

Keynote speech by Marcela Lorca

Northfield Public Library – centennial celebration 4/25/10
Northfield Arts Guild

Hello everybody,
I am so honored to be here today
to celebrate this important day in Northfield's history.
I am a theater director and choreographer
and I am part of the artistic staff at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis.

A couple of months ago I took a short vacation
to go visit my family in Chile South America.
While I was there...
right at that time
a massive earthquake hit...
Wow... 8.8... the 5th strongest earthquake ever recorded.
When the earth moves under you...
with such power -
you are reminded of how small you are...
how brief your life is in the large scope of things
it's just a glimpse...
It is a humbling experience...

On the days following the earthquake
you hear many stories...
some are wondrous and surprising,
some are very painful and terrifying...
and as you listen and share these tales
you're also reminded that everyone in this planet
has a unique experience...
different from anyone else's
a most precious and personal story...
That human beings
create, throughout their lives -
and weave through time and circumstances -
their own unique story...
When I was invited to come and speak to you today
my mind immediately went to the countless stories
that a library holds,
and the nurturing that an arts center
provides to each individual in its community...
So allow me to reflect on life's stories and the importance of the Arts...

There is the story we happen to live... the one we weave...
but there are also the stories we imagine
the stories we make up
and the stories that appear in our dreams...

We can be moved, enlightened, delighted, terrified,
amused by them...

So what do we do with all these stories?
the ones we experience
the ones we imagine
the ones we dream
the ones we create... ?

They seem to live waiting to be told...
There's some fundamental and very human desire to capture them,
to not let go of the ones that seem precious or important.....

Why is that? And How do we do it?

In thinking about the **why** I can't help but think
of the role of writers and artists...
they cannot help but to be intensely curious and imaginative...
and seem to always find ways to bring stories to life...
Some of them do it in a conscious effort
to share an experience that moved them deeply.
Some of them are hungry
to wrestle with issues that concern our collective experience.
There's much passion involved in this process, much drive and persistence...
hours, months, years of research, labor and sheer dedication...
Their effort is often fueled by the belief
that we learn from each other's experience...
across time
across space...
And then again writers could not survive without readers... those who are intensely interested and
curious about other's lives and experiences.
Joseph Campbell says:
"We seek perhaps not a meaning for our lives,
but a shared experience of having been alive."

Then there's the How?
How do we share stories?
How do we express them?

We can simply tell them to somebody else
or we can write them for others to read.
We can also enact them, sing them, paint them... or dance them...
The question is: what vehicle will better communicate our story,
our dream, our quest...
This is where the Arts come in
The Arts provide the tools to flesh them out
the structure and the vehicle --
be it a stage, a piece of paper, or a clump of clay...

The Arts can sometimes help us speak about something
that's not yet tangible...an instinct, a premonition, a message...
elusive sensations that warn us - or provoke us to imagine the future,
or maybe to re imagine the past...

As a theater director
I get to play with words
with actors' imaginations
with music, dance, and visual arts.
And with all these tools I endeavor
to move an audience through a story...

I tell my acting students
that they are the messengers of society
that in bringing characters and stories to life
they have a most important role.
They are the ones who pose the questions
the ones who keep audiences
engaged in their communities
coming together to simply be inspired
or to wrestle with social, political
personal, or historical issues ...

Joe Dowling, the Guthrie's Artistic Director often talks
about the vital relationship between the author, the actor and the audience.
He says: "New writing is the lifeblood of the theater and any theater that ignores the voices around us
runs the risk of becoming a museum where only the past can be explored. The dramatist is the
chronicler of our concerns, of your hopes, fears and dreams. He or she tells the story of our time."

Our world and lives nowadays
often seem rushed and confused
some of our media penetrates our homes
with steady streams of
fearful news or senseless gossip...

It is crucial in our society -
it is vital that we maintain
a curiosity for what's really around us
a vigilance that protects goodness,
human development, truth
creativity, generosity and justice....

Throughout the years,
what I've learned about our Minnesota audiences
is that they are intellectually sophisticated
and artistically hungry...
Not everyone decides to be an artist
but I believe there is an artist in each one of us...

I am often moved to create by my secret belief
that each of our audience members possesses an artistic soul...
Yes, each of you have an artistic soul...
You might not remember or think of it this way...
but when you were a baby
I am sure you loved to sing
you couldn't help but dance when you heard music
and the paintings you created as a child
were without a doubt absolutely BRILLIANT!
Nowadays, you may be channeling your creative talent through your work,
your reading, your cooking, your caring for others or for the environment...

Artistic institutions such as yours
give children and adults
the opportunities to exercise their creativity.
They applaud ingenuity, uniqueness
and develop the power of human imagination...

Garland Wright, who was Artistic Director of the Guthrie from 1986 to 1995 said:
“It was inspiration and instinct that led the first human to lift a rock and transform it into a tool – not
reliance on fact. And it was the instinct for expression that led that same creature to invent language
and lay the foundation for rational thinking. The human was an artist before he was a scholar, and
imagination is what unites him with every other single member of his species.”

In much the same ways plants need water to survive
the human soul needs inspiration, beauty and discovery...
Cultures need their rituals
their celebrations, their knowledge
and we all collectively need understanding
and wisdom in order to live in harmony.
Arts and literature
allow us to learn about each other's stories
The more we learn
the more we open our minds
we open our hearts to accept
what's different about us
and to celebrate what unites us.
We can even learn to love our differences
and appreciate the beauty of cultures
and individual expressions of all kinds.

So...

Why are the arts important for our communities?

Because in providing creative means
to share our individual and collective stories
we learn to appreciate and love

what makes each one of us unique and different.
We develop the courage to look at life in all its complexity
deeply and fully...
We learn to face our challenges with inspiration
to value the power of the truth...
In nurturing our artistic souls,
we develop an appetite to contribute
the very best part of ourselves to our community.

Arts foster peace
Arts promote understanding
Arts cultivate appreciation.

I think of this library that holds so many precious stories,
an arts center that inspires learning and creativity
and I celebrate today their contributions to the human experience.

The Guthrie Theater has been my artistic home for 20 years...

We at the Guthrie are proud to support institutions such the Northfield Library –
and the Northfield Arts Guild.

We celebrate with you the power of literature and the arts,
and the life of these institutions
that inspire, educate and provide “artistic homes” to those in this community.

Happy Centennial celebration...