

Aims and objectives: During the summer of 2014, I will write a first draft of a play tentatively titled "Trading" based on my experiences corresponding with a young woman in Northern Ireland in the late 1980's and early 1990's. The narrative will bring to the public either in South Jersey, Philadelphia or both places, an examination of intercultural exchange, global citizenry, engagement with recent history, female friendship, LGBT themes, and the psychology of becoming an adult.

Background work already accomplished: In the late 80's when I was fourteen, I sent away to a place listed in the back of *Rolling Stone* that advertised a penpal matching. I filled out a form, was assigned several penpals and letters, some of which were perfectly interesting, and one of which was a young woman living in Northern Ireland, Emma Marks (not her real name) a woman who lived with her parents and sister and pets, all named Max.

I was not prepared for the way in which the exchange with Emma Marks (not her real name) opened up my mind to the world and remains the experience that made me feel I was beginning finally my adulthood. Her first letter was zany and hilarious and forthright. I asked was it worrying to live with bomb threats from the IRA and she said it was something that went by as one did one's ironing, she herself felt deathly fear at the idea of tornado sirens in Kentucky. She asked if black people blush. I asked her how much people hated the Queen. She told me about the political satire *Spitting Image* and *Absolutely Fabulous* which offered a barbed critique of politics and consumer society in a way I needed, appreciated and wasn't seeing anywhere else. After two or three years she wrote me that she was actually gay despite the boyfriend she'd mentioned and I immediately went to the library to get out all the books about it. I eventually visited her in London while she happened to be in a rather dank hospital, then later when she had her first girlfriend and lived in a council flat. One of the last things we did was sleep once in an abandoned graffiti'd building with her rather down and out friend. This was cultural exchange I believe really changed us as people, broke in upon my relatively safe middle class upbringing.

I related the experience of corresponding with her to a friend last year who said, "That's a movie." While I can imagine this as a screenplay quite easily, I feel more compelled to try to draft it first as a play since, realistically speaking, it would reach more people and convey the importance of understanding another culture and global issues, of the vitality and potential of adolescent intellectual growth and friendship, etc. This seems a message that would be pertinent in the South Jersey region and to the community of Stockton undergraduates.

The work aligns with my other projects in its concern for stepping out of one's subject position to examine the true nature of the self, and the ability to see others and other cultures, clearly.

I have already drafted an outline of this play including a fairly complete list of scenes, main events, and a relative arc of action. I have had conversations with people at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia about the options for producing a drama in the area, and am seeking other venues. I have also looked into external grants that would apply for this material, such as a grant from the New Jersey Arts Council.

Statement of procedures or methodology: For two weeks in the summer, I will research the craft of playwriting. While I did study plays quite extensively in college, I feel that reading books like *Karoo* by Steve Teisich would help me translate the experience into a well-developed manuscript. Other books I will read include *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader* edited by Michael Huxley and Noel Witts and *The Art and Craft of Playwriting* by Jeffrey Hatcher.

The next three weeks will be spent actually planning and building the scenes and drafting them in full.

The next three weeks of summer, I will ask my friend Lesley Jenike, an actor and former colleague, to help me continue to shape the main pieces in the play and see where more concentration might be needed. I won't be revising, but continuing to build what I have in terms of scenes and plot points.

While I am slated to begin work on a prose manuscript for my sabbatical in the spring of 2015, I am confident that a first draft of this play can be completed in the summer months and not interfere with the execution of the other work. This piece will be set aside once the first draft is completed. I will not pursue revision or production during the scheduled sabbatical period as that project has priority in my artistic goals.

Importance or Value: The correspondence between Emma Marks and myself was intense—two letters a week between Kentucky and Europe, for something like eight years that culminated in phone calls, and two visits one of which was in hospital. While I intend to fictionalize the events, I intend to keep the substance of the relationship we formed, particularly the ways it engaged my mind in global citizenry, quite literally in political engagement and social critique, and in the possibility of undertaking meaningful travel to enrich friendship. I hope to depict the importance of female friendship and the importance of support and sensitivity for adolescents with LGBT identities. The play would help underscore to an audience the importance of exchange between cultures and the understanding of others.

Further Research or Study: After my draft is finished, I will continue to polish the draft, seeking out time at writing residency to do so. I would continue to develop a relationship with a theatre that might be interested in producing it and seek financial support for the production through outside grants, such as the several grants available for such a project through the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, the McKnight Foundation, and a community grant from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation.