

Normal native's wife voice of Abby Cadabby

By Mary Ann Ford
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BLOOMINGTON — When Leslie Carrara-Rudolph was growing up in northern California, she always wanted to be a teacher.

But her expertise as a puppeteer, singer and actress kept landing her jobs as an entertainer.

Now, she's found a way to do both.

Carrara-Rudolph, wife of Normal native Paul Rudolph, is the voice and puppeteer for Abby Cadabby, the first major female character on the children's educational television program, "Sesame Street."

Abby, the 3-year-old daughter of Fairy Godmother and a fairy-in-training herself, just moved to Sesame Street from Fairyside, Queens, making her debut Aug. 14, 2006. Abby joins a cast that includes Big Bird, Elmo, Cookie Monster, Oscar the Grouch and Ernie and Bert.

"When you know everything about fairies, it was a no-brainer," said Carrara-Rudolph. "Abby's a wish fairy. She's all about finding about things in people's hearts."

The role seems a perfect match for Carrara-Rudolph, who grew up listening to her grandpa's stories about gnomes and fairies. "I played outside a lot," she said. "No matter where we lived, I always had an outside playhouse. I'd make an outdoor environment for fairies and gnomes."

She started cartooning at a young age and always dressed like her characters.

When she was 16, she helped with a parks and recreation program. The kids and parents loved her so much, the parents paid her to entertain at birthday parties, she said.

"I owned my own business at 16," Carrara-Rudolph said. "I was a clown for children's birthday parties. I was really an entertainer. I created games, painted faces and made puppets out of slippers."

She put herself through San Francisco State University by painting windows with holiday scenes. She created her own major: child development through art.

Her first puppet job — and the place she met Paul Rudolph — was on "Muppets Tonight," a television show that started in 1969 and featured the Muppets and guest celebrities.

"It was a 'falling down the rabbit hole' of a job," she said. "I just kept showing up and really enjoyed it."

She built her first puppet — Madame Velveeeta — at the show's workshop. And, she met Rudolph, who was the show's assistant music director. They married in August 2000.

The show had ended in 1998, but Carrara-Rudolph's career didn't.

Although she admits her career included long droughts, Carrara-Rudolph has voiced the character Blue on Nickelodeon's "Blue's Clues," Edi the Zebra on "Animal Jam" and background players on "The Simpsons."

Carrara-Rudolph also is Ginger on the Disney Channel's "Johnny and the Sprites" and Nate in an upcoming PBS show "Nate the Great."

"She has about 100 characters in her head and 12 (done) in puppet form," said Paul Rudolph.

"My whole mantra is 'spread joy.' It's what I do," said Carrara-Rudolph. "I want to make a

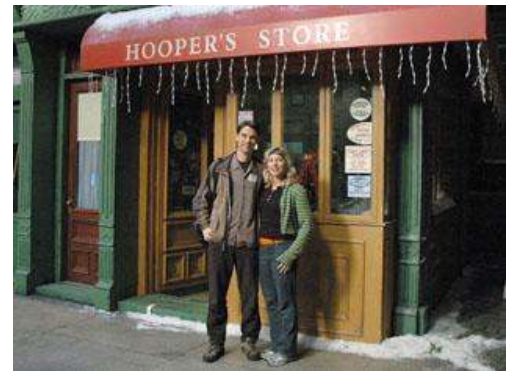
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Take a look



Abby Cadabby is the newest Muppet on Sesame Street. Leslie Carrara-Rudolph, wife of a Normal native, is the puppeteer for Abby. (c) 2006 Sesame Workshop. "Sesame Street" and its logo are trademarks of Sesame Workshop. All rights reserved.



Paul Rudolph a Normal native, poses with his wife Leslie Carrara-Rudolph in front of Hooper's Store on the set of Sesame Street. (FOR THE PANTAGRAPH)

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difference in a child's life."

Talent may be a family affair

BLOOMINGTON — Leslie Carrara-Rudolph isn't the only talented one in the household.

Her husband, Normal native Paul Rudolph, son of Sally and Lee Rudolph, has made a name of his own in the entertainment field.

The 1984 Normal Community High School graduate is audio engineer and (non-musical) sound designer for commercial composers John Trivers — who worked with rock group Blue Oyster Cult and singer Tina Turner — and his wife, Elizabeth Myers.

Rudolph helped with an animated commercial for United Airlines in 2004 that was broadcast during the Academy Awards and since has been displayed at various art museums. The commercial features the George Gershwin song, "Rhapsody in Blue."

Rudolph also has his own percussion performance art ensemble, called "Glank." The group uses instruments created by Rudolph, who graduated from the University of Illinois in 1989 with a music education degree and in 1995 with a master's in music composition.

"I'm into finding objects," Rudolph said. "I have 300 instruments."

He's made musical instruments from metal, liquid propane tanks, salad bottles and saw blades.

Besides his previous job as assistant music director on "Muppets Tonight," Rudolph also has worked for Richard Gibbs of "The Tracey Ullman Show" and helped with the movie, "The Christmas Box."

"There have been some ups and downs, but it's been amazing," he said.

On the Net:

www.glanktheproduct.com

Where you've seen her

Being part of the Sesame Street group has brought a variety of options to Leslie Carrara-Rudolph. Listed are a few:

- Besides being the puppeteer and voice for Abby Cadabby on "Sesame Street," Carrara-Rudolph has been a tap-dancing chicken and a spoon.
- In a few weeks, she and Paul Rudolph will travel to Australia with the Jim Henson puppets.
- Carrara-Rudolph (as Abby Cadabby) was on the Sesame Street float in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. A clip is on her Web site at www.lesliecarrara-rudolph.com.
- Carrara-Rudolph performs as Prairie Dawn's mom in the "Sesame Beginnings" DVD for parents and children.

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JB2 wrote on January 15, 2007 6:45 PM:
"Bloomington/Normal should be proud of Leslie and Paul and be reassured that there are positive influences out there for our children today. As a Bloomington native I think it's so important that we realize that personal and professional success isn't limited to tall buildings and big cities. Paul and Leslie are examples of working toward and realizing a dream. Success!"

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February 2007						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28			

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- [Thursday, February 1](#)
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- [Sunday, January 28](#)
- [Saturday, January 27](#)
- [Friday, January 26](#)
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No, "News Now" wrote on January 15, 2007 5:02 PM:

"You need to recognize it. People in far off places, well-hidden from you by the media, are dying daily for the lies you pretend don't exist. Even in the 1960s the media showed the world the horrors of the unpopular war. But now, nothing. As long as people dye on a daily basis, that story should come first. And not a page later."

Lucy wrote on January 15, 2007 2:57 PM:

"RE: News Now.....I can read through your sarcasm. Good for you for telling the others the story belonged on the front page! Go, Leslie. Go Sesame Street."

Lucy wrote on January 15, 2007 2:54 PM:

"Thank you, Pantagraph for putting it on the front page. It's fun to read something other than doom and gloom first thing in the morning. Don't pay any attention to those who are complaining."

? wrote on January 15, 2007 2:39 PM:

"...the first major female character on the children's educational television program, "Sesame Street." Um, what about Zoe? "

News Now wrote on January 15, 2007 1:44 PM:

"What's wrong with you soft, decadent, happy fools? Every newspaper should have more of the real blood and guts of everyday life - more pain and suffering - more crooked politicians and street level degradation. No friendly little characters belong with REAL news. C'mon. Get with it. Life is full of hate; we need to embrace it. "

:) wrote on January 15, 2007 1:06 PM:

"Abby rocks! She got to meet Rosie O'donnell!!!!"

I love Abby Cadabby! wrote on January 15, 2007 12:23 PM:

"I enjoyed this story very much! And it's nice to hear stories like this and yes it deserves to be front page story. Who wants to read about the war and the troubles of the world everyday!! Spend less time on the comments and go out and make a difference in the community, nation, world. Abby is and so are Leslie and Paul. The children of today are our leaders of the future! "

Costanza wrote on January 15, 2007 12:15 PM:

"the very definition of a "slow news day", I guess"

Linda X wrote on January 15, 2007 12:06 PM:

"Does The Pantagraph not have an entertainment section? We have a president who has violated nearly every Amendment to The Bill of Rights; we have a lost war that commenced with lies; we have a million homeless while mountains of money go to foreign ventures. . . . And this is what we get for front-page, top-story news? Am I the only one who sees something wrong here?"

WOW wrote on January 15, 2007 11:48 AM:

"MY kid love sesame street and I cant lie I do too."

jimmy wrote on January 15, 2007 11:31 AM:

"nice profile. thank you."

Linda X wrote on January 15, 2007 11:25 AM:

"Is there no shame in media? On the front page . . . top story yet!"

Not front-page worthy wrote on January 15, 2007 11:04 AM:

"Good but out of place."

yo wrote on January 14, 2007 8:07 PM:

"Wow!"

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