A ‘Geeky, Frazzled’ Star of Screen
Dena Tyler ’94 ditched her plans for a medical career and took a shot as an actress. It’s working out.

By Karen McCally ’02 (PhD)

In the past several years, Dena Tyler ’94 has been showing up in some high-profile television series. In 2005, she appeared in multiple episodes of Law & Order. From 2011 to 2015, she popped up on the hit shows 30 Rock, Orange Is the New Black, and Homeland. This fall, she played a key role in the pilot of the new CBS drama Bull.

“I love playing characters that are raw and fiercely committed to their charges,” says Tyler, adding that she has a “goofy” side, too.

Those traits describe Bull’s Liberty Davis to a T: a “geeky, somewhat frazzled” attorney. Tyler says, hired by Jason Bull (Michael Weatherly), a psychologist who runs a trial consulting firm. Earnest and intense, Liberty stumbles alongside her more graceful colleagues, juggling multiple briefcases, navigating precariously in her high heels.

Her professional career took off in 1999 when she was introduced to the Actors Studio in New York City. She steadily landed leads in off-Broadway productions before turning her focus to television.


Tyler is also a coach at MN Acting Studio in Manhattan, where she teaches a workshop called TV Audition Bookcamp. She says that being yourself—even on a difficult day—can work to your advantage.

“My audition for Liberty was long delayed, and by the time I went in, I had underarm stains down to my waist and my stomach was eating my back,” she says. “I thought, well, I’m going to use it. So I flashed my sweaty pits and belched in my audition. That says geeky, somewhat frazzled, to me.”

SNAPSHOT
Dena Tyler ’94
At Todd Theater: Carol Cutrere in Orpheus Descending, spring 1994.
Last role in Rochester: Edna St. Vincent Millay, in Take Up the Song, Geva Theatre.
Law & Order (NBC): Multiple appearances from 2005 to 2008. “I was the go-to girl for the bereaved widow,” Tyler says.
Louie (FX): Bianca, a New Age cult leader. Season 5, “Pot Luck.”