



James Edward "Parkie" Parker

January 22, 1933 - September 19, 2017

James Edward "Parkie" Parker, 84, died Sept. 19, 2017, at his home in Spencer after battling Parkinson's disease.

Born Jan. 22, 1933, in Pulaski, N.Y., he was a son of the late Edward S. and Isabelle Rickard Parker. He graduated from Pulaski High School in 1950, and earned a bachelor's degree in speech from Ithaca College in Ithaca, N.Y., in 1954. He studied at the Lester Polokov Studio of Stage Design in New York City. He earned an MFA in technical theatre from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in 1973.

Before becoming a teacher at Catawba College in 1970, he worked in professional theatre, including at Equity Library Theatre in New York; Eastern Slope Playhouse in North Conway, N.H.; London Little Theatre, London, Ontario, Canada; Malden Bridge Playhouse, Malden Bridge, N.Y.; Boothbay Playhouse, in Boothbay, Maine, where he met his late wife, Betty Downey; The Pittsburgh Playhouse in Pittsburgh, Pa.; and Washington Theatre Club in Washington, D.C. He also did summer stock theatre with UNCG at Parkway Playhouse in Burnsville, N.C.

He designed sets for a multitude of plays, including "Blithe Spirit," "Come Blow Your Horn," "Cyrano de Bergerac," "The Dark at the Top of the Stairs," "Where's Charley?" and countless other productions.

At Catawba College, where he taught for 33 years, retiring in 2003 at age 70, he designed sets and was the principal costume designer for many years, known for his frugality, once making chain mail out of pop tops from soda cans. He was also known for his obsession with patchwork, which he also wore around campus.

He taught technical theatre courses, theatre history and literary styles, acting and directing. He also made masks from gallon milk jugs for numerous productions. He adapted a number of plays, and acted in several Catawba productions, including "Macbeth" and "Pericles," which he directed and performed in as his final play before retiring. He also appeared in Piedmont Players' Productions, most notably, "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum."

He enjoyed directing Greek tragedies and comedies, but his special interest was Shakespeare, and he directed 14 productions, including staged readings that featured Catawba faculty.

He received the Swink Award for Outstanding Classroom Teaching in 1978 and was inducted into the inaugural class of the college's Blue Masque Hall of Fame in 2007.

In retirement, he began designing Parkie's Patches, a line of purses, backpacks, hats, vests, even overalls, using patchwork.

He met late wife Betty Downey Parker while doing summer stock theatre in 1959. Betty died in 2010 from complications of Alzheimer's disease.

His brothers, Howard Parker and Bruce Parker, also preceded him in death. Survivors include daughter Deirdre Parker Smith and husband Stephen of

Spencer; brother Richard Parker of Greenville, Del.; sister-in-law Judy Parker of Pulaski, N.Y.; niece Cindy Parker DeFoore (Bill) of Aubrey, Tex., and a host of former students.

The family wishes to thank his caregiver, Jeanie Weant, for her extraordinary service.

Service: The memorial service will be on Sunday, Sept. 24, at 2 p.m. at Catawba College's Hedrick Little Theatre. Private burial will be at Sacred Heart Catholic Church Cemetery.

Memorials: In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to the Catawba College Department of Theatre Arts, 2220 W. Innes St., Salisbury, NC 28144.

Summersett Funeral Home is serving the Parker family. Online condolences may be made to www.summersettfuneralhome.com.

Previous Events

Memorial Service

SEP 24. 2:00 PM (ET)

Catawba College Hedrick Little Theatre
Salisbury, NC

Tribute Wall

PC

“ *Dierdre, you dad was such an incredible icon of Catawba and the community. Such a gifted man who touched the lives of so many. I know you are so very proud of him. Please know that my thoughts and prayers are with you and your family during this difficult time.*
Pam Coffield

pam coffield - October 05, 2017 at 09:53 PM

AP

“ *Deirdre, I'm so sorry for the loss of your father. From what I've read about him, he was a very good person and will be missed.*
Ann Powlas

Ann Powlas - September 24, 2017 at 08:55 PM

BM

“ *Deirdre, as a fellow reader, I quote Emily Dickinson when she wrote, "I wish I might say one liquid word to make your sorrow less." Your dad sounds like a great person. With deepest sympathy, Betty MacLean*

Betty MacLean - September 22, 2017 at 09:35 AM