

# CREATIVE LIVES

AN ANTHOLOGY

ED MURPHY  
EDITOR

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

# CREATIVE LIVES

ESSAYS BY CREATIVE PRACTITIONERS

Edited by  
**ED MURPHY**

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## INTRODUCTION

**I See Creativity**

Ed Murphy

*“Set your course by the stars, not by the lights of every passing ship.”*

—Omar N. Bradley

America is an immigrant nation, made stronger by our inclusion of diverse cultures. Every culture has its own oral traditions and its own storytellers who share legends, teach values, and encourage creativity. In modern times we share through books, movies, and digital technologies. Our elders teach us and we pass that wisdom on to our children. As adults we share with each other and learn from our neighbor’s experiences. Stories are the way we know each other.

We are all storytellers. We inspire each other. Stories explain who we are. We all love and we learn from personal tales.

Creative Lives is a collection of personal stories written by reflective practitioners; those who were inspired to express themselves through cultural activities. They took personal journeys, often unexpected, and they are now willing to discuss their experiences and the lessons they learned. For each author, creativity is a passion, expressed through their work and their life. I see creativity as a spark of innovation and initiative, the foundation of hope, more powerful than optimism. We need creative people to strengthen our communities.

Each new American makes our nation richer and more interesting. Inclusion is not always easy. We are an evolving democracy. Our founding myth is the American Dream of opportunity. We hope that a new citizen's family will integrate rather than blend, improving their lives and ours. We remember and celebrate our traditions through stories of our histories and roots. Mine include Celtic legends alongside tales of a time in America when we weren't welcome. Signs existed saying "No Irish Need Apply."

This is another reason I appreciate stories. They open our hearts, take us beyond bias, offering an opportunity to understand cultures we don't know and to discover common ground. The best stories include a message, but you often have to look for it. Good narrators entice, invite, and lay a trail of breadcrumbs, connecting our lives with theirs. They help us find our own place, and in the process, we make room for them. Our authors tell personal stories about how they fostered their creativity. We hope you will find inspiration to celebrate your own.

Hope brought our ancestors to this country, but it is not enough for immigrants to show up. We need them to help us remember the American dream, to inspire us, to encourage our neighbors to be creative and for us all to contribute. America is a story of stories, an evolving experiment in democracy. We need grandmothers and mothers teaching values, cooking, and sewing, fathers passing on their priorities and skills, parents and teachers opening each child's eyes to a wider world and encouraging all children to make their dreams come true.

Creative people encourage us and we need to encourage them. I invited some to tell their stories, asking each to share something significant from their journey. I am reminded of a quote by: Thoreau, "If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away." I think of Zorba the Greek and "teach me to dance!" Through stories, we teach each other the music we hear and to live a vibrant life.

The writers here are willing to share their stories. Each one hears their own music and has found a way to be creative. We can, too; for ourselves, our children, and our communities. In this anthology, we present a diverse collection of professionals. They have expressed themselves through film, photography, sound, design, crafts, mythology, counseling, poetry, teaching, spirituality, on the stage, and more. These stories invite us to reflect on our own creativity.

Heraclitus advised, "You could not step twice into the same rivers; for other waters are ever flowing on to you ..." Stories are situational. I am different each time I read a favorite poem, see a familiar movie, or hear the same story. New and subtle dimensions always emerge. The same is true each time we tell a story. I've read each of these stories many times and find myself continually refreshed by new insights. I appreciate the hard work these writers have done and their service to so many communities. I also appreciate how much each of them has learned about themselves by writing their essays. I hope that in reading them, you will be inspired to write yours, celebrate your own path, and share your story. Creativity is a fire that must be fed and respected. It is the glue of an inspiring society. We are all storytellers.

Once upon a time ...

## THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTORS IN THE CREATIVE ARTS

Ian Bearce

*“Reading, conversation, environment, culture, heroes, mentors, nature—all are lottery tickets for creativity. Scratch away at them and you’ll find out how big a prize you’ve won.”*

—Twyla Tharp, *The Creative Habit: Learn It and Use It for Life*

When I was asked to contribute to this book, I sat down and made a long list of all of the jobs I’ve had during my lifetime. What I noticed when I looked at that list was a common theme of the importance of mentors in my life. The definition of a mentor is “an experienced and trusted adviser,” and without a doubt, the people I’ve met throughout the years helped me become successful in the entertainment industry. I lucked into my mentors. It was never a conscious decision on my part to have these people as mentors. It was proximity. They were always people who had something I admired. The word ‘mentor’ was never spoken between us. They took me under their wings, and I was happy to be there. It’s only in retrospect that I think of these people as mentors. They gave me advice. They looked out for my interests.

These mentors may not have always been people I liked, but I

learned nonetheless. I think people generally think of mentorship only in the corporate setting, but I feel it's equally important in the creative arts. Blacksmiths, glassblowers, and other artists traditionally learned by apprenticeship. I would argue that in the 21st century, guidance and teaching are just as important. Today, in my job as Head of Content for Mill+, US, my department makes TV commercials, Web commercials, virtual reality experiences, TV show title sequences, and website-specific content. My role is to supervise the live action production of the work out of our L.A., Chicago, and New York offices, and I feel strongly that this includes mentoring my staff as well. It's a challenging, and rewarding job. My path to get here was one filled with hard work and great mentors, and below I'd like to share how it looked.

Initially, I was not a great worker. I didn't have a good work ethic, and I whined when asked to do chores and any kind of project. I started working when I was 12 or 13, painting my dad and stepmother's front porch. I distinctly remember one of them giving me a compliment about being a good worker, and that sticking with me and causing a shift in my attitude. Encouraged by that feedback, I would find odd jobs through friends, or my high school guidance counselor, who would get requests to have students go out to people's houses to do odd jobs. I stacked wood. I did brush removal. I was still under the working age to have a steady job, but the motivation and desire to do well and earn money was sparked.

When I turned 15, my dad and stepmother, the same two people who had given me the positive feedback for painting the porch, really pushed me to find a job. We would go through the Help Wanted ads in the newspaper together and they would drive me around to fill out applications. I got one job as a dishwasher and prep cook, but they let me go when they realized I was only 15. I spent the summer washing dishes at the Union Coach House Restaurant in Saratoga Springs, New York. In retrospect, it was a great first job because the staff was fun, and while it was a hard job, you felt good about the paycheck you earned. That same summer, my dad and stepmother

got a VCR. (Funny to think how excited I was about that at the time and how much the technology has changed since then.) I would get home from work late, around 1:00 a.m., and stay up even later to watch a movie. All kinds of movies. Really bad sci-fi movies, foreign movies, cheesy action movies. This is when the film bug bit me. I was already into comic books, and film was a natural extension of this. I also found a book called *Getting into Film*, by Mel London. It talked about the different jobs on a film set and gave descriptions of what you did in those positions. It also said to "go for it." It advised you to badger everyone you know who might know someone working in the business already, and then go work for them for free. It was common sense, but often the most obvious is not what we first try.

This same summer, 1986, I took a film production class at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. I was obviously passionate about this field, as I did this on my own while still in high school. Remember, this is pre-Internet, and my parents weren't pushing me to do this. This was all me. Find the class, register for the class, pay for the class, go to the class, and finish the class. The experience was eye-opening for me. I was in way over my head, and my fellow classmates were all much older than me but very kind and generous. I think they saw me as their little brother and helped me out. Mentored me. For our final, we made a two-minute film and had to pull an all-nighter to get the editing done. Normally, my mom didn't notice what time I got home, but my grandparents were visiting. We were editing late into the night and someone started knocking on all of the doors down the hallway, eventually getting to our room. It was the campus police. My mom had called them in a panic. They put my bike in the trunk of the cruiser and drove me home. Getting lost in a project and working long hours is often part of this industry, but I found that because I was passionate about creating and learning, I didn't mind, even though my mom did!

My grades in school were never very good. I was in special education classes until my sophomore year of high school. I had mild dyslexia and had trouble focusing. Despite this, I knew I wanted

to go to a college that offered a film major, so I applied to several schools in the Northeast. I got into several, and the decision ultimately was between NYU and Massachusetts College of Art. NYU was very expensive and Mass Art, being the only State art school in the country, was not. Money talked and I chose Mass Art. In retrospect, it was a perfect fit for my self-sufficient nature. There were no dorms and we were responsible for finding our own housing. I was 17 when I started college, and wasn't actually old enough to sign a lease, but my responsible, go-getter nature offset any worries I had about this huge undertaking of starting college and moving to Boston from quiet Amherst.

In college, it wasn't a professor who was a mentor, but the Video Lab technician and maintenance man, Joe Briganti. He wasn't that much older than me, but he seemed like a full-fledged adult. He was encouraging of my pursuit of internships and working while I was in school, as he realized that the key to success in this business was getting out there and learning on the job, and he encouraged us to create our own career path. Having a career in the film industry was not something that my professors at art school ever mentioned, but Joe felt it was important to go beyond book learning and really experience the world of film.

That Mel London book I mentioned also discussed how important an internship is. I found one at a camera rental house, where the owner, Eric, wasn't much older than me. The man who managed the rental house was named Drew and he was very nice, and later, when we had a mishap while borrowing equipment for a school project, he modeled for me what cool under pressure really looks like. We had made a big mistake while filming; we broke a lens, and instead of getting angry, he encouraged us to keep shooting and do what we needed to do to finish our project.

While I was in college, I was a member of the Student Government Association, a monitor at the Video Lab; I acted in fellow students' movies, and I worked on the production of their films, which led to meeting more and more people, and during my junior year, one

of these friends started getting production assistant (PA) work around Boston. He was a bit older than me and he asked if I wanted PA work also. Of course, I said "yes," and he promised that if he got a call for a job, he would pass my name and number along. (A Production Assistant is an entry-level position on any set. You do pretty much whatever is asked of you, while earning the lowest pay, working the longest hours, and often being viewed with the least respect. BUT, it is an extremely important first step. You are getting your foot in the door, learning on the job, and meeting so many people, and from there you can go into the positions that you want: lighting, grip, assistant director, wardrobe, etc.).

A few days later I was in the shower, when one of my roommates said there was a woman on the phone who wanted me to work on a TV show the next day. I thought he was pulling my leg, but it turned out that he was serious. I jumped out of the shower and took the call, and accepted my first PA job. I was so excited! The next day, I went to a courthouse in Cambridge, MA, and met another Production Assistant and a British man named Daniel Lupi. My first day of glamorous work on a TV show consisted of cleaning out years of clutter in the garage of a courthouse. Not very fancy, but it was the introduction to my first production mentor. It turned out Daniel was the boss and he liked the way I worked, and he called me for more work. The TV show was called *Against the Law*, and it was the pilot episode that we were making for this new network called FOX. He was a tough-love mentor. He was loud, brash, and smart as a whip, and could give a shit what you thought about him. We all admired him and he was like a pied piper—we all followed him. It was a work environment unlike anything I had experienced prior or since then. He hired me on and let me join the parade that he was leading. Here was a guy who was in charge of millions of dollars and he came to work in sweatpants, swore at everyone, and partied like a British rock star. He didn't tolerate fools and he had a work ethic like nothing I had ever seen. He worked seven days a week and had a bounce in his step like a little kid the whole time. His title was Production

Manager and he oversaw the budget and personnel for the project. Every third word out of his mouth was a swear word. He would not hesitate to yell at you if you messed up. He liked to party. He liked to laugh and he had boundless energy. At some point he told me to give him a call for more work in the future if the show got picked up to be a series. This was near the end of my junior year of college, and as the school year was coming to a close, I started leaving messages for Lupi at his apartment in New York, and I didn't stop. I called all summer long. Over and over.

He didn't call back, so that summer I found an internship on a low-budget feature film, and I got this because of the prior internship at the camera rental house. The hard work and networking paid off. And guess what? In the fall of my senior year, Lupi called me back. He asked me to come back and work on the show *Against the Law*, as it had gotten picked up by FOX! I was now working 14–16-hour days, three days a week, and fitting classes in around jobs, and as you can imagine, my grades were pretty bad. When it was time for graduation, I was short one paper for a class. I was allowed to participate in the ceremony, but since I still owed that paper, I hadn't technically graduated, but I already had a job in my field, the goal of college, so the lack of a diploma didn't seem so important. I was regarded as one of the best Production Assistants in Boston, and even if it was slow, I still had a fair amount of work because I had a good reputation. Let me be clear. I was freelance. You go from job to job, hired by word of mouth and recommendations. In this business, people don't ask for your college info, and it wasn't until a few years ago that I had the interest in making up that class. It makes me laugh to see that I “technically” graduated in 2009.

During these couple of years, I also did the line production on a few short films with friends around Boston and the director had a lot of connections around town. His godfather was Jan Egelson, the same Jan Egelson who directed the show *Against the Law* that I worked on! Through his connections, I got nominated for a Sundance Institute Producing Fellowship, which is the opportunity to

work directly with a producer on a feature film. At the same time that the nomination process was going on, I was working on the biggest feature film to come to Boston. *Blown Away* starred Jeff Bridges, Tommy Lee Jones, and Forest Whitaker, and the director's assistant, Kris, ended up writing me a recommendation for the Sundance Fellowship. I made it to the final round, which was an interview in Los Angeles, and didn't get the fellowship, but about a month later, I got a call that the person they selected wasn't working out and they wanted me now. I was overjoyed. The next decision was, should I move to Las Vegas and work on a Martin Scorsese movie called *Casino*, or should I move to Los Angeles and work on a movie called *Pie in the Sky*? The Fellowship only gave you a small stipend, and since I had a free place to stay in Los Angeles, I picked *Pie in the Sky*. The Fellowship was not what I had imagined, and in retrospect, I learned an important life lesson from this experience. A big opportunity doesn't always equate to a life-changing opportunity, or a free pass, if you will. While an extreme honor to have been chosen, it didn't automatically catapult me to the higher echelons of Hollywood. I still had to work my way up the old-fashioned way.

Remember when I mentioned bad mentors? After the film was over, I became the assistant to the producers from the Fellowship. This was by far the worst job I have ever had. I was miserable. No matter how I tried, I couldn't make this job good. I was a horrible assistant. Going to work every day felt like something heavy was weighing on me. Like I wanted to run. But, I learned from them. I learned what I didn't want to do. I didn't want to produce feature films. The producers I worked for were miserable. They had their hands in dozens of projects, hoping that maybe one of them would actually move forward. The movie I worked on, *Pie in the Sky*, was never released. The director had spent two years of his life working on this movie for no one to see it. Then my boss did a truly “Hollywood” thing. She fired me from her cell phone while at the Sundance Film Festival, and aside from my wife and kids, this was the best thing to happen to me, and the only time I've ever been fired.

Not one to sit still, I jumped back into PA work, thanks to a friend, and soon I was working on all sorts of different projects in Los Angeles. I rose through the ranks of production, moving from PA to production coordinator to production manager, and finally, producer. There is a lot to learn in each of these positions, and I always had to feel very comfortable and grounded in my position before I felt ready to move up. During this time, I had the good fortune to work with a man for several years whom I think of as the quintessential mentor, Peter Keenan. First of all, he was very loyal to the people who worked for him. Especially in Hollywood, that is rare. Another of his fine attributes was his temperament. On one job, I made a huge mistake that could have cost the company a lot of money. He didn't yell or scream. He focused on solving the problem as quickly as possible without fireworks, but what he did next was even more amazing. He continued to hire me. In the world of freelance production, this is unheard of. He was under no obligation by any sort of contract; I was freelance, and that could have been my last job at that company, but instead he continued to hire me.

Finally, Peter was always honest and upfront. He never beat around the bush, and you knew where you stood with him. I feel that, too often, confrontation is avoided, and can grow, unnecessarily, into something ugly. If he thought you had screwed up, Peter would politely let you know that he expected more from you. He wanted those who worked for him to advance, do good work, and be happy. All of these traits epitomize the definition of a mentor.

So how did I find all of these mentors? I never seek them out; we just find each other. I gravitate toward people who are forthright and kind. My mentors are always people I respect, and on some level, want to be like. While everyone we meet changes us a little, I think a mentor is someone whom we let influence us more than other people. Someone whose advice we will consider more than others.

Almost 30 years since that first PA job, I find myself in an executive position, and it's my turn to be a mentor. It's a role I take very seriously. Now that I'm in a position to be a mentor, I take it

seriously. I have people who work directly for me, and by default, that is a mentor-mentee relationship. My nature is to try to be helpful and give people opportunities. When I get a well-written e-mail from someone asking for a meeting, I try and take the meeting. If they are prepared and seem to be serious about what they want to do, I try to help them. If I directly give them an opportunity and feel that they have done well, I give them more responsibility and more opportunity. I am happy to give advice and dispense knowledge, as long as I don't feel like my time is being wasted. If someone isn't respecting my time, I won't respect them.

If I'm going to take someone as a mentee, I look for passion, for seriousness, and for willingness.

Being a mentor today is tricky, in that you have to manage the mentee's expectations and your own time. I get asked to do a lot of things for a lot of people in my work and personal life. I've accepted that I may not get all of them done and that it will probably take me longer than I would like. Mentoring means adding to your workload, and you have to be thoughtful about what your commitments already are. The biggest difference I find today compared to when I was starting out has to do with technology. Of course, it impacts the actual work I do, but as it relates to mentoring, it greatly expands your opportunities. Twenty-five years ago, I was somewhat limited to those I came into contact with directly through work, but with LinkedIn, Twitter, Vimeo, and a host of other Internet and social media outlets, you have potential access to people around the world. A quick tweet of "I loved your latest commercial. How did you do that shot?" could start a dialogue that leads to connections and introductions that never would have happened pre-Internet.

I hope that the people I have helped go on to have successful careers and are able to inspire others along the way. I tend to have a rosy outlook, but I am also a realist, I know that there is only so much help you can give someone. Ideally, if you have picked your mentees well, they will do you proud and you will remain in touch for many years.

If you are thinking of entering into this field, three things will help put you ahead of your peers: hard work, networking, and having a mentor. I wasn't the best student, but I often was the hardest worker. Sweat equity still goes a long way, and I find that encouraging because it is something each of us controls. At the same time, I couldn't have gotten to where I am today without the support and guidance over the years from so many people: my parents, former bosses, friends, and co-workers. Build your network. Be prepared to work hard. Ask for help. Be curious. Help others. Everyone is creative. Everyone is an artist. What they do with their creativity is key. How they share their art is what makes the difference.

## ACTING OUT OF CHARACTER

Kevin Christoffersen

At the age of eight, I vividly recall not wanting to leave the movie theater after *Raiders of the Lost Ark* ended. I was infatuated with the credits rolling down the screen; curious as to what all these people did in order to bring a film to life.

Little did I know that this interest would eventually evolve into a career producing independent films. But not without first going on my own planetary journey as the protagonist in a multi-layered plot similar to that of a three-act film screenplay.

My first creative milestone early on in Act I was my senior year of high school on Staten Island when we had the opportunity to learn the inner workings of the community television station through our Speech and Media class. Our teacher encouraged us to find a direction within the studio setting. You could choose to engage with lights, sound, camera, or even appear on-camera.

I immediately chose to be behind the scenes and I've never been entirely sure why—perhaps being shy or unable to fully articulate myself publicly at the time.

This led to a volunteer trainee opportunity with a local political talk show, where I learned how to operate a TV camera by steadying the large, cumbersome beast to and fro throughout the studio. The content of the shows was so amusing at times that it was hard to always keep a steady hand. The host was controversial, to say the least

—sort of the Charlie Rose of Staten Island liberal politics.

My creativity really came from making opportunities when there weren't any. An inciting incident occurred during my sophomore year at college after evolving out of a journalism program more focused on print, radio, and photography. I wanted to learn more about broadcast television production but walked into an old, outdated TV studio dressed in cobwebs. I eventually convinced the communications director to have it cleaned up, so I could learn all ends of the technology while gaining three college credits at the same time. He liked the idea so much that it became an officially accredited class ever since.

We also created college campus video news stories in our sleepy agricultural cow-town. So, from out in the field to back in the studio—there was shooting, editing, camera operation, lighting, sound recording, and mixing – all hands-on skills that could be applied to a profession in the broadcast television industry.

Later on in Act I, fresh out of college, my buddy and I decided we would make a 16-millimeter film by figuring out how to do it on our own—rather than spending a small fortune getting a post-graduate university degree through a film academy or institute. We talked a good game but realized we had no idea what we were getting ourselves into, especially \$25'000 later.

Eventually, we had a finished forty-minute film, after a labor-intensive editing process on one of those old flatbed editing machines where you had to precisely fine-cut (splice) the film reels together clip by clip—one slight hand slip-up and you may have lost your best take. We were proud to have a premiere screening at the New York Film Academy for all of our friends and family (investors) to enjoy.

Shortly thereafter, I took on a tape operator trainee position at a television post-production facility that involved duplicating and converting a variety of video formats for the Arts & Entertainment Network (A&E) and The History Channel.

As for the final assignment in order to pass the tape operator

exam, you had to loop a one-inch large reel (similar to a 35-mm film) through an endless maze of spindles. The slightest alteration could easily spin thousands of feet of tape out of control, damaging hours of archived footage and the machine itself. There was a first-aid kit nearby for safety. I somehow managed to pass the test and became mentored under my new boss, who could detect a digital broadcast hit or any form of resolution inequality from a mile away.

Something really started to change in me around this time, however. A form of independent spirit kept driving me further away from the familiar. I became increasingly lost, not knowing what community to fit into (along with a growing political dissent). It's hard to really place my finger on why I became this detached, yet I knew I had a desire to break away from the systematic approaches I saw all around me as they became more and more unappealing. The option to develop a career in an extremely competitive New York City job market while spending a fortune to live in a walk-in closet apartment did not seem logical anymore. I began to ask myself. What does another city have in store? What does another country have in store? What does another continent have in store?

Perhaps I felt that the grass was greener on the other side and that re-inventing myself in a completely foreign land would provide a clean slate to begin from by integrating into a distant culture on a spontaneous whim. Would leaving the U.S. lead to a different kind of creative life altogether and perhaps change my jaded perspective? The key questions became: How do I re-invent myself? How do I find a way to be a big fish in a small pond, rather than a small fish in a big pond?

Perhaps this approach may have been more about doing the opposite of what everyone else was doing by simply being rebellious. And if the trade-off was somehow finding a way to survive in a new country that represented my core values, then the risk of not having as much money in the bank or the right pension plan was well worth it to me.

This was a motivating force because it prevented me from re-

remaining stagnant in the same country culture for too long.

Assuming that being born into our native country is not necessarily the right society in which one can co-exist harmoniously given there is a choice of 200 or more countries to live in. It's like going into an ice-cream parlor and only being satisfied with trying one flavor for your entire life. I also think a combination of my being stubborn, narcissistic, and ego-driven propelled my leaps to such a great distance away.

This first part of my foreign journey began by leaving New York behind and venturing up to Montreal, Canada, after a previous summer's jaunt enticed me enough to try living there. Such an amazing metropolis, as you would never know there are 3.5 million people living there amongst the seamless integration between parks and urban culture. I did the door-to-door résumé (CV) drops in person to as many video post-production houses as I could, attempting to make good first impressions through these spontaneous visits. The Québécois were not as receptive to this as much as some other cultures might be, as I would find out later on during my future career endeavors.

After three months, and around my fifty-ninth visit, I struck a bit of luck finally getting an interview for a tape operator position that required duplicating and converting various video formats and doing the quality control check of each. The woman I interviewed with liked my prior experience and training from New York. So much so that I received a call-back a few weeks later:

“Bonjour. C'est Kevin?” “Oui, c'est moi.” “We have some good news— and perhaps some bad news to inform you with.”

“Okay, so tell me the good news first.”

“We would like to offer you the position.”

“That's good news, indeed, what could the bad news possibly be?” “The position is not here.”

“Well, where is it, then?” “It's in New York.”

I declined the offer and ended up plugging away at various restaurant jobs, including working as a cook's prep assistant, learning

how to delicately fry calamari to the utmost perfection and identifying the sour parts of arugula salad. I had my meals covered, so that saved on much of my food expenses. I also wrote a few articles for a local weekly entertainment newspaper about the American-to-Canadian transition.

The travel bug bit me again and I also felt I needed to gain a different perspective and a fresh start somewhere more foreign than Montreal. I ventured overseas deciding to dive head first into a pool of linguistic loss by not knowing the language, and taking on the challenge of integration shortly after a new right wing conservative anti-immigration political party took power. Copenhagen, Denmark was my next new home - the land of hygge (comfort and coziness), the Jante Law, (no hierarchal societal structure) biking, and beautiful people.

I was searching for socialistic values, striving to learn more about how communities work together, rather than the U.S. model of overly celebrating the individual (hard to interpret in a world of eight billion people). Reading the Culture Shock! book on Denmark offered little in the way of preparation for what was to lay ahead. I became employed under the most unlikely of circumstances after once again pounding the pavement, submitting my résumé to over a hundred media companies throughout the city until my shoes were sole-less. This was the fittest I've ever been in my entire life, though. Most of those who greeted me were quite friendly. “Why don't you come in for a spot of tea?” he or she may have remarked, for example. I still had no work permit, yet created an illusion that it was easy to achieve (as an American who spoke garbled broken Danish at the immigration office). I took some Danish language lessons prior to my moving, but the tutor kept remarking on how my Danish had French pronunciations.

Eventually, I met a guy who knew a guy who knew another guy, who recommended that we meet. I then somehow got the go-ahead as a cameraman to shoot a video news release of a local entertainment event going on around Copenhagen. When the producer was

unable to make it that day, I told my employer that I could assume this position, as long as he could quickly find another cameraman. I really had no idea what I was doing, other than the fact that I had to ask questions with a microphone in my hand. Humility comes with the art of labor.

Proving you have the creative ability throughout a profession is one thing—actually using your creative ability to get a job in a foreign country requires an entirely different form of creativity altogether.

Learning how to work, live, and survive where you are lost in translation was by no means an easy undertaking; however not being able to overhear what many people are saying did have its advantages.

The same philosophy applied some years later when I moved once again. It was time for another re-boot, this time to Geneva, Switzerland. Act II was about to begin.

It was another opportunity to be cleverly creative figuring out survival without that work and residence permit. My partner at the time applied for hundreds of jobs, with little traction and funding to support this venture of ours running thin. You couldn't really go door to door anymore with CV in hand, as electronic transmission became the only acceptable norm, leaving all your experience and the chance to be physically present lost in the vast digital domain. But if our plan worked, the rewards of living in Switzerland would be so enormous to us. Beautiful geography, robust infrastructure, high quality of living; a utopia.

I met a British chap, who ran a European global communications company, at a local pub, under what I presumed to be rather casual circumstances. But once he received a phone call informing his friend that he was busy conducting an interview, I had to step up my game. I think I made a good first impression—our competencies in French were more or less on the same footing between our British and American accents.

I didn't hear back for several weeks, and my partner and I had to decide whether or not to return to New York or continue finding another way to become employable. Then I received a phone call

in the early hours of the morning, asking if I was available to meet in Lausanne (a city one-third the size of Geneva, forty-five minutes away). I got there as quickly as I could—three people interviewing me this time, with the rising lakeside sun glaring in my eyes, children screaming by an adjacent playground, and the obvious nervous pressure of not seeming as desperate as I was. I sold myself quite well, convincing these higher-ups that I was capable of taking on the New Business Developer/Producer position they were offering. I eventually became an executive producer, living in Switzerland for seven years and working in over twenty countries, producing corporate films and video webcasts. The only consequence was being assigned film projects in countries you would prefer leaving off your itinerary, including the Ivory Coast and Nigeria, that were ravaged with war and ongoing incidences of terrorism.

One of our biggest productions occurred every January in the cozy confines of the majestic, snowy Swiss Alps. For five years in a row, I was a producer at the World Economic Forum's annual conference in Davos. We managed the live video webcasts and produced a highlights video of the entire conference—hundreds of hours of footage that needed to be edited down into a tiny little ten-minute segment. Our creativity really came into play by having to connect a multitude of video machines through a plethora of cables entangled as if it were a string theory formula.

The conference featured world leaders, heads of state, politicians, celebrities, and innovative activists, all adhering to the World Economic Forum's model of "Improving the State of the World." We conducted interviews with various high-ranking politicians and celebrities, such as Bono, Tony Blair, Gordon Browne, Bill Gates, Queen Rania of Jordan, and so on.

When I was nearing the end of my tenure in Switzerland and thinking about returning to New York, I started coming up with a new start-up concept, under the premise that filmmakers from all around the world could share resources to produce one feature-length

narrative film. Yet, I was determined to follow through on my long-lived dream of film producing. For every one producer I began to meet, though, there seemed to be thousands of writers, directors, and actors, and it was very hard to learn about a profession in which you couldn't meet a mentoring producer.

When you did, they were quite secretive with regard to their magic formula for getting their films packaged and financed.

I then had the good fortune to meet one of the founders of CollabFeature, who were doing more or less what I was envisioning in my start-up concept, except they were already several years ahead, after producing two feature films in which up to forty filmmakers from twenty-five countries all contributed different pieces to the feature length film's narrative puzzle.

The philosophy is that, rather than millions of independent filmmakers all competing for the same tiny spaces to get their films shown at film festivals, you collectively team together. It's also a way to advance your career forward, showing that you were a director, or cinematographer, or actor, editor, etc. in an international feature-film project. The other advantage is in the fact that we can access public funding opportunities within each filmmaker's respective country. This includes co-production agreements, tax incentives, broadcaster funds, and film commission support. This filmmaking support counteracts the ninety percent of all American movies being produced by one of the seven major Hollywood studios and the lack of government subsidies to support independent film and original creative stories rather than the redundant violence-driven films.

Reflecting back on this story's timeline taught me that it wasn't so much about being creative within the work itself, but being creative in finding the job, given all of the obstacles that needed to be overcome, from work and residence permits, language comprehensions, cultural identities, the tightly gated film fraternity, and, most importantly, the employer's belief in you. Maybe it wasn't about having as many of the qualifications as the next employee candidate did—but being brave enough to take on challenges that the next

candidate did not.

At the same time, the technology curve throughout these three decades was constantly evolving. Every few years a video format would change along with all of the machinery that coincided with it. You really had to be up to speed on the latest trends; otherwise, you could quickly find yourself out of a job. What used to be four positions is now really one, when you consider shooting, interviewing, recording sound, and editing all part of one 'producer' position's responsibilities.

So, by not competing with the plethora of jobseekers all applying for the same opportunities in New York, I become a unique entity in different countries, where my alternative background stood out so much so that the employers valued and respected my breaking away from the status quo and taking on all of the challenges of being a foreign entity.

Throughout this journey, I've learned a lot about myself and what I was capable of achieving through persistence, determination, and revelations about my character's arc and transformation.

My lesson learned is that anyone can step outside of their boundaries and find a way to live and work in a new country once you set your mind to it. It's not as difficult as it is portrayed to be, and creativity can come from confronting challenges that you never thought could be overcome in the first place. Quite often, character is built within the journey, more so than the destination.

Oh, and that childhood awe of having my name in the movie credits still rolls on in Act III ...

## DON'T LET THE FEAR OVERTAKE THE JOY

Vincent Ciulla

My name is Vincent Ciulla. I have just recently wound down a 45-year career as a museum planner and exhibition designer. For most of that time, I had a private practice called, you guessed it, Vincent Ciulla Design ([www.ciulladesign.com](http://www.ciulladesign.com)). My wife and partner, Julie Ciulla, completed over 300 projects, first out of our Soho loft, then later from a Brooklyn brownstone. Recently, we moved south to be near grandsons Charlie and Zach.

My essay is non-linear, a collage of thoughts, feelings connected to memories from my life. The overall theme is ...

*“Don't let the fear overtake the joy.”*

—Joe Maddon, Manager of the Chicago Cubs

I heard this last fall when the Cubs were playing the Mets in the MLB playoffs. The Cubs were contending a year earlier than expected, and Joe Maddon, their manager, calmed his nervous young players by giving them this sage advice.

The quote struck me as insightful, not only for that moment, but it could also serve as a kind of way to live.

I have experienced fear many times in my professional and personal life. I am sometimes haunted by my mistakes but know that I did not let the fear overtake the joy.

**FEAR AND JOY**

When we were eight years old, friends of mine and I taught ourselves to play baseball. This was before Little League, and we played on traditional informal sandlots used by the community for baseball and softball. There were no coaches or any other adults around. It was the end of an era of open land on the outskirts of towns. We learned the moves of the game by watching major league games on TV and from each other. Every day after school, from April to October, a big group of us would ride our bikes to our own sandlot surrounded by woods and set next to a brook, called Red Wing Oval; “Red Wing” for short, for a two-hour exercise of pure joy. We had one ball, sometimes with the cover half off, one bat, and cardboard bases. We “chose up” sides each day—real Americana on Staten Island in the 1950s. After that I played on teams in Little League, CYO, PAL, Babe Ruth League, and American Legion. Sometimes I had three active uniforms in my closet. I played three to four times a week in various leagues. By the time I got to high school, I made the team. We had really good players and I often sat the bench.

Because of the tension of each game, when I did play, I played with the fear of making a mistake. My coach was a real SOB and he did nothing to encourage me. He was critical and nasty. “Son, you can’t hit,” he sneered at me. I lost all youthful flow of the game and sometimes made mistakes when I did play. The last game I played in was for the New York City Championship, and to add insult to injury, I was pinch-hit for in the last inning of that game, which we lost. Although I played some softball later on, like most high school seniors, I never played baseball again.

Fear overtook joy. Joe Maddon, where were you when I needed you?

Lately, though, in most of my creative activities I’ve reconnected to the pure joy we eight year-olds had teaching ourselves to play baseball. The fear has become a manageable and smaller part of my life as my joy expands into the vacated spaces of my mind and heart.

**LUCKY ME**

I consider myself very lucky. I spent my career planning and designing museum installations and exhibitions throughout the Americas. I started my museum career in The Metropolitan Museum of Art Design Department. I designed seventy-five exhibitions and installations there, including blockbusters like “Gold: Objects from the Museum’s Collection,” “The Kings’ Book of Kings: Persian Miniatures,” “The Permanent Musical Instruments Installation,” and “The Great Age of Fresco.” I opened my own practice after seven years at The Met, in 1973.

Since then I’ve designed over 300 exhibition projects for art, history, science, and children’s museums, as well as state and national park visitor centers. My clients have included The National Park Service, The Art Institute of Chicago, El Museo del Oro in Costa Rica, The Smithsonian Institution, The Henry Ford Museum, The Anchorage Museum, The Staten Island Children’s Museum, The National Trust, The National Purple Heart Hall of Honor, Colonial Williamsburg, Yale University Art Gallery, The Royal Ontario Museum in Canada, The Museum of The Americas in Puerto Rico, and many others.

Along the way I was lucky enough to collaborate with a diverse and committed group of clients such as Purple Heart veterans, National Park rangers, Native Americans, various children’s educators, Costa Rican archaeologists, NASA scientists, Puerto Rican historians, and countless curators. It was hard work, requiring travel to distant museum and park sites, but it was worth it. The Italian-American kid from Staten Island, first in my family to go from rural Little Italy on Staten Island to college and well beyond, is a success. Lucky me. Talent, a ton of hard work and unyielding perseverance made it happen.

**CREATIVE TIMES**

We all have the ability to be creative—but not all of the time, nor any time we want. Sometimes we just don’t feel it. We have nothing

we want to do or say, have nothing we especially want to create. No statement we want to make. Can I use the time to simply wait? For now, I just watch TV, especially MLB Network, and relax.

### DOING IT FOR MYSELF

I have mainly created for others. First I did it for my family, friends, and teachers; then for my clients during my 45-year career as a designer. I was a very good designer and had a successful career, but I hardly ever did art or design for my own pleasure. In the 1980s, I changed that. I took six months off, and with the coaching of my therapist at the time, created a dozen large assemblages. I “simply” explored saying yes rather than no to my creative impulses. “Yes” has helped me conquer my fears about creativity. I did some great pieces. Even then I felt joy. I find it in every creative endeavor I find myself in.

### CREATIVE DREAMS

I'd never had creative dreams before a recent night. Oh, when I was a kid I remember a dream where I could actually fly. It was great, but that was it.

I dreamed I created a giant learning space for kids. It was created with a group of like-minded individuals. We worked on it together and finished it in full scale in a day. It was wonderful and filled with color and happy, creative kids. I knew I was dreaming and wanted to remember the design when I awoke so I could recreate it in real life. So, in my dream, I borrowed a digital camera to record the scene. I saved several stills from that camera. Of course, I didn't possess those digital images after I woke up.

What happened—where did the dream come from? I hope I have some more of them. I must have tapped into some current in me. I want to be open to it happening again.

Next night, I dreamed that I hit a cop with my car and got arrested.

### SELF-AWARENESS

I have a family history of clinical depression. I didn't feel it until my twenties. Then it hit me big-time. I became self-sabotaging and ruined my marriage, which ended in divorce.

I decided to start psychotherapy to help me survive my life. I soon thought of therapy as a lifeline to help me cope, and even flourish. I found that I could do creative work, even with a self-image that wasn't positive.

I've “worked on myself,” as they say in the psychotherapy world, for almost my entire adult life. I find that it's much easier to be creative with the more positive self-image I have now.

The more I accept myself, the easier it is to access the creative flow within me.

### POWER

During the early years of my adulthood (ages 23–33) I got a really good job as an exhibition designer at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. I did some fine creative work there. I really enjoyed designing exhibitions, and began to see that I had some real talent.

Unfortunately, I had a boss, the Head of Design, who lacked even an ounce of integrity. He stole many of my projects for his own credit. Rather than be depressed by this bully, I became angry and fought him at every turn, but in the end, I had no power.

I didn't want my work to be stolen by this crud, so I left my job and went into my own exhibition design practice. It took me years to build a sustaining practice. Then, after Julie, my second wife and business partner, joined me, we started to really flourish. The joy of doing really nice projects, for good money, overcame years of fear that I would fail.

### WORKING WITH GRANDPA

It was hard for me to work with my grandpa. He was so manically driven, he hardly looked at me when he was working, which he did most of the time. But work with him I did. He had a used car

business, known to the family as “The Lot,” and my mother and he decided I could learn something by working there during the summer of my first year of high school. It took me an hour and a half on two buses to get there. My grandfather taught me the basics of cleaning, repairing, and refurbishing used cars. He showed me once; then it was up to me to deliver. He checked my work at first. After a few successful tries, he trusted me to do the job and finish it reasonably on time. It was lonely out there, without friends, but I figured out a temporary escape.

At 1:00 p.m. every day, the Yankees played on Channel 11 on my grandma’s RCA television in my grandparents’ house, right next to The Lot. I would leave the game on and put my head in for a peek every chance I got. Eventually, my grandmother, the Italian peasant, actually learned the game and became a Yankee fan from watching the games with me. Her favorite player was “Migee Mandela,” Mickey Mantle to the rest of us. I actually did learn to work diligently to complete projects Grandpa gave me, be they washing a car, adjusting its brakes, or gapping its plugs. By the time I got to college, I had a positive work ethic, always finishing my projects on time and in very good presentation shape.

### ALEX AT THE LOT

Every so often we would get a visit in the dark of night from Juan, the Mexican mechanic. He came at night for two reasons. One, because he had a day job, and two, because he didn’t want to get caught doing what he was doing at The Lot. His specialty was turning back the mileage on the odometer of cars, which was considered a serious crime. Grandpa paid cash and never spoke about it among the family, even though we all knew what was going on. He cheated customers. What I got from this is that it’s OK to cheat, and hell, everybody did it. I didn’t get my moral compass from these experiences. It took me years to form a good sense of honesty and integrity about myself. I pieced it together from my early life of being with Grandma, going to church, and hanging out with caring people.

### CREATIVITY AND PERFECTION

An architect colleague said that mistakes are “God’s way of reminding us we are human.” He’s right. When I was growing up, my mother convinced me that I could attain perfection in my life, if only I could eliminate my mistakes (sins). Whenever I tried something, whether it was playing baseball or making a drawing, I would feel frustrated when I was not perfect. This frustration with myself stopped me from continuing on my task, and took away any full joy I felt about my actual accomplishment. Creativity and perfection are at odds with each other. However, I shoot for perfection in each project, knowing I won’t reach it.

### THE OLD WAYS

Picture me at four years old on a homestead farm in rural Staten Island, New York. My grandparents, illiterate Italian immigrants, were the head of our extended household. We lived a life more like the one they had left in the old country than the one they created for us in America. My grandfather hunted for table meats, my grandmother grew and canned fruits and vegetables from our immense garden. I remember very clearly putting in seeds with her in the spring. Our life was prescriptive; governed by the seasons, subsistence, and our old-world values of humility and simplicity. Inventive thoughts or actions were not normally considered in our day-to-day lives. My designated task was collecting the eggs from our chicken coop each morning. Although I got pecked a lot, my methodology never changed. These were the old ways, tried and true, and unchanging. Nobody considered that there might be a better way to collect eggs.

No one believed then that I, or anyone in my family, would actually have the opportunity to take the big risk. At four years old, the pecking just hurt. And yet, in the end I did it, with a lot of pushback from my family. Eventually, I had to reject them and the old ways to develop a new life. Today I lean on my unique roots for support in my life. I have great memories of my early life out in the country on Staten Island.

**HUMOR**

I grew up in the 1950s with its rigidity, rules, and commie hating. Joe McCarthy lurked everywhere. There was always a right and a wrong way to do things, and God forbid you did them wrong. Looking back, I think my friends felt the same pressure to conform. So about five of us (Donny, Jack, Joey, Charlie, and I) did something sensible to relieve the pressure. We formed a regular hangout group of freewheeling humorists, creative funny men who laughed about the craziness of life until our sides literally split. It was our outlet. Fans of Sid Caesar, Carl Reiner, Howard Morris, and Imogene Coca, we invented complex characters, situations, and skits that set ourselves free. I hang around funny people even today, as laughter opens my heart as well as my mind; as it sets fertile ground for creative thought and action. It's good to laugh. It's joyful and totally eliminates fear.

**RISK AND OPPORTUNITY**

Someone once told me that the words risk and opportunity share the same character in Chinese. I later heard that it is actually danger and opportunity. Anyway, this seems to fit my life. I risked leaving my prescribed life for what, I didn't know then, and my life turned out to be filled with opportunities.

**HIPPIES**

Thank God for the Sixties and the hippie movement. It took hold just when I began rejecting my family and my early life. I liked the movement's challenge to live a life of integrity and of exploration. The pot didn't hurt either. In 1967, I discarded my hairpiece (my mother had complimented me on it for my "improving myself"). In actuality it was used to hide my negative view of myself. The rug was the final attempt to live up to others' view of myself. I ditched it, grew a beard, donned love beads, and railed against the horrible war in Vietnam. The hippie movement gave me hope that I could make a better life for myself, and it was worth the struggle for me to do so. I'M STILL A HIPPIE. I continue to live by the creed. Love, love, love.

**THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

I grew up in the late 40s and 50s a true believer in Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church. My family used the guilt of sin, invented by the Church to control the flock. It really did a job on me. The Church discourages individual thinking, controlling all of us with prescriptions on right and wrong, what to do and what not to do; the promise of heaven, and the threat of hell, control us. I am resentful for the ways it hobbled me, even to this day.

I remember a Saturday afternoon at confession when I was a young teenager and still under Church influence. I was confessing my sin of making out with my girlfriend, when I noticed Father Leone, who was hearing my confession, breathing heavily and kind of drooling. I was stunned and confused, only much later realizing he was most probably a pedophile priest, recently having been sent to our parish. Great job, Catholic Church. The Church taught me ethics, but the guilt of mortal sin kept me down, dampened the potential of my life, and generally led to my unhappiness. I came to learn while exploring life that other religions, such as Buddhism, are based on the unfolding of the self. Give me a self-actualizing religion like Buddhism any day.

**MY FATHER**

I loved him. He was kind and had a good sense of humor. I got this from him. He was no help in my navigating the world, nor protecting me from my mother; not doing a good job of those items for himself. I remember, when I was a teenager, my father's boss fired him. This was someone who was supposedly his friend. My dad cried on the back porch and said he felt like a failure. I felt sad for him then, telling him he wasn't a failure, wondering silently why he didn't stick up for me when I was a child. My dad's basic kindness, compassion, and heart, and his ability to cook great Sicilian food, give him a lot of points in my book. I accept the parts of him in me.

**FRIENDS**

I am currently friends with a small group of people, most of whom have lived non-traditional lives. Some I've known for 35 years. Some I've known for just a few years. All of them are creative people; funny, fun-loving, searching, and unique. My friends know me and I know them. I've committed myself to my close relationships. Even though I don't require regular contact with any of them, we have strong bonds.

**AMERICAN DREAM**

I consider myself very lucky to have been born in this country and to live my life at this time. While our country has a lot of problems, it has a cultural climate that allows a person the opportunity to choose his or her own life. Grandpa and Grandma did a great thing coming here from the poverty of rural Italy. They had no idea how it would affect their offspring and grandchildren.

I hated, and still hate, capitalism. I'm more of a small-d democrat, so I work for museum clients to present exhibitions for visitors' enlightenment and entertainment. I've made a good living at it, and my design work contributed in no small way to society. Vincent Ciulla Design's work can be currently seen by millions of exhibition-goers per year around The Americas. Thank you, Grandpa and Grandma, for moving here and giving me this wonderful chance.

**FROM STATEN ISLAND TO MANHATTAN**

After my divorce, I had to pry myself away from the light, airy, safe apartment on Staten Island we lived in during my first marriage; to a derelict, unsafe one in the East Village in Manhattan. I had to break with conservative, rule-oriented, insular culture in favor of one with possibilities in New York City. The East Village was a fearsome place. I got mugged, lived on a block with drug dealers, had my car broken into, and had my apartment burglarized twice. I was free from the dead end of Staten Island. I had a few new friends in Manhattan, people whose lives were, like mine, not settled or secure.

I fit in better there. Looking back, it was a time for me to start over. At the time, I mostly felt pain. (I know for sure why babies cry at birth.) It was hard to go through this. During this time, I found a new steady girlfriend, developed my relationship with my daughter, and did good creative work at my job. The physical move was wrenching, but I don't regret it for a moment. It started me on my new road, which coincided with the beginning of my long career in museum planning and exhibition design. This move actually made a huge difference in my life.

**BROTHER AND SISTER, TWINS NO LESS**

When I was 18 months old my life changed drastically. Not one, but two siblings arrived at the same time—Connie, the older by minutes, and Jimmy, the baby. As we grew up a little I became in charge of taking care of them. Together we walked at least a mile to P.S. 48, with the two trailing me all the way. We also did the same to St. Sylvester's Church on Sunday mornings. I really love them both. They took entirely different paths from me, finding long careers as an emergency room nurse for sister Connie, and a Battalion Chief and Head of the Firefighters Officers' Union in New York City, for brother Jimmy. I'm proud of them both. Both were drawn to careers of service, as I was.

**GRANDSONS**

I saw my grandsons recently. They live nearby, so I have a lot of contact with them. They both like art, and the older one is in an art high school. I've had a very positive influence on them. They both have a great sense of humor and a positive outlook about their life choices. A very supportive and positive mom, my daughter, and her husband, have them feeling good about themselves. Seeing this makes everything—all my struggles, searching, risk-taking, blazing new trails—worthwhile. I know today that I have a lot to give them, as well as to get from them. It's my biggest joy.

**DISCIPLINE AND JOY**

About fifteen years ago I took up rowing, mainly for exercise. This is a sport that strives for perfection—the perfect stroke, the perfect rhythm, the perfect ratio. The goal when in a boat with others is for everyone to row exactly the same way. No room for creativity here. But a lot can be said for the discipline it takes to do it well. I find that structured discipline is the counterpoint to creativity. With discipline, creative work can be actualized. I've used discipline over my career to get my designs built.

It's fair enough, also, to talk about joy here. When I row with four or eight others and we are rowing together nicely, moving the boat with both grace and power, it is truly joyful.

**THE BEATLES**

Thank God for The Beatles. They constantly reached for the new and the yet-to-be-explored. Their music was unique, as were their lifestyle and their ethics. John Lennon was their spiritual leader and a hero of mine. He took the creative approach to life. He influenced me a lot. I'm sad he was taken from us so long ago. I wonder what John Lennon would be like today had he lived; a world statesman at least.

“Got to admit it's getting better, getting better all the time (can't get no worse).”

**PRATT INSTITUTE**

I graduated from high school on Staten Island in 1960. I had been to Brooklyn, home of Pratt Institute, only a few times. High school was fun, and in many ways prescriptive, where the process was to find the right answer. There was a lot of testing and grading. Although we were given grades, Pratt was more flexible. The answers were open-ended, and the process was to explore. It was my first real experience in thinking subjectively on a regular basis. For a nineteen to twenty-one-year-old, I did great work there, showing openness to new ways. Pratt prepared me for my later rejection of the prescriptive life, and for how to use the fruits of learning.

**JAIMIE**

She's my little girl. She had a very rough go of it when she was very young because of the breakup of my marriage to her mother. I really regret hurting her then, but in the end I was able to give her a lot more as I myself grew and changed. Today, happily for me, we live only about 20 minutes apart. I forgive myself for hurting her and let go of the pain of it, while I enjoy its fruits.

**THE NEW AGE**

In the 1980s, still searching, I joined a spiritual/psychological organization called The Pathwork. I learned about “the God in me” and in all of us. The Pathwork satisfied my need to see and accept the best in myself. I have made some lifelong relationships at The Pathwork. I think the best in me, in all of us, is our ability to love, to feel compassion, and, for me, to be creative. The Pathwork encouraged me to learn as much about myself as I did and continue to do. Self-awareness, an ongoing quest for me, has been one of the basic tenets of my creativity.

**JULIE**

She's the rock to my kite. A string is tied around her and attached to my tail. Opposites certainly do attract. Most of our conflicts are about who is actually tugging on whose string. I met her when we were both employees at The Metropolitan Museum. Then she left for Paris and a life of good food and drink. A real bum. One spring, she let me know she was planning to visit America to see her dad, and wanted to know if we could meet for lunch. The rest is history. She became my life partner and business partner at the same time. Our business grew and prospered. When I was hesitant to buy a house in Brooklyn, she dispelled my fears, and we ended up living a great life in an 1879 brownstone in Park Slope. Our office was on the garden floor. Today, she's my best friend, quiet and deep in her own way. I was in therapy at the time I met Julie, and because she is more like my father was, I wasn't as attracted to her as I had been to women

with whom I had had harsh and battling relationships. She was a very good move for me.

### **BROWN PAPER BAGS**

When I was young, my mother saved the brown paper bags from the A&P for me to draw on. The bags and a No. 2 pencil were my only art supplies for a long while. I enjoyed seeing the shine of the lead on the brown paper. I appreciated the supplies. I give a reluctant thanks to my mother here. Thinking about it now, my mother did support me as best she could, considering who she was. A full “thank you” to her now. I forgive you and love you, Mom. Thanks for taking me to see Jon Gnagy’s TV show Learn To Draw live on a set in Manhattan when I was five or six. I got to show him a portfolio of my drawings. Wow.

### **GRANDMA**

I had a good role model for grand parenting in my grandma. Unlike most of the family, which brought the art of the putdown to a world-class professional level, Grandma unconditionally loved her seven grandchildren, one of whom was me. We basked in it. It’s crucial to be open to love, and Grandma, long ago, showed me that love exists. Thank you so much, Grandma, you were the light of my early life.

### **FEAR OF WORK, JOY OF WORK**

In my early career, I approached every creative task with the fear of not having any ideas. Gradually in the course of my life, some of which I’ve told you about here, the fear has turned to joy. Some call it the silent change. Now I look forward to creative work, knowing it will, in fact, be creative. The spark is there.

### **OLD AND NEW**

Recently I’ve noticed that I have rediscovered many of the old ways, as taught to me by my family. I have combined those teachings

with the new ways I have created for myself during the course of my life. Together they complement each other and create the full me.

*“Don’t let the fear overtake the joy.”*

—Joe Maddon, Manager of the Chicago Cubs

## CREATIVITY IS CONNECTING THINGS

Esther Cohen

*“When you ask creative people how they did THINGS they feel a little guilty because they didn't really do it, they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after a while. That's because they were able to connect experiences they've had and synthesize new things.”*

—Steve Jobs

1

What does creativity  
mean? A very dark woman  
maybe she is tall  
stood near a short pink pig  
at a big international  
airport. Maybe Singapore  
or Dubai. What did  
they say, and how  
did their words help them both?

**2**

There isn't a person alive,  
anywhere of any age,  
who isn't creative.

Creativity is like  
eating. It doesn't  
have an age,  
or a sexual identity.

Maybe a color.

Maybe not.

More orange  
than white.

Though white  
could be creative.

We all might not  
sing, but the world  
would be better  
if we could.

**3**

Children  
when they draw

see how easily they put  
elephants next to apples  
tall women near  
pink pigs

If we let them.

They write plays  
dance without thinking  
about what  
they look like.

When we visit old people  
in homes, even people  
with deep problems  
they are happier  
when they hear music,  
when they've had a chance  
to make birds from paper bags  
or do all they imagine.

**4**

What we do  
how we do it  
is entirely connected.  
We help each other

when we work:  
 serving food  
 building roads  
 teaching cleaning  
 putting out fires.  
 How can we add  
 creativity to the way  
 we work to the way  
 we live how can we  
 be who we know  
 we are?

## 5 Ed Said

This morning a friend  
 called and asked the question  
 (he is in the workforce business)  
 how much money do I make  
 writing poems?  
 Economics  
 of the poetry business,  
 financial breakdown.  
 Economics is not usually

a poem, though it could be  
 in the right hands  
 but those hands  
 aren't mine. We  
 all know no one writes a poem  
 for money. Songs either  
 although if you can find  
 Someone Big  
 to sing your song then maybe.  
 Social media person once  
 suggested I tweet  
 my poems to Oprah  
 if she read them  
 if she liked them  
 maybe. I sent her one poem  
 but she did not tweet back.

## 6 We

Our work, all our work  
 whatever it is we do  
 to earn a living  
 or because

we have no choice because we are poems  
 every one of us all our work  
 putting cans of peas  
 on the Price Chopper shelf  
 taking a photograph of the woman  
 with one leg delivering  
 mail she's  
 making sure we get  
 a handwritten letter from Aunt  
 Ruthie in a nursing home all those people  
 taking care of Ruthie in the nursing home  
 giving her baths and meals  
 making her laugh even though  
 she doesn't remember why  
 Paul who mows lawns and chain smokes  
 when he stands behind the barn  
 Paul is working so is Roman  
 the dishwasher at Betty's Luncheonette  
 in Leeds New York if we could understand  
 how it is that all the jobs we do  
 are part of one big job how small  
 and large make up the whole of life  
 how work is always we

## WHERE CREATIVITY SITS

Jim Crabtree

*“If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he marches to the sound of a different drummer. Let him step to the music that he hears, however measured or far away.”*

—Henry David Thoreau

Theater has always been part of my life. I was raised by parents who succeeded in theater and TV in New York and Los Angeles, parents who decided to raise seven children in Crossville, Tennessee, where they and local visionaries started and ran a theater that changed the lives of a rural community and region, and changed my own life too. I remain at that theater now, having helped build and run it for forty years.

My path has had many turns. From a child of the theater, to seminary, to Yale School of Drama, to building a professional theater organization for forty years. What follows is Part 1 of my story. Theater can be magical wherever it happens. I've seen that in Crossville, Tennessee.

### BEFORE

My parents were successful in New York, Palm Beach, and Hol-

lywood. Then they moved to Crossville, Tennessee.

In August 1963, my family moved from Los Angeles and the TV industry for which my father, Paul Crabtree, had been writing. We settled “temporarily” in the small town of Crossville, TN, pop. 4,500, a mountain crossroads on the rugged Cumberland Plateau, where my grandmother and her mother had grown up. The family roots date back to 1870. Granny had moved to Pittsburgh with her soldier/engineer husband Major Ed Ducey. He had returned from France after World War I. In that postwar era, Crossville and many other Plateau towns were “sundown towns,” where people of color had not been welcome after dark, since black and immigrant railroad laborers had been pushed out by economics and hostility once the trains were rolling, and the Klan grew ascendant after the Great War.

A few weeks earlier, in ‘63, I had graduated from Chaminade Prep, then a boys’ Catholic high school, amid the meadows and horse farms and relentlessly encroaching suburbs of Canoga Park, California. In late August, the family enjoyed a community “welcome” reception for my family that was organized by Crossville folks who knew of my parents, Paul Crabtree and Mary Evelyn Ducey Crabtree, and their theater, radio, film, and TV work.

They met in the early 1940s in New York City, in the National Touring Company of *Kiss and Tell*, a successful Broadway comedy directed by the great George Abbott. Courtship was followed by marriage, followed rapidly by me, in August ’45, 18 years before our “short-term” relocation to Crossville.

In the mid-‘40s, Dad’s career blossomed, with major radio roles, and a successful audition for Rodgers and Hammerstein that put him in the new production of *Oklahoma!*

Mom’s career as a successful model and actress was interrupted and deferred by my impending and actual arrival, and then by the six siblings who followed me over the next 16 years. Mary juggled family with occasional roles at theaters where Dad was director or producer.

That same year as the family move, Martin Luther King Jr. was

delivering the “I Have a Dream” speech at the Lincoln Memorial, and I headed off to the Roman Catholic seminary of the Paulist Fathers, St. Peter’s College in Baltimore, to study for the priesthood.

I mourned my California girlfriend as we drove Route 66 across Arizona and New Mexico, through Texas and on to Tennessee. I was idealistic, and headed to the seminary perhaps in part for lack of another clear ambition beyond playing baseball—my high school coach was a part-time scout for the L.A. Dodgers—but that seemed unrealistic, and besides, the family was leaving California. I was not ready to be on my own.

I had grown up as a good student and jock primarily in Catholic schools, playing occasional kids’ and teen roles for Dad in Palm Beach with his professional company and in benefit musicals he wrote for Rosarian Academy, the Catholic girls’ school of my sisters. Life there sort of alternated among Little League, then high school sports, and plays for Dad and Mom.

I was successful in the small California pond at Chaminade, prompting “the boys”—surfers, mischief-makers—to push me for student government president instead of a great guy who dated Ricardo Montalban’s beautiful daughter, and was deemed an upper-crust “soc” (“sosh,” as in “social”) by the surfer-world ho-dads and gremmies who made up “the boys.” I wasn’t very good at the office and its modest politics, but I made sports teams as a starter at the tiny school, and excelled in speech contests, getting to the state finals. But I suppose I had lost what roots I had put down in Palm Beach, and didn’t know where to head or what to do for college. My instinct was to stay close to home, and Mom and I considered Loyola College, south of L.A. But with good memories of Dominican nuns at St. Ann’s and Rosarian, and surrounded by Marianist brothers and priests and a great regular-guy pastor at our church in Canoga Park—the seminary seemed a good and idealistic choice. Decisions about the future were made for me. Life was planned.

And then Loretta Young’s TV series, for which my father wrote, directed, and acted—was cancelled mid-season. All the other shows

had writers and scripts as spring approached. Paul and Mary decided to move us “temporarily” from sunny, lavish California to Granny’s home in rural Tennessee—an inexpensive place to park seven kids until Dad returned to New York or L.A. for the next TV season—and maybe a good place to write a book.

The trip from California became another family journey, like all those from New York to Florida each December, right after Christmas. We reversed the drive from Palm Beach to L.A., which had featured New Orleans, the Grand Canyon and Route 66 and Carlsbad Caverns, through the desert to L.A. and TV-land. The return featured a blowout in the Mojave Desert, engine trouble in Albuquerque, and cooking out at campsites and outside motel rooms in sweltering Oklahoma—to save money, I now realize.

For me, the trip to Tennessee was about “the girl I left behind me,” away from another set of friends in giant L.A. to tiny Crossville—and then a monastic life at St. Peter’s, and beyond. The trip seemed a pilgrimage of sorts. I was Paul on the way to Damascus, or at least to St. Peter’s. The sense of mission heightened on my late August trip north to New York to see relatives, then down to Baltimore, as Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech echoed. Later that fall, with Gregorian chants as background in suburban Baltimore hallways, I honed new handball skills, accepted celibacy, and, grudgingly, got used to touch football and tennis. I registered for Selective Service at suburban Catonsville, Maryland’s, Draft Board, and was deferred as a divinity student. In November, ceremonies, tragedy, and destiny intertwined as John Kennedy was assassinated and Advent began, with its waiting and preparation. And I heard from home about a Crossville production of Dad’s *Pinocchio*, in which I had starred at the center of Rosarian Academy beauties.

Just before Christmas, I came home to see the Crossville *Pinocchio*. My younger brother, Tom, triumphed in my role! Townsfolk thrilled to songs by a hundred kids on the 1930s junior high stage, as Dad worked magic and Mom sketched costume designs and recruited seamstresses.

I went back to St. Peter’s, but the stream of news from Crossville continued. A new theater building was planned! Kids were hoarding pennies to buy a share of stock—at \$10 per share—in “The Cumberland County Playhouse—CCP.” Dad was planning an Actors’ Equity Association professional summer stock company—with stars, like in Westport and Florida!—as the centerpiece of year-round programming. Local schools and the new “Cumberland County Community Theater” would use the facility in fall and spring. A dream was becoming reality, in a small Appalachian county where the Interstate stopped just before climbing up our mountain. The dream featured a professional theater for general audiences, in a state where none existed.

But, that spring, it became clear to Paul and Mary that the sale of stock in the new for-profit theater (after the models of Westport, Palm Beach, and the Theater Guild in New York) would not generate enough money to build a facility. Yes, the remarkable sum of \$100K had been raised, from 700 stockholders. But the building would cost \$200K, leaving no money to post Equity bond—two weeks’ salary for New York-based pros—to guarantee their travel home if the new Playhouse folded mid-season.

I don’t know why Paul and Mary didn’t throw in the towel and head back to NYC or L.A. Perhaps Dad’s small-town roots beckoned. Perhaps they were broke.

Paul went back to his “trunk” of original works, and dusted off 1959’s Florida Rosarian/Royal Poinciana Playhouse show, *Dreamland, USA!*, which had again benefited the school, and had provided me with a good role. Dad needed a tall, good-looking young man who played the guitar to play the young leading man. And I couldn’t play the guitar.

But I did know a talented guy who played the guitar and sang pretty well. During a phone call, I told Paul about Bob Gunton, a fellow seminarian from California. Bob was a handball addict and a powerful folksinger, with a repertoire ranging from The Kingston Trio and Bob Dylan to Joan Baez and The Limelighters. He sang

lead baritone in Rev. Bob Mize's seminary chorus, which learned the liturgical chants to lead the congregation of St. Peter's High School and college seminarians and the faculty of priests. I sang with the group, never blending quite well enough to suit Father Bob.

Bob became "Johnny Timberlake" in Tennessee USA! When Dad needed a choreographer, I proposed seminarian Vic Luckritz, a trained dancer and Broadway fan who had directed Bob and me in a couple of holiday shows at St. Peter's. Paul took my word that Vic could choreograph the show.

And it was a huge hit, generating summer revenue (at \$1, \$2, and \$3) that would carry the theater through fall and winter, and building the foundation of a theater audience in rural Tennessee—the audience that now has averaged over 100K visits since '65—over five million, in fifty years. Tennessee, USA! ran five summers, through '69, then came back ten more times through 1995. Paul wrote a dozen more shows for the Playhouse stage, developing a tradition for new, original plays and musicals.

Bob, Vic, and I returned to Crossville for TUSA! '66 after our second year at St. Peter's; and I returned home for the Christmas holidays. We dated, grew up a bit. Personally, I had found friends, a community, and an extended family. A hometown that felt more authentic, more traditional, than homes in Queens, summer stock locations, Westchester County, NY, Palm Beach, or West Palm, and eleven different primary, middle, and high schools. Somehow, Crossville felt like home. The hometown where I belonged.

For Paul and Mary, Crossville was a mixed blessing. It was exciting to see the Playhouse succeed and grow, and fun for us seven kids to be in Tennessee, USA! each summer, and involved, like it or not, in whatever was happening onstage. Crossville seemed a good place to raise a family, though New York and Palm Beach had excitement and large salaries. But paying the mortgage took most of the proceeds. The Kennedy Administration had established the National Endowment for the Arts, which generated state arts councils (and funding for nonprofits) across the country. Nonprofit regional the-

aters, based on the Theater Guild model of season schedules and subscriber audiences, were developing across the country. Paul helped start the Tennessee Theater Association, and was asked to serve as an original member of the Tennessee Arts Commission. But his theater, nominally "for profit," was ineligible for funding.

Paul was an original incorporator of the Playhouse—and would share in the profits. But after the mortgage was paid, no surplus remained. He wrote scripts to keep the theater alive, receiving no royalties as writer, just a very modest salary as CEO. Mary was unpaid, then became a salaried theater teacher at Crossville Elementary after several years, when federal funding was developed to broaden the mission of the Playhouse and continue connecting with local youth. Then Mary was diagnosed with cancer. After five years of TUSA!, volunteers had run out of gas—they had given up summers for half a decade.

Dad drank too much, and must have felt his career was lost but couldn't figure how to find it again. Still, when a sixth consecutive season of Tennessee, USA! seemed impossible to cast with enough volunteers—and with Bob Gunton in Vietnam—he responded creatively: 1970 featured his new musical *That's the Spirit*, after its earlier premiere as a musical for Cumberland County High; and summer brought *An Evening with Paul Crabtree*—with new music by Crossville musician Steve Wheaton, and songs and stories drawn from Paul's youth in "Doby Creek"—his pseudonym for Pulaski, VA—and his careers on Broadway, in Hollywood, and amid the wealth and society of Palm Beach.

*An Evening* was a huge success, with a small supporting cast, including my sisters Abby and Amy and composer Wheaton, and a very modest production budget for scenery and costumes. And Dad was in his element, back onstage as a song-and-dance man, and remarkable storyteller. His tales of youth in small-town Appalachia, and his songs from vaudeville and Broadway and growing up, sold out the theater all summer, and led to his Patchwork Press publication of a crude locally printed but strong-selling volume of auto-

biographical Stories from Doby Creek which helped to support the theater. And the next year, '71, saw the return of *An Evening and the Summer Premiere of Step to the Music*—a big, splashy semi-autobiographical musical starring Dad himself and now-Vietnam vet Bob Gunton. The show's lyrics connect deeply to our family.

And *Step to the Music* became his career solution. The developers of Opryland, USA!, a large theme park in Nashville, came to see both shows, and hired Paul to create and direct all the live shows for the new "Home of American Music."

Opryland was economic salvation for the family, though Paul wrote "for hire" rather than retaining his copyrights—anathema in the theater business, but not unusual in the Nashville music industry. As Paul was drawn to Opryland, the Playhouse was drawn to convert to nonprofit status as a 501(c)(3) corporation. Most of the stock was donated by founding families who loved the new Playhouse, and the remainder was repurchased, over a period of years, as the law prescribed. But Paul and Mary informally, but quite distinctly, separated, with Paul in an apartment near the under-construction theme park. Though legally intact, the family was broken.

Remarkably, Mary took the reins as Producing Director strongly enough to balance the theater's budget for the first time—and every year for the remainder of her tenure as CEO.

By this time, I had left the seminary, drawn to the theater as a career. Two years at St. Peter's had been followed by summers of Tennessee, USA! The next step in training for the priesthood was a "year of prayer and contemplation" at the Paulist Fathers' rural "novitiate" in northern New Jersey. I had basked in the bright lights and applause and the social life that came with small-town celebrity. I had seen Dad and Mom work magic, involving scores of families and hundreds of volunteers—inspiring and leading a successful sellout theater far from urban centers, before I-40 had cut driving time in half to Crossville from Knoxville or Nashville. Instead of uncertainty about college and future from California, and the "life-as-planned" noble security of the seminary, I now saw a new horizon. Three

months into the "year of prayer and contemplation," and without the academic anchor and challenge of classes, I decided to leave the Paulist novitiate. I came home, idled awhile, and helped at the Playhouse, until my mother wisely suggested I get a job, and think about the future.

The job was driving a photo-finishing pickup route and developing film for Harry Cravens, whose photography documents the Playhouse's early years. The future was envisioned, during months of working and dating in Crossville, as beginning at Middle Tennessee State University, to complete my last two years of college. I knew about MTSU because Dad had taken his high school theater class there, to compete in the state one-act play competition. They won, with a one-act he had written and directed, and he had made the acquaintance of Theater Chair Lane Boutwell. I headed for MTSU, a young man in a hurry. And I met a Tennessee girl who had seen me in Tennessee USA; and she would change my life. Annie.

In 18 months, cramming 21 hours of credits into semesters and returning to Crossville for two more summers of TUSA!, I completed the BA degree. But midway through the undergrad curriculum, most satisfying in literature, history, technical theater/design, and other classes where I found my academic competition much less formidable than at St. Peter's, I grew frustrated about the program. There were a few other guys who shared my feelings, and thankfully, we found encouragement in Clayton Hawes, the theater tech director and tech/design instructor. Clay challenged us to challenge ourselves, by putting on our own show, offering the small arena theater, and suggesting we read *Waiting for Godot*.

We did. And the show, and its challenges, taught me volumes and lessons—one of which was "quit griping and get to work."

#### WHAT COMES NEXT

At the drama club, I met Ann Windrow, and her identical twin, Nancy, who mercifully changed her hair color shortly after I met

them both. Before *Godot*, to take on a project of my own in a realm which I thought I knew—musical theater—I had posted a notice on the theater message board seeking a (free) piano player. Annie responded. And she has “musically” directed and guided my life ever since.

And as we dated, and began to get serious, I thought about the future. More training? I certainly needed it. Grad School? Seemed a comfortable idea.

While at St. Peter’s, I had haunted the library, where we could read *The New York Times*. An article in the Theater section had caught my eye a year or more before. “Painting the Green Room Red” chronicled Robert Brustein’s new-broom/new-spirit arrival as Dean at Yale School of Drama, which had evidently grown somewhat musty and academic. The article spoke of the school’s long and great prestige, but also an exciting new late ‘60s spirit. After all, the “Summer of Love” would hit San Francisco, and for Annie and me, it would hit Murfreesboro, too.

Knowing no other options, since I hadn’t researched theater grad schools, I applied to Yale. My academic transcript was strong. But my experience in the theatre was short-term, and my training had just begun. Could I possibly be accepted? If not, what then? No options.

The Yale application threw me a curve, asking for an essay on “Why I believe I have the background, training, and experience to succeed at the Yale School of Drama.” I realized I might be in over my head, and stewed for several weeks through several drafts of the essay. Finally, in frustration, I decided to simply come clean. “I have realized that I DO NOT have the background, training, and experience” to be successful at such a top competitive school. But, I expressed, I had begun to learn from my father; knocked the top off the grading curve in academics; and I had directed a successful (and independent) student production of *Godot*. I griped about weaknesses in the MTSU program, while lauding the academic strengths of St. Peter’s and several MTSU classes in history and lit. And I admitted that I had much to learn, and promised to work hard to do so.

And I was accepted. A year later, Associate Dean Howard Stein would tell me that the essay, its frankness and reasonable craftsmanship, had led them to me. And it didn’t hurt that Stein had seen Paul on Broadway in *The Iceman Cometh*, and knew his name from New York theater. I had the genes.

But I struggled at Yale. New Haven was then amid year-round summers of love, and I had led a sheltered, even cloistered, life. I was not cool. My clothes were from Sears, not the East Village or the Ivy League. I lived in a rented room with the bath down the hall, cooked bologna in an electric skillet in my room, but was slow to acclimate. Like Dad, I began to drink. And smoke. Gradually, I made friends and grew more comfortable—but still felt quite alone—no family, no seminary pals, no Annie. Our parents had asked us to wait a year before marriage, which my Catholicism and Ann’s Southern Protestantism seemed to justify.

Year 1 at Yale finished successfully, and I returned to Tennessee for TUSA! rehearsal, then marriage in Columbia, Tennessee, in Annie’s Cumberland Presbyterian Church—a branch which had splintered off for its opposition to slavery. Ours was the first Catholic marriage in Tennessee celebrated by a priest in a Protestant church, with the church’s minister assisting. For the rehearsal dinner, Dad made his specialty—meatball pie—and Bob Gunton sang Billy Edd Wheeler’s lyrics, “There’ll never be another hunk of woman like my Ann—she makes me feel like a great big man.” We had a one-day honeymoon, then returned to rehearsal for TUSA! ’68, with Annie leading the soprano section of the show’s large chorus. We collaborated on musical revue “show dinners” at nearby Holiday Hills Resort, recruiting TUSA! cast members to volunteer. For the summer, I was the resort “entertainment director,” Annie the music director and dining room hostess. We rented our first home, an apartment just off Main St, in downtown Crossville.

In the following year at Yale, I made connections through Annie (now a secretary in the School of Music) with conductor C. William “Bill” Harwood, who was to become a key colleague in my early ca-

reer. With Bill, I became stage director for several theater and opera productions during the coming years.

Bill planned a “staged concert production “of Jesus Christ Superstar, which brought us together. Certainly the work’s biblical roots were not lost on me, given my seminary years, but the rock score is what excited us and the community. While preparing for Superstar, Bill also asked me to help him with some staging for a less commercial opera—Benjamin Britten’s *Noye’s Fludde* (Noah’s Flood), a medieval “mystery play” set to music with a quartet of mature voices and a professional core orchestral ensemble—and with a chorus written for youth choirs, and orchestrations encompassing parts such as “tuned teacups” to evoke raindrops, and a supporting orchestra of young players. Knowing nothing of opera, but eager for Superstar, I agreed.

Ironically, Superstar was canceled during a licensing rights dispute, as a production of the rock opera was planned for Broadway. But Bill and I went forward with *Noye’s Fludde*.

And what a blessing that “medieval mystery play/opera” became for us both. We had little or no budget, but the combined forces were impressive—Yale Collegiate Chorus and the Smith College Glee Club—nearly 200 college singers, and a volunteer youth and university orchestra eager for opportunities to play, thanks to Bill’s enthusiastic recruiting and magnetic musicianship. We were to perform in Battell Chapel, the Yale University Church led by Reverends William Sloane Coffin and Phil Zaeder. I was pleased to have the opportunity but had no idea how to proceed.

For we had no set, no costumes, no lighting, just 200 singers and the orchestra for cavernous Battell, and to create an ark and all the creatures who boarded it to escape the flooding sea of deluge. But auditions produced a strong group of grad student opera singers for the leads, and a 75-ish emeritus faculty member as God—a spoken but rhythmically complex role—and I had to figure out how to stage this opera in a church, adapted from a medieval “mystery play,” sung in a version of medieval English!—and incorporating the Navy

Hymn of Great Britain, no less!

I recalled a comment my father had made once about directing problems—“See if you can turn your biggest problem into your biggest asset”—as he had done with a town full of enthusiastic amateurs in TUSA!, I assumed. So the 200 collegiate singers (mostly music students, not actors) clearly comprised one problem, along with no scenery, costumes, or lights!

So the singers had to become everything. And Britten’s use of the Navy Hymn suggested a spirit of creative license. As Bill rehearsed the singers and his Yale Chorus, I listened, and imagined another 100 voices when joined by the Smith College women (and a few men, for Smith was newly coed, like Yale).

And the Navy Hymn’s rhythm became, to my ears and imagination, the rocking of a vast ship amid a stormy sea, as it was during Britten’s youth in the Second World War, when Britain’s navy youth fought the tide of swastika’s tyranny at sea, in the air, and “on the beaches, in the streets” as Churchill’s stirring oratory promised, should Britain’s island be attacked, The hymn, by British composer and choir director William Whiting, was also adopted as the U.S. Navy Hymn—and incorporated by Britten in three full verses for choirs and orchestra in *Noye’s Fludde*:

ETERNAL FATHER, STRONG TO SAVE, WHOSE ARM  
HATH BOUND THE RESTLESS WAVE,

WHO BIDDEST THE MIGHTY OCEAN DEEP, ITS OWN  
APPOINTED LIMITS KEEP,

OH, HEAR US WHEN WE CRY TO THEE, FOR THOSE IN  
PERIL ON THE SEA!

With image in mind of a vast ark rocking on vaster seas, as 200 voices burst forth in repeated “Alleluias!,” in my mind (and then in reality), half of our 200 singers became the joyous animals, in brightly colored plumage from personal and dorm-buddies’ closets, prancing two by two down church aisles to be welcomed in celebration by Noah and his family, onto the church steps approaching the altar. First, in a raucous celebration of living creatures, then forming

into the shape of an ark! A ship with pointed bow and raised stern, with a captain's wheel of the arms of a kneeling, lanky girl at mid-ship, halfway up the steps, and a mast and sail of the tallest giraffe of a guy with the smallest young lamb of a girl on his shoulders, arms waving as a sail. The tribes of colorfully garbed animals celebrated fellowship, danced and sang together, then morphed into Noye's Ark itself on the final "Aaa-le-lu- iaaaaaahh."

And then came a percussive triangle's ting of rain, then tuned teacup raindrops—ping, ping—slowly first, then faster, as a bass rumble emerged from tympani and deep strings, as 100 black-garbed figures flowed and undulated down the aisles, splashing onto spectators, surrounded the ark of animals, flowing up to the altar itself, and nearly engulfing the front pews of spectators.

And the ark rocked. The entire church truly rocked on that Sunday afternoon, as the ark and sea began to sway in a circular pattern, gestures following the path of an imaginary dove circling the ark, bearing an imaginary branch of greenery as ten-year-olds tinkled teacups and triangles, echoing final raindrops. As the dove landed on Mrs. Noah's head (or so it seemed, as all pointed), our majestic white-haired God, in his very own commencement robe with bright collar, our God spoke in resonant rhythms from his organ loft high above, telling us he would send his rainbow to bless all. And miraculously, Prof. Benjamin DeLoach, as God, spoke of his coming rainbow, and the orchestral chimes celebrated salvation of humankind and all living creatures. And a celestial lighting designer brought the sun streaming through the stained-glass windows of Battell Chapel, gleaming on the organ pipes surrounding our warm-voiced God, then spilling onto the entire ark and sea, enveloping Noah, his family, all creatures, and Creation, in brilliant dappling of sunlight and stained glass. The divine light cues were astonishing and impeccable. And as God finished his words of blessing and salvation, animals and sea and Noye's family processed arm in arm up the aisles, as God threw candy kisses from his organ-loft perch. Children with hand bells and

musicians with chimes, percussion, pipe organ and more, evoked a new beginning for the entire world. A triumph for Bill and me, and our entire cast, their families, and the attending audience.

It was certainly a new beginning for my world; now with Annie in New Haven, and our discovery of an additional world of music and theater beyond the Drama School, and the collaboration with Bill Harwood. I learned much in the directing, design, and literature classes; the interaction on class projects with my peers. All that I learned I brought to Crossville, Tennessee, where our theater has continued all these years. I learned that theater can be anywhere and everywhere. That is the story I will one day tell in a longer piece. This is my beginning.

## WHY PHOTOGRAPHY

Michael Kamber

I grew up in a time, in the 1960s and 70s, when photographs made a difference. My family got *The Portland Press Herald* every morning. There was always a black-and-white news image on the front page.

This photo was a representation of an important event in the world from the previous day. Weekly news magazines, such as *Time* and *Newsweek*, were packed with photos too; I pored over them eagerly, occasionally cutting photos from their pages. They were my only links to far-off happenings in a distant world.

The iconic photos of the civil rights movement in particular were burned into my consciousness. I studied the defiant marchers, snarling dogs, and pot-bellied Southern sheriffs with insouciant grins. Pictures from the Vietnam War changed my consciousness as well. We watched grainy clips on TV every evening. Yet it was the photos, rather than the news footage, that seared the deepest. I remember the photos and the photographers: Larry Burrow's color work from the field of battle, exhausted men and blood-stained bandages against the brown earth; Henri Huet, a French-Vietnamese Associated Press photographer, took pictures with the eye of a poet; the classic images that I would see again and again in my youth: Eddie Adams' Saigon execution photo; Nick Ut's picture of the napalmed girl running down Highway One. These photos were credited with

turning the American public against the war. These photos provided evidence of people's lives, their suffering, American foreign-policy failures; realities that needed to change.

Somewhere in the mid-1960s, my mother, Hannah Kamber, picked up a camera and began to freelance for the *Maine Times*. She maneuvered her way into Pineland, a state psychiatric hospital. Her photographic expose of people chained to the floor in pools of urine created public outrage. The Maine Legislature quickly voted in reforms.

My mother did a few more assignments for the paper and then flamed out as her drinking and drug use spiraled out of control. Yet her brief career was enough, at least for me. Her photos were like talismans. They showed what was and what needed to change, and though I've not seen them in years, I can describe their many details. And maybe those photographs were part of what was best about my mother. Strong and clear, her pictures told the stories that changed people's lives.

When I picked up a camera in my teens, I was immediately hooked. I had the sense that I could freeze time, give evidence of happenings, express my feelings.

I photographed voraciously. My pictures were mostly moody, dark black-and-white landscapes, influenced by Edward Weston, Paul Strand, and others. I thought that one day I would be a landscape photographer. Too timid to approach people, and with no clear pathway towards social documentary or photojournalism, I had not yet made a connection between the photos that so moved me as a child and a viable career.

Then, when I was 16, I moved to Asbury Park, New Jersey. The legendary former resort town was in terminal decay, trash blowing past the abandoned amusement parks where I had played during childhood visits. I went to work at my grandfather's store in time to witness the end of an era. From an impoverished immigrant family, Bob Kamber had only a fourth-grade education; he moved to Asbury Park in 1925 and opened a clothing shop not much wider than

a closet. As Asbury Park boomed, he and his brother-in-law slowly made a go of it. Their earliest pictures show a tiny storefront. Leafing through the family album, you can see that every decade the store grew, until finally it filled a three-story brick building on the corner of Cookman Ave and Main Street.

My grandfather's model for success was simple: you put in a lot of time, you know your customers, you give a square deal. That was pretty much it. When he was well into his 80s, he routinely worked 60 hours a week.

Mostly I swept the store and ran pants up and down to the tailor shop. The top floor was like a mausoleum for clothes, with dust a quarter of an inch thick atop old mannequins and stacks of brightly colored pants left over from the "Tomorrow Shop," Bob and Irving's failed 1970s foray into contemporary fashion.

After 55 years in business, the shop closed soon after I got there. My grandfather was in his 80s and Asbury Park wanted the land for a bus station, and no one saw any use in fighting to keep alive a shop that was a relic from the 1920s. Soon after, a transmission shop owner on Asbury Avenue offered me a job and I began working after school, climbing down into a greasy pit to pull transmissions from cars.

The owner, a gnome-like man, knew little about transmissions, but he kept a pan full of metal shavings in the back room. We would do a small service on a customer's car and the boss would inevitably trot out the pan with metal shavings. "Your transmission is on its last legs," he'd say, explaining that the only way to avoid being stranded was to do a full \$300 rebuild. The trick frequently worked. I was astounded, yet the other workers told me this was standard operating procedure in many shops along the Jersey Shore.

The shop limped along; disorganized, filthy.

The workers occasionally dropped a nut into the two inches of grease, and mud into the pit where we worked, and where I once even saw a live snake. This necessitated long walks to the parts store for a five-cent part. Wrenches could not be found and broken tools

stripped bolt heads which then had to be drilled out. Jobs that should have taken 20 minutes took hours.

I quit and went down the street to A1 Transmission, run by Mr. Ed, a retired US Army command sergeant major. Mr. Ed was a stern but friendly African American, originally from South Carolina, and he ran a different kind of shop. If you were a minute late, you got docked an hour. Late twice in a week, you got sent home for the day. The shop was spotless; tools were kept on a board, each wrench carefully outlined in black marker. Nothing was lost, ever. Mr. Ed was honest with the customers and had great customer loyalty. And the shop was amazingly efficient—we were round-tripping transmissions in under an hour. I got paid by the transmission, and I began to make real money. I got my work ethic from my grandfather. I learned the importance of organization and structure from Mr. Ed.

On the weekends, I photographed. As I turned 18, I still harbored a vague dream of becoming a professional photographer.

My father knew two old photographers in Asbury Park, both bitter men. He took me to see them.

The verdict was unanimous. "You'll never be a photographer, it's a terrible profession, you work like a dog and nobody appreciates you. Don't even try."

I wasn't interested in much else, so I decided to skip college for the time being. Life became a pretty good party for the next year or so. I was making good money, getting drunk every night, racing my car, and occasionally seeing a pretty blonde waitress out on Route 35. The dream went south pretty quickly. (Later, I realized I'd been living a Bruce Springsteen saga, and they usually end sadly).

The waitress let me know she was seven months pregnant. My daughter, Sara, came into the world a month later. I slept on her grandmother's couch for six months, up all night taking care of my newborn daughter. The bills started to mount, winter set in, I moved into a basement. Each of my fellow mechanics—older men in their 40s, all heavy drinkers, men worn out by their lives—came to me in the quiet times, and confided. "I feel for you, Mike," one said. "I was

gonna make something of myself, get out of this town, but I got my girlfriend pregnant, and here I am today."

I'd seen the larger world in those magazines when I was growing up, seen the wars and revolutions and movements. The one thing I'd always wanted to do was photography. I applied to art schools and ended up in New York City.

My savings from three years turning a wrench was gone in eight months. When the money was gone, my education was too.

Still, a year in school was extraordinary. I went to Parsons School of Design. My landscape photographer dreams slowly merged with my fascination with history and politics. I began to read *The Village Voice* and *The New York Times*. I became certain that documentary photography and photojournalism were to be my future. The path there was less clear.

I had a camera, but often lacked money for film. I had no dark-room access (this long pre-dated the digital era), my camera was sometimes broken, repairs were expensive. My classmates carried on at Parsons, which, even then, was around \$20,000 per year. A few were working class, but the vast majority came from wealthy families. The message seemed clear, and unfair. Education was for those who could afford it. I wrenched on the weekends in New Jersey, took the train down to see my daughter, began working construction.

I moved to the Bronx in 1986 and worked in a carpentry shop, photographing on the nights and weekends, when I had free time. *The Village Voice*, featured New York's best photojournalism then, and I would bring my pictures in each week for the near-certain rejection by the surly editor, Fred McDarrah, who had run the photo desk since the 1950s. I occasionally sold a picture to the *Associated Press* for \$25. Slowly, I began to get my work published. I was doing less carpentry and more freelance work. An editor at *The New York Times* saw my work and offered me a freelance spot in their rotation.

As I worked more and more in the field of photography, I realized that the years I had spent working with my hands—years I thought were to my detriment—gave me a real advantage over oth-

er young photographers who had spent their lives in classrooms. I knew how to solve problems, to make things fit, to work out spatial equations and conundrums. And having spent years working on the streets, in transmission shops and on construction sites, I knew how to talk to people. And I'd learned a fair amount of Spanish, which would prove invaluable as I moved ahead.

Lacking a college education, I read everything I could get my hands on: the best of the new journalism from the 60s, Joan Didion and Tom Wolfe. And George Orwell's writings, the great works from Vietnam by Neil Sheehan, David Halberstam and Tim O'Brien. From reading *The Voice*, I learned about documentary film: the Maysles brothers, Frederick Wiseman, D.A. Pennebaker; and spent many hours in the dark at the Film Forum and the Thalia Theatre, learning how stories are constructed.

September 11 came and I quickly flew to Pakistan, traveling overland to Afghanistan, a disastrous foray that nearly got me killed, but one that taught me a great deal about foreign coverage. A year later, The New York Times offered me a spot in their West Africa Bureau. The original idea was that a reporter and myself would focus on the positive things happening in Africa, but the Bureau was located in the Ivory Coast, which was being rocked by civil war. Liberia, next door was also in a full-scale civil war. And violence wracked Nigeria and other countries in the region.

Almost by default, I began to photograph conflict. When I took a break from West Africa, *The Times* sent me to Baghdad.

War in Liberia was particularly gruesome, with child soldiers as young as eight or nine roaming the streets with Kalashnikovs. Random shelling of women and children was a daily occurrence, the results horrific. It was in Liberia in 2003, in a time and place before cell phones and without electricity, that I felt photojournalists made the greatest change. Working with a small group of photographers, including Chris Hondros and Martin Adler, both later killed in Libya and Somalia, respectively, I spent long days on the frontlines, or working among the tens of thousands of refugees sleeping in the

streets and parks. The rebels had surrounded the city and rained shells down on the defenseless population. Our photos were published around the world and were, for a time, the only visual record of the slaughter of innocent people.

And our photos created change. They landed on front pages around the world; the United Nations met to discuss the crisis. In mere weeks, President Charles Taylor was forced from power, a group of Nigerian peacekeepers was dispatched, and peace was achieved. The cause and effect between photography and change was proven again.

On the quiet days in Liberia, I photographed with my old Hasselblad portrait camera, exposing large rolls of the 120mm film. I heard rumor of another photographer working with a thoroughly impractical Hasselblad, which seemed both bizarre and unlikely.

The year after the war ended, I went back and, in a steaming bar, was introduced to a tall British photographer named Tim Hetherington. Sure enough, he was the other guy shooting portraits on 120mm film in the midst of the war. We hit it off immediately, talking and laughing for hours and comparing notes on the war.

It turned out he had been with the rebels and had photographed the launching of some of the mortars of which the civilians of Monrovia and myself had been on the receiving end.

Tall and lean, with the looks of a movie star, Tim was wickedly funny and a great storyteller. He was also modest and self-effacing to a fault. He could write, shoot video and photograph, and do it all well.

When Tim covered a subject as a photographer, he read extensively on the history of the subject: politics, the social movements, the people involved. After the war, he moved to Liberia and lived in Monrovia while he worked on his book, *Long Story Bit by Bit: Liberia Retold*, certainly the most in-depth exploration of the Liberian conflict to date.

And Tim was doggedly attached to education. It was not until years later that I learned that he had gone to Oxford at the age of 17. I did know, however, that wherever he went in the world, Africa in

particular, he worked with young photographers, giving them the training they needed, along with connections to editors and publishers. In later years, when I introduced Tim to young photojournalists, they invariably complained that Tim had taken such an interest in their work that they never got to learn about him.

I cycled between West Africa and Baghdad for the next few years. What I didn't realize then, but see now in retrospect, is that I was catching the end of a golden era in journalism. I had a front row seat to history, but also to the spectacle of newspapers closing down and laying off journalists with decades of experience.

Experienced photojournalists with contracts and staff jobs were replaced by freelancers, often paid a hundred dollars or less to risk their lives for a photo from a war zone.

The mentorships, the years working with older photographers who helped to train the next generation, were becoming scarce. I met 18-year-olds who bought plane tickets to Egypt, then hitchhiked across the border into Libya to cover the war with little more than a cell phone. Safety training, tourniquets, and flak jackets were out of the question for most of them.

Tim came to New York and lived with me for a while. Actually, he lived mostly with my daughter Sara, as I was overseas a good deal of the time. Our friendship grew and he became as close to me as a family member.

He had a great success in 2011. Tim's movie *Restrepo*, about the war in Afghanistan, was nominated for an Oscar. His book on Afghanistan, *Infidel*, sold well; he was courted by photo agencies, galleries, and publishers.

And the wars were getting more dangerous. The early days of getting caught in the crossfire were giving way to new militancies and dynamics: the journalists were now the target.

Tim and I had long talks about opening a center for documentary studies, where we could teach photography and journalism, particularly to young men and women who could not afford an expensive education.

I had lived for many years in the Bronx and I found a long-abandoned building which I bought it with the money I had saved covering the Iraq War. The building sat on one of the most troubled streets in the South Bronx, America's poorest congressional district. Tim and I sat in the building's empty storefront one evening in early 2011, discussing the details of the center education, journalism training, exhibitions, loaner cameras. But there was one thing we did not have: money. We decided the center was beyond our means; it would have to wait a year or two.

A month later, Tim made dinner for me on a cool May evening. He was leaving for Libya the next morning. We had the same conversation we had had many times before: when was the right time to quit?

"Covering war is what I want to do," he told me. "It is the crux of everything I'm interested in."

A few days later, I was at Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, DC, with my friend, Joao Silva, another war photographer, who had recently lost his legs in Afghanistan, when I got the call that Tim had been killed by a mortar shell in Libya. Chris Hondros, another friend, who had helped me out many times in Liberia, was killed along with him.

The blow was crushing. Years later, I still have trouble discussing Tim without choking up. I was in somewhat of a fog, when our mutual friend, Jeremiah Zagar, called me. "You know what you have to do now?" he asked. "You have to open that documentary center that you and Tim talked about."

From a certain point of view, it made perfect sense. I had spent two decades in an industry and worked in dozens of countries, and I wanted to carry on Tim's legacy, as well as the legacy of my mother and many great journalists I had worked with and grown up with. To me, accurate and tenacious journalism is the foundation of our country's democracy, nothing less.

From a financial point of view, starting a nonprofit documentary center was lunacy. I had no experience in such a venture and

no money; my finances consisted of a handful of nearly maxed-out credit cards.

What I did have was a great many close and supportive friends, a building, and a background in photography and construction. I knew how to build.

I rounded up friends and we set to work rehabbing the abandoned storefront. Students from the International Center of Photography helped out in droves, and I brought in Danielle Jackson, an experienced exhibition director. She worked alongside me to get the organization running.

Without the means to build a real gallery, we simply purchased a projector and began to screen documentary films on our back patio in the summer of 2011. We received Tim's blood soaked film from Libya, developed it, and mounted our inaugural exhibition in October 2011.

Six hundred people attended the opening, disproving what I had been told—that nobody would come to see documentary photography and journalism in the Bronx. Almost immediately, young photographers from the Bronx began to wander through the door. Edwin Torres was one of the first, a young man who had grown up in Hunts Point, a notorious Bronx neighborhood, then moved away for a college education and, eventually, an office job in Manhattan. Dave Delgado was next, also from a tough background. He had been on the wrong side of the law as a young man, then straightened out, raised a family, and now had an insatiable passion for photography. Rhynna Santos and others followed. The story was usually the same.

"I thought I was the only photographer in the Bronx," said Dave Delgado. "I go out and shoot on the weekends, but I didn't know there was anybody else in the Bronx who took photos or wanted to be a photographer." I quickly formed these photographers into a Friday night get together; then we formalized it as the Bronx Photo League. At the same time, neighborhood children were flocking to the center, partly drawn to the photography and film, and partly because they had found an oasis of safety and creativity in a neighbor-

hood with few resources. There are only a handful of art and cultural centers in the Bronx, a woefully underserved borough. (The budget of every cultural institution in the Bronx, combined is a fraction of one midsized Manhattan museum—I know; I've run the numbers).

We soon began an afterschool program with seven students, then expanded it the next year, and the next. We teach the children photography and much more: rigorous critical thinking, media literacy, research skills, and the types of technical skills that employers demand. I always question why our tech companies are forced to import hi-tech workers from around the world to fill well-paying jobs. We have the talent at home. It is the training and education we lack.

The South Bronx has been a place where the population has traditionally been disempowered on several levels. By teaching our students to explore, photograph, and present the realities in their neighborhoods, we enable them to take control. The students see that where they point their cameras, and how they use them, makes a difference in the public's perception of the Bronx. They begin to control the narrative of their community. Our teenagers print their photos and return to give them to their subjects, creating an important community interaction.

They also exhibit the photos and publish them in the press—in 2016, The New York Times and several local newspapers published our students' work from the Bronx. Poor children, nearly all African American and Latino, are greatly empowered through this process.

Our investments in education have taken years to bear fruit. Education takes time, especially with the adult students who work full-time jobs and raise families on top of everything they do here. But the successes have come. Edwin Torres works regularly for newspapers and magazines all over the world. Perhaps more importantly, he has moved back to the Bronx, reversing the "brain drain" that plagues the borough. Dave Delgado is a regular freelancer at The New York Times; Melissa Elian was just accepted to the prestigious Columbia Journalism School, Edwin Torres quit his insurance job, moved back to the Bronx and is working as a staff photographer

for the New York City Mayor's Office. There are others. A prominent photo editor recently called our after school program, "the best photography I have ever seen by students." In 2016, we were selected to represent the United States in a prestigious photo festival in Japan—children from the South Bronx traveling around the world to represent the United States. Some of our students are going into their fourth year studying with us; we believe they will be amongst the finest student journalists in America by the time they go to college.

The book *Once in a Great City*, about Detroit, traces the creation of Motown and modern American music. Three simple and inexpensive factors created the Petri dish that bore extraordinary results: educators ready to train young minds; a supportive school system that provided the structure to learn and work together; and access to cheap instruments through Detroit's music stores. None of this was expensive, but the results have changed America.

This is one of our blueprints. Slowly, we are adding resources, with dozens of cameras and lenses available to our members and students. With Tim Hetherington's books, we have created one of the finest photographic libraries in the United States, one of very few that is free and open to the public. A darkroom and digital print lab have yielded further learning opportunities.

Lectures and slideshows by photographers and filmmakers from around the world have born extraordinary fruit as well. In five years, we have become a bedrock in the community and a national leader in photographic education in low income communities. We are carrying on Tim Hetherington's legacy, and the legacy of so many others.

With my journalistic background, I'm a believer in journalism and photojournalism as a means of evidence, of educating the public, of establishing facts upon which the public can build through debate and discussion. For me, the real conversation that needs to be had in America is this fact-based conversation. It seems pretty simple, but it's something we're seeing less and less of lately.

The most important thing is to get the facts right: that's what good journalists do and that's our guiding ethos at the BOC. On a

second level, I covered conflicts for over a decade. I've lost many friends around the world to violence. Now I'm back in my own country, in my own neighborhood, where the level of violence is far too high. I'm exploring and trying to help stop violence in all its forms. Part of what we're doing at the BOC is helping to prevent violence by spreading knowledge and strengthening communities. Photography helps.

## A STEADY GRIND

Victoria Kereszi

### CHILDHOOD

I grew up with my artist grandmother living next door to me. She could draw; she could paint; she could sew; she could cook and bake; she made gorgeous porcelain dolls that sold for hundreds of dollars at a local Christmas craft shop. Even though my Nannie did countless art projects with me, she had to hold the paintbrush in my hand to make it work for me. My hands were just too shaky. It felt like too much pressure for me to create in that way. It felt too permanent. I couldn't sew, I couldn't draw; I couldn't paint. I wasn't really sure what I could do in the art department. So, when I was eight years old, I started photographing clouds. I remember laying on the grass on the edge of my gravel driveway in Brookhaven, Pennsylvania, looking up at the sky-peering up at the amusing cloud shapes and snapping them with a 5 and 10 point-and-shoot 35mm camera, hoping it preserved the image I saw in real life. Looking at the cloud photos after my mom picked them up at the drive-thru Fotomat in the Pep Boys parking lot, I remember being disappointed. The old lady and her poodle weren't there. Where was the dragon? I got frustrated and stopped taking photos.

Instead, I spent time climbing oak trees, collecting bird skeletons from under the evergreen trees, riding my go-cart and dirt motorbike around my backyard, and spending summer weekdays at my family's

junkyard in Chester, PA, playing in junk cars. Dodging deep puddles of sludgy rainbow-colored water, my older sister and I jumped from car to car and entered people's lives-their memories were strewn across the floors, behind seats, scattered throughout the trunk. Old photos, coins, greeting cards, rosary beads, and toys were still lying there alone-forgotten. My grandfather and his workers would tear these automotive carcasses apart for their metal and parts, as my sister and I searched for treasures and stories.

I always loved being at the junkyard, and am proud of the memories it gave me. It is there where my father taught me to drive; where my uncle, who later died by suicide, worked so hard; and it is where I got my first (and last) tattoo, at the age of 14.

Although I was a girl and not allowed to inherit the family business, I still felt that it was my culture, my blood, my roots. I was never taught to work on cars, but I sure loved exploring them and making up stories about who drove them.

It wasn't until many years later, after my parents' divorce, the deaths of my grandfather and uncle, the failing health of my grandmother, and three-and-a-half years of college under my belt, that I decided to pick up a camera again and start documenting the junkyard and all of its stories, this time on moving film. If I filmed those clouds many years before as they moved and took shape in real time, would I have seen the dragon? I'd be damned if my art attempts would be still this time. I picked up my family's old Super-8 camera and a borrowed VHS-C camcorder, and began my journey finding stories. My family's story.

### NO GIRLS ALLOWED

I was not expected to run the junkyard business because I was female. I grew up around men fixing up motorcycles and cars, yet was never encouraged to pick up a tool. There is one photo of a three-year-old me crouched down next to my uncle Mark as he fixed his motorcycle. I remember handing him paper towels to wipe up the grease. I vaguely remember playing with the adjustable wrench,

but that is the only memory I have of myself as a child with a tool. I was encouraged to ride my go cart and mini dirt bike around my yard like nobody's business, but I was never taught to fix them when they broke down. I was allowed to help with paperwork, however. I remember evenings after dinner, sitting with my mom at our dining room table, entering the car titles of the recently junked cars. My job was to read off the number on the title to my mother as she entered it by hand into a two-foot-wide book of hundreds of cars acquired over the past year. It wasn't a job with tools, but it felt good to contribute in some way to my family's business.

Even though my grandmother was the matriarch of the business, she said she wanted more for me-meaning a college education. All of the men in my family worked in the trades and all of the women went to college-my great grandmother, aunt, and great-aunt were all nurses. Women were the caretakers and men were the handymen. Women were supposed to use their heads and hearts; men, their hands. Unlike my father, who was forced to drop out of high school in the tenth grade, my forced path was college. Nursing was not my calling, but I chose psychology, because I wanted to help heal people. In my own family, I saw what happened to people with untreated mental illness, and I wanted to help others avoid self-destruction. I will get into that a little bit later.

### HISTORY

In 1949, my great-grandparents bought a large plot of land in Chester, PA, for their sons. Hungarian-American sons of a coal miner, they had oil and hard work in their blood. After a family rift (there are various opposing versions of the story), my grandfather and great-uncle split the land into two separate junkyard businesses: Joe's and Lou's.

My grandfather built Joe's from the ground up. Everyone called him Junkyard Joe (Pop Pop to the kids) and he had a reputation for being just as mean as he was kind. He often gave free parts to people who had very little money, but he would smash a car window instead

of selling it to a customer who was trying to rip him off. My father loved school, but, as the oldest son, he was forced to drop out of the tenth grade to help run the business. Here is where my father learned to fix cars and build motorcycles.

### LOVE

My grandparents met at a school dance in 1950. My grandfather had graduated a decade earlier from high school, but came to the dance to find a wife. There he met my grandmother and they were married shortly after. My grandmother describes their early years together as living the life of movie stars. She said they would drive around Downtown Chester, a bustling shopping district at the time, though today it is one of the most poverty-stricken small cities in America. According to my grandmother, local establishments would "roll out the red carpet for them at social events."

By the time my grandmother was 24 years old, she had four children. The junkyard was their home. My grandfather built a series of trailers there, where they spent the early years of their childhood. Their Super-8 family movies gave me a glimpse into their little junkyard world. The grainy film strips show the kids playing on junk cars with oil wands as swords, hugging each other in a field of sunflowers my grandmother had planted, and driving an old metal toy fire truck around a dusty fenced-in play area. My grandfather was proud of his family of three boys and one girl, and made sure it was documented. One of my favorite scenes is from Christmas morning as he played the part of Santa Claus, in his shabby red felt suit, with his beard half fastened. The kids were in complete awe of him. I love this footage, mostly because it shows me that there were, in fact, happy beginnings for a family that would suffer a series of tragedies many years later.

### TRAGEDY

By the late 1960s, the business was doing so well that the family moved from the junkyard into a beautiful stone house in a wealthy neighborhood. My grandfather had bought the home in cash from his

friend, who was a scrap dealer. The house came complete with gardener, maid, and butler, and was simply gorgeous. It was decorated in period furniture; everything down to the linens was included. The scrap dealer felt that the junkyard was no place to raise a family, and before he went to Florida, made my grandparents a generous offer. The man became wealthy because of scrap metal from Joe's, and felt he owed our family something. Life was good. My grandmother always dressed to the nines, and was the president of the Women's Opera Club. The kids took art and music classes and horseback riding lessons. All of my grandfather's hard work and dreams of success and providing for his family had seemed to come true.

However, in 1973 and 1974, my family's success and happiness took a turn. The dream home burned down to the ground, possibly the fault of my father's younger brother, who lived in the rec room in the basement. Rocky was the second child of the family, and, according to some family members, he was violent, did drugs, and drank a lot. About a year after the house fire, 19-year-old Rocky went into a violent rage, accusing his pregnant wife of cheating on him. The newspaper articles say that gunshots were fired from within the apartment house, forcing my great-uncle to escape by jumping out of a two-story window. The police were called, and as Rocky was shooting at a car full of his scared friends that was speeding away from the scene, he was shot and killed by the police. My grandfather and grandmother arrived at the scene an hour later, to police tape, flashing lights, and their dead son's body on the lawn.

My mother, who was nine months pregnant with my older sister at the time, told me that Pop Pop telephoned my parents in their row home in Toby Farms. My father answered and screamed out, sobbing that Rocky was dead. My mother, in the next room, ready to deliver any day, ran to his side. My father was on the floor with the phone cord outstretched, screaming and crying. My parents rushed over to my great-grandparents' apartment house, where everyone had congregated in the kitchen. The moment my parents got out of the car in the pitch-black night, they heard deep, desperate wailing from inside

the house. The next morning, when my parents left to go home, my grandmother was outside, picking up Rocky's gold hoop earring from the coagulated blood in the gravel driveway.

My mother said that after that September day, my father became quiet and Pop Pop shut himself in his attic room and would not come out for months. So that the business would not crumble, my grandmother went to work at the junkyard until Pop Pop was well enough to return. Joe's Junkyard still provided for the family for decades after Rocky's death, but there was always a deep wound that lived in the junkyard soil. The family and the business would never be the same.

### HEALING

My grandfather did not identify as an artist, but he made some of the most complicated, raw, emotional art I have ever seen. As I was doing research for my documentary about my grandmother and the junkyard, she gave me the scrapbooks that he had started after Rocky's death and continued to make well into the 1990s. Inside the colored construction paper art pads, Pop Pop created collages of family photos and tragic newspaper articles with electrical tape and glue. At first, I thought these were simple family albums with news clippings about people he knew, but as I dug deeper, I learned that he had begun to cut out all the horrifying and tragic stories from the paper he was reading at that time. All of the stories were about strangers, but somehow he must have felt connected to them through their heartache. Kids killed by drunk drivers, political figures committing suicide, and any disturbing story that kept him up at night were paired with his grandkids' class photos, wedding portraits, his baby pictures, etc. My grandfather's grief lived somewhere between the juxtaposition of the happy family portraits and the horror. I photographed, filmed, and scanned these scrapbooks numerous times, and learned something more about him each time I attempted to document them.

### DEATH

In 1991, my Pop Pop had his first heart attack. He was preparing to have minor heart surgery but did not want to miss another day of work because the business's finances were unstable. Against my grandmother's wishes, he walked out of the hospital with the IV still attached. Only days later, he got very excited over a large engine sale, and had a heart attack right there on the junkyard soil. My father and my uncle Mark witnessed the whole thing. When the paramedics were unable to revive him, they left, and my father buried all of the paramedic debris into the ground with their boots.

My grandfather's funeral was really beautiful. His sisters and old customers, employees, and business partners came to pay their respects. I met Rocky's son, my cousin Jamie. The first time he met his grandfather was here at his funeral, in his casket. Because of the trauma associated with Rocky's violence and death, Jamie had not been allowed to meet his father's family until then. It was a sad day, but it felt like a new chapter was about to begin. At the cemetery, before Pop Pop's casket went into the ground, my sweet uncle Mark made a speech: "Dad is in a better place now. Life got so hard for him and now he is free."

My Pop Pop did not have a life insurance policy. He regarded the junkyard as his insurance policy, but instead of selling it (it could only be sold to another junkyard or auto shop because of soil contamination), my grandmother and her sons, Joe Jr. (my dad) and Uncle Mark, ran it for many years after Pop Pop's death.

### MENTAL ILLNESS

From 1995-1999, I went to college and studied psychology. I think that one of the reasons I felt drawn to psychology was that I had seen so much pain and tragedy in my own family like that, I thought that I could possibly save others from suffering painful lives. In my final year of college, my favorite uncle, Mark, was a victim of his own mental illness.

Mark was the baby of the family and was the only one to enlist

in the U.S. Navy in order to follow in his father's military footsteps (Pop Pop had been in the army). He was one of the most loving men I have ever met. When he looked you in the eyes and asked you how you were, you could feel that he really wanted to know. Growing up, he was a curious boy, and had learned how to fix cars and do body-work by himself by the time he was 18 years old. He was a fervent Christian who was raised in a Pentecostal Christian Academy. He loved to talk about the Lord, and he dedicated his life to his religion. He met a woman at church when he was 25, adopted her three children, and then they had four children of their own. He was a wonderful father and worked night and day at the junkyard after Pop Pop died to provide for them and to keep the family business alive. In 1997, when Mark was 37 years old, his marriage became shaky, and his wife became pregnant with another's man's baby before the divorce was final. Life was hard, and Mark had no coping skills except for his religion. His faith was not providing the solace he needed to combat the stress.

On September 19, 1997, I got a late-night call from my grandmother. When I answered the phone, she said, "Uncle Mark is with the angels now." In shock and sobbing, I asked my college roommate to drive me to my grandmother's house in the middle of the night, and I sat with her for the next three days, making funeral arrangements. At first, my grandmother thought he was murdered, because, allegedly, he had been robbed earlier in the day and may have possibly shot the intruder. The police report noted that a gunshot was reported hours before and a man was seen leaving the junkyard, bleeding. Apparently, shortly after this incident, my uncle called both my grandmother and estranged wife to tell them about the robbery, and at some point during the call, Mark shot himself in the head. Both phones were hanging off the hook in the junkyard office when the police arrived. I have never had the courage to ask my grandmother what he said on the phone the moment before his death.

We all have so much under our surface, and I wish I could have connected more with my uncle before he died, even if it were just

to look into his eyes and ask, "How are you really doing?" Later on, by making my junkyard film, I found a way to ask him that through my lens.

#### FILM

About one year after my uncle's death, I discovered documentary filmmaking in a Women and Film class, and decided to take a couple more media electives while I finished out my Psychology and Women's Studies degree. In Documentary Film 101, we were asked to make a non-fiction video. Here I felt stuck, until my sister, who had been photographing the junkyard as part of her thesis for grad school at Yale, said, "Why don't you follow Nannie around the junkyard with a video camera?" My first response was, "No way. Who would want to watch that?"

From grade school on, I was very shy and embarrassed about my working-class background. Kids from the McMansion cul-de-sac behind my little cinderblock stucco rancher used to make fun of my family. They called me "Harley" because my dad was a biker, and when they found out I did not have a security system in my house, one kid said "I doubt her house even has windows." I was embarrassed to be one of those kids on the free school lunch program. I would rarely invite friends over. I'd say, "Oh, you can't come over because my house is under renovation. We are getting an addition."

As a result of my women's studies classes, I learned strategies to dissect issues surrounding class, gender, and race. This gave me the necessary space to embrace my upbringing in a new, informed, loving, and accepting way, so I said, "Why not!" I started filming my chain-smoking, foul-mouthed, working-class grandmother in her junkyard. It was, after all, a paradise for me growing up, and I adored my grandmother with all of my heart. Why not explore it from behind my lens? My grandmother was aging and was a more complex person to me now. Instead of the doll-making artist grandmom, I saw her as a fierce warrior trying to salvage a failing business in the midst of crisis. The tragic death of my uncle had left

a mark there at the junkyard. His blood had been cleaned up, but a deep sense of sadness and failure was present in the air. Even though I was not aware at the time, I believe I set out to document what was left of him after his passing. I regret not filming him when he was there only a year earlier.

I was hesitant to share this part of my life with strangers, but then I thought about Uncle Mark. I thought about the business that my grandfather built and how it seemed to be crumbling by the minute. Why miss another moment and lose another story? My grandmother may be gone tomorrow, so I should preserve her legacy. I started shooting the junkyard on an old Super-8 camera, searching for the energy that was once present there when my father and his siblings were young. I also desperately searched for those colors that seemed so beautiful to me when I was little, jumping from car to car looking for treasures. I could not find that either.

Instead, I found a sad, lonely, failing junkyard that had seen death and pain. At the time I started filming, my grandmother's and father's health began declining rapidly, and the business continued to decline as well. People were breaking in and stealing parts, and disgruntled employees were setting tire fires that cost thousands of dollars in cleanup and fines. My father was depressed, addicted to various 'recreational' drugs, and was misusing business money. All of the good customers were going to my grandfather's brother Lou's junkyard next door because they had more parts, better prices, and did state inspections. The junkyard I once knew as an exciting place that put food on my family's table seemed cursed.

In the moment, I was not sure why I continued to film the junkyard after my sad discovery. However, looking back after so many years of working in community media and hearing so many people's stories, I know for a fact that storytelling heals. Even if Mark was not alive to tell his part of the story, he lives in others people's recollections of him and deep in those puddles of rainbow water. When I was filming, I saw the clouds in those puddles, and they were moving. Could those moving clouds possibly be my grandfather and uncle?

I was not able to catch either of them in real life on my camera, but they found me somehow.

### SOLD

When the junkyard sold in 2003 to my junkyard cousins next door, I documented the sale and life after for the third act of the documentary. My grandmother and father both felt relieved that the junkyard was gone, but we all cried when we realized that it was permanent. The letters on the Joe's sign were painted over and now read Lou's. Only months after the sale, my grandmother started drawing and painting and making porcelain dolls again. That lasted a couple of years, until her emphysema got too severe, and now she says she is ready to pass. She says, "My work is done here. I am ready to go home to the Lord." My father, also ill but from diabetes and heart disease, is still a junkman, selling old car parts and trinkets at local flea markets and car shows. It is hard for him to get the junk out of his blood.

### LIFE

As for me, I am a media maker, arts coordinator, social justice seeker, junk collector, and a mother. I find joy in helping others find the creativity and freedom to tell their stories that would otherwise be lost. Perhaps that became ingrained in me when I met those people in the abandoned cars when I was little.

When I picked up that Super-8 camera and started filming my family junkyard, it legitimized my family's history and hardships. I came to terms with the class shame I once had and it helped me heal from my uncle's death. From behind the lens I was able to deal with the feelings of being a class outcast as a child, and celebrate it instead. I was able to jump into those old cars again-imagining those stories, but this time it was my story. They were all part of it. I may have been female and not allowed in the junkyard to work, but I found my place there so many years later, with a camera under my arms, shooting clouds and puddles of muck.

My life and my art have helped me immeasurably; to become an artist, to become an activist, to understand how art can change life. For the last eight years, I've been lucky enough to work with the Workforce Development Institute, doing just that in our Arts and Culture Program. Finding ways for working people to use their talents to tell their own stories—in photographs and in words. The Workforce Development Institute is committed to work, to working people, and to art as a tool for social change. Today, my camera is my tool to tell the stories of others, and the funding and support we provide help working people all around New York State to do the same.

All of my creative endeavors; not just my own, but the ones that I've facilitated in others, helping people find their voices and stories using media arts, began when I was a girl, at that moment I chose to look up at the sky and shoot the clouds with my little point-and-shoot camera.

College gave me a bridge to cross, gave me the tools and lenses of feminism and art to study myself and help others study their worlds and tell their stories. I've gained pride in where I come from, and I like helping others explore class, race, gender, and social justice issues. It is all connected—isolation, art, and the communion that can be had through self-expression. I love the fact that I've found my voice and vision in film, and that I have the privilege of helping others to also build bridges between the worlds of limits where they live and the worlds of choices that begin with telling our stories to ourselves, and to others.

## ON CREATIVITY, COMMUNITY, AND KINDNESS

Annamarie Lanese

*“If you wish to make an apple pie from scratch, you must first create the universe.”*

—Carl Sagan

The creative life is one of possibility and vision. My vision is to bring light, hope, and opportunity so that we all may thrive and shine more brightly together.

I've been lucky to have WDI breathe life into a vision I had—to bring opportunity to people who do not know how to identify and develop aptitude for working in the software field; that is, to open the door to a meaningful job and career for intelligent, hard-working people who might not otherwise have had the option. Ed Murphy asked me to write my story of a creative life. So here is my essay, and I hope the ray of hope and opportunity that I have felt throughout my life shines through.

### FAIRNESS

I love running a business, but underneath the business, within the business, and parallel to the business, I have a creative practice I get to do each and every day. It's called everyday life.

If you visit the digital markers of my identity today (e.g.,

LinkedIn, the Greane Tree Technology website), you'll get a clear image of my present incarnation. I run a software development company, sit on the boards of a few wonderful non-profits, and sometimes receive awards for community service. Most recently, I founded a program designed to expand the scale and diversity of the software talent pipeline here in the Capital Region, where I live and do business. I graduated from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, married a software architect, and am raising a son. Here's the first impression, the matryoshka doll on the outside: champion of the region's software sector, business owner who cares, local business-person who gives back.

What if I told you that underneath that portrait is the image of an artist? That the first step on the path I'm still on wasn't Junior Achievement or the computer club but a middle-school art project? That I used my time at RPI to immerse myself not in engineering but in electronic media arts?

What if I told you that beneath the community figure who gives back is a child whose earliest education was Head Start, who had subsidized school lunches, and a wardrobe unlike my friends?

Would you see as contrarian or crazy a young woman who won international awards for her art but left behind the faculty at both University at Albany and RPI because of a conviction that the business world would be not only more economically straightforward but also a superior platform for her creativity?

Finally, could you lay eyes on the smallest wooden doll inside all the others and understand that the lifeblood which keeps my heart beating isn't success, net worth, or position in the community, but the need to know that I raise my voice always for fairness?

The child, the adolescent, the young person we once were are inside us still. If we're lucky and skillful, every one of those versions stays alive and integrates with the current self. Identifying myself as a creative means that I keep the innermost doll, the curious and kind child in me, alive. Being a creative means I'm in conversation with the child who imagines a better world, the adolescent seeking be-

longing, the young adult seeking justice, the parent building stability at home and in community.

## SECURITY

My choice to be a creative has required me to take risks. The kind of childhood I had typically leads to a series of decisions that don't always end well. Instead, I've made a series of decisions to build community and follow my impulses to make the world a better place. A small-business owner is willing to pay the price of autonomy in lost sleep and stress. A software developer has no refuge from the relentless pace of change. After all, computers have ceased to be tools for limited purposes and are now the very fabric in which nearly every type of commercial function and human connection takes place.

It's good to build a business, but it's a higher calling to change the way people see themselves, their work, their connections, their community. That is the calling that keeps me living a creative life.

Call me a businessperson and you are not wrong. Like everyone who has to design, make, and sell a product or service, it's my daily practice to frame problems in ways that make them solvable. Show things in a different and more hopeful light. Staying in business means the business has to solve questions.

Call me a creative and you are also correct, because my practice of everyday life is driven by a need to create. Things that embody a principle of fairness, enable transparency and kindness, shed new light on old problems. The creative life, for me, requires a strong focus on defining a better future, not only for myself but for everyone.

## IDENTITY

Greane Tree Technology, the platform of my livelihood, is a rapid application software development firm. By the time my undergraduate years at RPI closed, I felt sure I would never work in computer science. The fact that I enjoyed the classes and did well in them wasn't the point: Computer scientists were people who did not

look, act, or think like me. Yet, here I am.

At Greane Tree Technology, we lay down lines of code to make a client's vision a reality. In the case of Complex—whose tagline reads the latest in music, style, and sneakers—that meant ultrafast architecture to host millions of simultaneous streaming video views. In the case of Baby-Friendly USA, the WHO and UNICEF initiative for best practices in maternity, that meant building a system for online training and certification for hospitals and birthing centers. Our final product is made by typing in the syntaxes of Ruby on Rails, PHP, jQuery, JavaScript, and so many more technologies.

So, in this line of work, how am I creative? Because the process of application development is a creative process. In some ways it's the process of using technology to be truer to principles, truer to culture, more open to seeing things in new ways, to make an impact. That's a creative process.

At the beginning of my transition from artist to businessperson, I was offered a position as a videographer. Morse Associates was documenting architectural damage to the Deutsche Bank Building adjacent to the destroyed World Trade Center, and I took the job of archiving it all. In the long, quiet, dusty, and quite likely toxic, hours of shooting inside the cramped space of a crumbled skyscraper, I knew I was doing something that had value. Maybe there was scant artistic merit in the work, but it was about fairness. What else could I do with my multimedia skills that would serve a process of discovery, even justice? In response to that question, I ended up building a division of the company to sell multimedia as a form of visual communication for the science of building forensics. I was ready to leave my days as an art professor behind me, because using video to bring people to a point of dialogue and action had become much more interesting than becoming an art star.

In many ways, when I 'took a break' from the art community for the business community, I was staying true to what my art had always been about: lifting veils and asking questions that led to answers framed in community and opportunity.

## ART

As a child, I had a loving mother, a brother, and a gram. The kids around me had new clothes, nuclear families, the security of a middle-class means, a dad. My friends had moms with free time and attention. Mine was struggling just to make ends meet, to keep the lights and the heat on. They had beautiful houses that commanded respect. We did not. Again, it wasn't fair.

When I found I could make things out of pixels, mastering that world beyond a keyboard is what gave me a sense of ownership. I owned light. I owned color. I owned images that I created that were like no others. Then I found video.

To create the work that still speaks most fully to my artistic vision, I needed myself, a video camera, a series of sunny days, and instinct. By now a young adult enrolled in RPI graduate school on scholarship, I still wondered about the paradox of ownership. One of my favorite pieces, *The Joy of Lying Down in Other People's Backyards*, was a hypnotic series of short videos. Silent, serene, and colorful, there was blip after blip of 30-second videos showing my shins and shoes pointing skyward in the many backyards I visited. They were nearly silent—the sounds of the suburbs.

A later work of video asked another subtle question: If our history books can celebrate its bootleggers, gangsters, and robber barons, why was the story of Troy's world-famous madam never told? She was a woman. She saw the moneyed industrialists building Troy and knew she could run an operation to redirect some of that wealth to the daughter of Irish immigrants, and to the other women who saw no other opportunity.

These two projects framed, if not directly, at least indirectly, the question that has always daunted me. If aptitude is distributed equally over the population, why isn't opportunity? How do we frame the problem of unleashing human intelligence as something that we can solve? How do we start conversations that recognize the pervasiveness of uneven opportunity?

## INNOVATION

Humans make tools. We want innovation, we want comfort. We want hope, joy, to feel alive. At the dawn of history, we used pottery to save water and serve food. In our time, we have smartphones and air conditioning, debit cards, Bluetooth.

Humans make art. Art is the jump from experience to representation in symbolic ways. When the first humans made cave paintings, we tuned in to the magic of existence. Life and art were one, directing that magic into experiences that promoted survival. Now we take for granted the magic of medicine, agriculture, transportation, refrigerators. We are accustomed to the abundance of music and video provided by iTunes and Netflix. The constant stream of museum-quality images on Facebook and Instagram. The never-ending text messages on Twitter. Our 10-years olds make short videos as if it were no more difficult than eating a banana.

I'm still tuned in to the magic that is yet to be made. My life as a creative is driven by the heart of that child who questions what can I do to make the world a better place? I stand on the cliff, look to the stars, listen to the sea, and capture the magic. We have so much: an impressive technologically advanced civilization humans have built. Now how do we invite everyone in? The artist in me sees that creative ability is distributed evenly. Now let us make the magic of distributing creative opportunity, so we all may shine more brightly together.

## OLYMPIC REFLECTIONS

David Thomas LLoyd

November 1979: It is rehearsal intermission of Tulsa Opera's double bill of Massenet's *La Navarraise* and Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci* (that's "Nav-Pag" for opera lovers). I am the production stage manager, responsible for ensuring that all production and artistic activity moves smoothly through the final run-through prior to paid audience attendance. My little brother, Tim, is my assistant. We have been raised in a performing arts family, and as "opera brats" we are a great team, and fairly good at our jobs. Everything must be perfect. A voice over the headset from the IATSE Crew office tells me I have a telephone call.

My lectern/console is downstage right, just behind the main curtain. I am hardwired via headset to the lighting booth, the conductor, the crew office, the special effects and follow spot guys, the fly crew, the house manager, the director, the lighting designer, and my brother, as well as the principals, chorus, and orchestra via the paging system. Tim is stationed stage left, and roves the backstage areas wrangling singers, pyro technicians, and supernumeraries and getting them lined up for entrances. We both get our creative jollies through control and manipulation of a variety of simultaneous well-timed and well-executed technical, visual, and musical expression. We have a few minutes to spare, so I decide to take the phone call. "Exit, Stage Right."

The call is from the US Olympic Fine Arts Committee. Mark Ross offers me a job to production-manage the Fine Arts Festival in Lake Placid. It starts a few weeks before the 1980 Games, culminating in the Closing Ceremonies, about seven weeks in total. A variety of notable people and groups are engaged to perform and present throughout the Games as a demonstration of the USA's contribution to the cultural component of the event. I am intrigued and I agree to take the job. There are big players in this operation, although I don't understand this yet, never having been to an Olympics. I negotiate that I will drive my company van from Warrensburg, New York, to Lake Placid daily, an easy commute. This turns out to be the best deal in the whole gig.

Adirondack January can be a brutal month, usually with 12–36" of snow and several weeks of sub-zero temperatures. 1980 is peculiar. The High Peaks landscape is a dullish gray-brown, certainly cold enough but without precipitation. Strangely, as I get closer to Lake Placid on my first commute, there are tiny crystals floating in the air. It reminds me of the first signs of oobleck, the sticky substance that first appears as tiny specks in Dr. Seuss's "Bartholomew Cubbins" story. I speculate that ancient hooded Weather Wizards are chanting and churning cauldrons of goo, conjuring the clouds to create snow because there is none at the Olympic venues. This turns out to be true.

The Fine Arts Program is ambitious. The schedule of the National Fine Arts Committee encompasses performing and visual arts events throughout the Games, involving American fine/folk artists and artistic groups of the highest caliber. Chamber, Ballet, Choral and Orchestral Performance, Folk Music and Dance, Experiential Art, Permanent Exhibits, Kids' Programs, Film, Visual Art, Jazz, Pop, and Rock & Roll. This all occurs everywhere throughout the region, on and off the ice, both planned and spontaneous. My initial review of the plan, and my instincts, tell me I will need a staff of 12 to properly prepare and manage the full itinerary. I am told that I will have a lighting designer and three interns.

The lighting designer, Jason Kantrowitz, is a savvy and talented lad from Glens Falls, who had worked with me as a designer for several years at the Lake George Opera Festival before charting a successful lighting design career in New York City. I am happy to have a seasoned veteran to work with. The interns are all terrific kids, theatre majors, seemingly tireless and ready to apply themselves to whatever the challenges of the Fine Arts Festival of the Olympic Games might be. Neither they, nor I, know quite what to expect. The first challenge is the "Solemn Opening," a highly politicized event for only the Organizing Committee, the International Olympic Committee, dignitaries, and the commensurate security and diplomatic cling-ons. This indoor event will follow the Opening Ceremonies, which are to be held outdoors at the local air strip.

We go to scope out the Agora Theater at the venerable Lake Placid Club, now demolished. I've staged corporate events there for GE, so I know the facility. This is where the "Solemn Opening" is to occur. There will be some speeches, music, and a dance segment performed by Toby Towson, "America's most famous gymnast." Simple enough, or so it seems. Upon arrival, however, we encounter a bureaucratic hodgepodge of International and US Olympic officials, Lake Placid Organizing Committee, and the Secret Service. We are new to the job, so none of us has credentials to even walk on the property. After much conversation, we convince these groups that all we want to do is get the theater set up for the event, not disrupt the Olympics. After thorough examination of our Swiss Army knives, and a good sniff from the dogs, we carry on.

Cyrus Vance has been dispatched to Lake Placid for this event because Jimmy Carter won't show up where there is political turmoil over Taiwan's boycott of the Olympic Games. As the production manager, I respectfully ask the NSA agent where Mr. Vance will enter the theater so that we can feature him with a follow spotlight. I get a dismissive response. I suggest that I won't be prepared to handle his entrance without knowing its location, but to no avail. Nonetheless, the show must go on. They finally lie to me about this,

and so he enters in darkness while I have the follow spot trained on the entrance on the opposite side of the room. So much for perfection. I'm sure the agents are proud of their clever deception, and I reflect on the experience as I drive my crew around Mirror Lake after the event. We will need better credentials and better "intel" if we are to succeed henceforth.

The New York State Police, a formidable force, has been reduced to the role of traffic cop for this endeavor. They have, however, been assigned the Herculean task of accreditation, which means they must examine every individual to determine which venues each applicant is able to access. I present my case the next morning in Ray Brook. I don't care about the athletic venues, just about where the Fine Arts events will be occurring, such as Athletes' Village, where Billy Williams is performing with his jazz ensemble in two days, and Bonnie Raitt the night after. They don't get why we need access to the venue, but we are told to come back tomorrow. I have trucks of equipment and a crew scheduled to show up tomorrow to set up staging, lighting, and audio for the concerts at the Ray Brook facility, a future minimum security lock-up. We manage to get temporary clearance.

Now we are on a roll. We get Athletes' Village set up; the Lake Placid Center for the Arts is ready; and the Lake Placid Club and the remote locations in Saranac, Westport, Elizabethtown, and Tupper Lake have been examined and prepared. All the performing groups arrive and we are supporting their gigs with our little crew as best we can. Every day and night there are events and ceremonies to manage, so not much sleep. As insomnia sets in, I get to drive my company van around Mirror Lake at night, and discover many foreigners, mostly inebriated, who don't know where they are going, much less how to pronounce it. Lake Placid is full of Scandinavians, Asians, Soviets, Europeans, Canadians, South Americans, Aussies, not too many Africans, and all their international support operatives. Plenty of KGB, well-advertised in their furry hats, and NSA, being obviously invisible. I am happy to slide the door open, roll them in, and roll them out at their hotels. What a gas!

Meanwhile, I have zero idea how the actual Olympic Games are going. My hands are full with the performing and visual arts activities and issues. I regularly drop by police headquarters to see about accreditation for our team, without much progress. Finally, snow arrives in the Adirondacks and this really annoys the athletes, who have become very fond of the artificial oobleck snow. Apparently, the real stuff slows them down. But we hear that on the ice, the US Hockey Team is doing well, and might get a shot at Russia, and perhaps even Finland, in the medal rounds. Coincidentally, I get called to the Fine Arts Committee office. Apparently, our program is doing well, and they want me to stage-manage the Closing Ceremonies, coming up in about a week. I let them know that I am not accredited to enter the Olympic Arena, so unless we can get our "stinking badges," we are unable to accept.

In the last two weeks of my Olympic tenure, I am awarded "all access" accreditation by the New York State Police. This is my version of the Gold Medal! Now, if only I had the time, I could visit every Olympic venue, witness every competition, and hang out with the IOC, KGB, NSA, and ABC Sports guys. Too bad we are still working 12–16 hours every day just to facilitate the plethora of Arts Programs. At the meeting of the Fine Arts Committee, I find out that I will be working with Moses Pendleton, founder of Pilobolus, an extraordinarily clever and athletic dance ensemble that we have been supporting for the past few weeks in a variety of magical performances. We are given rudimentary instructions, but Moses is given "carte blanche" directorial authority over the "Arts Segment" of the Closing Ceremony, so we schedule the first rehearsal.

The 1932 Olympic facility connected to the new Arena is called the "Lucy Rink," and we assemble there for the rehearsal. We have cloggers from Vermont, Greek and Yugoslav folk dancers, the Lake Placid Kids' Figure Skating Club, regional high school banner-bearers, and a few more groups as the cast, several hundred in all. Moses is as inspirational as Lake Placid itself. He spots the tiniest lass in the skating group and focuses his improvised choreography on

her. He works with everyone to construct a global statement about civilization swallowing youthful energy in chaos but subsequently embracing and glorifying future human evolution. It's pretty heady stuff, and the staging is a bit confused, but I think that proper lighting and musical accompaniment will help it work. I'm thinking about the Arena audience of 8,000, not the 80 million people watching it on TV. Pretty stupid of me.

We get a second and final rehearsal. My lovely wife, Theresa, has arrived, six months pregnant and bulging. Of course, she has no accreditation to accompany me to my new venues, but somehow we convince the officials to admit her. It must be her rosy glow. The run-through goes fairly well, although without the advantage of blackouts, spotlights, athletes, flags, pomp and circumstance, or orchestral and choral music. It is a "dry run." Simultaneously, next door in the Olympic Arena, Team USA Hockey is beating the Soviets, and the crowd noise totally disrupts our rehearsal process. We finish, but the euphoria that ensues as a result of Team USA's victory over the Soviets overwhelms us, so we all call it a day and celebrate. Afterward, I make my Mirror Lake rounds in the company van with my pregnant wife, and we deliver even more drunken foreign officials, spooks, and operatives to their hotels. USA! USA! USA!

It comes down to the Closing Ceremony. Team USA has defeated Finland for the Hockey Gold Medal, and fortunately for me, the "lightweight" rostrum we built at Adirondack Scenic Studios for the three person awards does not collapse when the entire US Hockey Team jumps repeatedly up and down upon it (there is a picture of this moment somewhere online). The Olympic Games of 1980 have concluded, and now all that is left is the "awarding of prizes to non-participants." The athletes are pissed off. They have been loaded onto buses at the Ray Brook Prison and brought to the Lucy Rink about four hours prior to the event. They are all sitting around on the bleachers, more vociferous by the minute. I've been given four communications devices so that I can speak with my crew, the lighting booth, the conductor, Olympic ceremony production, and the ABC

Broadcast Booth. This is my first opportunity to communicate with ABC Sports.

I explain to the Broadcast Booth that Mr. Pendleton's segment of the Ceremony requires a blackout of the Arena so that a single follow spotlight can watch the tiny skater shoot out into center ice to be swallowed up by the cloggers and folk Dancers in the chaotic world. I get a few chuckles in response. Suddenly I realize that our little "Arts Segment" of this event is not really on anybody's radar. ABC quickly responds that there will be no blackouts during this globally televised production. They are probably being coached by some federal agent who suspects that extinguishing the lights on thousands of global dignitaries in the Olympic Arena might be a bad idea. Now I have angry athletes and a brick wall TV producer about sixty minutes before this thing is supposed to start. I try to explain this to Moses. Fortunately, he is a colleague and he takes it pretty well. I wish we'd had a dress rehearsal, but we will forge on.

The Fine Arts ceremonial performers arrive, the little skaters and high school kids accompanied by adoring parents. The athletes are now becoming obnoxious. I station myself at the south vomitorium of the Arena as gatekeeper. My stage-manager instincts kicks in and I am back in Grand Opera mode, as when I first accepted this job months ago. I wish I were wearing my black tux because it has a calming influence on angry people. I have the athletes lined up with the flag-bearers, etc., ready to enter. We begin the march of international stars. This reminds me of the Grand Procession in "Aida," minus the animals (or not). We go through sixty minutes of marching, speeches, and pomp. The orchestra, chorus, Chuck Mangione, and the divine Michael, McCreesh & Campbell folk trio are ready to start the musical component. It is time for the "Fine Arts" performance.

Moses is pacing on the ice behind me, and tells me when he wants the lights turned out if I can convince the ABC Sports crew to comply. All I get is laughter on the headset. There is an awkward pause. We have reached a standoff, so, in a snap decision, I send the cloggers and the folk dancers, the banner-bearers, and the skaters

out to their positions in full metal halide brilliance. In spite of the crowd noise, they begin their choreography to Walt Michael's lovely hammered dulcimer solo. In what is supposed to be a blackout with follow spot, I dispatch the tiny girl skater toward the throbbing mass of cloggers, folk dancers, and skaters in the middle of the Arena. I suspect that nobody notices her, or if they do, they believe she just arrived late. The performance proceeds, but it is unlikely that anyone, especially the TV audience, has the foggiest idea what is occurring. Curt Gowdy, the ABC sports announcer, certainly doesn't.

We finish with an orchestra and choral rendition of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" as we celebrate the glory and hope of youth and sport. Chuck Mangione follows with his original Olympic anthem, and the Ceremony winds down. The crowd heads out to get hammered. We have a day or so of post-mortems and self-congratulatory events, and then my wife and I drive home to Warrensburg in our company van. I stop and thank every New York State Trooper we meet along the way. I am disappointed that the Closing Ceremony wasn't a perfect performance, and that it could be the finale of my 14-year professional stage management career. Thirty-six years later, I realize this to be true, but that Lake Placid was a splendid and ridiculous culmination!

Reflecting on this tiny but influential episode in my life, I realize how valuable it is to grow from difficult, challenging, inspiring, and even disappointing, circumstances. I paraphrase Christopher Detmer, my business partner of 42 years, that our experiences teach us that we don't always know the right way to do something, but we have certainly discovered plenty of the wrong ways. This perspective has given us the pragmatic objectivity to foster an organization with global impact in the world of entertainment. The worlds of sports, real property development, government, leisure activity, conservancy, and general public experience are our current playgrounds, for they all require elements of the performing and visual arts, as well as frequent future opportunities to make bad choices.

Every stage of life requires some form of management, some of it superimposed and some internally motivated. My parents never

encouraged my involvement in the performing arts, but I managed to discover a niche for myself that combines the creativity I was fortunate enough to inherit with a personal desire to be my own boss and do good work. This has led me to many venues and ventures around the world. I embrace the creativity surrounding me every day. If not for the extraordinary people I have encountered and engaged with in life and business, I might have been a French horn player, an actor, a numismatist, a librettist, a heldentenor, or perhaps a guitar-strumming folksinger, not that there's anything wrong with that.

Management requires experience, patience, and intuition, the result of which can be rewarding in so many ways. In my case, the reward has been a cumulative momentum that has precluded my retirement, a good and fun thing for me. I do not consider myself as being "at work"; rather, constantly engaged in a productive form of play, and in a pretty big creative sandbox. I worry, however, that those I have admired, learned from, and tried to emulate are either older than me or have passed on. How can I inspire, impart, and perhaps "switch on" the creative impulses of two, three, or even four generations beyond mine? I realize that, later in life, I am not "returning to childhood"; rather, I am embracing the child in me that continues to learn and thrive. I think I will follow this path. "Places, please."

**SUPPORT THE EDGE!**

Zigi Lowenberg

I will always remember this. I was 18 years old. I was going to City University of New York at Queens College. I was the only one to show up for a breakout session as part of a career fair on campus. Leading the session was a woman film director. 1977. A rare breed. She told me the story about how one day she was riding in a limousine going to the Oscars—the documentary she directed had been nominated—and how the very next morning on another set, as a production assistant, she was getting coffees for the director and crew. She emphasized how that was the nature of the business.

I am both the executive producer and chief dishwasher of my artistic career.

A defining moment occurred a couple of years ago on a walk in Oakland with a longtime artist friend. I was sharing where I was at vis-à-vis having worked on the UpSurge! jazzpoetry project for a long time. I was explaining how I had recently pulled back from self-producing, and how Raymond, my husband and creative partner, was calling it my SR phase—for semi-retired—with some affection and annoyance mixed in. How in NYC I hadn't yet reinvented myself, hooked onto another project.

My friend listened intently. She said she wanted to make sure I knew that I had accomplished a great deal. That UpSurge! was important, and definitely had an impact in the Bay Area. She reminded

me that you can't measure success as an artist in terms of how much money you make, or how many tickets you sell at every performance. You just can't quantify it the same way as you may measure success in other fields.

That walk and talk with her was another turning point in rethinking and reclaiming my abiding connection to UpSurge! and my role in it; seeing its history as beautiful and accomplished in its unique way.

Artists are cultural workers. When previous civilizations are examined, dug up—displayed in museums and studied in libraries—it is mostly their arts, their cultural products, physical objects and their ideas expressed in poems and plays that are what remain. 'ARTifacts' from a culture.

We are not just the attractive force of an economy—we are the barometer of the health of a society, a feedback loop on the status of our civilization.

As artists, we are accountable to our own authentic voices, otherwise our voices dry up on us—become tinny—ring a tone not our own. Someone else is ringing our bell.

Manufacturing a cultural commodity for the market is not the essence of making art. Sure some of it is highly polished and great craft; we love it all; but we need the forward, daring, challenging creatives—those who call attention to new depths to mine, new works that then become part of the future canons of creative expression. Think Picasso, Coltrane, Gertrude Stein. Support the edge!

Finding a creative partner. I grew up in a family that had a passion for the creative arts. My uncle was a painter and commercial illustrator. My Dad painted, my Mom is an avid art appreciator, and my big sister is a talented painter and mixed-media artist. I was encouraged to be creative but there was also a great deal of hand-wringing about artists not being able to make a living. The ritualized hand-wringing has become a meme and has fed into all my successes and failures—the coasting and the bumps along the journey. As the creative path curved, my creative focus evolved from

theater, to film and video, to painting, and then primarily to performance poetry.

From the outset, Raymond was a major supporter of my pursuit as an artist. When he met me I was concentrating on painting, and though he had his particular tastes and hadn't spent much time looking at visual art, he was eager to accompany me to an opening, and celebrate with me when I had pieces in a couple of art shows.

Raymond was immersed in three passions of his own: radical politics, poetry, and jazz. During the first year we were together, he started a jazzpoetry ensemble and named it UpSurge! He became the influence in my creative expression conversion from mainly painting—to performance poetry. I had been journal-writing for decades, sometimes including poems or starts of poems. One I shared with him for a Chanukah present. It was about our cross-cultural love. Here's an excerpt:

*“Sharing cultures is like tongue-kissing the planet.  
Mingling my Jewness in your Africanness ...”*

Raymond invited me to perform the poem with him in UpSurge! for a new production that a collective of artists was producing in San Francisco. The collaborative project was called “Spread Love.” Raymond wrote a poem on the theme and we conjoined the poems. We did the production with jazz instrumentalists and a choreographer/dancer friend for a two-weekend run. That was a turning point. I became hooked on performance! I remembered how I had found earlier acting experiences electric—that immediate energetic exchange between an audience and performer. Years later, that joint poem, “Chromatology,” became the title track of UpSurge!'s second CD. The mysterious and surprising trajectory of the creative life of the artist and the work.

*“In 1995, Raymond made three decisions ... first, he invited  
Zigi Lowenberg to commit to performing with him and*

*share his vision of what the group could become. Second, he decided to collaborate with world-class jazz musicians. And finally, he articulated his goal of having UpSurge! perform at jazz festivals.”*

—Doug Edwards

Jazz Programmer at KPFA-Pacifica, Berkeley, California  
Contributing writer, *Jazz Now* magazine

Raymond and I then established UpSurge! as a legal partnership. I was now a co-leader of our ensemble. He and I were having weekly brainstorm “business meetings” that would go on for hours. We covered everything from how to promote, get gigs, design T-shirts using our band name, file taxes, review our previous outings, find professional services that could help guide and mentor us, seek out vocal and acting teachers, performance training, and prepare ourselves for taking it to the next level. We wanted to get our first recording done, and after several attempts at live recording, we gathered our resources and went into the studio. We had uncovered an amazing treasure in our midst—our saxophonist had some serious record producing experience. Richard Howell signed on to our project as the producer. A saying that became our joke was, “nobody knows what a producer does.” But we quickly learned. He became the piper of our unruly band and samurai of the board along with his cohort mix-master, the good DR. Richard was our chief midwife. *All Hands on Deck*, our first CD recording, was born.

*“UpSurge! is truly radical—it takes the performers and audiences back to their roots. Raymond Nat Turner and Zigi Lowenberg perform jazzpoetry using the spoken word as a form of musical storytelling. All Hands on Deck is their long-overdue first CD. The title cut is their poetic and musical tribute to the great jazz pianist McCoy Tyner. Sitting in the audience during a Tyner concert, Zigi scribbled notes on a napkin which eventually became the song-poem ‘All Hands*

*on Deck.’ She says it’s part of art begetting art.”*

*“UpSurge!’s fusion of poetry with music carries on the traditions of the Langston Hughes and Charles Mingus collaboration of the 1950s, the great 1970s group The Last Poets, and master poets Amiri Baraka and Allen Ginsberg. The spoken words always fit perfectly with the jazz, gospel and blues.”*

—Reese Erlich

Producer and host, *Jazz Perspectives* on National Public Radio

We kept our marathon-like business meetings going, even through the rough spots of our relationship; whether we were together or not, our commitment to UpSurge! was solid. A couple of years later, we started on a second CD. And somewhere in the middle of that, Raymond and I got married! Recording independently took all of our resources and then some. But as we persevered, we also grew a loyal group of folks who became supporters of UpSurge!

Being with a creative partner helped me work harder on the art in all aspects. I was focusing on one medium longer than I had with other art forms. I was learning to navigate my balance between Allen Ginsberg’s “first thought, best thought” and the value of revision, revision, revision. It was not just my expression anymore. I couldn’t give up on an idea or a goal. Now I was accountable to a shared vision and goals, and endless tasks to get done after and around the day jobs. We completed our second CD recording on our own Abolition Media label and Chromatology was born.

*“East Bay jazz-poetry ensemble Upsurge! has just delivered a new disc containing 15 tracks of well-executed and captivatingly conscious music. They take the Gil Scott-Heron formula and turn it on its ear. I was really impressed with the production values and above-par musicianship. Very cool and engaging release from this East Bay institution, which also just won the Best Poet or Spoken-Word Performer*

*Award of Best of the East Bay 2003.*"

—Royce Seader  
Bay Area **BUZZ**

Doing political poetry, we have worked on stages to support radical ideas and the good fight—perhaps being marginalized as a “hot potato.” We weren’t fully embraced by the non-profit cultural organizations, who were careful about their funding, benefactors, presenting too radical. This especially hit us after 9/11/2001, while we were finishing up *Chromatology*, which released in 2003. We were distinctly against the wars and had performed at anti-war rallies. Though much of our work did not address those themes directly, enough of it did, and we had acquired a certain political reputation.

*“Raymond and Zigi’s poetry examines, highlights, and often satirizes the injustices of society. Delivered with passion juxtaposed with bebop and the driving urgency of swing, their words illuminate and communicate like coherent jazz solos.”*

—Doug Edwards

Working across cultural lines presents its double edge. I am Jewish-American. Raymond is African-American. We have had a mix of ethnicities in our ensemble at different times.

For some situations, we are not ‘Black enough.’ Raymond’s poetry often challenges the Black bourgeoisie. His co-leader in this jazzpoetry ensemble is not Black. Jazz, and even poetry with jazz, have a distinctly African-American historical lineage. We are crossing lines. On the other hand, when trying to play at venues for Jewish audiences, we’re not ‘Jewish enough,’ or too Black, too challenging, and more pointedly, not unconditionally supportive of Jewish causes, i.e., Zionism and Israel.

Funny how this goes. Our wedding was a great mix of traditions. It was co-led by a woman rabbi and a Nigerian theater director, with

our friends as our jazz orchestra. Our invited guests defined it as a very “African-American wedding” (if they were Jewish) or a very “Jewish wedding” (if they were African-American). The dancing, from the Hora to the Electric Slide, was amazing. Oh, and our Soul Train line ...

So, socially, we have the great benefit of partaking in life’s bounty at many tables, yet professionally, it has also proved to be a liability. We had heard through friends who sit on boards of non-profit cultural organizations that it would be more of a fit to book UpSurge! if it were an all-Black group, or that maybe our messages are too radical. Perhaps in NYC it will prove a different experience for us.

*“An ensemble that earns its exclamation point with dynamic performances that capture the soul, humor and off-the-cuff inventiveness of a cascading saxophone solo.”*

—Andrew Gilbert  
*Contra Costa Times*

I spent 11 years co-facilitating 41 community dialogue groups with Raymond in our friend Mary Webb’s living room in Berkeley, on “Race, Racism, and Ethnicity in the U.S.” She and Kate Meyer have made a film *Living Room Revolution: The Race Dialogues*, a short documentary that has appeared at film festivals. Over the eleven years, I thought of this work more as a long-term community-building/social justice project than a creative arts project. But, upon reflection, I see that my learning to facilitate and grow with this community had a significant impact on my creative life, and our poetry and performances informed the group as well. Sometimes it was a place to recite a poem to open the conversation topic, putting the praxis of poetry to work. We also formed lasting connections and grew our audience.

Currently I continue to write poems and perform in UpSurge! NYC, the latest configuration of our ensemble. I also find occasion to present my poetry solo or with other musical friends. I am partic-

ularly attuned to new collaborations, experimenting with artists in different media.

And there is always working on the craft. I have been blessed with amazing teachers and mentors. As I have evolved as a performance poet, and have published in terms of our recordings, my challenge has been to see myself as a poet on the page—to appear in print publication, poetry journals, a chapbook, or even a collection of my own.

Just recently, I have had two of my poems published in an online poetry journal, Rabbit and Rose and another on the aadunanotes blog. I am grateful for this breakthrough; it is another step for me.

I would enjoy something in print. I still love paper. An artistic poetry book or journal. It is something I want. And there are steps along the way with much to learn.

One of my latest projects is part craft practice and part exploration, with an eye toward publication. I call this almost daily practice, my found subway poems.

Composing found subway poems interests me right now—the tug of narrative and the play of resistance. Teasing out narrative among found words, snatched phrases. How we love stories, or want to make a point. Express our outrage, our disbelief in the latest currency of manufactured language. Re-crafting words into irony, glimpses of faith, even triumph. Critical Subway Literacy. My subway fortune-cookie poetry of the absurd decoupage. My DIY MFA. FREE TUITION. APPLY NOW.

I have arranged 108 found subway poems so far ...

*Author's Note: My creative life would not be in blossom without friends and family, especially our parents, here and gone. I honor Raymond Turner Sr., William Greene, Caffie Greene, Alvin Lowenberg, and Ellie Lowenberg.*

## MY MULTIPLE PATHWAYS TO RIGHT LIVELIHOOD

Marianela Medrano, PhD

I am a writer and a psychotherapist. Psychotherapy is my livelihood, how I put bread to the table; writing is my breath. The two are intimately connected. In fact, they are two sides of the same coin. I consider my practice to be a means for crafting my soul while helping others craft theirs. I love what I do. In this essay I'll gather the stray memories from my formative years and herd them into what I hope is a coherent account of how I came to love my work, which has been shaped in large part by the stories I heard as a child and the Buddhist teaching I absorbed in my adult life.

I learned the importance of storying our lives from my grandfather, who wove life's events in a way that made them memorable. These stories gave us an understanding of how to live our lives. Papa Fano, as we called him, was a fine storyteller, one of the first ones to tell me stories about our mythic ancestor La Ciguapa, a woman with feet pointing backwards and long hair covering her naked body. This wild woman of the Dominican imaginary represents the need for protecting the sacred in the solitary self. Understanding this has served me well, both as a writer and a psychotherapist. The stories about La Ciguapa paved the way toward my spiritual consciousness, which has filtered into both my writing and my therapeutic practice.

In my writing workshops I use this archetype to illustrate a feminine symbol of political and spiritual consciousness; the archetype, more often than not, resonates powerfully with the participants, regardless of their cultural backgrounds.

For over 20 years now in my professional life, I have found ways to align the mind and the heart, reason and emotion. My close attention to Buddhism, with its precepts for a mindful, ethical life, has informed the decisions I have made in finding work that is both meaningful and supportive of my spiritual beliefs. While I am not an ordained Buddhist, a lot of my professional and personal leanings are guided by its philosophy. In plain language, my approach aims at causing no harm to others or myself. My life and work are bound together.

While my professional practice involves much verbal interaction and interventions, interestingly, my writing life has taught me the value of silence, of paying attention to my inner and outer experiences, and distilling them into verbal artifacts that are not only accessible to others but also help them find their own voices. What helps me as a writer often spills over into my practice as a psychotherapist. The need to reconcile the dichotomy of my internal and external worlds compels me to expand my vision in order to encompass as much as possible. Better yet, writing poetry or prose pushes me to inhabit my surroundings more fully, to feel a part of something greater than myself. This is no different from how I feel when others allow me to enter their world of pain and sorrows, their fears and afflictions. I feel called to practice focused awareness in which my whole being has to be engaged. The intention is to help, as we do in poetry, individuals take something they already know about themselves and work with it until they feel it at a deeper level, so much so that it creates a new meaning, a new way of understanding. In this sense, when I approach people's narratives, I pay attention to the part of the narrative that can bring forth a sense of who they are and, draw out the complexities of their stories with a new language, a vibrant and assured voice that is bigger than the stories themselves.

The Buddhist Eightfold Path extends an invitation to us to cultivate a life of presence and attentiveness in the pursuit of enlightenment. The first path invites us to cultivate right thought or right thinking; it means that we define our goals with a pure mind and heart. Right mindfulness implies carefully choosing the path of our work. Right Understanding is the act of bringing our work in line with our personal values. Right Speech involves the use of language infused with compassion toward others. Right Concentration or attention leads us to do our work with profound awareness and love. Right Action implies doing work but not attaching ourselves to its outcomes. Imagine what a fundamental change would take place in the world if everyone were to practice the Eightfold Path, an antidote to the greed and egocentrism that plague us.

Right Effort involves choosing work that we can do for our entire lives, keeping ourselves in a state of constant learning, and preserving a beginner's mind. When work embodies love and committed action, then we are in a constant process of growth. I am convinced that my success as a person depends on my willingness to nurture my beginner's mind, my willingness to learn and be changed by the learning. The result, no doubt, is "vocational wholeness," which involves doing work that calls for the union of our professional and personal lives. When making a living is connected to reaching our authentic self, we open ourselves to the possibility of spiritual growth.

In hindsight, though, the strongest influence for keeping Right Livelihood as a main focus in my life came to me way before I learned about Buddhism. It came from my childhood experience in the Cibao region of the Dominican Republic, where I was born and raised. My strong resonance with Buddhism happened because of the strong resemblance I saw between it and my ancestral beliefs.

Up until I was 10 I lived in Copey, a small rural village where I experienced the virtues of interdependence, way before my brain could even grapple with the concept, but I guess this kind of knowing filters into our cells and expands within us as we grow. The farmers in Copey, my parents included, practiced a form of reciprocity

that was the basis of the juntas or convites, in which groups of men and women would gather to cultivate or harvest each other's parcela, until everyone's land was tended. I witnessed them coming together in an effort to ensure that no one was left behind.

These communal gatherings practiced by my people in Copey showed me the way interdependence could support and shape the self. The concept of doing no harm and rejecting greed was made clear by the principles of the juntas or convites. This agrarian mentality in the countryside was assaulted by the era of industrialization that began in the 1800s and accelerated in the following century. In our country, capitalism reached its peak in the span of 30 years of the Trujillo dictatorship (1930–1961).

The convites or juntas began to be seen as useless folkloric expressions. At the heart of the convites was the intention of doing work without the mediation of a salary or payment. As with many other things, this way of being of the campesinos, the cooperative spirit and the solidarity, were slowly changed by the concept of private property. In the Dominican Republic, the emergence of the sugar industry gradually did away with these agrarian cooperatives. The industrialization of the Dominican Republic took place with the incorporation of capital investments in sugar production, although the practice of *compartir* remained alive among the campesinos. After all, people in Copey were still gathering in juntas in the '60s, when I was a child.

I know by now that memory, like any other archive, is always there, but it only serves a purpose when it's activated. So I am activating these memories now to find my footing and speak from the perspective of someone who knows that lived experiences are always reshaping the new. The convites are no longer a formal practice in the agrarian life in the Dominican campos, but I feel that the spirit of reciprocity still animates the way most Dominicans with a farming background interact wherever they are. I don't want in any way to romanticize the Dominican. I have had far too many experiences where Dominican greed hits me right in the face. We have a tradition

of corrupt politics and caudillismo, where individuality taints collective practices. Further, I am living in this chosen exile because I got tired of the greed, egocentrism, and male chauvinism so commonly practiced on the island.

Writing has helped me, and continues to help me, make peace with the past; it also allows me to reconfigure aspects of my life in which I feel conflict. I use poetry to get closer to my emotions and prose to explore and expound on them. I extrapolate from life and expand the horizon of my thinking through writing. My emergence as a writer has had a lot to do with my birthplace, the tiny valley which, although it limited me at times, became an inviting model for how to live my life in communion with others. At the same time, it is perhaps in the craft of poetry and writing that I learned to be a listener; an indispensable tool for a psychotherapist. I let the story from the person enter me, I hear the nuances; pain reaches deep into me, before I take a step back so I can appreciate what I am receiving; I resonate with her; I might put her story into my own words but in sympathy with hers, so that the pain that has obstructed her can become more graspable.

The work of the therapist is to hold things up with enough distance that the person can, by herself, apply all the resources she can muster and take the experience, in all its rawness, and transform it. In my view, therapy, like poetry, is about taking the problems of the world and transforming them into something manageable and possibly even beautiful in their darkness. Things may be falling apart, but the person feels there is something she can do as she falls; one gains a measure of control in the act of shaping and adopting a new perspective. Both therapy and writing are ways to make vessels in which to contain what feels uncontainable. We capture difficult experiences in poems in order to free them; we let them go as we offer the poems to the world. In the same way, the person captures a story and drops it into the receptacle of therapy; there is a letting go and, consequently, a freeing in that action.

As I said before, my exile is a chosen one, but exile nonetheless,

with all its complexity. Exile, no doubt, fueled my creative potential, especially through writing, and has shown me an effective vehicle to help myself and others find a way out of emotional troubles and into a more wholesome life.

Writing is more than a mere fanciful exercise. It is, in fact, for me, the real coming home, an answer to my sense of exile, both geographically and spiritually. Writing transforms loneliness into the solitude in which we find our sense of wholeness. It is in that sense of wholeness that the root connections between us and others grow deeper. There is a sense of connection with the world, a great sense of hope when a bad experience is shared by two; there is a sense of relief from the weight when the strength of one meets the strength of the other. That is what I think happens in both writing and in therapy. They are both ways to recognize our own experience in the other. So many times a person will say something in a session in a way that I never imagined, and I get the same sense of reassurance I feel when I read someone's poem, or when someone at a public reading tells me how much my poem spoke to her.

The well-known Joycean strategies of survival in exile—silence and cunning—are very relevant in my journey. Unlike Joyce, however, my silence is not haunted by disconnection. Rather, it is an element of depth that nurtures me, one in which I find my center. And as for cunning, well, that's what the Ciguapa symbolizes. She can be a telling metaphor for the way we create a pathway into our own story. Silence, (el silencio), exile, the cunning, the protection of our solitude, and the release of our creative potential, especially through writing, form the scaffolding, learned from my background and experience, which I use in my practice.

The recovery of the whole self is a sacred task that also involves a challenging journey. All too often, we give in to the temptation to surrender ourselves to the way things are—the mass culture, the familiar norms and conventions, the peer group, the established way of being. It is vital to distinguish between a collective in which the individual gets erased and a genuine community in which he or she

flowers. My long-standing connection to Buddhism, and my experiences with the juntas and the communal support they provided for everyone, have no doubt shaped this undivided Self that dwells contentedly between my writing and psychotherapy, between my life and my work.

## LEARNING TO SHOOT

Ed Murphy

Through photography I was opened. I learned what creativity means. Taking pictures was an opportunity for me to see deeper and share, strengthening both my confidence and activism.

I learned to shoot in Vietnam with a Canon 35mm camera. In basic training, I was trained to kill. We fixed bayonets and charged. Our drill sergeant shouted, “What’s the spirit of the bayonet?” “To kill!” “And what does that make you?” “Killers!” we shouted. It was hard to hear myself saying those words.

We learned to use hand grenades. I fantasized throwing a baseball from center field to home plate; got familiar with the M16, and when I arrived in Vietnam, I learned to use a 45-caliber pistol and an M79 grenade launcher. I never fired in anger, did not kill or wound, and seldom carried these weapons. As an intelligence agent, I often traveled alone, wearing civilian clothes, with a snub-nosed .38 on my belt. Common sense, Vietnamese language skills, intelligence training, and my wits were my primary weapons.

I bought a camera and taught myself to focus and to shoot what I saw. I learned to capture rather than to kill. I wanted to understand Vietnam. Looking through a lens, I could see detail, gain perspective, and compile artifacts. Photography helped me remain calm, transforming fear and communicating my experiences when I came home. Photos remind me that Vietnam is a country, not a war. Photography

opened my eyes to more. I found life where the focus was on death.

I'd had enough dying before I went to war. My mother's death when I was six surrounded me. As a teenager I lost two friends. The first died in a go-cart and the second in a car accident. As a young seminarian, I walked through death row at Maryland's state penitentiary. JFK, my president and hero, was killed when I was eighteen. He was followed by Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and many civil rights workers. Young men from all over America came home in coffins. I was safe in the seminary but changed my mind. I decided not to become a priest. War waited for me.

Bill and Augie, friends from Little League days, were surprised to find me on Dragon Mountain, our 4th Infantry Division base camp. They thought I was becoming a priest and was protected from the draft. I was shocked as well, wondering how I got to Vietnam, but it wasn't that confusing. I had left the Paulist Fathers and enlisted. I didn't wait for the army to collect me. We were together for two days before Bill and Augie went home. They gave me hope that I too would survive.

Once I bought my camera, I looked closer at life. First I took tourist snapshots: scenery, our military base, those in my unit. Then I saw more: water buffalo, kids, Montagnards, Vietnamese families, monks, clothes, sandbags, tents, and the effects of weather. I saw faces, emotions, hands, feet, and hair. I saw individuals rather than people. I made friends, and started listening. It was my job to pay attention, but the camera took me past searching for combat intelligence, threats, facts, and contingencies. I valued the people of Vietnam and they valued my curiosity. They invited me into their homes for meals and to play with their children. They spoke of their lives and asked about mine. They wanted to know why I was there and how I imagined life when I went home. I saw their hopes and fears, shared mine, and found we had much in common. I never forgot the war, but the camera and these conversations offered more. We discussed their religions and mine, education, work and play, marriage and death, French colonialism, literature, culture, Ho Chi Minh, nationalism,

Saigon, their dragon and fairy founding myth, and American history. We talked the way people do who want to know one another.

I became creative before I understood what creativity meant. I was trying to survive, having fun when I could, and documenting my life. I was looking for material to consider. I may have remembered Camus's writing in *L'etranger* that a man could turn one day's experience into reflections for a lifetime. For almost fifty years I've looked at my photos and remembered.

I wonder how I came to pick up a camera. It changed my life. Cameras were available on the army base and cheap. Most of my colleagues had one. The Post Exchange (PX) imported excellent equipment and sold everything at a discount. A camera and tape deck is what I chose. At first the camera gave me something to do. I distracted myself from the war with beer, music on my tape deck, and the camera. Then I began to study my photographs; taking a second look at what I'd seen, gaining a deeper understanding of what I experienced, I found details I missed with the naked eye.

Being Irish, I collected stories to tell. I can't sing, an embarrassment in an Irish family. Singers were always in demand at parties. Both my father and godfather had good voices. My eighth-grade music teacher asked me to mouth the words when we sang at graduation. Art class taught me to forget about drawing. My hand was not steady and my penmanship was horrible. It got me into trouble. I yearned for music, and even bought a trumpet at a pawn shop but we could not afford lessons. Like most kids, I was drafted into school plays. I played Tiny Tim in *A Christmas Carol* and felt the part. In high school I had a walk-on as a soldier in *Aida*. I joined the Forensic Club and was taught public speaking, my first success, and developed a skill that continues to serve me to this day. I like standing in front of crowds. I am not afraid of microphones. In seminary, I expected to be taught to preach but didn't stay long enough, so I learned through political activism.

My first college paper was a bust, as much to do with my handwriting as the subject and my lack of training and discipline. My

priest professor humiliated me in front of the class. I lost confidence in my ability to write. It was a wound I nurtured for decades, even though I published dozens of articles and then a book. Fortunately, my grammar school principal had planted hope, and I found ways to nurture it. Eighth-graders did log books. They included one-page essays and a related sketch. One could not graduate from Public School 11 until Mrs. Ceretta reviewed your collection of essays and illustrations. I made errors and corrected them, and she encouraged me. I felt that if I could meet her standards, there must be some hope.

Then there was the flower show. Students from all over New York City went to The Coliseum to arrange flowers in a competition. It seemed an odd form of creative expression for a working-class boy, but I had grown up surrounded by woods; saw the beauty of wild flowers, trees blossoming, and autumn colors. Our ancestors were farmers. My grandfather planted fruit trees and grew his own food. Our father was a great vegetable gardener and, today, my siblings have beautiful flower gardens. I plant oak trees and flowering bushes. The flower show was a new aesthetic experience. It was playful and pretty. I enjoyed myself, was not embarrassed by my awkward voice or inability to draw well. I found a familiar artistic form and recognized the creativity in my working-class backyard. I realized that creativity was not dependent on traditional forms or expensive lessons, and gained more respect for the Murphy family. It gave me more confidence to seek my own form.

Gaudeamus Igitur (so let us rejoice). My seminary, like some older universities, had a Gaudeamus tradition of putting on plays poking fun at professors and college life. A few of our classmates had strong talent. I got supporting roles and had fun. We lived in a world with Gregorian chants. I enjoyed listening, sang quietly, was never shamed but did not look forward to singing a High Mass. I doubt that my parishioners would have enjoyed it. My exit from seminary spared us all.

The military strengthened my analytical and mechanical skills. I learned to type in intelligence school and found confidence in words.

My penmanship did not get in the way of what I had to say, so writing became more rewarding. I was trained to report facts; focused on words and concepts. Report writing is a discipline akin to journalism, requiring the integration of observations, ideas, and clear statements. In a war zone, the military wanted basic information, to know who and where their enemy was. The camera and typewriter became tools that supported my creativity and enabled me to transcend physical limitations. They removed the barriers to my words and insights. I stopped being embarrassed, and became playful and experimental.

Back on Staten Island I gave my first slide show to our Peace Coalition, joined by Dr. David McLanahan. David had volunteered in Vietnam and had a sensitivity to the Vietnamese that exceeded most Americans. We spoke about the people of Vietnam, a country not just a war. Most of the audience had come for a different story. They wanted to hear about the violence and for us to validate their politics. We spoke out against the war and invited them to share our deeper appreciation of who the Vietnamese and Montagnards are. Cold War and simplistic politics was how our country went to war. Most Americans wanted to discuss politics rather than culture. The best part of our presentation was gaining a new friend. We are still in touch today. David is now a retired surgeon and a frequent visitor to Indonesia. He has kept his values, and now promotes indigenous crafts.

After Vietnam, my camera helped me understand my life. Four months out of the military, I took my camera to England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland on my way to our ancestral home near Blarney Castle in Cork with my father, my brother Tom, and our friend John Soldini. My camera took me deeper than landscapes into my own history and soul. I saw England's power over Wales and Scotland, and their yearning for independence. I photographed the people who explained these values so I could remember them later. I photographed my father at St. Andrews, a professional golfer's pilgrimage to his sport's sacred site, reminding myself not everything is political. In Northern Ireland, I saw Protestants and Catholics caught in a historic political, cultural, and economic contest, rather than a

religious conflict. Coming south into The Republic, I was inspired by a land of poets and writers, bards and singers. I came home from America and war in more ways than I anticipated. I felt Celtic more than Catholic and Irish as much as American. In Vietnam, I'd felt a connection and responsibility to my ancestors. In Ireland, I came to understand what it meant to be colonized and to be a colonizer. I'd gone to war thinking it was an American mistake but right for me, my responsibility. In Vietnam, I saw the error; saw myself as a colonial soldier and compared myself to the British troops occupying Ireland. In Belfast, we'd heard British soldiers singing "All we are saying is give peace a chance." When I placed photos of Vietnam and Northern Ireland side by side, they were similar. It was hard for me to hate the British soldiers. A year earlier, I'd been in their situation. In Cork, we met my father's family; sat by the same fireplace where my grandfather was raised and sipped Irish whiskey. I walked the land, listened to its stories, and used my camera to stay focused. Vietnam opened my soul. Ireland gave me roots, identity, and voice.

I found myself through my camera.

Back in New York I became more of a subject in news photographs, on the radio, and television; an activist more than an observer. I took fewer pictures and used my voice instead against the Vietnam War, racism, and mistreatment of our developmentally disabled neighbors. My creativity was expressed through action, writing, speaking, and elections, through nonviolence. I had used photography as a tool, to research, capture, and share what I saw that others didn't. At home there were more and better photographers, so I stood in front of the camera. My strength was in using my caste privilege as a combat veteran, leadership, courage, and organizing ability. I challenged traditional ideas, assumptions, rules, patterns, and relationships. I was arrested twice for what I believed; at the White House protesting the Vietnam War and on Staten Island for Irish independence from England.

During this period I was moved by music, especially messages of hope. Music inspired many of us to action. At home I used the

reel-to-reel tape deck I had bought in Vietnam; learned to mix my own sequences and became my own personal disc jockey. Exhausted from school, politics, and organizing, I would spend hours feeding my soul listening in guided musical meditation. Not a good singer, I am a good listener.

Four years later, Lin and I moved to San Diego so she could attend graduate school. I was hired as director of a nonprofit community agency serving youth, the poor, and the homeless. When the business community tried to shut us down, I used all the leadership skills and organizational creativity I had to fight for our clients and agency, to strengthen public support. This was my apprenticeship in executive management and organizational psychology. I articulated a clear vision for the agency and wrote an editorial that helped turn the tide of resistance and build community support. I redesigned the agency to address community concerns.

In 1976, Lin completed her graduate work and we moved back east to Saratoga Springs, a small city just north of Albany. I found work in state government and started graduate studies in public administration. I wanted to move beyond advocacy to implement my values. At the same time, I was hired as regional program coordinator for the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, in Saratoga Spa State Park. Ten years earlier, the Saratoga Performing Arts Center (SPAC) had been established within the Spa Park. SPAC became the summer home of the New York City Ballet and Philadelphia Orchestra, and hosted a variety of large popular concerts. My opportunity for a creative life was enhanced. Saratoga has a vibrant arts community. Many of our friends were artists and performers. We frequented Caffè Lena, the oldest-running coffeehouse in the country. Dancers and musicians rented apartments for the summer. We swam in the pools with them, ate in the same restaurants, and drank in the same bars. We bought season lawn tickets for music and sat inside for the ballet. Yaddo, the famous artists' retreat, was our neighbor. We got to know the director, were invited to dinner, and met resident artists. My arts consciousness was raised far beyond my own work-

ing-class roots.

The state park system added more. My portfolio included funding the arts performances in regional parks and at historic sites. We gave many young performers a start and a paycheck. I earned a certificate in Arts Management through North Carolina State University.

In the '70s federal funds were allocated through the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) to hire the unemployed. Governments used these funds mostly to hire maintenance staff. I obtained five slots and hired an arts management crew. I taught them four key concepts, goals, objectives, activities, and timelines, so they could develop and manage programs, and expand their work skills. I set them free to interview park workers, visitors, and community members, and charged them with coming up with an arts plan to supplement SPAC's role. They brought back a variety of good ideas and more enthusiasm than they would have had I directed them. One idea provoked controversy. Spa Park had a 500-seat theater that was used by SPAC for one month each summer. We proposed opening it to the community during the off-season. SPAC's president gave me a lecture on quality. He pointed out that their long-term lease gave him a veto over cultural activities within the park. I spoke with my boss and the concessions manager, and then read their lease. The theater was owned by State Parks, not SPAC. They had a right to use the theater if they specified each year by March 1st. I waited till mid-March, found out when it would be free, and invited community participation. One year we recruited local musicians through their union, hired a conductor, and produced a free Irish cabaret with singers, musicians, dancers, actors, and storytellers. We let dancers and theater teachers use the rehearsal rooms. I left State Parks in 1981, but by then we had demonstrated to SPAC and State Parks management that this asset should be available to the community. In 1986, Home Made Theater moved from their 55-seat Caffè Lena venue to their new home in the park, and remains there today.

Later, I helped found the Vietnam Veterans of America. Lin, our friend Van, and I founded Pathfinders Institute, and developed some

of the earliest PTSD programs. I became the lead program consultant on developing New York's Vietnam Memorial, research center, and fine arts gallery, where my first photo exhibit, *Vietnam Lives in My Soul*, was shown, laying out the forces and events that shaped my life before war, during, and after. I returned to Vietnam many times and developed two additional shows. I led a humanitarian mission into northwest Vietnam and created a show, *On the Road to Dien Bien Phu*. Some years later, I brought our daughter, Zoëann, to Vietnam and Laos on a project to help the City University of New York establish English language programs and academic exchanges. Zoë was being trained as a photographer in college. We shot and produced a third show, *Vietnam: A Country Not a War*. This exhibit was turned into a book, *Vietnam: Our Father Daughter Journey*.

In 1999, our friend Denis Hughes was elected president of the NYS AFL-CIO and invited me to become part of his team. We developed the Workforce Development Institute (WDI); building education and training programs for unions; and expanded into a variety of additional initiatives: economic development, manufacturing, childcare, energy, the environment, and cultural services. Esther Cohen was directing Bread and Roses, the cultural arm of 1199SEIU. I learned of their *unseenamerica* project, where they lent cameras to workers and taught them to document their lives. We expanded their program statewide. When Esther left Bread and Roses, she started consulting for WDI, and we worked more closely together developing arts initiatives. Esther pushed me to believe in my own writing voice, develop my skills, and to publish a memoir, "to teach us how you did your work." I am doing that now.

An award opened a new door for creativity. My graduate school, Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy, University at Albany (SUNY), gave me their distinguished Continuing Professional Education Leadership Award. I was described as a reflective practitioner. A year later, I recruited eighteen others and asked them to write essays about their work and how they chose their careers, based on the idea of reflecting on your work. I edited these essays

and produced *Working Stories*, essays by reflective practitioners. In 2017, I am editing *Creative Lives*. In addition, I edited an anthology, *Becoming a Leader*, which contains thirty-five essays and op-eds I wrote and published over the years.

My professional life started in military intelligence and evolved through war, antiwar, politics, public administration, organizational development, leadership, and organized labor. My creativity has been expressed through a variety of forms. The most obvious have been writing and photography. Some of my best work has been done as an innovative leader, an organizational chiropractor, helping agencies align their internal energies and strengthen their systems.

To become creative, I had to be less obedient and compliant within many institutions: the Catholic Church, military, politics, and government. I needed to be clear about my values, stand up rather than go along with the crowd, take risks with my personal identity and our family's economic security. Lin took risks herself and inspired me to do the same. She led me into deep inner work, therapy, feminism, exploration of broader spiritual concerns and relationships. Returning from war, I became an activist; developed an identity as a political and organizational leader. To be effective, I needed to understand myself, and the internal and external forces shaping the organizations I was involved in. I became an innovative and effective change agent. That is my service in the world. Meanwhile, I keep learning, playing with ideas, photos, and words.

Because photography and writing didn't bring me money, I often valued them less. My organizational skills and creative leadership are what fed the family and gave our children the resources they needed to launch their careers. In my elder years, I am putting more effort into traditional creative activities; mostly writing and helping others do the same.

I found my creative voice. Esther got me to admit that I am a writer. I am on a roll. I am returning to my memoir project with a deeper focus on ethics and the spiritual values that have guided me. I am building my own Web portal and blog. I read somewhere that

there is no free press unless you own it. There is a part of me that wants to stand on a street corner and tell the world what I think.

I am curious where all this takes me next.

**MAKE IT SING**

Moses Nagel

I credit Rudolf Doblin. He was a diminutive German Jew who had escaped Nazi Germany with his wife, Helga, the daughter of an SS Officer. They came to America and found a living from his musical genius and her expansive brilliance; she was a professor of linguistics, speaker of many languages, and a dynamic cellist herself. He served as conductor of the Buffalo Symphony Orchestra and other appointments before they settled in a little cabin (a dacha, almost) in the countryside outside Saratoga. As it happens, just a mile from my parents' homestead.

By 1984, Mr. Doblin was semi-retired and only took on a small number of students whom he deemed to show real promise. It was only because of our proximity and their involvement with my family in a neighborhood group that Mr. Doblin agreed to give me lessons. I was an average student with a lackadaisical approach to practicing. Under his regime of fear and inspiration, I became good enough to be second chair in my school and make the All-State Orchestra, but there was never any confusion that I might someday go to a prestigious conservatory or play for a top symphony like his other students. Still, whether he knew it or not, he mentored me into a lifelong love of music and an appreciation for the world of sound that has become a career for me. This small, rumped man, with a thick German accent, who only reluctantly listened to classical music on the radio,

because he thought recorded music was an ineffective imitation of real performed music, is the mentor I credit with starting me toward my work: using computers and multimillion-dollar digital audio tools to produce television programs. The connection, as I see it, is in the lesson that he always emphasized about playing the cello: as a cello player, you are a technician. You must, through practice, learn the correct techniques and positions. If your finger is just a millimeter off, you are badly out of tune. However, once you have the technique and position, you must make it sing. This is, I believe, the theme of my work. I am in a technical career. Audio engineers don't build their own preamps anymore, and we don't do much soldering either, but being able to do the job effectively requires a firm grasp on the mechanics. Electrical signal flow, as well as computer savvy, makes the difference between success and “we are experiencing technical difficulties; please stand by.” I came to this work through music, though, and I believe that what separates getting the job done from really nailing it is that last part: making it sing. The part that keeps me engaged is the creativity and improvisation that comes into play once the technical part is in place—or, actually, in my work, the two interplay constantly, not necessarily one before the other.

After working at recording studios and music clubs, the first well-paying job I got, fortuitously, just at the time of my first child's birth, was as a radio engineer for United Nations Radio. The United Nations has a radio service that provides free content in dozens of languages for national radio stations around the world. I was hired because of my knowledge of Sonic Solutions—a digital editing software that I had learned mostly because I was interested in CD mastering (the final 'finishing' process before duplication in the production of music albums). I had paid less attention to the program's appeal as a top dialog editing tool. The UN had recently bought this system, and there was a lot of tension as they made the transition from ¼-inch analog tape reels and vinyl (really!) to digital mediums. The fact that I knew the basics of this program made me useful to them in the transition.

The UN was a place where people stayed for their whole careers. As you might imagine, there was an intense culture and workflow that built up between the producers, the journalists who worked in the different languages of the UN, and the audio engineers who worked in the production studios in the basement under the General Assembly Hall in Manhattan. These engineers had decades of experience and familiarity, so I struggled to learn all the practices and culture of the workflow, as well as learning Sonic Solutions for this specific application. I was the 'digital kid,' but our production was still half analog tape. Unlike the old-timers, who were razor-blade masters, I was barely proficient at cutting and splicing tape. I remember sweating profusely trying to make a complicated edit on the reel-to-reel machine. I had to find the edit point, make a cut, and then spool out several seconds of tape onto my shoulder. Once I found the end of the piece to take out, I had to reattach it. Then, with the piece I'd taken out still on my shoulders, I had to find the new place, splice it in, and wind it into place. With all that done, I rewound to edit point to audition my work, only to hear the new piece play backwards!

With time and experience, the job started to slow down. Soon, I knew the personalities. I adapted to the UN culture. I was interested in the subject matter (although the daily reports about the Secretary General's latest address on the peacekeeping protocol could get tedious), and I liked the work. I started to get really fast and accurate on Sonic Solutions. The great thing about that software was that, although it had a fairly high learning curve, it was remarkably flexible. It allowed for very fast dialog editing, and also, because it was designed for music as well, extremely accurate, and involved cross-fades and mixing. I started to get a reputation for fast and efficient work. As I grew comfortable with the basics, I started to search out methods for adding a little extra. I relished the pieces that used music for color. I loved to back-time the song perfectly so that the relevant lyric would fade up right at the moment the talking stopped. Sometimes there were sound effects to sprinkle in. I helped mesh music

with voice in an interview piece with a man who had been tortured by the military regime in Argentina, which was nominated for a radio documentary award. A producer for the French unit traveled to UN projects throughout Francophone Africa and came back with lots of natural sound along with interviews. We worked together to create a four-part series that presented an immersive and seamless 'journey' through these UN Africa projects and the people and communities that were affected by them. These projects were creative, fun, and gratifying. As a result of my developing ear and creative enthusiasm (as long as it was mixed with technical accuracy), the producers started to compete for time in my studio.

All this is not to give short shrift to the hours of boring repetition. Just as practicing cello is not all beautiful vibrato on an exquisite Mozart sonata, the UN was often hours, or even whole days, of routine editing, counting the time until lunch break and the train ride home to my young children. I am not someone who suffers boredom especially well, though. So my response was two-fold. First I filled the downtime with other projects. When a coworker had a baby, we had colleagues from different countries come in and record a lullaby or children's story to make an international baby CD. I used the studios for music recording and making mix tapes that I would give out for holiday gifts. Yes, I surfed the Web a lot too, but my other technique for fighting the mundane was to make the most out of every opportunity for expression. Even the smallest piece of music or natural sound in a piece could be sculpted and finessed for maximum effect. Now, almost 10 years after leaving the job, those are the most memorable moments.

It is no coincidence that this time was also the beginning of a new family. I got the permanent position when my son was about a year old. Our little trio went from an uncertain future paid for by hustling between live sound and erratic studio work to a weekly paycheck. A good one, too! We bought a house upstate. The hour-long train ride could be tedious, but we had a nice house for my son to grow up in and I was home every evening and on weekends. A few

years later, a daughter joined the mix. Fatherhood was another area in which to exercise creativity. I loved to play and wrestle with my children and to make up serialized bedtime stories, which they loved.

After eight years at the UN, we decided to move out of the commuter orbit of New York City. We bought a small farm in the foothills of the Berkshires, but this was no executive weekend home or retirement. The goal was to have a farm and be far from the City; to find work based on the life we wanted, rather than find a life around the requirements of a job. I did not have a plan for how to make a living with the only real job skill I had.

It quickly became clear that finding work in nearby Troy or Albany, New York, was not going to provide for my family. There were audio jobs, doing live sound or A/V installation, but these were jobs for young, unattached types, not a 35-year-old with two kids and a mortgage. The job at the UN had allowed me to become accustomed to a good salary, benefits, and paid vacations, and although expenses were lower way out in the country, they weren't that much lower.

Through some coincidental connections at the UN, I found my way into the world of live television, mostly sports. The pay was good and there was definitely a boom in the televised sports world. The catch was that the work was all in New York City, Long Island or New Jersey. I started driving the three hours down to work for a day at a time. Sometimes I would get two or three days in a row and stay on a friend's or a sibling's couch for a night or two. I was, suddenly, a freelancer. I scrambled to get my name out to all the regional 'crew-ers' and networks. I drove late nights to be home to milk the cow in the morning. I would book work and fill up a busy month, only to be home a few weeks later, worried about when the next job would come. It was impossible to predict how much income I would have from one month to the next. I was new, often the last choice, so even if I was busy, my datebook for the next month was likely to be blank.

All this was a shock, but an even bigger change was the work and my position inside it. At the UN, I had been known as one of the most accomplished engineers. The producers, our clients, clamored

to get time in my studio. They saved challenging projects for their time with me. They appreciated my work, and my colleagues, the other engineers, respected me. I was a resource for answers about production issues. I wrote a manual to train everyone on a new CD-burning process and was appointed a 'super-user' to test a new editing software that we were adopting.

In this new world, I was the new guy. My accomplishments at the UN amounted to very little. The skills were much different, the language and culture were different, and I was not necessarily welcomed by all into the small community of audio technicians in the region. While most were not hostile, there was no doubt about my status: 'green' and at the bottom of the crewers' list. Now I was the new kid at 36!

In TV, there are two audio positions: A1 and A2 (no blurring of status in this world). The A1 is the mixer. Their position is inside the control room (usually in sports, a mobile television truck with an entire production facility inside a 16-wheel truck). They are responsible for the patch bay and mixer and, often, the configuration of the communications. The A1 is the one moving the faders during the show, controlling what we hear during the broadcast. The A2 is the 'audio assist.' Their responsibility is everything outside the control room. They run the cables, plug in the microphones and communication equipment, and 'wire up' the talent. Both jobs have their own skill sets, and although there are some people who do either job, most do one or the other.

I had to begin as an A2. Despite my twelve years' experience already and my success at the UN, there were too many new skills and too much new equipment. The UN required people skills and editing proficiency, but we basically sat in the same chair every day from 9 to 5. Now I was in a different workplace every day, doing a job that was at times physically taxing. At the least, we would walk several miles around a baseball park or hockey arena, dragging heavy multi-channel audio cable.

I liked the change. After all the years of routine, this felt refresh-

ing. At the UN, people would often avoid work, and sometimes that would come down on me, since clients wanted to work with me anyway. Here, it seemed, everyone was responsible for their own part of the world. I liked sports, so it was fun to be working at a Devils game or a Yankees-Red Sox series. There was also an element of puzzle-solving that was fun. The goal was to get good audio to the necessary positions as efficiently as possible. Sometimes the TV truck was parked thousands of feet from the event. At the pro stadiums, the cable was usually installed permanently, but at smaller venues, it often had to all be put in just for the event. This is where strategic laziness could really come into play. You wanted to do the best job and make it all work, but with the least amount of effort you could manage. Also, once it was set up, if you had built it correctly and with solid gear, there might not be much to worry about until it was time to 'strike': dismantle everything and pack it back inside the truck. Often the best A2s were the ones who looked like they were hardly doing anything.

Even as I learned the ins and outs of this new job, I could see that it was the A1 position that had the real potential for creativity. To me at the time, it looked like rocket science. The A1 was seated in a room, facing a massive mixing board, with a patch bay behind bristling with what seemed an impossibly tangled mass of patch cords. The rest of the room was stuffed with computer monitors and outboard gear full of flashing lights and flickering meters. The noise was incredible. Different mixers worked at different volumes, but every audio room contained the sound of the game being played: the sneaker squeaks, the rattle of the boards, and the bat cracks, along with the drone of the announcers. In other speakers around the room, the director and producer were barking orders, calling camera shots and cracking jokes, or chewing out whoever was unlucky enough to make a mistake. To the uninitiated, it sounded like pure chaos. I wanted the job.

Back at home at this time, we were setting up our new farm. The field was cleared for vegetables. Chickens were procured. We

bought a dairy cow, too. I learned to milk the cow and tried to fence the pasture. These are not skills that I have experience with, so it was all a struggle. Still, I liked the contrast of milking the cow and feeding the chickens one day and plugging in mics for the Yankees in the World Series the next. The kids loved the farm and we started making movies together using a little camcorder and iMovie, which became second nature to the kids. One of the first films we made was a comedic newscast, with my six-year-old daughter as the anchor, about life on the farm.

I started learning from other A1s as I worked as an A2. Most people in the field were fairly generous with information and willing to help. Some were even willing to let me come in on my own time and help set up their shows for them. The audio room consisted of three main elements: a large-format mixing board, almost always digital, containing the faders that you picture, and an extremely powerful routing system and, a patch bay that often covered the entire back wall of the audio room with a jack field of hundreds of 'tiny telephone-size' patch points and a rack of hanging patch cords. (If you have trouble picturing this, imagine a telephone operator in a 1950s movie). And a computer that housed the ADAM program. This was the standard software that ran all the communications in the truck. It was what allowed all the people in the truck to talk to each other, to the announcers and reporters outside, and to the studio or master control elsewhere. At first these elements all seemed incredibly complicated.

Mixing boards I knew from all my previous training, but these were bigger and deeper than I was used to. Besides the 48 or 96 faders stretching across the room, they were sometimes several layers deep and had even more meters and controls buried in menus and levels that might not be immediately obvious. Patch bays were labeled with tiny writing that didn't always make sense. Plus, our work meant that you might be on a different truck in a different location every other day and the IFBs (how the talent hears the producer and director) could be in one place one day and somewhere else entirely

the next. The ADAM was the most mysterious of them all to me. It was a computer program that seemed to produce all these different forms of communication by magic. There were PL's: party lines, where many people could all talk on one line, and the IFB's, where talent could take direction and hear themselves and the show, point-to-points, where one person in the truck could talk to another without anyone else being included, and many more. Essentially, it was a giant and complex switchboard that existed only inside a computer but controlled lots of real-world devices.

I tried my best to put all these pieces together. I filled a little notebook with advice and diagrams. Eventually, I felt like I knew enough of the outlines to take some jobs as the A1. My training had always included one important thing: an experienced A1 there with me who was responsible for the actual show. Once I was alone in the audio room, nothing prepared me for how fast it all moved. We would usually show up at around 1:00 p.m. for a 7:00 p.m. game. In that time, we had to build a whole show from scratch and have our mandated hour lunch break. For me, it felt like the clock was loudly ticking from the moment I set foot into the truck. There were so many things to worry about. It was hard to keep the order—I'd start putting in patch cords and then someone would remind me that they were waiting for their communication panel; then the producer would want to hear the music he had chosen for the show. By then I had completely forgotten where I was with the patching. Then, if something didn't work right and required troubleshooting, that meant even more time. I was sweating and stressing. When the game started and I was actually mixing a show, I was exhausted.

Inevitably, mistakes were made. On one show, the 'talkback,' a separate circuit that the announcers rely on to talk to the producer mid-show without their voice going on the air, never worked. At another, I inexplicably opened the wrong mics and left the announcers silent for several seconds. I couldn't seem to get through a whole show without some memorable screw-up. The combination of stress and not being sure of what was coming next made it very hard to succeed.

After working as an A2 on a grueling track and field competition (grueling for the TV crew—no comment on the athletics), I was invited at the last minute to come to Kentucky for the World Equestrian Games. This is something like the Olympics for horse sports, with several venues at once, dozens of events, and hundreds of competitors from around the world. I was to be an A2, but my A1 training would be useful for giving breaks to the other mixers. It would be 20 days away from home, but I was in no position to refuse. I'd never been away from my family for that long. Compounding my stress, my marriage had started to fall apart. We were separating, which makes my worry about leaving my kids greater.

When I got to Kentucky, it was decided that rather than providing relief, I would be mixing the NBC show. It was a big promotion in responsibility and pressure. I was inspired and up for it, though. I was learning and the other mixers were helpful. The complexity was mind-boggling at times. There were so many layers of connectivity and control to integrate all the different venues and facilities. It took all my concentration and effort to be ready to go for the opening ceremonies. It all went well and I was relieved, but as soon as we finished, the executive director walked in and told me he wanted me to do a 'follow cut' on the cross-country race in two days. This meant integrating 50-something mics into my mixing board in a whole different setup, while maintaining the one I would need again in five days. I swallowed hard and got started.

The event was a positive experience. I built a lot of relationships and confidence. I came back inspired and upbeat. However, it was also the beginning of a struggle to have time with my kids in balance with rewarding work. My wife and I were soon divorced. She left the farm and was not cooperative with my erratic schedule. At this time, I was still building clients, but sometimes it was a struggle to book enough days every month to cover the bills. It was not really feasible for me to say, "I don't work Mondays or Tuesdays", and certainly the weekends tend to be the prime time for this work. Making a shared custody schedule that allowed for the time I was used to with my

children was really tough. I stayed on the farm and found ways to manage the work and travel while keeping the comfort of the farm for me and the kids.

My daughter was a precocious eight-year-old. She read books that seemed like they should be beyond her. Her vocabulary was off the charts. She, my son, and I set up a poetry contest—we pit 16 different genres of poetry against each other in a tournament style. We randomly chose which genre to write in and what the topic would be. Then we had our friends and family go to a blog and cast their votes. In the end, the sonnet beat out the limerick and haiku for the win.

The following year, I was invited to work on the NHL playoffs with NBC. The main mixer hired me as his assistant. For two years, I spent 2½ months on the road with the playoff crew, flying around the country, working a game every other day, sometimes even more. I would do the patching for the show both inside and outside the truck and make sure everything was working for the mixer. During the game, I would run interference with anyone who needed anything, so that the A1 could focus only on the game. During this time, I gathered confidence with regard to all the different parts of the patch bay and the truck. Things that I had sort of known, 'plug that here and it works,' I now understood more precisely. Even more importantly, I sat beside the mixer day after day. I watched him work and followed the flow of the pre-production, pregame, and game. I started to get familiar and know what to expect.

After that, when I went back to mixing smaller shows, my stress levels were dramatically lower. Things started to slow down and I could get through a whole game without having a mental lapse. There was still a lot to learn, but I was in a position to improve instead of panic. I started to notice that it had been awhile since the last fiasco. They are still lurking out there and happen to everyone—remember the Super Bowl a few years ago?

Recently, I started to travel farther for work rather than driving back and forth from New York City and Boston all the time. In the last few years, work has taken me around the country, as well as to

Malaysia, Russia, Botswana, Canada, and Brazil. The airplane travel is hard and so is being away, but it beats driving until 2:00 a.m. several times a week and staying on friends' couches. My son is in college and pursuing creative endeavors. My daughter started high school and is a master of Instagram and Tumblr, but also an actor and musician. I feel lucky to have a new partner, and a new baby to experience the creative act of parenting again. The challenge is still finding the balance between being present for the needs of my teenage children and baby and keeping the flames stoked with my partner while feeding a career. There isn't much time to look back and reflect, but this work has carried my family here. I continue to be challenged by it. As I write this, I am preparing for my first shot at being the main mixer for a UFC bout. This will surely be a new chaos and a chance to go down in flames. It may, however, present a way to discover a more elegant way to do something or a new improvisation to capture the sounds; things I find greatly satisfying.

It reminds me of those moments with Mr. Doblin when the lesson would stop in the middle of me struggling through some scale or audition piece. He would put aside the frustration over my lack of technical skill and talk about life. It would sometimes be about how the logic and beauty of the music radiated out to explain the world and us. He never was much for recorded music, and I'm positive he never watched a single mixed martial arts match, but I hope he would still know that his lesson made its mark.

## A FORGOTTEN RIVER CALLED THE NICKEL VLY

Justin K. Rivers

I stood with a yellow plastic air horn jammed between my legs. My sound kit rested on a table draped with black cloth: two yogurt cups on a bed of gravel, a laptop with a broken backlight, a toy cell phone, some potatoes, a popcorn tin filled with shards of glass, and an empty water bottle. At my elbow was a stage full of kids dressed as gazelles.

Baby Gazelle cradled its mama. Mother shuddered, raising her neck to meet its teary gaze. My job was to bring the environment to life through live sound effects, and at the climax, render the low cry of Mother Gazelle as she passed from the world, using the yellow plastic air horn. If my lips pursed off-center or welled from a bit of spit, the moment was lost forever. Not because I would fail to make a sound. But because that sound (the instrument only makes two) would instead be that of a wet, juicy fart. The amplifiers and cross-overs hummed above my head, waiting to let it ring.

Earlier that day, I had slogged up to Van Nuys to deliver pornography to a TV studio. I was told to knock on 4C and ask for Oren. Oren was a large, hairy man with flaring sideburns that swept the sides of his face. He gave me a videotape in a blue case, which I took back to my van. All day I hopped in and out of air-conditioned

rooms. I drove from the soundstage where I worked to post houses and dub suites, tucked away in old motels with sound insulation stuffed into the walls, or in donut shops with unplugged signs behind rows of orange trees.

Los Angeles. I worked by day for an adult entertainment empire. By night, I was a sound designer for a children's theatre company. It was a beautiful city, filled with fresh flavors and textures. It was sunny and sad. L.A. lacked institutional memory, its ebbs and flows, like its staple industry, impermanent. I trained as a screenwriter, but I found that the work was scarce. I was haunted by a kind old neighbor who showed me a long hallway of scripts he had written and been paid handsomely for. A life's work, never produced. In certain circles, I'm told, he was highly regarded. To me, he was a translucent specter, mustering his craft for an audience of conference rooms.

I'm going to work backwards now. There's these things I do for a living (mostly writing). The things I write are produced by muscles. The muscles are made up of experiences. The experiences are made up of collective definitions. The collective definitions are made by people. I discovered this one day when I was very young and wandered into the forest near the Nickel Vly.

I was hired for the sound design job because of my interest in radio drama and my experience in college tinkering with audio. I had a degree in screenwriting, too, which meant I could create or manipulate a sound, and then place it within a narrative to advance the story. I grew my skills from a 4-track recorder in my childhood bedroom, cross-legged on shag carpet, to a college recording studio, to a black box theatre with a yellow plastic air horn.

These events detonated each other through a common mechanism my ability to say yes a little bit more than I've said no. I took classes and taught myself things and waded through internships and messy jobs. But the one piece of the toolkit that has moved me forward the most is an ability to say yes. And sometimes I wonder what would have happened had I said it more often. My career has unfolded along a ramble, but it moved because someone took a chance

on me, and I said yes even though I was afraid to. If you want to do these things, say yes often. I write grants now. It's not that different from screenwriting or sound effects. They're made of the same stuff.

I didn't pick writing out of a brochure. It came naturally from my behavior. A defense mechanism that became inseparable from life, and a livelihood emerged from it. The choice that I did make was about the shape of my daily routine. Each occupation has its own morphology. Where you fit in depends a lot on the hours you wish to keep. The hardest thing, starting off, is not deciding what activities you're interested in pursuing, but instead, what shape of day suits you. You might never know until you encounter it. Bear in mind, my job is different from my work. My work is writing and performing, which I do all the time. The job, on the other hand, is simply a container for some of the writing that shapes my day. I draw my raw ingredients for these tasks from experiences. I form them with tools using my hands.

I know how to lay a bead of weld on a piece of iron. I know what it feels like to press my hand over the air intake of a tractor to choke the engine as it spews hot oil out of a dented exhaust stack. I recall the sound of a philharmonic playing in a cool night. Or the soft rustle of paper in a storage room as I look for an old book. The lathe on which I shape these experiences is called narrative.

Creative work seems like the spinning of something from nothing. But it has very concrete structures that build real things, objects, systems, results. There are usually two sides to any art—the public face that is seen by others, and the private mechanics clicking behind Duvetyne drapes. Writing is one of the places where they converge, where the blueprint and the dabs of color are the same action. The dancers on stage. The flyman in back. There's engine grease on these fingers, there's pipes and wrenches and sockets and electrons making things flow. We're cooking up a batch of hydrogen from a bucket of washing soda and a car battery. We're doing two things at once—the ephemeral and the tangible living together, dogs and cats, the brim-

stone end of the world and the dawn of a dewy new morning.

My neighbor in L.A. traveled restlessly. He spent his life criss-crossing North America in a station wagon with a polyester blanket. He told me how he liked to sleep underneath his car in the corner of a Denny's parking lot, because nobody ever notices a person underneath a car in a Denny's parking lot.

Sometimes he would put on an old tuxedo and go down to the Disney Concert Hall. "My friend couldn't make it; she had the tickets with her," he'd say to strangers. "Does anyone have an extra ticket for me?" A kind old lady would always come by, holding a ticket from an absent friend. He had nothing but the means to tell a story, and that story changed the world around him. This is an example of how we define the reality we live in. Everybody knows about the two parts of reality, the subjective and the objective. But I work primarily in a third, seldom-noticed, realm. The socio-subjective.

The world as we know it is not constructed by what our hands touch or by the emotions that wash over us. It is constructed by what we collectively define to each other. Pain, love, and barbecue are things that we associate with objects, people, and feelings. Memories, too. But a love is never of nothing. A pain is never a pain in nothing. A memory is never a memory of nothing. In the essence of writing, the degree to which we understand this is the degree to which we are free to control art or ideas or whatever.

Barbecue is an abstract concept. A bunch of people got together and gave it a name and defined what it is and isn't, generally speaking. They gave it a social context and forged an agreement upon which to proceed. And this pact transmits outward and grows and evolves and forms local divergent chapters.

Thus, when our eyes see a lump of brisket that's been smoking over coals for five hours, we understand that it is, indeed. Barbecue. Thank heavens for that. We're good at not noticing this third plank, because to notice it perfectly would be to step outside of our own perspectives, and that is very hard to do. Why does it matter?

Because what I do on a daily basis, whether in fiction, or a grant narrative, or onstage in a scene or song, is not a trick. It's a usage of the structures of meaning. I first glimpsed them at this one spot about a mile beyond the big house where I grew up.

There is a small river out back called the Nickel Vly, and you won't find it on a cheap map, but you might find it on a very old one. It flows along an apocalyptic landscape, where a hundred years ago the economy veered away from agriculture. One by one the family farms wound down and the trees closed in. Acres of forests concealed the litter of human remains. A spinning tractor tire once ruttled on an overturned headstone to reveal a lost family graveyard. A deer trail led to a dug well near a stone ice dam.

One of my favorite things back then was to ride in the back of our steel-wheeled cart as my dad chopped wood. Along one trail was a special treat — the skeleton of an old manure spreader. "What did you do today?" "I went to the old manure spreader!" I imagined this is what other children did. In reality, they were playing ColecoVision. Beyond the manure spreader was a cliff. One day, left on my own, I wandered off, wading through Canadian yews to peek over the edge. Below, I saw a sliver of water that flowed through a ravine. An ancient road led down the cliff to a bridge. I followed it to the source, a crater-like pond filled with dark, green liquid. A steep hill surrounded it on three sides, shaded by hemlocks. Along the slope was a dump; a defunct, exposed landfill with mounds of detritus. Bottles, machines, household debris, and signs and toy trains and rusted metal, snowed in by the sawtooth leaves of American hornbeams. There I found my playground.

These were ghosts and ruins of a lost civilization. Even the trees were scarred, with rusted barbed wire running through the middle, or pockmarks from taps and sap buckets. The stone laneways led from the woods to the fields with boneyards of horse-drawn farm machinery: hay rakes and mowers, drillers, harvesters, loaders, fillers, threshers, reapers, binders, shuckers, winnowers, and planters. On

their own, these are perfectly normal things for a 1900s farm. But I was stranded there outside of time and I felt lost and alone.

Every day I bused from our rural hamlet into a small city, and once we passed the town lines, the bus stopped at the East End and picked up the city kids. They were poor. They were loud and aggressive. They assaulted me. As they knocked my head against the glass windows, thoughts rattled around in there about what was hidden back in the country under thatches of dead grass or beneath forest leaves. The woods and fields were not what they seemed. My schoolmates took it for granted that things had always been the way they were. I was too young to understand, but I had discovered that my classmates and I did not see the same reality around us. I thought I was crazy. My teachers weren't much help.

They just told me that the wild grapes and black raspberries were poison. (They are, in fact, delicious). After school, I trudged out into the woods and traced the route back to the dark pond. I unearthed artifacts and discovered strange devices buried in the earth. Rusted beer cans crunched beneath my feet. These things must have been put there for a reason. I did not know what that reason was, so I made it up.

Like the earliest humans, who devised mythology to explain the mysteries of nature, I devised stories and characters, entire histories, to explain the landscape as I saw it. They gave context to a world I didn't understand. They brought order to chaos. People, represented in token objects like action figures and dolls and pieces of trash, led remarkable lives in my imagination. They lived and died. They fought and conquered. Tragedy struck. A rainy basement became Noah's flood. The ice dam became a rampart for an Alamo. I made these stories to protect myself from the bullies and from the alien world of city life. They comforted me when I had no friends. As I got older, I kept creating stories, writing them down in notebooks or on the back of school papers, illustrated with diagrams and maps. Some were familiar, real places. Others were worlds of magic or science fiction. They lived by the same principles--cause and effect, narrative

structure, character growth, the balance between plot and color.

They were something I did. And then something I just had to keep doing. And then, eventually, something I could do for a living.

Let's be honest, I'm writing these notes on the back of a tax form. I don't have a lot of answers. I do have some material, though. Let me see what's around here ... on my chair is my grandfather's old wool coat, with a ratty sleeve cut by a bramble along the trail to that little river out in the woods. The light on the paper comes from a lamp with a base that's a plaster statue of a creepy Italianate baby. Around its neck is a bracelet from a girl in Chicago whom I've always been a little bit in love with. My work here is to fix these pieces of socio-subjectivity to a storable form, taking them from the air around our collective definitions and putting them into discrete parcels. This is the same activity I have been doing since I first found that river. And sometimes it's hard to tell fact from fiction, you know how that goes, late at night, getting sentimental, ahem, but it's all true, you see. The pond is still there, swollen with oozing green.

The leaves fall on the mountains of ancient trash. It wasn't a dream at all. It just seems like a tall tale because the light is dim ...

The theatre air is dead. I press my lips around the plastic trumpet and hope that it does not make the heinous farting sound. These kids depend on me, their friends and family watch from their seats. I'm going to make a bunch of troubled youth cry if I get this wrong. My director and the whole cast and crew wait for me to play the note, the song of the dying gazelle. I blow.

My horn sings out a beautiful moan as Mother falls to the cool floor and passes away. Baby Gazelle looks out at the crowd and bows her head. The lights fade in time to my crunch crunch of yogurt cups on gravel. The herd gallops. Baby joins them, weeping but strong in her new understanding of the world. I cue the music, the lights come back up, and the kids take their bows. I pack my things into a cardboard box and put them into my Hyundai and drive back along the midnight freeway with the windows down. A week later, I leave town in the early morning and head north to Canada and then across the

mountains and the plains and back down to the States again until I am here sitting at this metal table with a tax form and a creepy lamp.

Baby Gazelle will never realize her own part in my story. I've never spoken to her. She doesn't know who I am. But that scene onstage was a culmination of everything I was doing back in the forest. My work, as far as I know, has not saved anyone's life or turned back a flood or earthquake. But sometimes it has helped to make the world more understandable to me. And maybe to you. It all starts by saying yes more than saying no.

I've never told anybody these things before. But now that you're here, well, maybe. I could talk about how the stories you tell never leave you. About apples and tractors, about the old ice-cream stand, about racist chants on the school bus, about pieces of wood with rusty nails, about pine cones that look like zeppelins, about how to survive L.A. traffic by wearing a cowboy hat, about how to beat a blizzard chasing you across the mountains, about alternating short sentences with long ones, about that third plank of reality.

But most of all, I could tell you about a forgotten river called the Nickel Vly. And how, in this line of work, wherever you fly, it goes with you. Whether your luggage ever makes it there or not.

## ROGUES, RENEGADES, AND RELIGIOUS WORK

Donna Schaper

I don't believe they pay me to do my work. They do, and I am grateful for the money. But my work is so much like play that I am in a full-tilt boogie quarrel with retirement. I don't want to retire. How can you retire when you haven't really been working? Play is what you want to do; work, many say, is what you have to do. I want to do my work.

I work about 60 hours a week. I work at 5 a.m. and at midnight. I almost never work 9-5, because that is when other people are working, and I work when they are not. I have made a lifelong habit of the siesta. I learned in my second job NOT to go to the office at 9:00, because there were no people who could talk to me or work with me then. That's when I became a writer and a gardener. I write in the mornings, and garden or play tennis or go biking in the afternoon, after my nap. I usually work at lunchtime. I like my free days—and also my committed early mornings and late nights. Every day around 4:00 p.m., I start a round of appointments and meetings. They usually go till 8:00/or 9:00. I also work in the interstices, pretty much all day long every day. I check my e-mail at least twice an hour, make phone calls, and sit in endless phone meetings (while double-timing them on e-mails or with writing). I am active but am not working all the

time. I am playing.

The downside of this fully flex flextime is that I work just about every day of the week, including, of course, Sundays (why of course Sundays? She hasn't introduced that she is a pastor yet). Another downside is that my doctor insists that I should eat earlier in the evening, so as not to exacerbate my acid reflux. I just can't eat till I'm done working, and I really dislike sandwiches. Yes, I eat a lot of sandwiches.

I am a renegade and a rogue. I have been lucky enough to find renegade institutions that would employ me. I think I rode a wave of affirmative action and made the wave even more interesting than it was by taking advantage of my freedom. I'm not sure everyone has this kind of freedom. I am sure that most of us have more freedom than we use. There is a difference. What I say here about being a working pastor may not apply to many other people. Unless, of course, you want to sign up for the best non-job in the world.

### ORDINATION

The year before I was ordained, 1973, I spent every Tuesday night reading *Beyond God the Father* by, Mary Daly, with five nuns and a Presbyterian laywoman. We read a dozen or so pages each Tuesday. We also drank a lot of wine and ate a lot of cheese. We were part of the great feminist religious underground, what Dan Brown popularized as the Holy Grail. Quarterly, we went on a retreat. We stayed together as a women's group for many years, and even published an illustrated cookbook of all the good food we had eaten together.

One of our members, Patti Smith, just died. Another, Sister Rachel Fitzgerald, will receive the dedication of my forthcoming book, *I Heart Francis: Letters to the Pope from an Unlikely Admirer*.

On the day I was ordained, Reformation Sunday, October 30, 1974, I had asked if my women's group could be a part of the laying on of hands part of the ritual. The five nuns were not deacons but teachers. One was the principal of a large school. My judicatory and

its Committee on the Ministry said absolutely not. No non-ordained hands. Nothing not in the male line of Peter. No way. "It's enough that we are ordaining you as a woman; we've never done this before. Don't push it."

When it came time for the laying on of hands, all six of the women in my group arrived to lay on hands, and nobody could do anything about it at that moment. I had no idea they were going to do this, and they did it. I was kneeling in the middle of a group of 40 or so men, feeling weird as hell, when six women nudged in and touched me. I felt doubly ordained. First by the United Church of Christ and then by my women's group and Mary Daly's God. I am proud to be ordained, proud to be one of the "firsts" of women to be ordained, and I am simultaneously wildly concerned about the diminishment of the meaning of the sacrament of ordination.

The idea that people in the line of Peter, who both happen to be and have to be men, is absurd. Peter was the most fallible of the disciples, denying Jesus at the drop of a rooster's crow and making one leadership mistake after another. Surely, he was also brave and good. But the notion that Peter was better than others—when actually he was worse than others—is ludicrous. The Petrine Succession argument is a thinly veiled promotion of masculine supremacy, which, in and of itself, should, and has been, questioned by many, including Jesus.

Plus, any elevation of the ordained ministry or priesthood demeans the so-called laity, as if there were work were less important than the sacramental work. The separation of powers—the holy and the profane—is dangerous and unchristlike. You have noted, I am sure, that I rarely use the word "Christ". It elevates Jesus into something he would never have wanted to be—the only savior, the ultimate savior, the best savior in the religious Olympics, the imperial savior, etc. But there is a worthy concept in the word "Christ"—which is the mystery and majesty of the holy, to which Jesus was always pointing. Let's call it the divine human, which includes Peter and all his pettiness.

My own ordination reflected this view. Laywomen and ordained men ordained me—if, by ordination, we mean the holy laying on of hands. I got a lot of rights and privileges, authority and respect, out of their action. Its goodness derives straight from the mixture of lay and clergy attending. Had it only been clergy, I would feel regularly ordained and diminished by the very act to being the pedestaled clergy in a world where most people are put down. Jesus sided with the put-down. I aim so to do also. I am irregularly ordained.

Before the ordination, when we heard that the inclusive laying on of hands was going to be prohibited, we had prepared a joke. We and all of the women attending would wear pink undies. Many did, with a kind of glee. We had a quiet bond. It was doubly good to have a loud bond as well as a quiet one. The judicatory and the Committee on the Ministry were apoplectic at the inclusive laying on of hands. Most people in the room didn't really know that women couldn't do what my friends were doing, so they just thought the mixture of genders was sweet. I never heard from the judicatory about this rogue and renegade behavior. Believe me, I also never asked. And I have gone on to serve 41 years in the ordained ministry of the UCC.

I had experienced what Roman Catholic women experience now. We could be servant leaders, "Christian education" directors, but not sacramental purveyors. I was raised in a church that still doesn't ordain women, the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church. For the first ten years of my ordination, my Lutheran mother whispered to her friends that I was going into "Christian Education," so embarrassed was she of me doing something so unusual. She wondered if her friends would approve, which they did not. I had put her in an awkward position. They didn't even approve of my ordination, much less the pink undies. My mother did not wear pink undies to the ordination, but she did read one of the lessons, with great eloquence and articulation.

After the UCC received me, I left the Lutherans. Actually, the Lutherans left me. Then the next year, the Lutherans decided to ordain women. They paid for me to go to six years of seminary, while they lollygagged on the topic of women's ordination. They just didn't

know how to say no, so they waffled. When I had one of my endless exams, they actually asked me if I had "gender issues." My Strong Vocational Interest Bank then designed for men only like the priesthood, had come back saying I would be best as an army general. I assured the committee, one after another, that I had incredible gender issues. Most of them had to do with being put down by men.

Rejection is big for me. Acceptance and welcome are also big for me, as being taken in when you have been thrown out means a lot to a person. But what means the most to me is the rogue behavior, the civil disobedience that marked my own ordination into the church. My women friends showed a genuine sacramental sensibility. They say only priests like me can perform the sacraments of vocation and ordination. I think not. I think all work is holy and in need of rogues and renegades.

#### SO-CALLED LAYPEOPLE

There are lots of ways people outside the "ordination track" can show up for themselves at whatever job there is. You may know the secret codes at your work better than I ever will. Often it is the lowest person on the so-called totem pole who is the only one who knows how to fix the AC when it goes out. Or how to phone the person who's been sacked at home that night and express a feeling, even though that kind of human behavior is against the rules. Or how to clean out the office refrigerator. Or fly just enough under the radar to get something done in the system.

My friend works at a university. He has worked there for 37 years. He calls himself "vice-president in charge of what nobody else wants to do". He chaired the first sexual harassment committee, and now they have a whole department working on that matter. He chaired the first disability committee, the first LGBTQ committee, and the committee that eventually got the university to recognize religion. Why, I asked him. "Because I could." Plus, "I just love prayer." There are now 69 chaplains of all faiths at this university.

If you don't think medical people have a holy call, then be on

the table while the cardiologist is doing open heart surgery and the electricity goes out in the hospital. My tennis partner just told me this story. The night before, our area had had a huge electrical storm. We are in the hottest summer on human record in the Hudson Valley. All the freezers are overworking and the air conditioners are overworking. Many people are collapsing in the heat.

While my doctor friend was performing the surgery, the power went out. He then had to pump the machine with his own hands, stabilize the patient, and keep the electricity going by hand. The next day, he had to convince the hospital that all hospitals during this time of accelerated heat waves in the Northeast need to have back-up electrical systems. If they couldn't get them, he would no longer do surgery—and he would have his photo removed from their advertising. He was the best doctor they had. He prevailed. If that is not vocation—from the actual healing, to the systemic healing, to the prophetic behavior, to the refusal to work in absurd conditions—I don't know what is. It is not just rogue or renegade to behave like this. It is common sense. It is operating from a sacramental sensibility first and not from fear of losing a job first. When we have a sacramental common sense, we don't work for a paycheck, or for approval, or against rejection. We work for God. We are free from the diminishment of vocation on behalf of common sense, which is also sacramental.

My tennis partner reminds me of Quentin Young, a famous physician in Miami. His memoir is titled *Everybody In, Nobody Out: Memoirs of a Rebel Without a Pause*. Vocational meaning or meaning at work is not a given. Many of us have to fight for good work. Why not? It's a great fight.

Aimee Semple McPherson, the famous Los Angeles evangelist, founded a prayer line that was among the first of its kind. She also did another remarkable thing, right near her temple on Echo Lake in L.A. She ordered Chinese lotus for the lake. She wanted the people she was ministering to, the new immigrants, to feel at home. The lotus grows in a beautiful mud. Last Easter, I preached a sermon called "No Mud, No Lotus," which comes from a Buddhist slogan meaning

exactly what it says. What allowed McPherson to be interested in the vocation, the call, and the essence of her Buddhist congregants? Respect for them is the answer. When we respect each other, magical things happen. The lotus now takes over half of Echo Lake and blooms a magnificent yellow. The people who shipped them are to be thanked. The people who grew them are to be thanked. The people who tend them are to be thanked. The people who waded in the mud to get out the litter in the lake are to be thanked. Work is so holy that it requires our respect. All work is holy, not just the "ordained."

By the way, Catholics join Protestants in enjoying a doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers. By that, we mean something very similar to what I am arguing here; that all people have vocation and are to be respected for and in it. I might lose the word "believers" and just say "the Priesthood of All". I would follow the Shaker frame: "Make it simple. Make it simpler still. And when you cannot make it simpler, make it beautiful."

What drives me to my knees more often than not is an overwhelming appreciation for all that God made: the thistles and the thermonuclear scientists, the columbine and the caretakers, the mandrake and the musician, the lightning and the lightning bug. What drives me to my heartbreak more often than not is knowing that some people are not only unemployed but also underappreciated in their employment. How any human being could be kept unemployed is beyond me. There is so much to do and so much to give.

I would argue that the economic system does not tell you whether you have vocation or not. It only tells you whether you have a job. Of course, not having a job is brutally difficult on multiple levels. Sacramental sensibility allows us to think rogue thoughts and enjoy renegade behavior. We are valued by God and not by our paychecks. We can stop and start there. We all have holy orders. Mine happen to be word and sacrament, which is my job description. Others have other job descriptions. One does not outrank the other but, instead, circles the divine in magnificent ways.

**BRING YOUR OWN GOD AND HERE'S MINE**

In these days, when many reduce Christianity to its right-wing version, Judson Memorial Church, my employer, is an increasingly visible and alive alternative. Judson is an “early” church. It is a post-denominational church, with many Jews as members, and dually affiliated with the United Church of Christ and the American Baptist Churches. It is a traditional church—in the sense that it follows the Jesus of the Bible who privileged the poor and outcast, the sinner and not the saint. When Italians first came to the Lower East Side and many said that they smelled, Judson opened a health clinic for them. The Judson fountain brought the first clean water to the Lower East Side. Before many other churches affirmed homosexuality, Judson did. When others thought ordaining women was unbiblical, Judson did it out of a conviction for open interpretation of scripture. When others spoke of addiction as though it were a sin, Judson members gathered on Wednesday nights to create bleach kits to reduce the harm of drugs. When others poured concrete over scripture, Judson kept its meaning alive in jazz, making Al Carmines’ art sing here. When others threw the word “sacrilege” around, Judson used its meeting space to talk of drama, sex, suicide, AIDS, needles, and prostitution.

Judson’s former minister, Howard Moody, founded Clergy Consultation, which helped women get safe abortions. In that same period, a health van circulated in the village to help prostitutes and others get health care. Judson was early in affirming what mainstream Christianity is just now getting around to noticing. While issues of homosexuality and poverty rock the churches, Judson relies on its history and tradition. These are traditions of innovation and of “firsts”; they are also in the classic Judson style of incubations and midwifery. Judson continues its mission of doing what others won’t do. It follows its other famous pastor, Al Carmines in the ongoing support of emerging artists. Bailout Theater and Magic Time, as well as the gym at Judson, express the best of Judson’s fusion of the arts, politics, and spirituality, all based in a self-governing congregation

of real people who provide mutual care for each other. We say we are “the perfect church for imperfect people”. We also taught Italian immigrants not to use garlic in cooking. “Un-American,” we said, in a weaker moment.

I keep these pots well stirred as my main job. I also visit with people about life and death, sickness and health, and jobs, jobs, jobs. I do a couple of funerals and a couple of weddings a month. I preach a sermon almost every Sunday. I build teams of leadership and manage a staff of seven. I always have something really useful to do. I love my work. I love my people. And I get paid for it too!

My work is advocacy of the rogue and the renegade. I work at it seven days a week in a rogue and renegade way.

**FEET FIRST**

Patch Schwadron

I have always been a dancer. Since entering the world feet first, two months before my due date, I've been hyper-ready to MOVE and TAKE ACTION. Lucky for me, my parents sent me to dance classes at age five, since I was walking around on my toes whenever possible. By 13, I was performing with the State Ballet of Rhode Island, and at 15, joined the newly professionalized Boston Ballet Company. Those years of developing the ballet dancer took me to professional dance schools in Paris, where a renowned ballet mistress stated, *Quand elle danse elle chante* (when she dances, she sings), and in Cannes, France, where I later learned I was remembered as “La Petite Américaine.” My core identity was set—permanently.

Meaningful work would always involve connecting intensely with and for others. It would always be personal. Perfection would loom as the key goal. Work was expected to tire me out by the end of each day. As I matured, the challenge was to find and incorporate intellectual stimulation as well.

A half-century later, I now hold the position of Senior Career Counselor for Career Transition For Dancers, a program of The Actors Fund, a national human services agency offering a broad spectrum of programs to support the unique essential needs of all who work in entertainment and the performing arts. Not incidentally, during the past 40 years, my journalist/musician husband and I have

spawned and nurtured three professional artists: a painter/professor; a dancer/choreographer/professor; and a musician/composer. In my 17 years as a career counselor within The Career Center of The Actors Fund, working with actors and musicians as well as dancers, I have witnessed how my early understanding of meaningful work undergirds the creative workforce and how what we call “the civilian world,” by not understanding the nature of performing artists and the art-making process, often impedes and destroys the career paths of our most expressive, creative workers.

I fell in love with ballet. My father filled our house with classical music and took me to see ballet productions that traveled to Rhode Island and during our trips to Europe. My mother was working as an assistant to a theatre director in Providence, surrounding us with creative, expressive actors and designers. At 13, I was performing with the State Ballet of Rhode Island, a community ballet company led by my inspiring teachers, Myles and Herci Marsden. When I was 15, my parents were encouraged to take me to Boston, where the Boston Ballet was in the early stages of building a respected professional ballet company and training ground. Summers studying in France complemented the intensity of working toward adult expectations of perfection. My school life was arranged so that I could attend private school in Providence in the mornings and travel to Boston in the afternoons and weekends for ballet class and rehearsals. The pace and demands I made on myself were too much. After two seasons performing in Boston, my body objected, my thyroid shut down, and life as I knew it stopped. Everyone was surprised, even my parents. I appeared to be performing so well.

The loss was devastating. In my hyper-critical, adolescent black and white brain, I blamed myself for failing to be worthy of my first love. I told myself I wasn’t good enough and that I should have tried harder. I was no longer “Patch the Dancer.” I found myself totally at sea, unmoored from any recognizable sense of myself. My career counseling studies and years of experience have illuminated the overwhelming intensity of early identity formation and the grieving

process that inevitably follows such a profound loss. Looking back now, I know what I needed was proper guidance to lead me back to a healthy dance body, as well as help to face the fact that I was not actually interested in becoming a swan. I was funny and jumped like the boys.

Without that intervention, the dance chapter ended. With deep sadness, I learned to live with my private, painful conclusion that I would not connect to others from the stage, and I went on to explore developing other skills and interests. Nothing would ever take the place of dancing professionally, but my life would offer me other wonderful, fulfilling, creative opportunities—new loves.

By the time my body recovered, I was in college, with my anorectic body a thing of the past. Even though I did perform with a modern dance group in college, I didn’t believe in myself as a serious dancer anymore. During my college chapter, I also discovered that I enjoyed writing about theatre and dance for the college newspaper, as well as serving as “critic-at-large” for the college radio station. For two summers I interned at a newspaper on Cape Cod, where I wrote a feature piece on Herman Badillo. I then moved to New York, where I wrote for two trade publications and volunteered on Mr. Badillo’s mayoral campaign. Again encouraged by my father, I attended Columbia Journalism School for a Master’s degree.

Then I married a journalist working for The Providence Journal. We wanted children, and I knew I wanted to be their nurturer and guide. In the 10 home-based, child-rearing years, I volunteered wherever the children were involved and observed how creativity is either fostered or suppressed in schools and homes. Living then in Los Angeles, one connection led to a job offer in a part-time administrative position supporting a career counselor. Quickly, my research and writing skills were valued for writing reports about labor market trends and employment. I also learned from a pro how to craft targeted résumés.

And I learned about the counseling part of career counseling. I was delighted to learn how this work invited engagement in support-

ing an individual's search for meaning and creativity in the working world. With my husband's encouragement, I decided to pursue a graduate degree in Educational Psychology and Career Counseling at California State University, Northridge. There I quickly realized that performing artists were the workforce most compelling for me to study and support. Obviously, my work as a career counselor has linked profoundly with my personal story, along with the formal study of how the physically and emotionally demanding adult lifestyle of the professional ballet world can challenge the vulnerable, still-developing adolescent mind and body. Much to my delight, I discovered that the transference of energy that occurs in collaborating and brainstorming with a client is as satisfying as the energy expended in interpreting music and stories through dance. And there was talking involved! (It had always been difficult for me to keep quiet in my dancing life.)

Through networking, networking, networking, when my husband's job moved us from Los Angeles to New York, I was able to find career counseling jobs at NYU, St. John's University, and gratefully, with The Actors Fund, where I am the senior career counselor. I get to engage in an ongoing dialogue with seven career counselors in our NY, L.A. and Chicago offices about the diverse ways performing artists explore and pursue financial and creative wellness in their ever-changing and challenging work lives. Since I view creative talent as valuable to our culture and as fragile as clean air, water, and green forests, I can say that my early passion for dance has evolved and matured into the passion I feel for empowering the professional artists among us.

Here's what work looks like to a performing artist:

- Your mind and body are your instruments.
- Investment of time and resources is required, with no correlation to potential earnings.
- Work is periodic or episodic; that is, dancers who get hired by a ballet, contemporary or musical theatre production company, can perform for multi-week fall, winter, spring, or summer festival

seasons with unpaid breaks in between, as opposed to freelance performers, who may work with multiple productions in jobs ranging from one- to two- week commitments, with no predictability as to how many jobs will employ them over any given year. Most dancers experience great fluctuations in income as a result of the lack of steady, stable employment.

- Even when getting paid for performing, performers must focus on getting the next job.
- Injury, illness, family crises, and other life events have the potential to detour career plans. Because their bodies are their instrument, and their athletic lifespan generally reaches to their late 30s or early 40s, any interruption in the daily physical discipline can lead to dancers finding themselves permanently sidelined. The time, expense, and effort to rebuild peak conditioning are often too daunting to achieve.
- Artistic success rarely connotes financial security.
- Performers are working more often than not on 1099s, meaning that benefits and security are always a struggle. (That has started to change with access to Obamacare).
- The unemployment system is challenging for freelancers, who are always looking for work but not in the ways the system understands.
- Taking a steady "day job" often means limiting time and energy to invest in future artistic work.

Solutions to "What do I do now?" are as diverse and varied as the clients themselves. Performers themselves are not aware of the highly developed analytical and communications skills their craft has given them. So much of what I do focuses on helping in the translation of skills from one world of work to another. Watching clients expand their view of themselves, their possibilities, and new ways of impacting the world around them is my great joy.

Generally speaking, dancers spend their early years practicing and learning how to take direction, reproducing precise movements repeatedly, and closely monitoring their surroundings and other

dancers. As a result, they are on high alert for instructions from outside authorities on what to do next. When confronting their own next moves, they often need practice and support in exercising their own decision-making, based on their own needs. I help with that learning process, too. Here are a couple of examples:

J. was a Rockette, understanding that her youthful, high-kicking years were numbered. Beyond pursuing acting, she was at a loss as to how to seek out and/or identify and create other meaningful work. She was the person everyone trusted with their feelings and fears. With no college degree and no desire to pursue one, she somehow wanted to become a professional counselor/adviser. We hit upon interfaith ministry as a course of study and licensure, which would enable her to conduct life-cycle ceremonies and provide spiritual support. While becoming an interfaith minister, she wrote and performed a one-person show about her life, including being a rape survivor. She continues to travel with this play to community programs around the country, generating discussions about sexual harassment. This play has become her ministry, and she is in the process of writing a new work.

As a kid, B. drove his teachers crazy, and frustrated his parents. He couldn't sit still or concentrate on organized learning. His mother sent him to the local ballet and tap studio, where he quickly found that dance was more fun than anything, channeled his boundless energy, and, blessedly, focused his mind in class and beyond. During his ten-plus years as a Broadway dancer, advancing to the leadership position of dance captain, he volunteered to teach dance to kids living in a homeless shelter. His heart went out to the young people, whose pain and anger he witnessed. He told them that their despair and suffering were their "art supplies," and led them to self-expression and self-discovery through their bodies. Knowing that he was heading for a double hip replacement, he pursued a graduate degree in creative arts therapy, and consequently created a nonprofit arts organization dedicated to teaching tap dance to young people facing complex life challenges.

Every career discovery story is different, of course. But I've supported dancers who are still focusing on performance find meaningful sideline work in such body-centered modalities as yoga, Gyrotonics, acupuncture, massage, personal training, and nutritional counseling—areas where they have experienced positive outcomes relating to their own body maintenance and healing. Those with design skills explore interior design, Web design, and social media marketing. Dancers often have math and science skills, interests they can return to when they foresee the end of their performing careers. Current clients of Career Transition For Dancers are receiving scholarships to pursue graduate training in medicine or veterinary medicine, physical therapy, genetic counseling, speech/language pathology, or dance therapy. The dance teachers focus on the students and populations they wish to inspire, and design their career paths accordingly. Our program stresses adopting an entrepreneurial mindset in all endeavors.

While performers are challenged on all sides, they also have a lot to teach the "civilian" workforce about living with uncertainty and the need for what we call a "portfolio career"—incorporating multiple income streams and projects. Also, the artistic view of work is that everyone involved brings unique skills to the whole—sometimes referred to as the "orchestral model." When people feel valued as individuals, the whole benefits. Performers also know a lot about rejection and loss. Their resiliency comes from the love of hard work and willingness to put up with the more stressful aspects in order to perform/create/express. Dancers bring discipline and active attention to all work throughout their lifetimes. They bring energy to ideas and images and to the people they reach.

Somewhere in my late 50s, my dormant dancer self-convinced me that I had let my body sit for way too many years, motivating me to pursue certification as a personal trainer and group fitness instructor. I delight in motivating others to dance and move in healthy—not perfectionist—ways to music. Best of all, I am dancing as a career counselor—observing and analyzing the energy, personality, values,

and life challenges of professional performers, collaborating with them in the choreography of their next career moves.

## BUILDING A CREATIVE LIFE

Barbara Taylor

I grew up in a small industrial town in upstate New York. My grandfather owned an awning business that he started in 1908, which had provided a decent income to support his family. The business floundered after WWII and needed new ideas and a new direction for it to survive. When my father took it over, he expanded into the marine industry and developed the business to become a major player. He worked hard and did well. Consequently, as a child, all of my parents' energy and focus was on making the business grow and be successful.

My father had a very creative side to him, which he used to develop new products. He was actually an innovator, although I don't think he acknowledged that aspect of himself. I'm not sure why, but not recognizing his own creativity also meant that he was unable to nurture the creative side of his children.

I am a creative person, but I didn't know that, and didn't make use of my own creativity for many years.

When I was growing up, any activity involving art or creative expression was not only discouraged but frowned upon in my immediate family. But my grandmother was different; she encouraged my creativity through play-acting. She had a dresser full of old clothing to be used as theater wardrobe. My sister and I would create all sorts of fantastical costumes and put on plays for her. She always respond-

ed enthusiastically, clapping and laughing at our efforts, enjoying our antics. She made me feel loved and appreciated, and she inspired my creative side.

But my parents didn't. As soon as I went home and related the experience to my parents, they quickly quieted me with their disdain and disapproval.

The educational system I grew up in did not encourage creativity in the classroom. Although art classes were a part of the school curriculum, it was looked upon as an easy class with no value at all. All art projects were the same. Every child had to do the same thing. But even though that was the rule, everyone still produced something entirely different and unique to themselves. We could all be looking at the same object, following the same instructions, and using the same materials, but each interpretation and execution was distinct from all the others. So where does creativity come from? How does this happen?

Even though I had more time and freedom to express myself as a child, I was not encouraged to do so. Certainly in my house the adage "out of sight and out of mind" applied to our daily lives, since I was little seen and seldom acknowledged for anything I may have done or created. I don't remember ever being encouraged to put pen or paint to paper to express myself. The one creative activity I remember well is finger painting. I liked the feeling of the cold, gooey paint oozing between my fingers as I applied it to the shiny, slick wet paper. I swirled my hands around, using different colors to create magnificent images. I could make anything from those colors. After I was finished, the paintings were hung on a line to dry until the next day, when I would take them down. The dried paper, curled at the edges, was not nearly as exciting. The colors were duller and I wondered what I had found so wondrous in my paintings the day before. I think it was the excitement of possibility and the process of actually creating an image that was exhilarating at the time, but what a disappointment to see the end result the next day. Part of creativity in one's life is a process and does not just happen. Perseverance and

acceptance play a huge part in our ability to access our creativity.

Opportunity is another. For example, when I was a child, my grandmother taught me how to sew on her old treadle machine. She was very particular about how she sewed. She would measure and measure again, cut, place pieces together, pin, and then sew. The sound of the repetitive movement of the treadle was soothing. I sewed with my grandmother sitting next to me and guiding me as I learned. Over the years, I followed patterns meticulously, altered them as needed, and sewed to my heart's content. But if a garment did not work according to the pattern, I settled for it as it was, wearing it or discarding it altogether. As much as I enjoyed sewing, I never knew the true joy of creating garments until well into my middle years. I volunteered to help at an event for teens called "Fashion Freestyle." Twenty-five teens came together for a weekend. Fabric, notions, and accessories were provided, along with many volunteers who offered to bring sewing machines and sew with the participants as they made their own creations. I worked with a teenage girl who wanted to make a dress to wear for her mother's wedding. I had only made dresses from patterns and she had never sewn before. What a challenge! We looked through the piles of fabric that had been donated for the event and found a beautiful golden-yellow piece that she loved. As we held it up to her, she started envisioning what she wanted to create. We sketched on paper the style she was imagining, held the fabric up to her, pinned it here and there, and started to cut. I had a knot in my stomach as I made that first snip into the lovely material. As I started to cut and fit and sew, my stomach relaxed and I became immersed in the creation with her. We had great fun finding contrasting fabrics for highlights, and ribbons and buttons that complemented the fabric. We sewed a little kick pleat in the skirt with a bright pink fabric that perked up the dress in a way I never would have done previously. As we worked together, my heart began to open, and the creative juices flowed for the rest of the weekend. I can still picture every detail of that dress, and how beautiful and proud she looked wearing it. At the end of the weekend, the teens put

on a fashion show as a fundraiser for the homeless in the community. We were all in awe of the fashions that were created in just two days. When everyone strutted down the runway to music, displaying their creations for all to see, it was truly magnificent! We had spent two days as a group of individuals sharing and talking about where our clothing comes from in the world, who makes what we wear, and how we can all be ethical purchasers. This process, for many reasons, was an epiphany for me and a turning point in my own creative life. I realized I could make anything—anything at all—without a pattern, just by having the materials at hand.

Creativity is a mindset, a way of looking at yourself without judgment and allowing anything to happen. This was one of the most freeing experiences of my life. I was able to clearly see what happens when you give yourself a chance.

For years, my sister would tell me how creative I was because I would try my hand at so many different kinds of arts or crafts and do them well. I never saw this as artistic or creative, just a way of learning a skill that anyone could do as long as they learned the steps and the process. I didn't value my own abilities, perhaps because, when I was growing up, it was so devalued. That attitude became part of my own outlook on the arts. I had internalized the belief that the arts are not worth spending time on or doing because they are not worthwhile. My father always put a high value on achieving and making a contribution to society, but that did not include the arts. He felt that it was laudable to help someone in need but not to enhance their lives through any of the arts, even music. He didn't understand.

Unfortunately, I carried that attitude into adulthood and passed it on to my own children. When they were young, I was more concerned about putting a roof over their heads and food on the table than devoting time to the arts. I adopted my father's perspective, almost automatically. I was a single mother bringing up two young children, so I did not have the time or energy to address anything other than the necessities of living. There was no time for leisure

activities such as painting. All my energy went toward fulfilling the very basic needs of life. By the time my day was finished, I was too exhausted to do anything but go to bed and get a good night's sleep, so that I could begin again the next day.

When my oldest daughter was in kindergarten, she had to make a poster about herself and her life. The idea was to portray who she was: age, height, family members, pets, home, and what she wanted to be when she grew up, as well as her likes and dislikes. She very clearly expressed her dislike of my smoking. She placed a picture of a package of Viceroy cigarettes squarely in the middle of the area where she had to express her dislikes. When she brought the poster home, I was astonished at how clearly her message came across. Her teacher had found a way for her students to creatively express who they were, how they felt, and what they looked forward to in their future lives, without dialogue, but expressing themselves visually. I see clearly today, sixty years later, the poster my daughter created in her classroom, which so clearly expressed her inner self at just five years old. All she needed was right there inside her, and provided with encouragement and materials, she was able to express herself beautifully, which I admire to this day.

I lived in Ireland for many years as an adult. When I first moved there, I was amazed at the talent everyone seemed to possess. For every social gathering or event, one had to bring a party piece to contribute to the evening—a song, spoken word, or an instrument to play. This was expected, and most everyone participated. It was encouraged within the home to develop whatever artistic skills one possessed to be shared within the community. At many a late night in the local pubs, a sing-along occurred; a way to carry on the history and culture of the country. I loved those times. They lifted our spirits and created a true sense of community.

When I moved to Ireland, I had to clean out the house I had been living in for twenty years. I remember sitting in my kitchen and going through the cupboards, finding so many of my projects: pulling out the inkle loom, the beading projects, unfinished knitted hats and

scarves, bits of paintings; all the creative projects I had taken on during the years but never finished, life always getting in the way. I often felt that more important tasks had to be done. But a thread of creativity ran throughout my life, even though it did not have time to come forth. Creativity would rear its head, even when I was not aware of it. This was a basic urge that kept cropping up, not wanting to be dampened down, and springing forth even when I did not realize it.

I moved to Ireland in the mid-eighties to work in a manufacturing plant. We processed raw glass for the automotive, marine, and construction industries. Although the process seemed very straightforward, there was room for improvement, so I was delighted to have the opportunity to find new ways for myself and the people working in the plant to enhance the manufacturing systems through their creativity. Tying together work, creativity, and daily life was what I've always wanted to do, and I finally had a chance.

During those years, my creativity was expressed through my work. As more leisure time became available to me, I started to explore new avenues of expression. I joined local art classes and connected with a group of people who explored various mediums, such as oils, watercolors, and acrylics, for self-expression. For several summers, I volunteered at a youth camp in the UK, catering to teenagers. I worked in the art barn, providing beads for the youth and adults to make their own creations. As we sat around the beading table, they not only made a keepsake for themselves, but we also created a safe and supportive space for them to express their own thoughts and concerns about their lives. It was a most rewarding experience for me. Here too, creativity and life intersected.

So what do I want my grandchildren to know about creativity? That they are creative, first of all. All of us are. Another thing is that it is never too late to express yourself. I look back on my life and know that it has always been a part of who I am, even though for many years I did not actively pursue outlets to express myself. Now I have plenty of time, and I find that one of the biggest issues is pro-

crastination. I can so easily put off until tomorrow, or next week, the projects I am keen to take on. I think there are ups and downs around procrastination. Even when I put something off, it is always in the back of my mind, working away, so that when I finally get down to it, I actually have something in my mind to start with. So although I put it off, when I finally get to it, I can dive right in. Something to keep in mind is that sometimes it is easier and more productive to work under pressure or under a deadline.

Freeing my mind from the worries of everyday living also helps. I find it soothing to have music in the background or total silence; I can immerse myself in the creativity that comes through whatever medium I have chosen. It is most meditative; I lose touch with time, and can work for hours without realizing how much time has passed.

I also find that I need to step away periodically; take a walk and refresh myself, so that I can be renewed to step in again.

When creativity chooses me, my heart soars as I imagine the possibilities; the wonderful painting I will create with my watercolors and paper, or the beautiful quilt I will sew with all the scraps of fabric in my closet, or the fabulous sounds I will make on my drums. I lie in bed in the middle of the night, wide awake in my mind, creating all these delightful things, and cannot wait to get up in the morning and begin. That's one of the ironies of imagination.

I finally see the daylight peeking through my window so I can arise and start my day. After a leisurely breakfast, and with a steaming hot cup of coffee in my hand, I enter my studio. I pull out the crisp white watercolor paper and prepare my paints. I choose each color carefully, so there is a range of hues of primary colors—a blue, a yellow, a red—maybe several of each one, so I can create warm and cool tones of the many colors I can create from them. I stretch my paper on a board and place it on my easel, making sure it is the right height and angle for painting. I organize my brushes, palette, and water so they are all within easy reach. And now it is time to begin.

Where are all the marvelous ideas I had in the middle of the night? They are gone, buried deep within my unconscious mind, not

to be reached during daylight. My mind becomes a blank! Nothing comes to me! I stare at the bright, blank watercolor paper and look at my paints in despair. Where is it? Where did it all go? It was so crystal clear in the dark shadows of the night, but no more. What to do?

There is nothing to do but to take a deep breath, wet my brush, dip it in paint, and splash color onto paper—wow—my mind begins to loosen and I start to see possibility. Yes, that splotch of red could be the beginning of a poppy, and that dark blue could be the center; the mixture of blue and yellow is emerging as large green leaves in the background, and that little splotch of yellow with black is beginning to look like a honeybee landing to sample the nectar to take back to her hive.

My heart and mind have opened as I place color on my paper to create this painting.

Suddenly the day has disappeared; time has flown as I created the painting which, in the morning, had seemed so impossible to approach. I stand back and assess my day's work, and I am quite pleased and surprised at the result.

Of course, the self-critic quickly returns as I peer at the work and think maybe it's not so good—that it should probably be put away and not be seen by anyone but me. Despair sets in again.

I have my chamomile tea before bed, and as darkness descends as I fall asleep, my mind soars and I think of the marvelous painting I will create tomorrow—one that will surely be good enough to share with others. Eternal optimism returns!

My creative life continues each day as I feel compelled to find a way to express myself. This has been a thread throughout my life; connecting my inner creative world to the outer experiences of my life, even when this does not seem apparent. I find it challenging and satisfying to experience the wonder and excitement of creating something new, in whatever way I can. And I still try.

**BIOGRAPHIES**

**IAN BEARCE** is currently the Head of Content for The Mill in New York. He creatively problem solves production challenges on a daily basis for projects across The Mill's US offices. He works closely with the Creative Directors, Directors, Art Directors, Executive Producers, Producers, and Clients to find solutions to the budget, schedule and creative requests of projects.

**KEVIN CHRISTOFFERSEN** continues to be a self-starter entrepreneur taking the initiative of having lived in five countries and working internationally on a wide variety of multi-media projects over the course of two decades. Recently, he has begun to fulfill his film producing dream through Legacy Pictures and TriStar Global Entertainment serving as an Executive Producer and Managing Partner of both companies.

**VINCENT CIULLA**, award winning designer, plans and creates visual experiences for museums, historic sites, parks and schools, appealing to the mind and heart. His work is concerned with creating new experiences for participants.

**ESTHER COHEN** writer, teaches, curates, and is a creative consultant for WDI.

**JIM CRABTREE** has served Cumberland County Playhouse in 46 of its 52 seasons as a professional theater in rural Tennessee, 40 of them as CEO/Producing Director, and is author of book and lyrics for a dozen plays and musicals, many rooted in Tennessee history,

including FRONT PAGE NEWS. This historically accurate play with music (adapted and written with Nashville songwriter Bobby Taylor, based on a script by Deb Harbin), is about the 1925 Scopes “Monkey” Trial, with 2017 its fourth summer in the historic Scopes Trial Courtroom in Dayton, TN, 50 miles from his ancestral home in Crossville, TN. A grad of St. Peter’s College Seminary, Middle TN State U, and Yale School of Drama, he’s married since 1968 to his musical director, Ann Windrow of Columbia, TN.

**MICHAEL KAMBER** has traveled the world as a photojournalist, covering conflicts for The New York Times. His photographs have appeared worldwide. He’s the founder of the Bronx Documentary Center, (BDC) to share photography, film, and new media to the underserved Bronx community. <http://bronxdoc.org>

**VICTORIA KERESZI**, filmmaker and photographer, oversees the WDI Arts and Culture Program creating opportunities for workers to find their voices through the arts. She also is working with WDI and others on the Creative Economy initiative to help stimulate and retain the growth of creative careers in the Capital Region.

**JUSTIN K. RIVERS** is a writer and performer who lives in Cranesville, NY. He is also a company member of the MopCo Improv Theatre in Schenectady.

**ANNMARIE LANESEY**, a digital artist, software applications developer, and serial entrepreneur, is moved by a passion for addressing social and economic inequality. She is energized by the vision of a vibrant, inclusive economy and the creation of new structures for full political and economic participation. In 2008 she founded Greane Tree Technology, a custom software development firm in Troy, NY and in 2016 she established Albany Can Code, a not-for-profit organization working to bring opportunity and training to the New York’s Capital Region through educational programs.

**DAVID THOMAS LLOYD** co-founded Adirondack Studios in 1975. He still resides in Warrensburg, NY with his wife, mezzo-soprano Theresa Treadway. He attributes any innate creativity to his parents, tenor and opera impresario David Lloyd & concert violinist Maria Lloyd. [www.adkstudios.com](http://www.adkstudios.com)

**ZIGI LOWENBERG**, performance poet with the jazzpoetry ensemble UpSurge!, has appeared at music festivals, rallies, clubs, and universities from NYC to New Orleans to San Francisco. UpSurge!’s two independent CD recordings have garnered critical acclaim. Zigi is a member of the National Writers Union and the Radical Poets Collective and her poetry has appeared in the poetry journal Rabbit and Rose. Zigi and her husband, Raymond Nat Turner live in Harlem and Oakland. Find her [@ZigarinaZigi](https://twitter.com/ZigarinaZigi) and [upsurgejazz.com](http://upsurgejazz.com)

**MARIANELA MEDRANO, PhD**, poet, writer and psychotherapist from the Dominican Republic living in Connecticut since 1990.

**ED MURPHY** is the Director of the Workforce Development Institute. He’s a writer, motivational speaker, and reflective practitioner.

**MOSES NAGEL** is an audio technician living in upstate New York. Also, he is a father, farmer, musician and soccer player.

**DONNA SCHAPER** is Senior Minister of Judson Memorial Church in New York City. She is the author of 38 books, most recently I Heart Francis: Letters to the Pope from an Unlikely Admirer.

**PATRICIA (PATCH) SCHWADRON** has worked as a career counselor to performing artists and entertainment industry professionals at The Actors Fund for 18 years. She started her professional life, in her teens, as a classical ballet dancer with The Boston Ballet. [www.actorsfund.org](http://www.actorsfund.org)

## CREATIVE LIVES

**BARBARA TAYLOR** is a visual artist who works in a variety of mediums. She has a B.A. in Education and has taken a range of art classes to develop her sensibility and skill in self-expression through the arts. She was born in Gloversville, New York, lived many years in Ireland and currently resides in Saratoga Springs, New York.

