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COUNTY NEWS REVIEW

A proposal on stage; tribute to father

Joshua Malley honors his father's final advice to continue on with 'Mary Poppins'



Meghan Sly (Mary Poppins) and Joshua Malley (Bert) following their Feb. 10 engagement. (Inset) Joshua Malley and Megan Sly met when they were cast as Gaston and Belle in Play Inc.'s March 2018 production of "Beauty and the Beast." Photos submitted

by **Rachel Kytonen**
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For Joshua Malley, the closing performance of "Mary Poppins" was not only about proposing to the love of his life, but also a way to honor his father's final words of advice.

Malley, 22, of Princeton, and a 2015 graduate of Princeton High School, was cast as Bert in the recent production of "Mary Poppins" by Cambridge-based Play Inc. Arts. Performances were held Feb. 2-3 and Feb. 8-10 at the Hardy Performing Arts Center at Cambridge-Isanti High School.

Following the final performance on Feb. 10, in front of the entire cast and audience, Malley got down on one knee and proposed to his girlfriend, Meghan Sly, who was cast as Mary Poppins. The entire proposal can be viewed on Play Inc. Arts' Facebook page.

Sly, 24, lives in St. Louis Park but grew up in Wadena and graduated from Verndale High School.

Malley and Sly met when they were cast as Gaston and Belle in Play Inc.'s March 2018 production of "Beauty and the Beast."

"Belle had always been my dream role, and I had auditioned for it many times but never got it,"

See **PROPOSAL** on
page 13

Former Isanti County businessman charged with second-degree murder from 1993 case

by **Rachel Kytonen**
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Forensic DNA evidence from a genealogy website and from a napkin taken during a January hockey game are part of the reasons a current Isanti resident, who previously owned several businesses in the area, has been charged with second-degree murder in the 1993 death of Minneapolis resident Jeanne Ann Childs.

Jerry Arnold Westrom, 52, was charged with felony second-degree murder, with intent, not premeditated, on Feb. 14, by the Hennepin County Attorney's Office. He made his first official court appearance on Feb. 15 where bail was set at \$1 million without conditions or \$500,000 with conditions. Westrom posted \$500,000 bail at 8:04 p.m. that same day and was released from custody. His next court appearance is an omnibus hearing scheduled for March 13.

Westrom was arrested in Waite Park on Feb. 11 following a multi-year investigation by the Minneapolis Police Department, Bureau of Criminal Apprehension Forensic Laboratory, Hennepin County Sheriff's Office and FBI Minneapolis.

Childs was 35 at the time of her death, while Westrom was 27.

Her body was found in the bedroom of a Minneapolis apartment

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page 24

INSIDE



Decade worth of state tournament advancements for Cambridge-Isanti gymnastics team

Bluejacket gymnastics take home the Section 7AA title after Feb. 15 meet.

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INSIDE

Cambridge- Isanti 2019 Triple A winners announced

Cambridge-Isanti High School seniors Annika Schlueter and Jack Hennen were named the 2019 Triple A winners.

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APG
EAST CENTRAL MINNESOTA

PROPOSAL

Continued from front

Sly said. "When I found out I was cast for Belle I was ecstatic. So I looked up Joshua on Facebook, since he was cast as Gaston, and I thought he was kind of cute. A couple of weeks later I messaged him and we talked nonstop for days, and then eventually we met."

Malley said his first get-together with Sly was very casual.

"The first time we met, we had a dinner date. We had dinner at Applebee's, then saw the movie 'Thor: Ragnarok,' and then went to Caribou Coffee. After Caribou closed, we sat in the car for about two hours watching YouTube movies and hanging out. It was really like a, 'just be yourself,' kind of thing; we weren't trying to impress one another. I knew after that date I wanted to pursue a relationship with Meghan."

Sly felt the same way after the first date.

"I knew Joshua was extremely handsome and someone I wanted to date," Sly said. "It was the best first date of my life and it was so organic. He was someone who could make me laugh and make me smile. After we were dating, hanging out, for about a month, I was talking to my roommate and I told her I have a feeling it was meant to be."

Malley and Sly officially became a couple in January 2018. Sly said the past few months they had been talking about marriage and she and Malley had even picked out her engagement ring together.

But then Malley's father, Brian Malley, was diagnosed with stage 4 esophageal cancer, and died exactly two months after his diagnosis on Jan. 29, 2019.

"About a week after the cast list went out for 'Mary Poppins,' my dad got his diagnosis," Malley said. "I met with Aaron Knudsvig, the director, and told him about it and we formed a contingency plan in case I couldn't do it. About a month into rehearsals, I was visiting with my dad and he had been in and out of consciousness, sleeping, the entire morning, but once in a while he'd have a burst of awareness. So I was talking with him and asked him if I could go to rehearsal or if I should stay with him. And he woke up, looked right at me and said, 'You have made a commitment and you need to honor your commitment.' From that moment on, I knew I would continue on as Bert in 'Mary Poppins.'"

Malley said his dad was always one of his biggest supporters and was the reason he got into music and acting.

"I've been singing on stage my entire life and my dad was also a performer and I would sing on stage with him," Malley said. "I got into music theater because of my dad and my first real audition was for 'The Sound of Music' in Elk River when I was 12 or 13 years old. My dad went to every one of my shows and was always real excited about it."

Malley said his dad would want him to be happy.

"The last thing my dad would ever want for me would be to stop doing something

that makes me happy," Malley said. "I thought what better way to honor my dad and his memory than by honoring the last words of advice he ever gave to me."

Malley explained when he was cast as "Peter Pan" his junior year of high school, his dad was in charge of the flying apparatus. So during the performances of "Mary Poppins" the cast made sure Malley knew his father was still with him.

"Our set designer, Angela Gregerson, put an X by the flying apparatus for 'Mary Poppins' and taped the dedication found in the program on the curtain by that spot, as a reminder that he was still with us and a reminder to me about the final words of advice he'd ever given to me," Malley said. "I knew my dad would want me to keep going, living, dreaming, pursuing the arts, being creative, and living and loving life."



Joshua Malley (Bert) proposes on Feb. 10 to his girlfriend, Meghan Sly (Mary Poppins), on stage, in front of the entire cast and crew and audience, following the final performance of "Mary Poppins."

Malley said even though he and Sly had only been dating for about a year when his father died, his father loved Sly.

"My dad was put on hospice about two weeks before we'd have to say goodbye to him, so we had time to prepare," Malley said. "But in that two weeks, I was able to tell my dad I was going to propose to Meghan and I asked for his blessing. He

gave me his blessing and then we prayed and he did a short blessing over our marriage. When talking about Meghan, my dad said with a slight smile, 'How can you not love her.' It was a very cool experience."

"I feel very blessed to have known his dad and raised him to be the man Joshua is today," Sly said.

Malley's memorial service for his father was the morning of Feb. 2, while his first performance for "Mary Poppins" was the evening of Feb. 2. Malley mentioned a large number of the cast from "Mary Poppins" attended the service even though they had never met him.

"My dad was a very relationship-centered person," Malley said. "The memorial service was standing-room only. He was the guy who would randomly call to see how you were doing, and I inherited that from him. I am an extremely relationship-centered person, and I think that's a blessing that is coming into fruition with this marriage."

Malley said the cast and crew of Play Inc. have become family to him.

"The people who are part of Play Inc. are just the most brilliant people," Malley said. "There is just an incredible amount of talent within this community theater group. And it's amazing the number of people who drive up from the Twin Cities area to be a part of this group."

Malley said besides his family and Meghan, his Play Inc. family really helped him through his father's passing.

"We really are like a family to each

other," Malley said. "And the kids in the play are like little siblings to us. Wesley Kennedy, who played Michael Banks, and Evangeline Gillard, who played Jane Banks, had more stage time than Mary Poppins and Bert, and they both did such an outstanding job. Wesley really pulled himself together for this role, and for Evangeline, this was her first show, and she was an absolute joy to be around. And Jeff Edblad, who played Admiral Boom, has become like a father figure to me, and he's a genuine, kind, awesome guy."

"I really felt like Wesley and Evangeline were like a miniature us," Sly said.

Sly said she had actually mentioned the idea of a proposal following one of the "Mary Poppins" performances.

"I had told Joshua how cool it would be to get engaged following one of the performances, but he said it was too soon, and said we should just wait until the show is done," Sly said. "So my parents were in the audience for the Feb. 9 show and I thought maybe it would happen after that performance. And then I was all disappointed after that performance when it didn't happen. But then I was thinking it'd probably happen on Valentine's Day. But Joshua was super sneaky about everything. During our final performance on Feb. 10, I saw my par-



Meghan Sly (Mary Poppins) plants a kiss on Joshua Malley's (Bert) following a performance of "Mary Poppins."

ents back in the audience and I had sort of an inkling. It wasn't until I flew in for my final curtain call and I saw someone recording everything that I realized then it was probably going to happen. I don't remember much about the moment but I said, 'yes,' and I was bawling. I was surprised."

Malley said it was during one of the last rehearsals for "Mary Poppins" that he talked with Knudsvig and musical director Shannon Shogren about proposing to Sly.

"We all went to a private room and I talked to Aaron and Shannon about how much their support means to me, and I asked for their permission to propose to Meghan after our last show," Malley said. "Shannon immediately said, 'I called it, and I knew it would happen.' Aaron was just smiling and said, 'Absolutely, of course we can do this.' They also told me we are the fifth Play Inc. couple to get married, but the first to ever have a proposal on stage."

On Feb. 10, the day of the final performance for "Mary Poppins," Malley said he and Knudsvig were able to have some time alone before the final performance. Malley said there were only a handful of people who knew he was going to propose following the Feb. 10 performance.

"I met with Aaron and gave him the ring and he put it in the lock box in the ticket booth," Malley said. "And then we had this 45-minute conversation, just talking about things and him providing me with encouragement and advice, and he talked about



Joshua Malley, with his parents, Lisa and Brian Malley, and his sister, Jaime Malley, joining via FaceTime, when picking out a Christmas tree in December 2017.

when he proposed to his wife, Sarah. I really developed quite a relationship with both Aaron and Shannon, and I appreciate them both so much."

Sly mentioned Malley also called her parents to ask for their blessing before he proposed to her.

Malley first became aware of Play Inc. through Julie Moore, a longtime music teacher with the Princeton School District.

"Julie told me they were doing 'Beauty and the Beast,' in Cambridge and told me I should audition for it. I really hadn't heard about Play Inc. before, but I decided to audition for the part of the Beast," Malley said. "I had just played the part of Gaston the summer before, but after I auditioned for the Beast, Aaron (Knudsvig) asked me to do a reading for Gaston. So after I read for Gaston, I pretty much knew I'd be cast as Gaston."

Sly auditioned for Play Inc. for the first time after talking with her former roommate at college, Mikaela Kase, who is from Cambridge and has been a part of Play Inc.

Sly said the past few months have been a little crazy for her and Malley, but she's now focused on planning the wedding, which will be in September. She said nothing is final yet, but she's hoping to have the wedding in the chapel at the University of Northwestern, St. Paul, where she went to college.

Sly currently works as an office manager for Aufderworld Corporation in Minneapolis, and Malley currently works for Beaudry Oil and Propane delivering propane. His mother, Lisa Malley, works part time for Coborn's in Princeton and for a bank in Zimmerman. She's also heavily involved in the ministry of her church, Living Waters Church in Elk River.

"We both really love Play Inc. and hope to continue performing in more of their shows," Sly said. "They have really become like family to us and we love them so much."

Sly said the proposal was everything she could have imagined.

"While Aaron (Knudsvig) was talking on stage, my heart was just beating so fast because I knew it was coming, while I was also kind of shocked and sobbing at the same time," Sly said. "But I have always dreamed about meeting a guy in theater that was cute, handsome and share the same Christian values that I do. We met during my favorite show, 'Beauty and the Beast,' and I was proposed to on stage. Joshua is creative, artsy, musical, a great writer of music and poetry. Everything about him just makes my heart melt."