on one play. I found a school in a brownstone not far from where I lived—Lester Polikov's Studio and Stage Design School. He had professionals come in to teach the classes. I took scene painting and design, and even a lighting class.

Before I left Marquette I had started designing scenery there. We didn't have a whole drama department; we just had the players. So I designed Peter Pan and other plays, and I was also in the plays. We didn't have classes to teach us how to design. I was self-taught. The woman who was doing the design went off to Yale, which was where Father Walsh had graduated. He had a Ph.D. in drama from Yale. He was a serious “dramatician.” I loved the theater at Marquette. I was so happy there. To be thrown out was really hard for me.

Four years ago my husband and I went to a Marquette Players reunion to honor Father Walsh. He was eighty-seven. They had this whole weekend around Father Walsh at their new theater. It was wonderful seeing my old friends and have Will get a chance to meet them. The first night Father was standing in the middle of this big room and a whole line was waiting to speak to him. But when Will and I came up to him, he looked right past me and took the man behind me. I couldn't believe it! Thirty-five years later and the same thing was happening again? I refused to let it happen. At the end of the evening as he was starting to walk out the door I went over there and I grabbed him. I said, “I'm sure that you're very tired and I'm sorry I didn't get a chance to talk to you tonight, but we'll be here during the weekend and I really want to talk to you.”

He looked down at my nametag, caught his breath, and said “Holly!” and he threw his arms around me and we both were in tears. So I did talk with him a little bit and thanked him, actually, for kicking me out of the nest so early, because where I was supposed to be was with my friends in New York. If I hadn't been thrown out, I would have stayed in college the four years. I didn't need that. Did he ever say why he threw me out? He remembered that he did it, but I don't think he has the slightest idea why. There was maybe some kind of rationalization in his mind that maybe I was too connected with the group that was leaving and he wanted to change some things. Also, for the next show that was coming up he had asked someone else to design it and he maybe thought I was upset about it, which I wasn't. You never knew why he did some things. But it

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started making me understand that we create our lives by what our intentions are.

When I registered at Marquette they asked what classes I wanted. I said I thought I was only going to be there two years, so I would only take what I was interested in. I would do the core classes later, if I wanted to stay on. So I had set my intention to be there only two years. But as the two year limit was coming up, I was feeling frightened at the idea of going to New York. I would be leaving the nest. For Father Walsh, though, it was just following what I had set up.

Father Walsh used to do a Sunday morning show on CBS called "Look Up and Live." He'd fly to New York to do the show. They would shoot ten shows at a time, so he did this fairly often. At Marquette we did a play called *Ludus Conventrea*, a medieval miracle play. I designed the show. We did it every Christmas. I also designed one for Easter. It was all dance and music with voice over narration. The fellow who choreographed it and designed the costumes is now artistic director for the Stuttgart Ballet. CBS flew to Milwaukee and filmed the play in four segments. I got paid \$100. That was my first theater pay.

In New York

When I went to New York I got in touch with some of the people at CBS. I'm not sure they helped me get any jobs, but they did help me make an important decision. While I was going to Lester Polikov's school I was working at Gimbel's as Santa Claus's helper. One of my good friends was Dustin Hoffman. His roommate was Robert Duval. Dustin worked at Macy's as a hockey game demonstrator. We would get together for lunch. We were all poor. In our one-bedroom apartment there were five girls. We had two double bunk beds and one single. The tallest dancer slept in the single bed. They were actors, dancers, and singers. I was the only one working behind the scenes

Two of the Santa Clauses at Gimbels (there were four altogether) were working in a theater in West Palm Beach, Florida and they invited me to come down as the assistant to the scenic designer. I couldn't decide what to do. Lester Polikov thought I should stay at school. I asked a director at CBS for advice. He said, "You can always go to school, but you can't always get a job." I thought about that overnight and when I woke up in the morning I decided I would go to West Palm Beach. Then in Florida that stage manager recommended me for another job assisting at a huge theater in Ohio. That's where I really learned to paint scenery. We had to paint fast; we did a musical a week. I followed the designer, Leo Meyer, to another theater in Palm Beach, Florida. Then I got my own job designing in Saratoga Springs, New York.

I was nineteen when I got to New York. At twenty-two I took the exam to get into the Scenic Artists Union. It was intensive and lasted eight weeks. You had to design a play. They gave us a choice of five; I chose the opera *Aida*. On the final day you had to design the scenery, lighting, drafting, costumes, the works. Then you got twelve hours to paint one scene. On the last two days they picked out a second play for you to design, so in fact, you had to be ready for all five. There were 135 people taking the union exam that year. Of that number only five passed; I was one of the five. For years I was the youngest member of the Scenic Artists Union, and one of the few women.

(Note: From 1967 to 1978 Holly worked as a scenic designer in many cities. She got bachelor and master-of-arts degrees from San Francisco State University and was lead scenic artist for the San Francisco Opera. Then she started looking at other options for her life. On a three-month bus-and-train trip across the country she visited Dennis and Deborah Larkins, friends from San Francisco who were living on the Rio Grande in Embudo. She decided then that she

wanted to be here.)

The House Of Legends In Dixon

We had been looking around Dixon for a week when I noticed the For Sale sign in front of this house. Deborah said, “You don’t want to buy that place!” Why not? “There are all kinds of awful stories about it.” First of all, the front building, which was all boarded up, had been El Bambino, a bar notorious for fights and shootings. But you know, I looked everywhere and I never found one bullet hole. The other legend had to do with the house on the hill, of which only the foundation remains. A man and his wife had had a fight and he tied her to the bedstead and set the house on fire and burned it to the ground with her in it. It wasn’t until a couple of years ago that someone told me what really happened. The man was actually on the fire department. He and his wife were getting divorced and she had run off to California. The house was empty when it went up in flames. People concocted the story because they never saw the woman again.

Besides having the boarded-up bar in the front, there was this house in the back where Reuben and Jane Lovato were housesitting. I looked in the windows and looked around the land and I said, “This is my place.” I made an offer and got the place for \$37,500. This was in 1978. It has about an acre and three-quarters and it backs up on BLM land. It had two buildings and a garage and it was perfect for me, for a studio and a place to live.

When I left San Francisco on my trip there was one thing I became aware of on the train. I was going off to find my new home, to do my own art, and to have a family. When I moved into this house on May 15, 1978, I bought the house from Virginia and Gwyn Pluebell, the ones who built it. He was from Maryland and she was from Taos. The bar was built in the fifties. They moved here in the sixties. They ran the bar and lived in a trailer while they were building the house. Who would want to buy such a house? It looks like a Pennsylvania barn instead of a New Mexico adobe. This house

made sense to Pluebell as an Easterner, but it didn’t make sense to people around here. That’s why it was on the market four years before I bought it. But it had a gas heater, indoor plumbing—all those things I needed. Then I asked myself, now that I was in Dixon, how was I going to make a living? Two weeks after I moved in, Deborah Larkins came by and said, “You’re not going to believe this, but we’re moving back to San Francisco.” Dennis had had a job in Park City, Utah, and now he was accepting a new job in San Francisco. Park City, however, now wanted him back. He told them he couldn’t come, but he could recommend his good friend Holly Haas. And that’s how I ended up in television.

Painting for Television

I went to Park City and painted sets for *Abe Lincoln In Illinois* and, *Mark Twain’s America*. The set in Park City was a shock for me because it was very different from theater. You had these sets that were buildings scattered around the area. A backdrop for *Mark Twain’s America* was an entire city block from the nineteenth century. I thought, what do I do now? I remember going back to my hotel room and crying. How had I gotten myself into this? Then the next day I woke up and went for it. Park City took about a month.

Right after I got there the designer asked me if I wanted to go down to Page, Arizona to work on *The Greatest Heroes Of the Bible* for NBC. So I finished Park City and went down to Page. They drove me out to the “Walls of Jericho” which were over five hundred feet long, with an entire town inside. I was put in charge of some eighteen-year-old girls, who were girlfriends of the carpenters. This was my crew to paint these humongous biblical scenes. I ended up calling Peter, my first husband, to ask if he would come out to be my assistant. He wasn’t doing anything at the time, so he came out. It was an amazing learning experience for me—the amount of hours you had to put in, the dedication. I said we would work a sixty-hour week, but there were weeks we had to go overtime and I insisted we get paid overtime and we did.

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Every time I would come back to Dixon from these jobs it would feel like coming home. But it was strange for me. I was raised in Milwaukee, spent nine years in New York and eight years in San Francisco, and here I was suddenly in the middle of nowhere. I tried to figure out why I was here, but I couldn't; I just knew I was supposed to be here. When I took an out-of-state job I would have someone house sit for me. Connie Wood sat one time when I had two huge dogs that were pregnant. Joan McDonald's mother house sat once. I called to see how things were, and Joan answered. I asked if she were visiting and she said no, they were living there. "You mean your whole family is living in my house?" That's when their house had been burned down. And so Ken, her husband, was sitting on the second level at night with a shotgun to protect the house. When she told me that, I thought Oh, my God! That kind of energy was the last thing I wanted around my house.

Doing My Own Art

After I finished in Arizona I wanted to go to Egypt to see the original sites of Moses and the other bible stories. I used the money I had saved and went to Greece and Egypt for five weeks. On that trip I was inspired by how the local people used the media of their area for their art. They couldn't send to New York to get what they lacked. The Greeks used their marble. The Egyptians used limestone and adobe. So I came back to Dixon and decided to work on carved adobe panels. I had loved the bas relief in Egypt and in Greece and I wanted do something like that with adobe. I experimented with pouring adobe into framed plywood forms and figured out how long it had to dry and how much time I had to work with it.

Meanwhile, while I was in Greece, I had fallen in love with a Greek drummer and got engaged, and so in the middle of all this I went back to Greece for six weeks. The good news is that that didn't work out. Actually I spent most of that time in Belgium staying on the third floor of a Greek bouzouki bar in the red light district of Antwerp, waiting for Takis to show up. I could write a book called

Waiting For Takis. In the district, the prostitutes sit in picture windows in various costumes so the sailors can decide whether they want to be with the kitchen maid or the woman with the whip or whomever. Then I found an old roommate of mine who was a dancer living fifty miles away in Holland and I spent a lot of time there while waiting for Takis. But his work papers never came through. It was one of those fated things.

I came back just before the annual New Mexico Arts and Crafts Festival in Albuquerque which I had been accepted into. That was my first arts and crafts fair, in 1980. I had already made up a lot of adobe panels and was ready to do the show. But as you know, during that outdoor show at the end of June the temperature can reach over 105 while in Belgium it was about 70. I got sick and was sick during the whole fair. My first arts and crafts fair was hell!

In 1981 I kept driving past a little bar and package liquor in Embudo called el Cerrito, probably because it backed up to a little hill. At that time the highway to Dixon went right by it, so you passed it every time you went to Española or Taos. I kept having a vision of how it might be made into a meeting place. One could have a restaurant and a gallery. Next door there were some cottages which had been a motel. These could be artist studios. I remember stopping by and the owners telling me they wanted to sell. Meanwhile I was having an indoor rock swimming pool built at the house. Before it was finished I ran out of money. It never had water in it till 1990. Dixon people called it Holly's Folly. When I started negotiating to purchase El Cerrito, one of the owner's sons, Anthony Baca, came out from California to run the package liquor. He was nine years younger than me and we had completely different backgrounds—he had a high school diploma and I had a master's in art, but by some strange act of fate we fell into each other's arms and married. It was something I had to go through, another great lesson in my life.

El Quinto Sol

In 1982 we were married and two weeks later we opened El

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Quinto Sol. Of course I was warned by every friend I had in the world not to do this. We rented out the cottages as studios and put a skylight in the garage to make a studio. Bravo had a studio there, and Sheena Cameron, and then Ahimsa who made candles. Suzanne Duran (then Dunham) had a dried flower studio in the garage. We borrowed \$50,000 from the bank and redid the bar and built a dance hall. So we had a restaurant, a bar, a dance hall, a gallery, and studios, all part of my vision. I should also have had a vision that this would make money, but I didn't seem to have that. That was the poorest I had ever been in my life. If we had been selling shoes, we would have starved. At least we were selling food. And it paid our overhead here, which wasn't much.

This house turned out to be on BLM land. So for the first 12 years I was paying rent with the option to buy. I couldn't get title to anything for twelve years. Evidently there were a lot places like mine on this side of the river. The fact that I had a patent that said the land went down to the river didn't matter. In the 1920's BLM wanted to dam the Rio Embudo and put all of Dixon under a reservoir. So they just claimed all the land whether it was patented or not. Then for years all the people here were paying property taxes on land they didn't actually own. Finally in the 80s, the BLM came in started surveying and giving people back the land they used to own.

When I bought El Quinto Sol, we had the same problem with the land that went to the river. I got a lawyer and we pointed this out. We showed that the river had moved and that the land was ours. Here the problem had to do with the highway. When the highway was paved, the Highway Department took twenty-foot easements on both sides of the road. After that, people stopped claiming the land to the river because in their minds it wasn't theirs any more. Then we had to prove that the river had not been moved by mechanical means. Once we proved that it was a natural meander, then everybody in Dixon could get their land back to the middle of the river.

The Night My Life Changed

After finishing the remodeling we used to bring bands in for dances. On this particular night in 1984 I went home after a dance and Anthony stayed behind to close up. His brother Mickey was going to give him a ride home. I expected he would be home about fifteen minutes after me. Some young fellows from Peñasco stopped to buy some liquor. Anthony told them it was after two o'clock and he was closed. Then he and Mickey started toward the house. Now Anthony had been nervous for a couple of weeks. He had gotten a threatening phone call and had started carrying a gun. Well, as they started in this direction, the boys from Peñasco were right behind. They were heading home, too, but Mickey thought he and Anthony were being followed. Anthony stopped the car and he and Mickey got out. During the confrontation the boys took a hunting rifle out of their trunk. There was a scuffle. The rifle went off. The bullet went through the door and hit Anthony in the stomach. He was bleeding pretty badly. There was no vehicle to take him to the hospital, except Anthony's truck, which never left Dixon. On the way to the hospital in Española, the truck ran out of gas. A car was flagged down. By the time they got to the hospital, Anthony was dead.

It changed my life in many ways. He was not only my husband, he was my business partner. I was grieving, but I couldn't just shut down the business and walk away because we owed so much money. I had to keep the business running. And I didn't want to sell it because Anthony and I had made all these plans. So I decided to keep the plans going, but do it without him. The bank loved me and felt sorry for me, so they gave me another fifty thousand dollars to pull me through and do some more remodeling. We had to move the package liquor from the front of the building. We had to extend the kitchen. And we needed a bigger cooler. For a time Mickey and Roxanne worked with me as business partners. But that marriage had problems, and finally she packed up the kids and moved back to

California, and Mickey followed. So there I was trying to run it all alone while knowing that I couldn't make the payments. That whole three and a half years, and even longer, was the hardest time of my life. I was a wreck. Anthony had died, nothing was working, and I felt I was a total failure. I was starting to take on some little mural painting jobs just to make some money to pay the employees.

Finally, I was ready to claim bankruptcy. I went to the banker who had helped me, Jerry Miller, and asked him what I had to do. Then just at that time Financial Futures, an investment group, came to the bank looking for a local business to invest in. That saved me. So I sold the business for my debt, which was a quarter of a million dollars. I didn't have to claim bankruptcy and I was so glad!

Transformational Counseling

In January 1986 they took over and I went to Mexico by myself for three months. I just needed a rest. I looked ten years older than I was. We had done a lot of things—we had dances, folk singers, a gallery, but now the whole thing was gone. In the agreement I got fifteen hundred dollars from what was owed to the package liquor, and that's how I got to Mexico. When I came back I was broke. I went to crime victims reparation in Albuquerque and was able to get the full amount for Anthony's death—twelve thousand dollars. That paid off the hospital bill and Anthony's funeral. And I had money to take classes at Southwestern College in Santa Fe. The program was called Creative Expressive Therapy, based upon Transformational Counseling. The idea was to counsel a human being not only with their emotions and intellect, but also with their spirit. It was an inspiring program.

In the last semester I took a class in which you were supposed to find a person that you believed came into this world at the time of a paradigm shift to be a change agent. People were choosing all kinds of historical figures, like Jesus himself. I chose Steven Spielberg. I got really excited working ten weeks with Spielberg as a change agent—meditating on him, seeing his movies, reading articles about

him. Then finally when I gave my final presentation I was Spielberg. I had edited some of his movies to show how he used archetypal images—the beast, the magician, the innocent, the warrior, and you could see these themes. At end of that class I went out to LA. I had never worked in the film industry and I wanted to do that. I had some friends there—the Larkins and others. I had \$300 in my pocket and was down to my last \$50 when I got my first job. I ended up staying fifteen months and made enough money to come back and finish the second year of the master's program at Southwestern. So I got my second master's in Creative Expressive Therapy. It's now called Art Therapy. It's a combination of art, movement, and drama.

Teaching At the Penitentiary

With that degree I went to teach at New Mexico Penitentiary. Why did I choose that? When Anthony was killed, the three young men involved each had a lawyer. I remember one of them saying to me, "You don't want to send these young men to prison for twenty years." They were each about twenty-one or twenty-two. I said, "I don't know; are they going to come out better?" I was so naive, and I'm still naive about that; I couldn't answer that question. That got me interested, so I did my internship at the Penitentiary. In my last six months I worked on my internship in the Psychology Department there. But there was no opening in that department. I got a call to work on *Young Guns II*. While I was working there, someone had seen an ad that the prison was looking for an art teacher. I had met people there and I had a pretty good portfolio and they hired me. I had no idea I would stay there five years, and it would change my life again. I met Will, who also had a master's in Transformational Counseling, though from a different school. And I learned some things about teaching that I had never thought about.

When I started teaching for the first three months I was teaching the way I had taught at the city college in San Francisco. The guys were taking classes because they wanted to, not because they had to. For one thing, it was to get out of their cells. But I found many

creative, right-brained people, who had not fitted into our left-brained society. I didn't want to know what they had done to get in prison. If they wanted to tell me, that was fine. But that wasn't my concern. I started by telling them each day what we were going to do, the way I was used to teaching. But they would bring in these weird little things, like picture frames made out of cigarette packs and pens wrapped with string that said different things or were different colors. This was what we know as prison art, but I had never seen it before. So for three months I would come home and say to myself, "They just don't get it, they don't get it." But finally, after three months, I said "Wait a minute; I'm the one who's not getting it."

Prisoners as Students and Artists

The teacher who had been there before had done prison art shows at several places in Santa Fe. These shows were important to the guys because it gave them goals. So I continued the shows and I also started finding collectors. The newspaper wrote about us and a television crew came in to do interviews. We were getting good publicity and the wardens were very happy; for once they were doing something for rehabilitation. For the first three years we were working for Santa Fe Community College. The classes were structured and the guys were getting grades and felt good about it. And we had a system where they could sell their art and the money would go into their personal accounts. If they were selling enough I would say it was time for them to start buying their own supplies. I'd make calls to get the supplies ordered and then once a week I'd get money out of their accounts and pick up their supplies. Now I had a six thousand dollar supply budget for the program in three facilities. But what the guys bought with their money was theirs.

We did a state-wide prison art show at Santa Fe Community College which was opened by Alice King, Governor King's wife. My students built a simulated prison cell with bars made of dowels they routed out of two-by-fours. We made a forty-foot hallway with

the partitions we used to hang the artwork. I went to one of the wardens and said we needed furniture for the cells. He provided prison furniture. He also did audio tapes of the doors slamming and the guys yelling. The show was written up in the paper and teachers started bringing their classes. The kids could sit in the cells and have the experience of being locked into a seven-by-seven-foot space. One of my students had written out what a prisoner was allowed to have in a cell. None of the prisoners were ever allowed to come and see a show, but what I did was videotape people at the show, talking about what it looked like and what they felt about the art.

Before the next year's show I videotaped the guys in class doing their work in class—painting, carving soap sculptures, whatever they were doing. The talked about what they were doing while they were doing it. I played that tape at the opening of the next show. I saw these art shows as a bridge between the prisoners and the community. The people outside were not looking at these men as evil, but as people, as artists. The guys on the inside saw people who were buying their work and they were feeling accepted.

The last year I was there things began to change. A new governor was elected, Gary Johnson. We were told not to talk about what we had so it wouldn't be cut out of the budget and taken away from us. Rehabilitation lost favor. Some people said we should just lock 'em up and throw away the key. They didn't seem to realize that ninety-five percent of those we put in prison are going to come out. A year or so after I left, the administration took out all the art programs around the state. We're not into rehabilitating; we're just into punishing. They don't do college programs anymore. Some people asked why someone who had committed a crime got his free education programs when they had to pay tuition for their kids. But you have to ask yourself whether you want someone moving next door to you to have a college education or just know about the wheeling and dealing that goes on in prison. And seventy-five percent of the people who get out of prison in this state go back in. I still get postcards from some of my students who are still in prison.

My assistant, who worked with me from the first class, seemed to undergo a miraculous change by working with spirit. He got out and is now back with his family in California.

I used a hands-on technique even in art history. If we were studying Egyptian pyramids, we would build a pyramid. If we were studying Renaissance portraits, we would paint a Renaissance portrait. In the maximum security section I could only teach one-on-one, so I created videotape programs. We had an in-house television station. When I was an intern I put together an awareness program that had six half-hour classes. The guys would see them, we would talk about their work, and I would take the supplies they would need the next week. Then I did an eight-week art program that I understand is still being shown. I would communicate through the food port, which was the size of a Kleenex box. Suppose we were practicing shading, or how to draw the human figure. I kneel down on one side and the student would kneel down on the other and he'd hand his work to me through the port and we would talk about it and I would hand it back. I had a schedule and went from one student to the next. They couldn't really do sculpture, but they could do collage by using toothpaste for paste.

I would have them do some written things for the college classes. If someone would come to me and say he couldn't read or write, I'd ask if he had a tape recorder. He said yeah and I said talk about it and hand in the audio tape. I encouraged them however I could. For example, they would make those paños, drawings on handkerchiefs or pillowcases or bed sheets. They would spend hours and hours drawing on them with ballpoint pens. Sometimes they would sit up all night getting ready for a show, just like artists around here.

The Spa and Personal Retreat in Dixon

I got the idea for a pool because I'm a Pisces and my basic self wants to be around water and there's no water here. Also, I have a bad back. In San Francisco, when I hurt my back again building sets, massages and swimming were my therapy. Will and I developed the

retreat idea. I met Will at the prison in 1990. He had come in as a counselor in the Education Department to help guys get into the various classes. He also worked in administration. He had worked in corrections before that in Albuquerque and in the central corrections office. He went to Canada to get a program called "Time to Think" and then trained teachers in New Mexico in using the program with our inmates. The program was well received and is still being used in Canada, though I don't think we're using it here anymore.

When Will and I married in 1992, we began finishing the pool, plumbing the bathroom and shower, painting the walls, and doing the rock work along the sides. Will's brother, Jim, came to help build and finish the rock pool in time for the wedding party and then he moved in and built some of the rock gardens. In 1995, after I gave my notice at the prison, we started working toward the spa and personal retreat. We opened in 1996.

Living by Intention

I have always felt that Dixon was a spiritual place. Many others have said the same thing. When I have a problem I hike up into the hills to get guidance and support. Will and I both have degrees in counseling and from the beginning we set out the intention of bringing people here whom we could share this place with, especially people in transition, people who are going through divorce, or have physical problems, or who are trying to make some decision. Some just come to have a place to stay while they see the sights. But when people tell us about things that are happening in their lives, we often end up spending a lot of time with them.

I am my father's daughter. My father was guided to get out of engineering and go into the ministry. I feel we are guided in our lives. We set an intention and it comes to us and it may not look like what we thought it was going to look like. It's been very important in my life to understand relationships, whether it's in communicating with another person or communicating through my art, whatever that is. Relationship is all we have. In my family we had a lot of fighting

Voices of Dixon: Holly Haas

growing up, so there was a tremendous lack of communication. And we were never fighting about the thing that was bothering everybody, so they weren't even good arguments. That experience set me on a path of spiritual seeking. Organized religion has never particularly appealed to me. When I was about fifteen or sixteen I told my dad I wasn't going to go to church anymore. He said, "Well, what do you want to do?"

I said, "How do I know this religion is the be-all and end-all?" He said I should go sit in on some other churches, and I did that. But that wasn't it for me either. For me it's been an internal, a solo journey. That's why Southwestern was so important to me. It was a culmination of things I had experienced, like Father Walsh throwing me out at nineteen. Instead of looking at it as an incredible tragedy in my life, I saw it as the time I was supposed to be leaving and he helped me get out. So everything, like the loss of Anthony and the loss of the bar, which were so difficult, got me to a place where I have to ask, "Who am I? Why am I going through this?"

Deepak Chopra's book, "The Seven Laws of Spiritual Success," really resonated with me when he said, "Ask how you can best be of service." I think I've been doing that for some years now. How can I best serve? It never looks like I thought it would. I never thought I'd be teaching high school in Los Alamos. I'd only gone to Los Alamos twice and never liked it. It was a struggle to go back to school yet again, to get a teaching credential from Northern New Mexico College. I went up to Los Alamos to design "Snow Queen" and was hired for their theater program. I found that the stage was like my high school stage. It was built in the same period, in the Fifties. I felt comfortable there. When I was working on the show I asked the person who was managing the theater what theater classes were offered. They offered acting; that was it. I proposed stage craft and other classes and then got enough kids to sign up so I was hired. Who would imagine that I would end up teaching acting when forty years ago I was so terrified about being on the stage that I had to go behind the scenes. Well, this was exactly where I was supposed to be

because I didn't complete something because of fear, as opposed to choice. Maybe it's all about flowing with the universe.

(Note, March 2011: Since Holly retired from the Los Alamos High School theater program in 2007, she has produced and directed several musicals in Dixon with local actors, including *Spitfire Grill*, *Fantastiques*, and *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*. Her latest intention is to have a performing arts theater in Dixon.)