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## Sue Hickerson astonishing person

By STARLA SMITH  
For the Press-Citizen

No one is really sure when, how or why it began, but Susan Gay Hickerson is a person who can astonish.

Many became suspicious when, in sixth grade, she was one of two students who didn't get hit by the teacher.

Others were amazed because she is a middle child and has no syndrome.

But the largest body of people who have been dazzled by her were in the audience that witnessed Sue Hickerson's performance in "Medea" at E.C. Mabie Theater a few years ago.

This seemingly quiet, nice, girl gave a performance that either left the audience members speechless or propelled them into passionate praise.

The she did something that did not astonish anyone; she went to New York City.

Now she has returned and is performing in Clifford Odet's "Awake and Sing," currently running in E.C. Mabie Theater.

She was raised in Brooklyn, Iowa. Her father, a general practitioner, and her mother, a high school art teacher, both graduated from the University of Iowa. They have two other daughters.

"I was very well-behaved as a child," says Hickerson. "In fact, I was such a goody-two-shoes, I can't believe it. My parents were not that strict; they were really liberal.

"And I was a very good student until I got into high school. Then I got distracted. But until that time, I received almost straight S's."

She began theater in high school, but didn't do all that much. What she did, she enjoyed; so did others. When it came time to choose a major at the University of Northern Iowa, she stayed with acting because she felt it was the thing she could do best.

In the spring of 1971 she came to UI to get a Master of Fine Arts degree in acting. A year later she left for New York.

"I had a chance to go with a friend. For me it as sort of like going to never-

never land; I'd heard so much about it. The thing that astounded me is that the city was everything I'd heard about.

"My friend left after two weeks to get married. I stayed."

Through contacts, Sue Hickerson got a job as an assistant stage manager for a summer theater in Massachusetts. She had a lot of fun.

Summer ended; so did her job. Back to New York. She became a Laury Girl — a temporary secretary. She would audition when she was not working.

"The first job I got was with an ad company that had changed buildings. None of the office phones were hooked up, so I had three million calls and messages. I couldn't believe it.

"Then another time I was on the switchboard unit that had only a few color-coded indicators. Well, I got them mixed up and had incalling people talking to each other. Finally I just linked into them all and asked everyone to call back. They did."

In "Awake and Sing," she is playing Bessie, the mother, a woman in her late forties from a lower middle class Jewish family in the Bronx in the early thirties.

"Bessie believes in middle-class values and middle-class propriety. And in the course of the play she struggles to hold the family situation in life in tune with those proprieties. But ultimately they collapse. New values emerge so there is a positive ending," explains Hickerson.

Sue Hickerson has always been a schemer, in the good sense of the word. And she aims high. One night she called a friend on the telephone. It was 3 a.m. "Come on over," she said, "I have an idea."

He went on over. Strewn all over her apartment were the plans and drawings for a huge apartment complex. "Do you know any one that could loan me a million dollars?" she asked.

She was dead serious. And the plans and drawings had credibility.

Astonishing! Just like Hickerson.

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