



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Grand Traverse Pavilions Brings “Mrs. Kelly’s Journey” to Traverse City and Old Town Playhouse**

*Traverse City, MI* – Grand Traverse Pavilions, the region’s largest public skilled senior care provider has partnered with the Old Town Playhouse to bring a moving, important, and often humorous play about life, dementia and “going home” to the care-giving and general community.

Mrs. Mary Kelly never wanted to leave her native Ireland and relocate to Detroit in the late 1950s, but her husband did and she didn't have a choice. So, she went. Kelly eventually came to love the United States and Detroit — she and her husband settled with their family in Lincoln Park — and her evolution from Irish immigrant to proud American is detailed in a touching, new one-woman play by Kelly’s daughter Breeda (Kelly) Miller. It also follows Kelly's journey with vascular dementia when Miller was her Mom's primary caregiver. Kelly died in 2011 at the age of 86.

After its premiere last fall, Miller is now taking "Mrs. Kelly's Journey Home" on the road. She performed it at the Gaelic League of Detroit in mid-May and to much acclaim recently in Chicago.

Miller, who also is a professional speaker, said the play isn't just for one demographic. It also shines a light on the demands of caregiving, something that isn't discussed enough. "I was blown away by the people who said this was

so powerful, this was healing," said Miller. "One minute they were laughing and the next minute they were wiping away tears."

A photo album Miller put together for her mom while she was in hospice created the vision for what would evolve into the play, "Mrs. Kelly's Journey Home." Mrs. Kelly lived with Miller and her husband for six years. "Instead of watching her decline and deteriorate, I spent time in her room, going through all these pictures and photos of her vibrant, wonderful life," said Miller.

Miller shared, she actually received a scholarship to study theater in college but decided not to pursue it. "At the time I didn't realize it was therapeutic for me, but it was." It was a local storytelling event, "Snapshots," organized by writer and director, Brian Cox, that prompted Miller to take her stories and photos a step further and turn them into a one-woman show.

Cox remembers the initial meeting with Miller to discuss the story she'd share and how best to represent her deceased parents. "The kicker for me was when Breeda spoke in her mother's Irish accent — the delightful accent and the photographs really brought her mother to life for me," said Cox, who went on to direct and co-produce "Mrs. Kelly's Journey Home." "In that moment, I saw how these stories could be stitched together and how wonderfully they could present a singular life on stage, and I could see Breeda had the talent to do it." Photos play on a screen behind Miller during the performance to provide a perfect connection to the past.

"This is a very funny show and it's not because I'm a good writer," Miller said. "It's because I remember these things, and my parents didn't mean it but they were hysterical." Kelly and her husband moved to North America from Dublin in the 1950s, when the economy was rough in Ireland. Kelly had no interest in leaving but Miller's father, a newspaper printer, did. He arrived first in Canada before eventually finding a job with the Detroit Free Press and having his wife and sons join him.

The show follows Kelly's evolution from a new immigrant in Detroit to eventually joining the National Organization for Women (N.O.W.) and even learning transcendental meditation, said Miller. "She was a feisty, little Irish lady that evolved," said Miller, who first premiered the play at the University of Michigan's Arthur Miller Theatre last fall.



Eventually, Miller, who lives outside Ann Arbor, would like to continue to tour with her play, performing it as both a fundraiser for different nonprofits and as a gift to those they serve. "Maybe it's the families of people with Alzheimer's or health care workers or people working in assisted living," said Miller, who'd also like to perform it in Ireland.

But the play isn't just about dementia and caregiving: That's "part of my mother's story. (But) it didn't define her. It's about finding the goodness." So far, Miller said she's gotten the one seal of approval for her play that truly matters, from her Aunt Betty, Kelly's sister, now 93, who moved to the Detroit area following her sister, "She looked at me and said 'Breeda, I don't know how you did but you got it just right,'" shared Miller.

The Grand Traverse Pavilions Foundation is pleased to bring the play, *Mrs. Kelly's Journey Home*, to Traverse City. According to Deborah Allen, who serves as the Pavilions Foundation Executive Director, "The Pavilions has had a professional relationship with Breeda Miller for several years based on her

publications related to caregiving, such as “[The Caregiver Coffeebreak; Take a Break Before You Break.](#)” Miller was scheduled to be the keynote speaker at the Pavilions Caregiver Conference in 2020 until the pandemic squashed the event. “Bringing Breeda to the stage is just another way that the Pavilions can help recognize the amazing work of family and professional caregivers in our community,” stated Allen.

The Pavilions Foundation will offer two general admission showings of *Mrs. Kelly’s Journey Home*,” the first a fundraiser for the Pavilions to enhance educational scholarships for clinical caregivers at the Pavilions, and the second showing will be a special matinee for caregivers with tickets being sponsored by local senior care service providers for their clients and staff. Information for businesses wishing to support tickets for their organizations caregivers is available at <https://www.gtpavilions.org/news-events/mrs-kellys-journey-home>. Allen extended a special thank you to Performance Sponsors; Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, and Comfort Keepers, for helping to bring this important and healing performance of *Mrs. Kelly’s Journey Home* to Traverse City.

Caregiver Sponsors; Bay Area Senior Advocates, and Hospice of Michigan are helping to make complimentary tickets available for the caregiving community. Tickets for both performances can also be purchased through the Old Town Playhouse box office at #231-947-2210 or online at [OldTownPlayhouse.com](http://OldTownPlayhouse.com).

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### **About Grand Traverse Pavilions**

Grand Traverse Pavilions is the region’s first and only public nonprofit providing a full-spectrum of services unique to the care for aging adults. Initiated by Grand Traverse County Department of Health and Human Services in response to the Social Welfare Act 280 of 1939 to care for the states most vulnerable citizens, the Pavilions maintains facilities to provide services for more than 300 on-site resident and 100 day-program participants. Grand Traverse Pavilions is a community of caring for the region’s aging adults, with Independent, Assisted Living, Long-term Care, Rehabilitation and Wellness Center programs for the entire community. Grand Traverse Pavilions has received Nursing Care Center accreditation by the Joint Commission along with Post-Acute Care and Memory Care certifications. A recipient of the Governor’s Quality Care Award, The Pavilions is owned by Grand Traverse County and governed by the Grand Traverse County Department of Health and Human Services Board. Learn more about Grand Traverse Pavilions by visiting [www.gtpavilions.org](http://www.gtpavilions.org).