

Entertainment

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Reality dramas

Counselor writes plays about people in a crisis

By Cathie Bredendach
special writer

BIRMINGHAM playwright Kitty Dubin's latest play, "The Last Resort," will soon have its world premiere at the Live Oak Theatre in Austin, Texas.

Besides being a playwright, Dubin is a counselor. She said her job serves "as a constant reminder of the internal journeys people go through. It's real fodder for my writing." Several days a week she works as an independent therapist, helping "adults going through the normal crises and transitions of life."

Dubin holds a master's degree in counseling from Oakland University in Rochester Hills. She has been a therapist for the last 12 years.

In her writing she never lifts people wholesale from real life to become characters in her plays. Instead, she pieces together parts of her own experiences and those of friends when she creates dramas.

SHE STRIVES to write plays anchored in reality, that have a natural organic quality. The everyday traumas and troubles of ordinary middle-class, mid-American people in crisis lie at the center of her plays.

"Everybody needs a good crisis," she said of her belief that crisis situations work as catalysts in people's lives, both for the real people she knows and for characters she creates. Teddy Spain, the protagonist of her newest play, faces a crisis when her ex-husband initiates a fight over custody of their teenage son.

As a last resort (pun on the play's title intended), Teddy retreats to a summer resort in Michigan where she went as a child. There she hides out, deliberates her course of action and, to add love interest and complication to her dilemma, she meets an attractive man.

Dubin said of crises, "People don't come into therapy just for work. The desperation brought on by a life crisis drives them to seek counseling, and when they successfully work through problems, they have a 'positive transformation.' They're exhilarated about having increased control of their lives."

"I like to write about people who haven't been in control and are coming up to a point where it's now or never," she said. That point often arrives sometime during middle age when the ticking of biological clocks grows louder and people become acutely aware of their own mortality. Their need to realize unfulfilled dreams becomes more urgent."

'My plays are all funny but they're not comedies.'
— Kitty Dubin

SUCH IS the case with Teddy Spain, who has blamed others, gotten sidetracked and, one way or another, never before taken responsibility for her own life.

The ultimatum of "now or never" makes "The Last Resort" sound like heavy drama of the wet handkerchief variety. Not so. The play capitalizes on humorous situations and delights in funny people. Dubin said of her dramatic style, "My plays are all funny but they're not comedies."

"The Last Resort" is Dubin's fifth play and, in many ways, she believes it is her best. "It's crafted better and is less talky," she said who can think more visually now and make points without words more often than she did in earlier works.

Her first play, "Cookies," won a Detroit Motion Picture Playwriting Contest Award while she was a student earning her master's degree in English from Wayne State University in Detroit. "Time's Up," a play about a therapist and her client, followed. It had three professional readings but no full-scale production.

"Mirrors," her next play, was produced with costumes, sets and the regalia of a full production in 1986 at the Michigan State Fair Theatre in Detroit. Critics praised the play, and it came close to being produced in Los Angeles, which is how Dubin met her mentor, Don Toner. He was set to direct the L.A. run of "Mirrors" and even after production plans fizzled, he and Dubin remained in contact.

TONER READ scripts, critiqued her work, gave her valuable feedback. In his opinion, "The Last Resort" is her best work to date. When he recently took a new job as artistic director of the Live Oak Theatre in Austin, he decided to put her play in his first season.

In the last six years Dubin has written three plays. When a new idea is fermenting, "It takes you by storm," she said. The first draft takes three to six months to write. "Then there's all the rewriting."

An early version of "The Last Resort" won her an Individual Artist Grant from the Michigan Council for the Arts, and last April the play was given a staged reading at Wayne



STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

In her Birmingham home, playwright Kitty Dubin goes over script of her fifth play, "The Last Resort," which will have its world premiere in Texas. "Mirrors," her second play, was pro-

duced by the State Fair Theatre in Detroit. A counselor by profession, she uses her own and friends' experiences to get ideas for her characters.

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to a Man?" to Family Circle.

Last year she took a year-long class in writing plays for stage and screen taught by Howard Burman, then at Wayne State. During the class she wrote an episode of "Thirtysomething" and relished creating a plot for already-established characters.

When she weighs the merits and money of screenwriting against the artistic control granted playwrights, she opts for "less money, more con-

control. As a playwright, you're still the authority on the play and you will be consulted on any word that is changed."

Of the future Dubin said, "I don't know where the road's going. I'm trying to see where this takes me. Meanwhile she keeps writing and keeps busy. Recently, Dubin flew to Texas to help select the cast: two men, three women and a teenage boy — for the world premiere of "The Last Resort."

'I like to write about people who haven't been in control and are coming up to a point where it's now or never.'

— Kitty Dubin

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