Ask her no questions

Interview with Howe is monologue

By Tina Howe "Playgoer Church"

"I'd rather discuss my work than my private life.
"If you ask 'When were you born?' I have to say how old I am.
"I was born in New York City, in Woman's Hospital. I'm very childish about my age. I want to live forever. It's not a vanity thing. Mortality terrifies me.
"Both my parents were, like Gardner and Fanny Church, from Boston families. My play is about a vanishing breed. My mother was a painter. My father was a woman. Two Diva Howes, TV woman. When I heard about Kennedy's assassination, it was by my father's voice on radio.
"Every time I stepped out of the house, the Metropolitan Museum was the first thing I saw. From the time I could walk, it was a refuge. I remember my brother and I toddling in to see the armor and the van Gogh, and all the Roman dead people in the tubs.
"I attended elitiest girl's schools in New York. They were the worst. Then my father accepted a position at the University of Illinois. I went to a wildly experimental high school in Urbana. It was chaos. We voted on everything. Then I went to two colleges.
"I studied the piano very seriously for eight years, but I got so terrified when I had to perform that my hands shook so much I had to stop. I didn't have any talent either. But if I could be anything in the world, I would be a musician, an organist. I'd play Bach chorales all the time.
"I graduated from Sarah Lawrence, and it kind of really got interested in theatre. I wrote a one-act play during my senior year that was performed. It was a terrible play and everybody loved it. It was about the end of the world, one of those with talking pigeons. It was really awful. But what I did was everyone started screaming 'Author, author!' and I went to my head.

"After graduation in 1960, I spent a year in Paris in a period I characterize as the heyday of the theater of the absurd. There I wrote my first full-length play, but the most profound thing that happened to me that year was seeing 'The Bald Soprano' by Ionesco. That exploded me all over the place. Ionesco, Beckett and Pirandello are still my heroes.
"I live on New York's Upper West Side with my husband and two children, Dari and Eben. Our drooling, bald babies; now they're big and hairy and expensive.
"I am very tall, I am underweight. I'm a Scorpio, I'm a compulsive shopper. Woolworth and Alexander's. I was an ugly duckling growing up. I was always about six feet tall from the time I was about three years old. I was always the high point in every school photograph. The awful thing about being tall is that you can never hide. And sometimes you really want to.
"I don't live in the past at all. I don't live in the future either. I'm totally now. I also don't think about anything. I'm very stupid that way. I'm like someone under a form of life that never asks questions.
"My kids, my husband, my work, that's about it. I don't have any message that I'm trying to get across. I've never thought of myself as being a woman, I've only thought of myself as a writer. I think that's because in our family we didn't define our roles in terms of sex, but terms of talent.
"I don't read. I used to, but I don't have time anymore. When I'm not writing plays I take care of my children. I write about five or six hours a day, and if I'm not doing that, I'm playing with my children or my husband.
"I have a profoundly rich and boring life. I don't go to parties. I don't know anybody famous. You have to be like an athlete to write, you really can't go out. I sort of live from day to day, and I can't imagine 20 years from now."