

However, not all students are as open to the idea of a haunted theater.

Senior Tyler Campbell said he enjoys the legend, but he doesn't believe the ghost of Joyce roams the halls.

"I do believe in ghosts," Campbell said. "I don't believe in Joyce. I think it's just a fun myth."

Campbell considers himself a skeptic, so it is no surprise that he questions the stories he hears.

"I believe some of them think they've seen or heard something," he said, "but I think there's a rational explanation for all of it."

Even more skeptical, senior Charles Goldbach said he believes that Joyce is a tall tale that has been blown out of proportion.

"I do not believe in ghosts. That would be crazy," Goldbach said. "I don't believe in Joyce because I don't believe in ghosts."

Goldbach said that most phenomena can be logically explained, whether it be friends messing with friends or Ms. Hilt controlling the lights from her phone.

"I have been in the dungeon the most out of anyone here, and I've never had anything weird happen," Goldbach said. "I think it started as a prank that slowly spiraled out of control."

Choir teacher Holmquist has had years of exposure to the legend.

"I have felt her presence many times," Holmquist said. "I have seen shadows, I have heard noises."

Holmquist detailed the events of a Friday night before spring break, when he was the only one in the building but felt far from alone.

"I wasn't even a foot from my door before it started

slamming like someone was jerking the handle as hard as they could to open it," he said.

The noise startled Homquist so much that the copies he had just made flew from his hands. He opened the door only to find nothing.

"No running away, no footsteps, no other sounds at all," Holmquist said.

Throughout his years he has had a wide variety of experiences.

"I've seen tools drop, I've seen lights go out. I've heard weird clanks come from doorways," Holmquist said. "You would see the curtains blow even when the air wasn't on."

However, Holmquist said he isn't sure what Joyce is up to nowadays.

"I haven't seen hide nor hair of her since we've opened this new school," Holmquist said.

Since the remodel in 2018, even the feeling of Joyce has been erased from most of the school. In fact, the only places Joyce is felt are places that were more or less untouched by the renovations.

The halls around the theater may have changed, but the inside was left mostly untouched, with the basement being just as old and creepy as ever.

Joyce lives on, not necessarily in the walls of "the dungeon," or on the stage, but in the hearts and minds of students who go through the theater program. That is where her spirit is kept alive.

"As much as I don't believe in Joyce, I would never want the idea of it to go away," Campbell said. "The legend was based on a real person, and I think it's very nice for her that we all respect and like her, and that we keep her memory alive."



11 photos by Allie Fischer

Above: The theater basement, also known as the dungeon, location of many alleged Joyce sightings.

Right and above right: Replica of Joyce's dress from "Death Takes a Holiday" on a mannequin in the dungeon.



Joyce Diller's yearbook (above) and high school memorabilia (below) in the theater department's display case.





SCHOOL

Spirit

THE LEGEND OF THE THEATER GHOST: JOYCE DILLER

II story by Chloe Highsmith

Ryan Holmquist watched the window as he heard a loud slam -- a slam that could only have come from the doors across the courtyard. Yet he was alone in the building. No teachers, no students, no janitors, and no sign of anyone at the doors.

He finished making his copies and headed back to his classroom, but whatever caused the slam followed.

"I felt her presence," Holmquist, a choir teacher, said when recalling these events. "It was Joyce's time in the school, and she did not want me there."

The "Joyce" he speaks of is Joyce Diller, the typically benevolent ghost believed to haunt the halls of the theater.

Joyce Diller was a young woman who attended Salina's Washington High School and was an active member in many school activities, as can be seen by the school's 1949 yearbook.

Most notably, Joyce was involved in the school's theater department. She starred as Grazia in their production of "Death Takes a Holiday." In the show, Grazia is saved from a fatal car crash by Death -- the grim reaper who is taking a vacation from the underworld -- only for the two to fall in love.

At the end of the production, Death claims her life so they can remain together even when he must return to the underworld.

In a tragic case of life imitating art, Joyce died in a car crash in 1950. She was 19 at the time of the crash, according to a 1981 Salina Journal article.

Now, it is said that Diller's spirit lives on in the theater.

Some believe that her spirit was brought to Central in the curtains from Washington High; others believe she arrived when Central opened its doors in 1972.

No matter the origin of her spirit, it is widely acknowledged that her presence is felt in the theater.

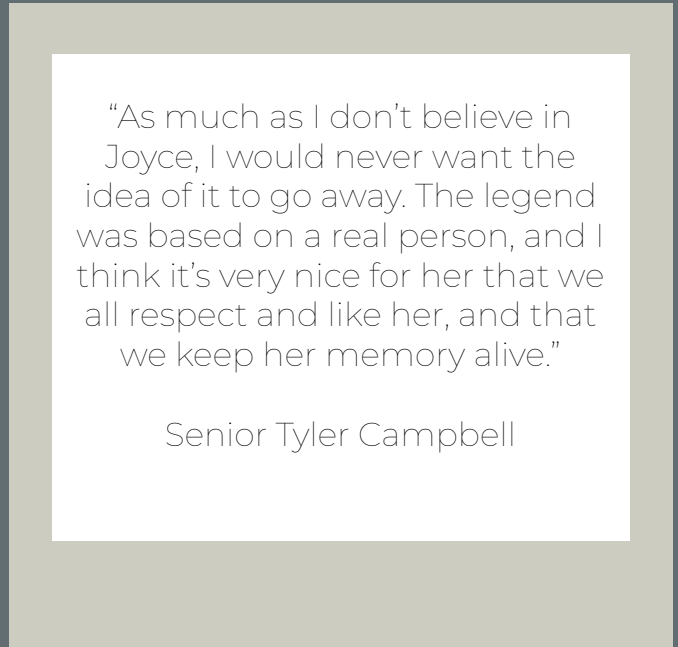
Theater teacher Barbara Hilt didn't know about the legends until she arrived in Salina the summer before her first year here in 2020.

"I made up the ghost at Garden City just so we could have one. It's a theater thing," Hilt said. "But this ghost here is real."

It wasn't long before Hilt started experiencing Joyce's presence for herself.

One of the first few times Hilt entered the building, she discussed with her sister the idea of replacing the curtains hanging on either side of the auditorium. This idea immediately brought about a shift in energy, Hilt said. The theater felt cold and unwelcoming.

The next time she came, the carpet in the



Senior Tyler Campbell

auditorium was being replaced. To get the roll of carpet through the door, the workers had to take down the curtains.

"Right as I stepped in the door I felt anger. It was tangible," Hilt said. "Her curtains were on the ground."

Hilt then went to the stage to apologize and promise Joyce that the curtains would be rehung and everything would be all right.

"I told her it wasn't my fault, and I would make sure the curtains were put back in their place," she said.

Senior Ethan Henry also has found himself in inexplicable situations. Henry mentioned one of his many trips to the basement, also known as "the dungeon" to those involved with theater.

"We were in the basement finding props for this show and we kept hearing loud noises from the other side of the dungeon," Henry said.

Henry went to investigate the noise.

"We found a plastic candle laying on the ground that we knew was not there when we first entered," he said.

Henry didn't want to think too much of it, until he heard another loud noise coming from the small room in the corner of the dungeon.

"There was another candle just lying there, in this really creepy chair in the corner," he said.

Since then, Henry has taken care to avoid being in the basement alone.