

# Overture

All my friends and acquaintances from New York thought I had lost my mind when I told them about this old theater that had been abandoned for twenty years. When I told them I was planning to leave New York for good and make a new life for myself out in the desert, they were convinced that I was now a hopeless case and gave me up for good.

Fifteen years passed before I heard from any of them. Perhaps they saw my picture and an article about me in a *National Geographic* they saw in some dentist's office. The article told a story about this dancer from New York who performs every night in an abandoned theater in the desert whether anyone shows up or not. In fact, they even said I painted a Renaissance audience on all three walls of my theater so that I would be guaranteed an audience each performance night. This of course is untrue. I painted a Renaissance audience to surround my performance with an atmosphere complementary to what I performed.

Of course, much of what has been written about me makes me seem crazy. It makes for good press. And of course, it makes gossip more fun.

In 1967, on my birthday, I settled in the town of Death Valley Junction. When I arrived, this place wasn't deserted. There was the old Amargosa Hotel which was operated by several families who were given a place to live in return. This of course did not mean they knew anything about operating a hotel. There was also a filling station across the road. "Death Valley Junction Service," it read over the porte-cochere.

Around the corner from our old post office and vacant general store was the Lila C Café. The same folks who ran the filling station ran the café as well. When business was brisk, the station hand, Smitty, could be seen climbing out from under a truck he was working on to fix a hamburger for a customer in the café without even bothering to wash his hands.

When business was slow, they would close up for the rest of the day and invariably a tour bus would round the corner with passengers hoping to find a place to eat. The closed sign would signal them to go on.

For a while there was a milk cow housed in a pen she shared with two jackasses by the filling station. An old bathtub inside the pen provided drinking water. She was milked every day. I never did find out if her milk was served in the Lila C Café. But the thought did enter my mind.

To me, the most important building was Corkhill Hall, an empty theater left from the 1920s when the town served as a company town for the Pacific Coast Borax Company. This building is the reason I was here. It's the reason I'm here now. This building, now the Amargosa Opera House, has been home to me. Nowhere else could I attain the artistic fulfillment I have found here.

When I first came, I was too many, the crazy lady who moved out into the middle of the desert to run an opera house. To many I am not crazy anymore. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the Amargosa Opera House has survived and become successful. I enjoy the public approval. However, if my Opera House had not become successful, I would still be here struggling to support my art. This is not because I think my art to be great. It is because my art is necessary to me. The early years here were difficult. I was misunderstood, gossiped about, and even heard tales of my death more than once. I am very much here and very much alive. And now, almost forty years later, I am pleased to present my life.