

THE QUINTESSENTIAL JANE CHAMBERS

ALISON McMAHAN

It was a great pleasure and honor for me to inaugurate the fundraising cycle for our documentary, *The Eight Faces of Jane: The Life and Work of Jane Chambers*, on Saturday June 24th at Poquatuck Hall for Jane's very own community, which is also the NFWFWF community.

As I said that night, I first got the idea to make a documentary about Jane Chambers back in 1983, when I was a playwriting major at the Catholic University of America, and noticed that there were not a lot of female playwrights I could look to as role models - at the time I could only find Sister Hroswitha (wrote in the 12th Century), Aphra Behn (wrote in the 17th Century) and Lillian Hellman. It also did not escape my notice that there were not a lot of strong female roles for the actresses of my acquaintance to play. Finally one of these actresses showed me a play by Jane Chambers, *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*. Here were not one, but eight powerful women - "the eight faces of Jane" as Jane herself described them. I have extended this metaphor to the documentary itself, and will focus on the various phases of Jane's life, the key loves of her life (especially her fifteen year relationship with Beth Allen), and her key works, whether they be plays, novels, or poetry.

I worked on the documentary from 1983 to 1985 and then put it aside due to an inability to raise funds. Many of you probably remember how difficult producing a lesbian- or gay-themed film was back then. Things are a bit easier now, especially because I have 20 years of professional film production behind me, but fundraising is still the key stumbling block for any documentary. Just to give an idea of what it costs to make a documentary of this type, we plan to do the bulk of the video interviews in August over the course of 14 days. One day of a camerawoman's time is \$500; of a sound person, \$300; sound equipment rental, \$150; camera equipment rental, \$600; an assistant camera person \$250; feeding everybody every day, as well as their transportation and basic expenses (cell phone use, etc) can go to \$300.

That's \$2100 per day.

The evening was emceed by Leslie Weisman. We started off with a production of Jane's one-act play, *A Quintessential Image*, directed by Pamela Scott (of The Terry Schreiber Studio fame) and starring Julia Campanelli and NFWFWF's own Jere Jacob. Pamela is credited as co-director of the documentary, as she is directing all the scenes from Jane's plays that we are dramatizing for the film. According to Beth Allen, (who is also executive producer of the film and has given us rights to use all of Jane's materials), it is possibly the first time that *Quintessential Image* has been staged with photographs, arranged just as Jane described them. It is truly inspiring to be so closely involved with Jane's work!

We concluded the evening with a screening of an eighteen-minute sample from the film, including a dramatization of a scene from *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* filmed on the beach in East Marion that inspired Jane when she wrote the play. Our goal with this film is to honor Jane's contributions to the theatre through her plays, to highlight her pioneering role in bringing positive lesbian characters on stage, and to chart her influence on subsequent feminist writers. For more about the film, see the website at www.8facesofJane.com.



Jere Jacob and Julia Campanelli
Photo by Warren Buckland



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For a description of the garden, go to
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