



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. But in a pair of dramatic courtroom scenes, Tyler shows her to be a hero.

In both *Homeland* and *Orange Is the New Black*, Tyler played medical personnel. Those roles, too, were fitting. A native of Syracuse, she arrived at Rochester with

IN CHARACTER: Tyler (above, right) is about to launch closing arguments as an attorney in the CBS series *Bull*. She minored in dramatic arts at Rochester.

the intention of becoming a physician. She majored in neuroscience, and fed her love of the stage with a minor in dramatic arts. In the spring of her senior year, she played the role of Carol Cutrere in the theater program's production of Tennessee Williams's *Orpheus Descending*.

After college, she decided to delay medical school, performing locally at venues including Geva Theatre, and working at the University's Strong Memorial Hospital as a respiratory therapist. On her actress's profile, Tyler lists her familiarity with medical terminology and neuroscience right along with her facility in Cockney, Irish, and New York accents.

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.

In 2017, she'll appear in the pilot of a new HBO series, *The Deuce*. The brainchild of David Simon, creator of *The Wire*, and novelist George Pelecanos, *The Deuce* is the fictional story of two brothers caught up in New York's porn industry in the 1970s.

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.

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.

30 Rock (NBC): Stephanie, "a jilted, chain-smoking ex-wife," says Tyler. Season 5, "I Heart Connecticut."

Louie (FX): Bianca, a New Age cult leader. Season 5, "Pot Luck."

Orange Is the New Black (Netflix): Miss Rosa's chemo nurse. Season 2, "Appropriately Sized Pots."

Homeland (Showtime): Surgical nurse. Season 5, "Our Man in Damascus."

Bull (CBS): Liberty Davis, a "geeky, frazzled" attorney. Pilot, "The Necklace."

"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." 📺