

HCC theater production presents 'Ugly Lies the Bone'

HOLYOKE – There's an early scene in Lindsey Ferrentino's 2014 play, "Ugly Lies the Bone," when the main character, Jess, rebukes her sister for removing a mirror from the wall of their childhood home.

"You don't have to change anything," says Jess, a soldier returning to civilian life. "I don't want things different."

Nevertheless, things are different.

Her hometown of Titusville, Florida, is suffering an economic decline caused by the ending of NASA's space shuttle program. She can't find a job. Her mother has dementia. Her younger sister, Kacie, has a new boyfriend Jess thinks is a deadbeat. Her long-term sweetheart married someone else while she was deployed.

More than that, Jess is different too, changed psychologically, the way all soldiers are who've served in combat and physically, from an IED explosion that left debilitating burns on her face, neck, arm and leg for which she is still undergoing treatment.

"She's dealing with the fact that she's not the same anymore, and neither is anyone in her sphere," says Holyoke Community College theater professor Tim Cochran, director of "Ugly Lies the Bone," the HCC Theater Department's spring 2019 production.

The show opens Thursday, April 25, and runs through Saturday, April 27, with performances each night at 7:30 p.m. and a matinee April 27 at 2 p.m.



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Carina Savoie, front, of Agawam, plays Jess, a disabled soldier, in the HCC Theater Department production of Lindsey Ferrentino's "Ugly Lies the Bone." The cast also includes, rear, from left: Idalisha Carmona of Westfield, Keith Gordon of Chicopee, Hannah Labreche of Holyoke, Haley Thompson of Westfield and Edward Rodriguez of Springfield.

The play interweaves the two main aspects of Jess's present life: her experience at home and her experience in virtual reality therapy - a real type of burn treatment known as "distraction therapy" that helps relieve acute pain.

For much of the play, Jess, played by HCC student-actor Carina Savoie of Agawam, wears virtual reality goggles while the disembodied voice of her therapist (Idalisha Carmona of Westfield) guides her through a virtual world.

"Jess really starts to embrace the escape she feels and the distraction from the past she vividly recalls," says Cochran. "In the virtual world she can do anything. She can run, she can jump, she can be anybody she wants to be. But it's sort of false and it becomes addictive."

For help creating both the real and virtual worlds, Cochran turned to HCC theater professor Matt Whiton for stage and lighting design and electronic media arts professor Justin West for

media design.

What they came up is a kind of fractured set and a series of scattered screens on and off stage that will display the digital images as Jess would see them through her goggles.

"I wanted the audience to experience some of what Jess is with this virtual freedom," says Cochran, "to watch the character in front of us, knowing that she can't do certain things anymore because of her pain."

For background, and to supplement the script, the cast and crew visited the Warrior's Art Room in Westfield and talked to veterans engaged in art therapy there. Warrior's Art Room founder Steve Jones '15, an Iraq war veteran and HCC alumnus, also visited the cast in the Leslie Phillips Theater and described his own combat experiences.

He also invited HCC student-veterans to audition and cast Keith Gordon of Chicopee, a veteran and National Guardsman as Kelvin, Kacie's out-of-work boyfriend, whose repartee with the tough, quick-witted Jess provides much of the play's comic relief.

Performances will be in the HCC Leslie Phillips Theater, Fine and Performing Arts Building on April 26 and April 27 at 7:30 p.m., and also at 2 p.m. on April 27. Tickets are \$10 for general admission, \$8 for students and seniors, \$5 for HCC students, faculty and staff, and free for veterans. For more information or to reserve a seat, people may call the box office at 413-552-2528.