

## Major Sheryl called to help Major Barbara

*by Jennifer Byrd –*

Every once in a while, a Salvation Army officer is asked for guidance of not quite a spiritual nature. Such was the case for Major Sheryl Tollerud, of the Santa Clara Citadel Corps, Calif., who was recently approached by the cast of Major Barbara for advice on how to be a Salvation Army officer. The play was in production at a local theatre in San Jose.

Major Barbara, a comedy by George Bernard Shaw, raises issues about religion, war, politics and social justice and questions the very notion of idealism. Barbara, a Salvation Army major, believes she can convert her father, a seemingly amoral realist and Europe's richest arms manufacturer. Barbara herself, however, wrestles with the complex and disturbing relationships between religion, government and business.



“It was a joy to be able to share in that context the real mission of The Salvation Army, and to help the cast be in character,” said Tollerud. “I thought they gave a very sensitive portrayal of the mission and message of The Salvation Army.”

In meeting with the cast, Tollerud explained a bit of the history of the Army, its doctrines and mission.

She harkened back to the time of Jack the Ripper, explaining to the cast that The Salvation Army began its work in England during that era. She shared that in an effort to reach the culture of that day, the Army took popular pub tunes and changed the lyrics to biblical phrases. She sang “Oh, Danny Boy” to demonstrate, using the changed lyrics of “If on my soul a trace of sin remaineth, if on my hands a stain may yet be seen...” (Chorus #72 in The Song Book)

The cast was so taken with her singing that they actually incorporated two Army songs into the play. No, the major did not perform them.

“This is not a musical and yet they incorporated two of the songs that I gave to them,” Major Tollerud said. “The director was very sensitive and intrigued about the spiritual dynamic of the Army’s ministry and wanted to depict that in their performance.”

The cast asked many questions, such as what does the Army do today? Do clients have to belong to The Salvation Army or be converted to receive services? Is The Salvation Army a church? Do the officers receive monetary compensation? They also were curious about the meaning of the ranks. In addition to teaching them about the Army, Tollerud also gave the cast copies of the War Cry that included the ABCs of salvation. Again, they were so taken with the history of the organization that they took the ABCs and put them on a banner that they used in the play.

“It was great fun speaking to the cast,” Tollerud exclaimed. “Really, I am happy whenever I get a chance to talk about The Salvation Army because I can explain our mission and how we serve suffering humanity.”