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## Fate has determined Farthing's footsteps

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Ian Farthing didn't dream of becoming an actor when he was a young child.

And even after becoming one, he never imagined he would one day be the artistic director of a Shakespeare theatre company in eastern Ontario.

But, as Shakespeare himself once wrote:

"What fates impose, that men must needs abide; It boots not to resist both wind and tide."

Farthing has indeed gone with the tide.

"I didn't really think of becoming an actor until I was in my late teens," Farthing recalled in an interview this week, in the midst of the current St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival now playing in Prescott.

"I had started to work front of house at a theatre in England," he said. "In the building, I felt at home."

Farthing decided that he would pursue theatre if he got "signs" to go into what he described as a "crazy profession with a crazy lifestyle."

Those signs, he said, were good grades in high school, getting accepted to a university theatre program, then a top drama school, and getting an agent and equity within a year of graduating.

He was accepted into Birmingham University in England and went on to all the successes he needed to pursue his dreams.

His early acting roles including performing in Christmas pantomimes. "Pretty much every town in England has a panto at Christmas. The audience participated."

Farthing describes them as "very slapstick, vaudevillian."

He cepting every role offered to him, whether it was in London or with a touring company.

"I love doing musicals... and I loved being on tour. You got a chance to see a lot of the country."

O ne of his favourite early performances was as a sailor in South Pacific in London. "That was the first time I had worked with anybody with a star name."

Patti Boulaye and Peter Polycarpou, both well known in England at the time, were part of the show, and Farthing discovered "it wasn't any different than working with anybody else."

Divas, he said, are less common in the theatre business than people think.

By age 29, Farthing said he wasn't getting a lot of work in England and decided to return to Canada, where he had been born. Farthing's adoptive parents in Canada had died when he was six years old, so he had grown up in England with his new adoptive parents.

Farthing questioned whether he should return to Canada, but decided to come on a one-year trial basis. He booked a ticket to Vancouver and has kept it as his home base ever since, although he has been there only six weeks in the past two years.

At the time, Farthing also questioned staying in theatre. He took a "real job" as a production manager in Vancouver.

"After a year in a real job, I knew I wanted to carry on acting," he recalled.

He let fate continue to dictate his future, but says he's pleased with where it has taken him.

Farthing started spending his summers acting in Prescott in 2004 with A Comedy of Errors and, after founding artistic director Deborah Smith moved on, he was offered the artistic director's position, which he continues to hold.

Now age 41, he says he had never imagined holding such a role, but enjoys bringing Shakespeare to life with the company. Because of the quality of acting, many spectators stop noticing the 400-year-old language of Shakespeare.

"People come up to me after the show and say, 'Who did the modern adaptation?' People think they are watching a contemporary story."

The stories of Shakespeare's plays still ring true today, he pointed out. "We still fall in love and feel aggrieved when people wrong us."

Farthing's career highlight to date has been performing The Sound of Music in Toronto. A part of the ensemble, he understudied the role of the captain.

He said he loved "being in paid work for a year and a half."

"And it was such a spectacular show," said Farthing, noting that \$1 million was spent on costumes alone.

"For the sets, mountains moved on stage," he added.

Farthing was thrilled when about 15 people from Prescott came to watch him perform in Toronto. All were ardent St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival supporters including Sandra and Robert Lawn, Patti and Mike Dimopoulos, and Judi and Peter Baril.

The Shakespeare festival has become so important to the town that many feel a sense of ownership and would like to see it grow. Farthing feels the same way.

Attendance numbers at this year's festival to date are up eight per cent over last year, and Farthing would like to see those numbers climb even higher.

"You are only as good as your last show, so the pressure is one to beat what you did last year."

This year, the festival includes Macbeth, a dark tragedy, and Trouble on Dibble Street, a madcap comedy.

"We want Prescott to become a tourism destination," said Farthing. "Our long-term dream is to have a roof over the amphitheatre ... and production facilities to build sets and rehearse."

Currently, the alternate location in case of rain is the local Presbyterian church, the sets are built at the arena, and rehearsals take place in the United Church hall.

The long-term dream is to build an indoor theatre in Prescott, Farthing said.

Is it realistic?

Perhaps not. But perhaps the goal of becoming an actor wasn't realistic, either.

"We dream," Farthing said. "But theatre is about dreaming."

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