

ROCKY MOUNTAIN OUTLOOK

## Dirty Laundry to address mental health issues

By Dave Whitfield - Rocky Mountain Outlook

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After a tour through B.C. and the Yukon, Dirty Laundry, a two-act, one-actor play produced by Canmore's Sean Krausert, is set for its Valley debut.

Dirty Laundry, a play dealing with mental illness, takes the stage at The Banff Centre's Margaret Greenham Theatre, March 18 and the Canmore Collegiate High School theatre, March 21. Both performances will be at

7:30 p.m.

"The purpose of the play, said Krausert, "is to entertain, like a good play should, but it also has a message about mental health and creating awareness of the effect on family and people around them."


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The play features Krausert's mother and actor, Marilyn Avient, who has written five books and who has suffered, along with her family, with a bipolar disorder since she was 36 years old. Avient is now 61 and had her first breakdown when Krausert was 15.

Over the decades, the entire family dealt with mental illness. Dirty Laundry was written by Avient and concerns her struggles with bipolar disorder.

Krausert, who has suffered from depression himself, said working with his mother on the project has actually helped their relationship by bringing suppressed problems to the forefront.

The drama onstage, he said, tends to affect audiences in one of three ways.

"The first is people who can relate because they're familiar with the problems and the play gives them a chance to talk about it. There are moments of absolute silence when you can hear a pin drop, then at the intermission you'll hear talking and chatting among groups.

"Then there are people who are somewhat aware of mental illness, but don't know what to do about it; and there are people who have no idea of mental health issues and think it's bogus.

"For them, the play can really open their eyes. It's my mother's story, and by association, my story, and there are always people looking to give a hug after."

While the play stands on its own as a play, Krausert does hope the message comes across, as mental illness is an issue world-wide.

Krausert says statistics show that

20 per cent of people in Canada will have a mental illness at some point in their lives, while 100 per cent of people will be in contact with someone, a family member, friend, or co-worker, who suffers some form of illness.

"Depression is the number one mental illness in the world," he said. "Millions of people live with depression and anxiety and the message is people don't need to just live with it. There is help, but there is a stigma attached. People suffering mental illness can be pushed away or pushed to the sidelines and marginalized."

In Canada, he said, 500,000 people each day miss work, which affects workplace and health care costs.

"We really want to raise awareness of the issue."

Tickets for Dirty Laundry are \$20 and \$15 for seniors (mature content, no children), with net proceeds being donated to the Right From The Start Program, a summer camp program, and the Clubhouse, a meeting place for Banff and Canmoreites who are chronic sufferers of mental illness.



Tickets are available from the The Banff Centre's box office and at Café Books and the Tinbox in Canmore.

In staging Dirty Laundry, Krausert has been working with Alberta Health Services and FCSS services in both Banff and Canmore.

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