



## Mary Jo Catlett, LHC '60

*As an undergraduate student, Mary Jo Catlett's dance teacher told her she had the talent but lacked the toughness to get to Broadway, noting that she was "too soft" for the hard knocks New York would surely give her.*

*Fortunately, Mary Jo didn't listen.*

Fifty years after graduating from Loretto Heights College, Mary Jo Catlett has seen a prolific career that has exposed her to generations of viewers, entertaining audiences from New York to Los Angeles through stage, film and television.

You might recognize her voice as that of "Mrs. Puff" on *Sponge Bob Square Pants*, or remember her as the housekeeper "Pearl Gallagher" on *Diff'rent Strokes*, "Mrs. Applebaum" on *That's So Raven*, or from her appearances on *Glee*, *M\*A\*S\*H*, and *General Hospital* (for which she received an Emmy nomination). Or maybe you saw her in feature films such as *The Champ*, *Serial Mom*, *The Benchwarmers* and *Beethoven's 5th*. Or perhaps you were lucky enough to see her on Broadway in *Hello Dolly*, where she originated the role of "Ernestina" opposite Carol Channing's "Dolly" in 1964.

"I was cast as a chorus member," Catlett remembers of her Broadway debut. "And a few weeks before opening night I got the role of Ernestina." Succeeding Broadway appearances included such shows as *Pajama Game*, *Canterbury Tales*, and *Lysistrata*.

A native of Denver, Catlett attended Loretto Heights College on a music scholarship. Although she loved music, she ultimately changed her major to drama and the rest, quite literally, is history.

She performed in LHC productions of *Wonderful Town*, *Finian's Rainbow*, *Annie Get Your Gun* and *Boom Town*, a Max DiJulio original which

featured a solo, "Respectability," that she would reprise in countless Broadway auditions during her career. And while juggling academics and collegiate productions, she worked at a nightclub her last two years as part of a local melodrama group. Her career eventually brought her back to Denver for productions of *Nunsense*, *Harvey* and *Auntie Mame* at the historic Elitch Theater, and *Something's Afoot* and a reprise of *Nunsense* at the Country Dinner Playhouse.

Yet of all the roles she's held, she cites her favorite character experience as "Lola Delaney" from *Come Back Little Sheba*, for which she garnered a Los Angeles Drama Critics Award in 1976. "This was the role of all roles for me," she recalls. "I used every part of myself and all that I knew about acting. You get used to playing certain roles over the course of your career, but Lola was different and complicated. I put my whole self into her."

Her friends would tell you that she has genuinely kept this sense of her whole self throughout her success, exemplifying the Loretto motto, *Fides, Mores, Cultura*. She will tell you her career has been a wonderful privilege. And all those she has entertained will tell you that she has brought so much to so many over the years.

Mary Jo Catlett not only proved she had what it takes to get to Broadway, she proved she belonged there (and in every other major entertainment venue). More than that, she set the stage for how to do anything worth doing with grace, joy and passion.

