



GUTHRIE
THEATER

McGuire Proscenium Stage / Oct 26 - Dec 15, 2019



Steel Magnolias

by ROBERT HARLING
directed by LISA ROTHE

PLAY GUIDE

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Guthrie Theater, 818 South 2nd Street, Minneapolis, MN 55415
ADMINISTRATION 612.225.6000
BOX OFFICE 612.377.2224 or 1.877.44.STAGE (toll-free)
guthrietheater.org • Joseph Haj, artistic director

The Guthrie creates transformative theater experiences that ignite the imagination, stir the heart, open the mind and build community through the illumination of our common humanity.

Guthrie Theater Play Guide

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DRAMATURG Carla Steen

GRAPHIC DESIGNER Akemi Graves

CONTRIBUTORS Rosie Jablonsky,
Morgan Holmes, Carla Steen

EDITOR Johanna Buch

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The Guthrie Theater receives support from the National Endowment for the Arts. This activity is made possible in part by the Minnesota State Arts Board, through an appropriation by the Minnesota State Legislature. The Minnesota State Arts Board received additional funds to support this activity from the National Endowment for the Arts.



PHOTO: THE CAST OF STEEL MAGNOLIAS (DAN NORMAN)

“I would rather have 30 minutes of wonderful than a lifetime of nothing special.”

- Shelby to M'Lynn in *Steel Magnolias*

About This Guide

This play guide is designed to fuel your curiosity and deepen your understanding of a show's history, meaning and cultural relevance so you can make the most of your theatergoing experience. You might be reading this because you fell in love with a show you saw at the Guthrie. Maybe you want to read

up on a play before you see it onstage. Or perhaps you're a fellow theater company doing research for an upcoming production. We're glad you found your way here, and we encourage you to dig in and mine the depths of this extraordinary story. [G](#)

DIG DEEPER

If you are a theater company and would like more information about this production, contact Resident Dramaturg Carla Steen at carlas@guthrietheater.org.



PHOTO: NICOLE KING AND AUSTENE VAN IN STEEL MAGNOLIAS (DAN NORMAN)

SETTING

A beauty salon in Chinquapin, Louisiana, in the 1980s.

CHARACTERS

Truvy, the owner of a beauty salon

Annelle, Truvy's assistant in the salon

Clairee, the grande dame widow of the former mayor

M'Lynn, a socially prominent career woman

Shelby, M'Lynn's daughter and bride-to-be

Ouiser, a wealthy curmudgeon

Synopsis

“When I was a kid, the mystique of the beauty parlor was that guys were never allowed. You didn't know what went on in there, and they all came back different somehow. I realized this hermetically sealed environment would be the best place to have these women express their true feelings.”

– Robert Harling, quoted in *Garden & Gun*, April/May 2017

Truvy's salon in Chinquapin, Louisiana, is a gathering place and sanctuary for a close-knit group of women from the neighborhood. Recently widowed Clairee is adjusting to life without her husband, who was the town's former mayor. Ouiser, a wealthy curmudgeon, finds any excuse to bicker and complain. Truvy has hired young Annelle just in time to get Shelby and her mother, M'Lynn, ready for Shelby's wedding later that day, and the women's excitement fills the beauty shop with gossip, warmth and familiarity.

When the normally friendly Shelby suddenly becomes cranky, everyone realizes her blood sugar has dropped, and the women fuss over her and give her juice until

she's recovered. Shelby's health is fragile because she's diabetic, which makes M'Lynn worry about her daughter's choices and the physical toll Shelby's body may not be able to bear.

Over the next few years, as Clairee fills the void left by her husband's death, Annelle embraces life in Chinquapin and Ouiser strikes up a new friendship, Truvy's salon remains at the center of their lives and becomes an oasis when tragedy strikes. [G](#)



PHOTO: NICOLE KING, MELISSA MAXWELL AND ADELIN PHELPS IN STEEL MAGNOLIAS (DAN NORMAN)

critiques. And we don't lose sight of the real focus of the play, which is how these women relate to each other.

Ted Shaw, "Play transports you to Louisiana salon," *The Windsor (Ont.) Star*, November 29, 1996

Like a hummingbird flitting among the bougainvillea, the two-hanky warhorse *Steel Magnolias* just shouldn't fly. It's talky, contrived and manipulative. But it works. ...

The play traces preparations for the wedding of the youngest customer, the birth of her first child and some life-threatening illnesses, all lubricated with shrieks of laughter and a plethora of hugs — sort of a Eudora Welty take on *Our Town*.

Inexplicably, this collection of archetypes sidesteps stereotyping, even if they are cut out of a Montgomery Ward's catalog. All seem realistic if eccentric individuals, like the crusty biddy who says "I'm not crazy. I've just been in a very bad mood for 40 years." Playwright Robert Harling excels at witty pronouncements tossed off effortlessly by this sextet as if they were the Deep South chapter of the Algonquin Round Table.

Bill Hirschman, "These Magnolias Still Steely," *South Florida Sun Sentinel*, May 15, 2003

Responses to *Steel Magnolias*

Mr. Harling has a grasp of local language, as in [Truvy's] remarks, many of which seem filtered through the imagery of her profession. "I always wanted to go to Baltimore," she says, "because I heard it's the hairdo capital of the world." ...

"Steel Magnolias" is at its most perceptive in offhand moments, as when one woman, caught up in her own problems, says, "I just can't talk about it," and the others reflexively respond in unison: "Of course you can." "Steel Magnolias" is an amiable evening of sweet sympathies and smalltown chatter.

Mel Gussow, "Stage: 'Steel Magnolias,' A Louisiana Story," *The New York Times*, March 27, 1987

Alternating between humor and pathos, *Steel Magnolias* is a marvel of controlled energy and verbal interplay. Truvy's Beauty Shop is where old friends and relatives meet to gossip, commiserate, cajole, and enjoy each other's company. They can literally let their hair down at Truvy's. ...

Anyone who has seen the movie ... but isn't familiar with the original play will be surprised at the lack of men. Harling had to open up the script for the screen and include the husbands, boyfriends, and ex-lovers who figure in the women's beauty shop discussions.

But the play is more effective because of the absence of men. It's more fun imagining them from the women's colorful descriptions and

Shampoo. Set. And cry.

This isn't the age-old lingo of cosmetology (unless you are talking about a really bad hair day) but the essential formula of Robert Harling's weepy broad comedy *Steel Magnolias*. ...

But as the new True Colors Theatre staging suggests, *Steel Magnolias* is more than just a caricature-ish "Perms of Endearment" about a particular type of breathless Southern belle who sits by the country-club pool in the mornings and swaps recipes for cheese straws and chicken salad in the afternoons. ...

For True Colors, director Kent Gash has placed African American women in the pivotal roles of Truvy and her assistant Annelle — and the good news is that it's not this big PC thing (like, say, putting the first black Martha in *Virginia Woolf* or doing an African American *Glass Menagerie*). Such smart casting may be a psychological breakthrough for Atlanta. To be sure, it's the kind of ahead-of-the-curve thinking that makes Kenny Leon's True Colors a strong local asset and a national player.

Wendell Brock, "Salon humor 'Steel' sharp,"
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution,
March 24, 2004

In the first scene of the play *Steel Magnolias*, Robert Harling's 1987 love letter to small-town Southern women, two Louisiana friends share favorites from their recipe boxes. Cuppa Cake is so straightforward, it doesn't even require an index card: "It's a cuppa flour, a cuppa sugar, a cuppa fruit cocktail with juice, and you mix and bake at 350 till gold and bubbly," [Clairee] says. Yes, it's

rich, she admits. "That's why I serve it over ice cream to cut the sweetness."

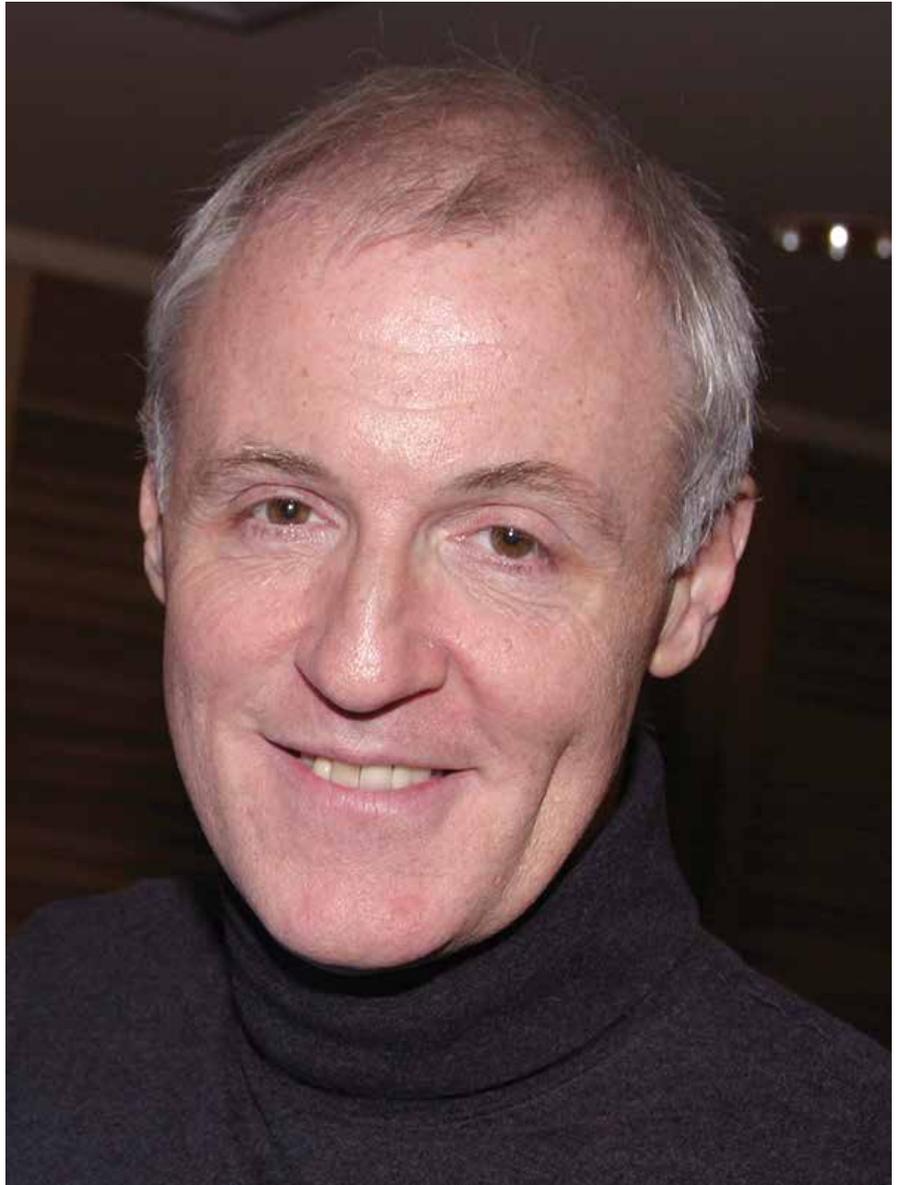
Like a lot of Southern cooking, this play ... doesn't stint on the sugar. But of course, as experienced bakers know, without a pinch of salt, sugar can be just plain cloying. The batter for *Steel Magnolias* ... may not cook up into haute cuisine, but it has just enough salty, sour, bitter and umami, along with the sweet, to engage the entire palate. I challenge the most sophisticated of you not to cry at the end.

Margaret Gray, "Fine Southern charm,"
Los Angeles Times, April 26, 2019

PHOTO: SALLY WINGERT AND MELISSA MAXWELL IN STEEL MAGNOLIAS (DAN NORMAN)



About Robert Harling



Before launching a successful stage and screenwriting career, Robert Harling graduated from Tulane University School of Law, but instead of taking the bar exam, he opted to become an actor in New York City. After years of productive work as an actor in voiceovers and commercials, Harling was inspired to write the highly acclaimed stage play *Steel Magnolias*, which was based on events from his personal life. *Steel Magnolias* continues to thrive in theatrical productions throughout the world.

Immediately bridging a career from stage to screen, Harling adapted his original play into the popular film of the same name, starring Olympia Dukakis, Sally Field, Daryl Hannah, Shirley MacLaine, Dolly Parton and Julia Roberts.

Over the years, Harling has become a much sought-after screenwriter. Other credits, to name a few, include *Soapdish*, which is based on Harling's acting experience and also stars Sally Field along with Robert Downey Jr. and Whoopi Goldberg, and *The First Wives Club*, starring Goldie Hawn, Diane Keaton and Bette Midler.

Harling made his directorial debut with *The Evening Star*, which he also wrote for the screen based on Larry McMurty's novel. *The Evening Star* reunited Shirley MacLaine and Jack Nicholson and also stars Juliette Lewis, Bill Paxton, Miranda Richardson, Marion Ross and Scott Wolf. *The Evening Star* is the continuation of the beloved and acclaimed movie *Terms of Endearment*.

Sourced and edited from Dramatists Play Service, Inc.

PHOTO: SALLY WINGERT, ADELIN PHELPS, AMY VAN NOSTRAND AND AUSTENE VAN IN *STEEL MAGNOLIAS* (DAN NORMAN)

On Writing *Steel Magnolias* and Its Legacy

Harling grew up in Natchitoches, Louisiana, the oldest settlement from the Louisiana Purchase, with two younger siblings. He wrote the play after his sister, Susan, died from complications of Type 1 diabetes. He'd been in New York for eight years at that point, a period during which Susan had married and decided to start a family, despite doctors' concerns that doing so could seriously jeopardize her health.

Shortly after giving birth to a baby boy in 1983, Susan's circulatory system and kidneys began to fail. A kidney transplant from her mother,

and dialysis, did little to help. She died during minor surgery in 1985, at the age of 33. Afraid his two-year-old nephew would never know who his mother was, Harling started writing. "All I wanted to do was have somebody remember her," he says.

He started the tale as a short story — "that lasted about half a morning" — before switching to dialogue, a format he felt more comfortable with as an actor. ...

[T]he play features an all-female cast, portraying characters Harling modeled after his mom's friends

as he remembered them from his childhood. "I always thought the women in my community were so witty and clever," he says. "It was like a witty one-upmanship [between them]. In a lot of ways, they talked in bumper stickers." He worried that the real-life Ouiser, a character defined by her cranky and brutally honest nature, would recognize herself and take offense, but as women from his hometown began to see the play, "they all said they were Ouiser."

Maria Carter, "The Heartbreaking Real-Life Story Behind 'Steel Magnolias,'" *Country Living*, July 28, 2017

In an exclusive interview with MailOnline, Robert [Harling] reveals: “Susan died in the fall of 1985. Pat, my ex-brother-in-law, remarried five or six months after her death, and the first time I heard my nephew call this other woman ‘mama’ was when I said, ‘No — Susan can’t disappear.’”

I guess I started writing the play about six months later. It came out very, very fast. I wrote the first version in 10 days. I was just trying desperately to get the language and capture exactly how the women spoke. I wanted to celebrate my sister; it was a time of tumult and the way it took off, who knew. I never, in a million years, thought it would even get produced when I was writing it.”

“Steel Magnolias writer on the real story behind the Hollywood hit,” *DailyMail.co.uk*, March 28, 2014

Susan was incredibly supportive after I came to New York. She was familiar with my frustration in terms of auditions, and she used to say, “You know what really makes me mad is the fact that I can’t do anything for you. ... I don’t know how to help you, and I wish I could.” Even when she was sick, she’d come home from the hospital and make a box of brownies and send them to me. ...

The last time I talked to Susan was on her birthday, October 7, [1985]. She was on dialysis and they were going to put in some shunts to facilitate it, and that required some minor surgery. I actually had to get off the call because I was going to an audition. She said, “Good luck,” and they rolled her down to the operating room. She never woke up, and I told her story. ...

As we were going into production, Michael and Kathy Weller asked me what my parents thought about the play, and I said I hadn’t told them. It was the only time I’d ever seen Kathy get riled at me. I said, “It’s got to be a painful thing for them. We’ll do the play, it’ll come and go, and they won’t know anything about it.” I was just chicken. Kathy said, “You weren’t there through all of that pain, you didn’t watch your child die. If there is one moment of joy to be gained out of this experience, you cannot deny them that. If you don’t tell them, I will.”

They came to New York to visit a week before we went into rehearsal, and I got up some courage. They were just flummoxed — I wasn’t a writer. When Mama asked me if she could read it, I said, “You don’t want to. It’s about you and Susan and the whole thing.” But she’s a Steel Magnolia — she was going to read it. I gave her the script, and I’d walk past and she’d be sobbing, and I felt terrible. Afterward, I said, “Mom, we’ll just kill it, I can’t put you through this.” And she said, “It’s wonderful because it’s true.” She just closed it and that was it, end of topic.

Robert Harling, quoted in “Thirty Years of Steel Magnolias” by Julia Reed, *Garden & Gun*, April/May 2017

Part of the magic of film is that people know — they don’t know me — but they know the story. They know the actresses, they know that it’s been told, they know that it lives, they know it’s been translated into a zillion languages, and the fact that this very simple story of a small American town and its community of women reaches out and speaks to everyone around the world ... what writer wouldn’t love that universality.

Robert Harling, in a video interview at the 10th TCM Classic Film Festival, accessed on YouTube, April 13, 2019

Guests noshed on an armadillo-shaped cake at the Cajun music-filled wedding reception, shot at the sprawling historic house that served as the film’s family home. The armadillo cake was part of Susan’s wedding, “but it was basically a sheet cake cut into the silhouette of an armadillo,” Harling says.

The elaborate, three-dimensional movie version, complete with a long tail, was rendered in red velvet cake. The cake has a cult following and has been recreated repeatedly by fans.

“If I only leave one thing behind as my legacy, it is the armadillo cake,” Harling says. “If I had been able to patent the armadillo cake, I’d be jetting around the world in my private plane. I have seen some amazing ones.”

Bryan Alexander, “Steel Magnolias’ wedding mixes fact, fiction,” *USA Today*, May 20, 2019

Southern Writers

Most contemporary writers raised in the South and who aspire to be serious writers still live under the long, intimidating shadow of William Faulkner, the “Dixie Special” as Flannery O’Connor once dubbed him. Some think of themselves as very much Southern writers — extensions in a long and distinguished tradition. Others resent the term; they consider it a restricting and artistically unflattering appellation.

Southern writer: The term can evoke the stereotyped Margaret Mitchell images of magnolias, courtliness, mint juleps sipped on the porches of once-splendid plantations. But there is also the South that embraces the rural Georgia of Erskine Caldwell’s comically grotesque Jukes family; Georgian Carson McCuller’s bizarre Southern Gothic; Thomas Wolfe’s Asheville, North Carolina; ... Reynolds Price, whose first novel *A Long and Happy Life*, published a few months before Faulkner’s death in 1962, won him the William Faulkner award for the best novel of the year — along with critics’ charges that he was a Faulkner imitator.

Then there is the first generation of black Southern writers born into a region of almost-inbred racism and discrimination, such as Richard Wright, author of

the autobiographical *Black Boy* and the novel *Native Son*. Born near Natchez, Mississippi, he was brought up in Memphis, lived for a time as a young man in Chicago, and died an expatriate in Paris in 1960 at 52.

And Ralph Waldo Ellison, born in Oklahoma City and who studied for three years at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama before going to New York in 1936. ...

In his introduction to *The History of Southern Literature*, Professor Louis D. Rubin Jr. of The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill wrote:

“The facts are that there existed in the past, and there continues to exist today, an entity within the American society known as the South, and that for better or for worse the habit of viewing one’s experience in terms of one’s relationship to that entity is still a meaningful characteristic of both writers and readers who are or have been part of it. The historical circumstances that gave rise to that way of thinking and feeling have been greatly modified. Yet in the year 1984 ... to consider writers and their writings as Southern still involves considerably more than merely a geographical grouping. History, as a mode for viewing one’s experience and

one’s identity, remains a striking characteristic of the Southern literary imagination, black and white.”

Charles E. Claffey, “Does the ‘Southern Writer’ Really Exist,” *Boston Globe*, December 9, 1986

At a time when dramatists from many parts of this country are grappling with contemporary issues, major playwrights from the South are still turning back the clock for their themes and inspirations. Family and home, the cornerstones of Southern life for generations, have taken a severe beating, as everywhere in recent times, but they still exert a profound hold. In separate conversations, several major playwrights suggested that no matter how far they have traveled from their roots down South — and no matter how much the home sites have changed — the voices and stories of their early years remain the wellsprings of their work. ...

The experiences of a childhood in Natchitoches, Louisiana, shape Robert Harling’s *Steel Magnolias*. Now in his late 30s, Mr. Harling has spent 10 years in Manhattan and, through the demands of his work as a successful commercial actor, lost every trace of regionalism. ...

Though some of his characters “take contemporary journeys,” Mr. Harling said, a lot of Southern drama today, “with a costume change, could be 1942.”

Steel Magnolias seems to owe much of its immense popularity ... to the humorous banter between characters. “The way Southerners communicate,” Mr. Harling said, “is in the rattling on. You ask my father which gas station to go to, and he’ll tell you a long story.” ...

Perhaps ... the plays defining today’s South, whether from white or black authors, will embody the South not as a place but as sensibility — a depth of involvement with language, family and regional history, wherever Southerners, increasingly mobile, may roam.

Roy Hoffman, “Brash New South Is Still a Stranger to Its Dramatists,” *The New York Times*, July 2, 1989

Whether or not a factual difference exists between Southern women and the rest of us, a mythology of the Southern woman does exist.

This myth incorporates beauty pageants and buttermilk biscuits, wide-brimmed hats and lace collars, magnolias and mint juleps. Most of all, it gives us a character with a sugar-sweet smile and an indomitable will.

In this literary version, the Southern woman is also always slightly goofy, or at least she seems so to far-more-staid Northerners. She is featured in plays by Tennessee Williams, in the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Crimes of the Heart* by Beth Henley and, most recently, in *Steel Magnolias* by Robert Harling. ...

The play spans the first two years of Shelby’s marriage and motherhood from the viewpoint of Truvy’s patrons. Over the course of the two acts, we get to know these eccentric Southern women as they are with their hair wet and in rollers. As the title suggests, what exists beneath the gentle speech pattern, the nonstop charm and the ubiquitous smile is a soul as strong as steel and twice as resilient.

Leah D. Frank, “Southern Women in a Small Town,” *The New York Times*, July 22, 1990

A sense of place. An obsession with the past. A connection to the land. A history of race relations as turbulent as the violent summer storms. Family life that, like our food, can hold us in its often delicious, sometimes unhealthful, and always magnetic allure. (Fried Snickers bars, anyone?) These qualities define the South — and its literature.

Building on the tradition of revered Southern writers like William Faulkner and Flannery O’Connor, a new anthology of short stories with a Louisville connection offers a kaleidoscopic view of what it means to be Southern, in stories that meditate, above all, on what it means to be human.

New Stories From the South 2008 (Algonquin Books), guest-edited this year by acclaimed fiction writer and Louisvillian ZZ Packer, aims to collect the year’s best short fiction by writers from the South. ...

“I’ve thought of myself as Southern pretty much forever, even though I was born in Chicago,” Packer said in an

interview. “Growing up, I tried to not be a part of it, even in Louisville, which is the upper South; I wanted to rebel against that because I guess I was used to seeing the negative side of things. I was always feeling that there was sort of this backwardness to it.

If you’re a black Southerner, you definitely have a different story than a white Southerner — it’s not all magnolias and hospitality and mint juleps. When I left, I began to think that some of the things that people in the north kind of take for granted — they assume that there is this sort of unity or melting pot in places like New York — and you think, ‘Well, wait a second — you’re not all that different than some of the race relations in the Southern states.’”

“It wasn’t really until going to college and coming back with some friends of mine, and one of them who had grown up in Connecticut and she was talking about oh, how amazing it was to be in Kentucky and how beautiful it was. It was just something I’d never really thought about until my friend said it, and then I began to notice it through different eyes and began thinking, ‘Oh, it is actually beautiful and there is such a thing as Southern hospitality.’ People don’t let people fall through the cracks the way they would in other places.”

Joanna Richards, “Southern draw,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, August 29, 2008

Type 1 Diabetes

Overview

Type 1 diabetes is a condition in which a person's pancreas does not produce insulin, the hormone necessary for the body to metabolize and absorb glucose. Formerly known as juvenile onset diabetes, Type 1 diabetes can manifest at any age.

In non-diabetics, insulin is naturally secreted when blood sugar levels go up after eating and slows down when glucose levels drop. When the pancreas stops working, there is no insulin and therefore no glucose regulation, so glucose continues to build in the bloodstream. In order to try and clear the system of the excess glucose, diabetics will become thirsty, drink a lot and then urinate a lot. But that doesn't work. Eventually glucose can build up so high that the body will begin to shut down, and the person goes into a diabetic coma.

Diabetics manually regulate their glucose by checking levels several times a day, via a finger prick and blood glucose meter, and administering correctives accordingly. (Or via a continuous glucose monitor, but that is technology not likely available to Shelby in the 1980s.) Low blood sugar means that carbohydrates are necessary to get more glucose into the system. High blood sugar means insulin is necessary to bring the level down.

Shelby most likely delivers insulin by injection into fatty tissue (stomach and back of the arms are popular spots) via a syringe or, possibly, an insulin pen, which has an insulin cartridge and a needle tip. The first insulin pen was introduced in 1985.

Too much insulin will lower blood glucose levels below the target range and potentially put a person into hypoglycemia, which can also result in a diabetic coma. Too much insulin may be the result of misjudging the amount needed to counteract carbs; exercise and stress (or the birth control pill in Shelby's case) can also affect the dose of insulin that should be delivered. When Shelby is particularly active, she might burn more glucose than she would normally so a regular insulin dose would be more than she needed and could send her glucose levels plummeting.

Shelby's health issues that lead her doctor to discourage her from getting pregnant is specific to her; there is no reason that an otherwise healthy diabetic who tightly manages their blood sugar cannot carry a healthy baby to term.

Symptoms of Hypoglycemia

Shelby experiences a bout of hypoglycemia, or low blood sugar, in the first scene of *Steel Magnolias*. Hypoglycemia is caused by too little food, too much insulin or extra exercise. Its onset may be sudden and can progress to insulin shock if not treated. Treatment includes the introduction of sugar, usually a juice or soda, if the diabetic is conscious.

Mild

- Hunger
- Dizziness
- Irritability
- Behavior changes
- Anxiety
- Weakness or fatigue
- Sweating
- Rapid heartbeat
- Shakiness
- Paleness
- Stomachache

Severe

- Irrational behavior
- Blurred vision
- Slurred speech
- Seizures
- Coma

Sourced from Children's Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota

In the Community



PHOTO: THE CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM OF STEEL MAGNOLIAS AT CURL POWER SALON (KATIE HAWKINSON)

To help create director Lisa Rothe's inclusive vision for Truvy's Louisiana beauty shop, the Guthrie partnered with Rosie Jablonsky, owner of Curl Power Salons, who happily offered her expertise and curl-thusiasm to the *Steel Magnolias* cast and creative team. Artistic Assistant Morgan Holmes interviewed Rosie about hair, mantras and more.

MORGAN HOLMES: One of my first hair memories is sitting on my Barbie Caboodles case while my mom brushed my hair into twists. What was your first hair memory?

ROSIE JABLONSKY: My mother would brush my hair and put it in two neat French braids. I hated having it brushed, but I loved the ease of my braids because I was a super active kid. My mom loved my long, curly hair and was very positive about it. She always told me curly hair was beautiful, so I was surprised (and disappointed)

when I encountered people who didn't love curly hair.

MH: Yes! When I was younger, my hair was a big deal. Especially in the South. "The bigger the hair, the closer to God." Having long, thick hair was treasured, but straight was the style. It took so long to wash and hot comb or flat iron my coils straight. I spent hours at the salon with my mom. Now, I wear my hair short and curly. How did your relationship to identity, community and culture shape your relationship with your hair?

RJ: My hair links me to various parts of my identity. I've gone from short to long to asymmetrical and played with every bright rainbow color. As a young, queer person, I used to feel like my haircut was a not-so-subtle indicator of my identity, but it's also a fun creative outlet. My hair helps me feel at home in my body and express my insides on the outsides. Having an art medium on my head has always helped me feel like me. When I discovered that my wavy-curly hair could look pretty, my hair suddenly connected me to my Jewish community in a way that my face never did. I've often heard, "You don't look Jewish!" Having a community of people who all *kvetch* (Yiddish for "complain") or even joke about hair in the same way can be incredibly bonding. But I also want to bring people out of a place of constant self-deprecation and bring curl love into those conversations.

MH: Tell me more about "curl love." How is that part of your hair philosophy?

RJ: You shouldn't have to change who you are to make anyone else more comfortable. You shouldn't have to be something you aren't so that the world will deem you worthy of existing. Beauty standards are a mighty cultural force that put significant pressure on all of us to look a certain way. I get that. But I also believe in creating the world we want to live in, and one way to do that is to stop apologizing for who you are. Hair texture, body size, skin color, physical ability, age and gender expression are all areas where we scrutinize ourselves through the lens of what we are told is beautiful. I think hair is an amazing tool for self-expression. My goal and mission with Curl Power Salons is to provide space for my clients as they journey toward self-

acceptance and to help them see their intrinsic beauty and worth, just as they are.

MH: What a perfect transition to Curl Power. Tell me about your salons!

RJ: You deserve to be yourself, and your hair is part of you. At Curl Power, we want to help you do that in a healthy, practical and joyful way. We have salons at Franklin and Nicollet and 50th and France. Curls and their people are our priority at both locations. Expect a luxurious specialty service served up in a sweet space where folks who do or don't feel like they "belong" in a salon can feel right at home.

We offer curly haircuts, styling, lots of information and hands-on education about taking care of curly, wavy and coily hair, transitioning to your natural hair and keeping it healthy. We also specialize in color services specially designed to keep the health and integrity of your hair while giving you all the flamboyance or subtlety you desire. We love rainbow hair color as well as silver/gray hair color transitioning. For the past two years, we've served "curlies" of all ages through our Curl Camp — a unique hands-on workshop for parents and children to focus on healthy and happy curl care at home. This year, we added a Teen Curl Camp to help young people start their self-care journeys with new skills and more confidence. And we are proudly part of the LGBTQIA+ community and will happily show up at events with extra glitter — just ask us!

MH: What has it been like working with the Guthrie?

RJ: [Director of Community Engagement] Rebecca Noon reached out to us after an

appointment she had at Curl Power. Our salon mission of curl expertise, inclusion and self-love clicked with her, and she appreciated how her stylist listened to her hair concerns, wishes and past traumas with salons regarding her curly hair. Of course, I was ecstatic to learn about partnership opportunities because *Steel Magnolias* is one of my favorite movies and pink is my signature color! I was invited to do hair for and with the *Steel Magnolias* cast and creative team at Curl Power, and it was such a pleasure. I love this show and had the sweetest time talking about hair and history and our lives with the cast — just like regular clients! Because what we offer is pretty unique, our goal in partnering with the Guthrie is to let people know about Curl Power, what we do and how it's possible and powerful to embrace your natural texture no matter what that texture is. All hair is good hair. 

People, Places and Things in the Play

PEOPLE



Cher

An American pop singer born in 1946. It was just a rumor that she had a rib removed.



Jane Fonda

An actor who produced a series of exercise videos beginning in 1982 with “Jane Fonda’s Workout.”



Elizabeth Taylor

A British-American actress (1932–2011) who was a movie star from age 12, when she appeared in *American Velvet*. Her career included playing *Cleopatra*, Maggie in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and winning two Oscars for *Butterfield 8* and *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Later in life, she was known for her philanthropy and activism amidst the height of the AIDS epidemic.



Princess Di

The former Diana Spencer (1961–1997), who in 1981 married Britain’s Prince Charles to become Diana, Princess of Wales. She consequently became one of the most famous people in the world.



Jaclyn Smith

An American actress who was one of the original angels on the television show “Charlie’s Angels,” which ran until 1981. She was a model and spokesperson for Max Factor during the 1980s.



Princess Grace

The American actress Grace Kelly (1929–1982), who married Rainier III, Prince of Monaco, in 1956.



Wayne Newton

An American singer born in 1942 known as “Mr. Las Vegas.”



PHOTO: MELISSA MAXWELL, ADELIN PHELPS, AUSTENE VAN AND NICOLE KING IN STEEL MAGNOLIAS (DAN NORMAN)

PLACES

Baton Rouge

The capital of Louisiana, approximately 180 miles southwest of Natchitoches [pronounced *NACK-a-dish*].

Chinquapin

A fictional community based on Natchitoches, a city of 18,000 in northwest Louisiana and the hometown of playwright Robert Harling.

Dry Prong

A village in Grant Parish in central Louisiana, approximately an hour southeast of Natchitoches and two hours southeast of Shreveport.

LSU

Louisiana State University, located in Baton Rouge.

Monroe

A city in Ouachita Parish in northern Louisiana, which had a population of approximately 57,000 people when it reached its peak in 1980. It is approximately 100 miles east of Shreveport and 75 miles northeast of Natchitoches.

New Orleans

The largest city in Louisiana, located 260 miles southeast of Natchitoches on the Mississippi River as it makes its way to the Gulf of Mexico. New Orleans is home to the largest Mardi Gras celebration in the country.

Petroleum Club in Shreveport

A private club founded in 1948 by employees of the oil industry (draftsmen, geologists and engineers). Located on the top two floors of the Mid-South Towers since 1969, the club offers events,

lunches and banquets for its members and serves as a rental location for events and weddings.

Tickfaw

A very small town in Tangipahoa Parish that is northwest of New Orleans and southeast of Natchitoches.

West Monroe

West Monroe and Monroe are the “Twin Cities of Louisiana.” The two cities are divided by the Ouachita River, with West Monroe on the west bank and Monroe on the east bank. West Monroe’s population in 1980 was approximately 15,000.

Zwolle

A small town in Sabine Parish that is west of Natchitoches, south of Shreveport and close to the Texas-Louisiana border.

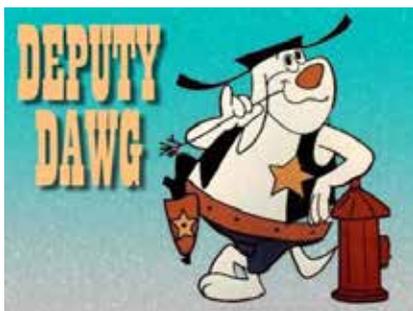
THINGS

Baptist Book Store in Shreveport

The Baptist Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention owned and operated a chain of bookstores called Baptist Book Stores. In the 1990s, they were rebranded to LifeWay Christian Stores.

“Circus of the Stars”

An annual TV event that ran on CBS from 1977 to 1994 where celebrities performed circus-like acts.



Deputy Dawg

An animated cartoon character created by Terrytoons who starred on a TV series of the same name from 1959 to 1962. The show featured a dog as a sheriff’s deputy in a Southern town. Despite his own incompetence, Deputy Dawg always got the bad guy.

dialysis

The manual removal of toxins from the body when the kidneys are no longer able to do so. Dialysis is usually performed three times a week and each session can take several hours.

“A dirty mind is a terrible thing to waste”

A play on the United Fund slogan, “A mind is a terrible thing to waste.”

earping

Another word for vomiting.

“Empty is the head that wears the crown”

A play on a quote from Shakespeare’s *Henry IV, Part 2*, in which King Henry says, “Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown.”

groom’s cake

A wedding tradition rooted in Victorian England and picked up in the American South. It was originally an alcohol-infused fruitcake and later expanded to include chocolate and red velvet cake. It was often boxed and given to guests as a wedding favor. Today, it represents the personality and/or hobbies of the groom and is served whenever the hosts want to serve it, often alongside the wedding cake.



magnolias

A species of evergreen tree found in North and South America as well as parts of Asia. They have big, waxy leaves and large, fragrant flowers that can be white, yellow, pink or purple. Magnolias are the state flowers of both Louisiana and Mississippi.

Mardi Gras

Also known as Fat Tuesday, Mardi Gras is the end of the Carnival season, which begins on January 6 (sometimes called Epiphany or Twelfth Night) in the Christian church calendar. Mardi Gras is the day before Ash Wednesday, which is the official start of Lent (the six weeks before Easter).

Pepto-Bismol

A bright-pink medicine used to relieve upset stomach, nausea and heartburn.



Piggly Wiggly

A chain of grocery stores founded in 1916 by Clarence Saunders in Memphis. They were the first “self-service” grocery stores where customers could pick their own products from the shelves rather than having clerks pick items for them.

soup to nuts

A phrase meaning everything, completely, from beginning to end.



Spoolies

A brand of hair curlers dating back to the 1950s that use heat to curl the hair.

Valium

The brand name for diazepam, an anti-anxiety drug.

For Further Reading and Understanding

EDITIONS OF THE PLAY

Steel Magnolias by Robert Harling, Garden City, New York: The Fireside Theatre, 1986.

Steel Magnolias by Robert Harling, Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1988 (acting edition).

FILMS

Steel Magnolias, directed by Herbert Ross. Screenplay by Robert Harling. With Olympia Dukakis, Sally Field, Daryl Hannah, Shirley MacLaine, Dolly Parton and Julia Roberts, 1989.

Steel Magnolias, directed by Kenny Leon. Teleplay by Sally Robinson. With Queen Latifah, Adepero Oduye, Condola Rashad, Phylicia Rashad, Jill Scott and Alfre Woodard, 2012.

ARTICLES

Maria Carter, "The Heartbreaking Real-Life Story Behind 'Steel Magnolias,'" *Country Living*, July 28, 2017.

Audrey Farley, "Steel Magnolias Is a Beloved Weepy With a Dark Side," *The Atlantic*, July 15, 2019.

Robert Harling, "An Inside Look at *Steel Magnolias* From Robert Harling," *Garden & Gun*, April 26, 2018.

Roy Hoffman, "Brash New South Is Still a Stranger to Its Dramatists," *The New York Times*, July 2, 1989.

Ted Lewis, "Playwright Robert Harling talks about 'Steel Magnolias,'" *nola.com*, July 15, 2019.

Julia Reed, "Thirty Years of *Steel Magnolias*," *Garden & Gun*, April/May 2017.

WEBSITES

JDRF (Type 1 diabetes research, funding and advocacy)
www.jdrf.org

American Diabetes Association
www.diabetes.org

National Kidney Foundation
www.kidney.org

VIDEO

NBC's "Today Show" interviews Robert Harling about the film's 25th anniversary, 2013.

www.today.com/video/today/56341099