

THEATER

Mother of murdered actress pours her grief into one-woman show

The story of Rebecca Schaeffer, killed by a deranged fan in 1989, featured at Hollywood Fringe Festival

By **Sandra Barrera**

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When Danna Schaeffer hears that one of her friends has welcomed a new grandchild, she's happy for them.

But she feels awkward, too.

As the 74-year-old Portland playwright put it, "It does ring that horrible bell of sadness: I don't have those, I'll never have those."

Schaeffer, whose only child — the up-and-coming actress Rebecca Schaeffer — was murdered by a deranged fan at the door of her West Hollywood home in 1989, recounts such stories in her one-woman show "You in Midair: Elegy for a Daughter."

The theatrical piece, which contains elements of memories, wisdom and loss as well as humor, is coming to the Lounge Theatre for six shows as part of the Hollywood Fringe Festival, from Sunday through June 17.

This Los Angeles run is its third staging since the show premiered in January 2017 at Portland's Fertile Ground Festival.

That was the first time Schaeffer — also a writer, teacher, and therapist — had gone public



PHOTO BY OWEN CAREY

Danna Schaeffer describes what it was like to lose her daughter to a deranged fan in 1989.

with her grief. It also marked her on-stage debut.

"I'm new to acting, and it's a fun thing, I'll tell you what," said Schaeffer. She studied the same Meisner acting technique that her daughter had as a 16-year-old model and actress living in New York.

Rebecca was born in Eugene, Ore., in 1967 to Schaeffer and husband, Benson Schaeffer.

"My mother called her effervescent," Schaeffer said, recalling that one of the things her

daughter got most passionate about was spirituality.

Rebecca had considered becoming a rabbi before setting her sights on the life of a model and actress. After small parts in soaps and movies, she landed a starring role on the CBS show "My Sister Sam" opposite Pam Dawber.

The show lasted two seasons before going off the air.

On July 18, 1989, a year after the cancellation, Rebecca opened the door of her apart-

ment to 19-year-old Robert John Bardo, who had paid \$300 to a private investigator for her address. She was killed by a single gunshot to the heart.

Schaeffer would learn of her daughter's murder hours later by phone, a moment that she relives on stage.

"You get the heartbreak, denial, hypnotic state of going to L.A. and going to the morgue and going through all these formalities while we wait for the trial to begin," she said. The



COURTESY PHOTO

Rebecca Schaeffer in 1986.

'YOU IN MIDAIR: ELEGY FOR A DAUGHTER'

When: Opens at 2 p.m. Sunday and continues through June 17; also noon on June 9; 6 p.m. June 10; 10 p.m. June 14; 8 p.m. June 16; and 4 p.m. June 17.

Where: The Lounge Theatre, 6201 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles

Tickets: \$12

Information: www.hollywoodfringe.org

killer, convicted in 1991 of the murder of Rebecca, is serving life in prison without parole.

And the show, she added, crosses time.

"It ends now with finally arriving at some tentative resolution about accepting that she's not here," Schaeffer said. "And we are."