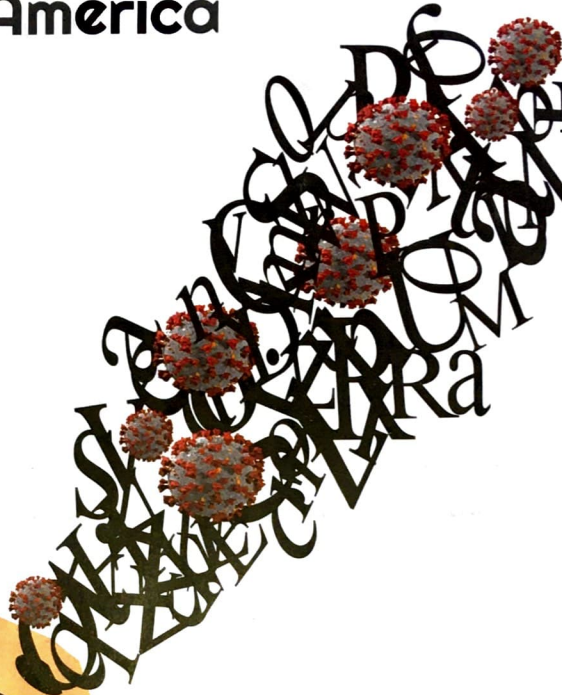


# dsa

Deaf  
Seniors  
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## New Horizons



"Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less."

*Marie Curie*

Corona

# Unmasking Dorothy Miles

by Steve Baldwin

When unmasking Dorothy "Dot" Miles as a person, writer, poet, actor, and literary figure, we first need to appreciate her lifelong admiration for the works of Dylan Thomas and Shakespeare while retracing her constant quest for her artistic niche in America from 1957 to 1977.

Before she left Great Britain in 1957 for Gallaudet College (now Gallaudet University), Dot grew up in the hills of North Wales, where her mother, Amy E. Squire (1890-1953), introduced her daughter to the Bards of Wales and England. The bond between Dot and her mother is typical of a deaf child whose mother had an impact on her life. Because of her mother's loving and tender care after she contracted cerebrospinal meningitis at age eight, Dot quickly fell in love with literature and the performing arts. With her training as an elocution teacher, Mrs. Squire became understandably easy to lipread in English, which became Dot's first language.

Like Dylan Thomas (1914-1953), Wales' foremost poet, Dot did not know Welsh, and she grew up studying and loving his pure poetry of lyrical imagery and the rich use of local color. The deaths of Thomas and Mrs. Squire in the same year of 1953 left an indelible mark on Dot's life. It was her mother's wish that Dot seriously aim for Gallaudet University as soon as she could, though funds were not available until four years later in 1957.



Dot's four years at Gallaudet were nothing short of her being a super talented undergraduate who proved her mettle as a student leader, campus newspaper editor (twice!), published poet, Dean's List honoree, and an award-winning actor. She performed in Hamlet and Othello, two of Shakespeare's most-produced tragedies out of his 37 plays. Both plays deal with the bipolar issues that foreshadowed Dot's own life several years after her graduation from Gallaudet in 1961.

Another foreshadowing aspect was a personal story entitled "The Overdose" that she published in the Buff and Blue: Literary Issue, Winter: 1960. The three-page opus covers the prevalent problems of mental health, depression bouts, endless medication, suicide thoughts, and frustrations. Dot personally faced all those issues in the next 10 years. She also had to cope with the 1964 loss of her only child, an infant named Jeremy, who lived for only four days in New Zealand where Dot's oldest sister, Wendy, lived.

As the editor of Gallaudet's 1961 Tower Clock yearbook, Shanny Mow (1938-2017), wrote wittingly in Dot's senior profile: "...an indefatigable ball of fire who rolls in all directions [and] reads while ironing clothes." Another college classmate jokingly repeated and embellished the same sentiment: "Dot was always seen rushing on campus with a book in hand while reading and juggling her food and coke with the other hand." For an English woman, such behavior was quite atypical, yet amusing and quirky.

Editor's Note: Watch for part two of Unmasking Dorothy Miles in the Summer issue of *New Horizons*.



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# Unmasking Dorothy Miles

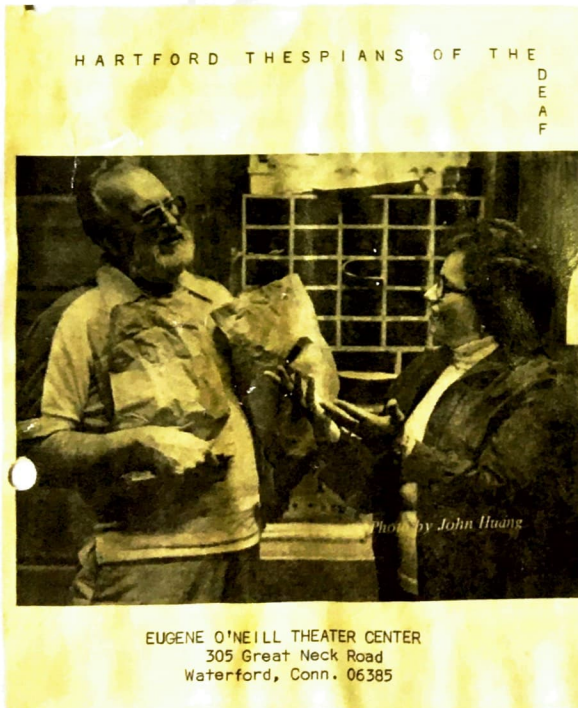
## The Deaf Bard of Wales, England, and America

By Steve C. Baldwin, Ph.D.

### Part Two: NTD Becomes her destiny, Her antithesis to NTD, Her Breakdown

(Part One focused on Dot's Life in Wales, her innate love for literature, and her Gallaudet experience.)

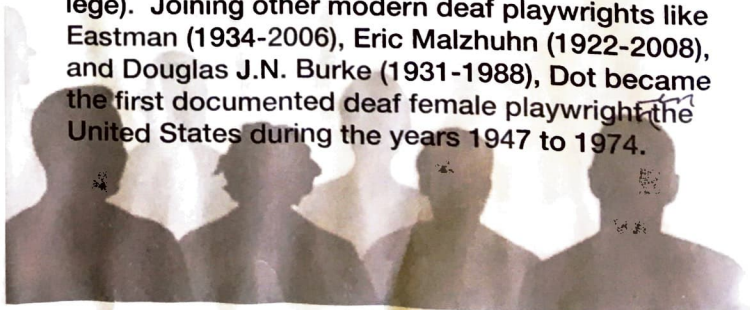
While living in St. Louis, <sup>Missouri</sup> Miss., in 1967, Dot was mesmerized and inspired by the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD) performance of "The Man with His Heart in the Highlands" by William Saroyan and two other famous poems. She applied to NTD, and subsequently received an offer to join the company and live in Waterford, Conn. Dot climbed her way up from being a wardrobe supervisor to costume designer, script translator, director of a short deaf-themed segment, company newsletter editor, and finally, an actor in six NTD mainstage productions.



From Steve's deaf theater collection:  
1973 program cover of *A Play of our Own*.  
Lead actors on cover are Leo Burke and  
Lilly Shirey.

She also performed for the acting company's offshoot, a children's program called the Little Theatre of the Deaf (LTD), and the summer storytelling series. She delightfully recited her original poems to school age children. Her four-year tenure at NTD was not a dream job, nor a bed of roses from her personal and philosophical perspective.

While studying for her Master's degree in theatre education at Connecticut College in Waterford, Dot wrote her first deaf-themed staged opus, "A Play of Our Own." A month earlier, Gil Eastman's adaptation of "Pygmalion" called "Sign Me Alice," premiered at Gallaudet University (then Gallaudet College). Joining other modern deaf playwrights like Eastman (1934-2006), Eric Malzhuhn (1922-2008), and Douglas J.N. Burke (1931-1988), Dot became the first documented deaf female playwright in the United States during the years 1947 to 1974.







Tim Scanlon, a fellow NTD and Hartford Thespians actor, witnessed Dot's first major nervous breakdown in 1974 after she graduated from Connecticut College. Her bipolar disorder required hospitalization at St. Lawrence Hospital for a period of time. Following her hospitalization, she returned to England to recover. Contributing factors may have been a combination of having to finish her pioneering M.A. degree thesis about deaf theater history, directing plays, lecturing about poetry, and writing numerous papers while dealing with her severe depressions and anxieties daily.

Dot's illness and treatments remind me of the impressionist Vincent van Gogh or the British actress Vivian Leigh. Sometimes their irrational mental health bouts may have aided their sublime creativity.

Consequently, they paid the price for their lofty artistic goals which reminds literary scholars of the fatalistic element of Romanticism. Dot was no different in her daily struggles, whether creative, emotional, or mental.

*Editor's note: Watch for part three of Unmasking Dorothy Miles in the fall issue of New Horizons.*

*Songs from Milk Wood shows Dot in one of her several roles in the National Theater of the Deaf productions during the (NTD) 1969-1970 Season. (Source: "Pictures in the Air: The Story of the National Theater of Deaf" by Stephen C. Baldwin).*

In retrospect, "A Play of Our Own," was an overt declaration of war against NTD. Dot's stage play was an antithesis to the performance style of NTD that adapted and translated mainly English language scripts, following a hearing world theme, and utilizing two onstage voice actors. Her original play adhered to a bona fide deaf perspective with no onstage or offstage voice interpreter. American Sign Language (ASL) became the norm, not the stylish sign-mime approach that NTD used.

It was Dot who encouraged Leo Burke, Jane Wilson, and Lilly Shirey to form the Hartford Thespians of the Deaf. The troupe aspired to entertain the deaf community by using ASL, a deaf director, and an all-deaf cast exclusively. Henceforth, her play showcased her new philosophy and radical support for a theatre for the deaf. This episode taxed her emotional and mental well-being.



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