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*In Pursuit of Wellbeing: The Purpose, Process, Pleasure, and Pain of Forming
Boomerang Intergenerational Theatre Company*

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Boomerang Intergenerational Theatre Company brings together artists of a wide variety of ages to create live theatre from the inception of an idea to performance, focusing on shared social, economic, and political issues. By exploring the dramatic form through role-playing, script development, and production, elders from the public and students from The College of Wooster, a small, private liberal arts college, create an environment where physical and mental wellness flourish. As a result, their shared experience narrows the gap between generations and develops ongoing collaboration between campus and community members.

Successes and challenges accompany every new artistic endeavor, and the process of bringing *Boomerang* to life brought many joys and trials. The journey began in the fall of 2009 with a course entitled *The Artist as Entrepreneur*. Team-taught, as an extension of the Center for Entrepreneurship, the class encouraged students to develop their enterprising skills through writing business plans for their own artistic endeavors, as well as engaging in the practical

application of being part of an emerging venture: *Boomerang*. The class consisted of nine students from a variety of disciplines: art, theatre, economics, communication, and mathematics. They were joined by eight elders from the community, ranging in age from 65 to 82 years old. Together, they spent one class period per week immersed in the creative endeavors of product development. While Shirley served as the faculty member, Jamie, a senior theatre major, joined the class as a teaching assistant and, perhaps more importantly, a co-creator and co-director of the eventual production.

Simultaneously, Jamie was working on her Senior Independent Study Project (I.S.)¹ entitled *Theatre for Physical and Mental Wellbeing: Exploring the Therapeutic Benefits of Intergenerational Theatre*. The purpose of the study was to provide foundational research that answered the critical question: does intergenerational theatre support mental and physical wellbeing for its participants? Ultimately, the paper became an examination of creative arts programs and their therapeutic nature, culminating in an investigation of the introductory season of *Boomerang*. In addition to the written thesis, Jamie prepared a documentary film that traced the process of creating *Boomerang*, providing a wealth of anecdotal observations and qualitative data relating to the success of the company in relation to mental and physical benefits.

Our² work relied on data from a recent analysis conducted by the late Dr. Gene D. Cohen, the first Director of the Center on Aging, Health & Humanities at George Washington University. In 2001, the National Endowment for the Arts³ armed Dr. Cohen with the necessary

¹ Senior Independent Study (I.S) at the College of Wooster is a yearlong investigation resulting in a major research paper for all students, and for most students majoring in the fine and performing arts the addition of an art exhibit or performance, as is typically the case in the Department of Theatre and Dance. Students work one-on-one with an advisor who provides guidance throughout the research, writing, and production process.

² While both authors have contributed to the writing of this essay and reflect, at times, from their own individual experiences, the story is a shared one. To maximize readability, the authors will, from this point on, use general first person to avoid switching back from I (Jamie) to I (Shirley).

resources to embark on “the first formal study using an experiment designed with a control group, examining the influences of professionally conducted, participatory art programs on the general health, mental health and social activities of older people” (Cohen 10). *The Creativity and Aging Study* took place in three locations with three different participants: Elders Share the Arts in Brooklyn, The Center for Elders and Youth in the Arts in San Francisco, and the Levine School of Music in Washington, D.C. The 300 participants in the three-year study ranged between the required minimum age of 65 and 100 years old, with the average age being 80. The participants were divided into two groups:

The intervention-group participants were all involved in intensive community-based art programs that were conducted by professional artists and that met twice weekly for a period of approximately nine months a year for two years, with additional time for concerts, exhibitions, and the like. Intervention participants also spent time between sessions on practicing and ongoing artistic work. The control group was actively involved in a range of community activities, but not intensive art programs conducted by professional artists. (Cohen 11)

One year into the study Dr. Cohen found some startling but hopeful results from the D.C. group. In terms of overall health, those in the intervention group reported improvement while those in the control group reported a decline in health, including an increase in visits to the doctor, an increase in medications, and a greater number of falls. In terms of mental health, Cohen discovered that morale was up, depression down, and a sense of loneliness declined with the intervention group. In addition, the activities of the intervention group increased by two in

³ Additional funding was provided by “the Center for Mental Health Services, of the Department of Health and Human Services; the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) of the National Institutes of Health; AARP and the National Retired Teachers Association; the Stella and Charles Guttman Foundation; and the International Foundation for Music Research.” Gene D. Cohen, “Research on Creativity and Aging: The Positive Impact of the Arts on Health and Illness,” *Generations* (Spring 2006), 10-11.

just one year. As Cohen notes, “What is remarkable in this study is that more than a year into the study, the art [intervention] groups, in contrast to the control groups, are showing areas of actual stabilization and improvement apart from decline—despite an average age that is greater than life expectancy” (Cohen 13). With Cohen’s findings in mind, we set out to collect our own data⁴ regarding the effects of cultural activities, specifically intergenerational theatre, upon elders in our community.

Throughout the summer we planned the classroom sessions. We agreed that there should be a through-line for our improvisations that would guide us toward a script. We wanted a theme that could be universal to all of the age groups represented within the company. After much thought and deliberation, we chose the theme “Letting Go” because of the possibilities that it might entail, such as letting go of a loved one, letting go of a preconceived notion, or even just letting go in the sense of letting your hair down. We were inspired by an anonymous poem.

LETTING GO TAKES LOVE

To let go does not mean to stop caring, it means I can't do it for someone else.

To let go is not to cut myself off, it's the realization I can't control another.

To let go is not to enable, but allow learning from natural consequences.

To let go is to admit powerlessness, which means the outcome is not in my hands.

To let go is not to try to change or blame another, it's to make the most of myself.

To let go is not to care for, but to care about.

To let go is not to fix, but to be supportive.

To let go is not to judge, but to allow another to be a human being. . .

To let go is not to be protective, it's to permit another to face reality.

⁴ Information collection consisted of a series of systematic interviews of all participants conducted by Jamie as part of her Independent Study. Interviews were then transcribed and analyzed as qualitative data.

To let go is not to deny, but to accept. . . .

To let go is not to criticize or regulate anybody, but to try to become what I dream I can be.

To let go is not to regret the past, but to grow and live for the future.

To let go is to fear less and love more . . . ⁵

Pinpointing one particular line of the poem for each week of improvisation, we outlined our sessions according to the methods that would work best for *Boomerang*.

As part of her Independent Study, Jamie researched several creative arts programs established for elders, carefully examining their methods and successes. One example is Elders Share the Arts in New York City, a thirty-year success story of an intergenerational creative arts program. She also examined Grandparents Living Theatre Company developed by Joy C. Reilly. Based in Columbus, Ohio, Grandparents is wholly comprised of elders. Among those studied, we chose to model our organization after the New York based intergenerational theatre company Roots & Branches, whose structure and methodology came closest to our own.

In keeping with Roots & Branches' approach to intergenerational collaboration, each session began with time for greetings followed by fairly typical physical and vocal warm-ups. Stretching exercises were specifically chosen to accommodate the physical challenges of the elders while best preparing everyone for the task at hand. Warm-ups were followed by a physical and vocal activity or theatre game, using the whole group to get our energy and creativity flowing. We then moved on to improvisation scenarios based on our theme of "Letting Go." We always ended the sessions with a ritual closing borrowed from Roots & Branches

⁵ Anonymous, "Letting Go," <<http://www.community4me.com/LETGO.html>>.

entitled a “thank you circle,” where we would stand in a circle and thank each other for the risks taken and the positive aspects of the session.⁶

The topics of the improvised scenarios were purposefully chosen to challenge assumptions and create the possibility for interesting dramatic tension. These ranged from an elder choosing to get a tattoo despite the negative reaction from her grandchild to discussions of sexual freedoms in both dorm rooms and nursing homes. The somewhat controversial topics we addressed were met with mixed opinions and reservations for some of the company members. Within the first month, for example, one of our elder members elected to leave the group after participating in a scene that discussed the use of condoms, which he felt went against his beliefs and comfort level. While we were sad to lose him, we resisted the urge to “play it safe,” so we plunged forward, continuing to push the envelope as the semester progressed.

Equally challenging were our improvisations involving the issue of war. Overall, the topic seemed easier to approach in this style because the opinion being relayed was not necessarily shared by the performer; it was the stance of the character. Therefore, participants were more willing to explore and even represent obviously stereotypical views. The discussions that followed the improvisation, however, were trickier. For instance, one of our elder participants referred to World War II as “The JUST War,” which was not necessarily the same way our two Asian international students viewed it. Fortunately, by this time, we had developed a rapport with one another that fostered acceptance of each person’s individual point of view, and we were all able to reflect on why our perspectives differed, bridging both cultural and generational gaps.

⁶ For a full description of the Roots & Branches company see, Arthur Strimling, *Roots & Branches: Creating Intergenerational Theatre*, Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2004.

Some of our scenarios came from current happenings in the news. For example, at one class period, we shared a news item about an alarming outbreak of sexually transmitted diseases in nursing homes, which turned into a scene where an elder mentor, Ed, informs his younger apprentice, Danny, that Chlamydia and safe sex are as much concerns for elders as they are for students. The improvisation eventually made it into the final script, starting as a skit we lovingly called “Sex Ed” in its rough draft phase. As the scene from the final script begins, we find 19-year old Danny having coffee with his boss, Ed, a 70-year old local painter who believes he needs to educate his protégé in the ways of the world.

ED Chuckles to himself as he pulls a strip of condoms from his overall pocket.

ED. Here you go my boy. My gift to you. A good boy scout is always prepared!

Mortified, Danny tries to hide the condoms as fast as he can and realizes Julie is coming back with his check. She lays it on the table then walks away.

DANNY. Holy . . . Ed, what has gotten into you?

ED. *(Still beaming from ear to ear.)* Oh, I could just tell there was something “pressing” on your mind, and I thought I would make it easier on you. It’s always a little embarrassing your first time.

DANNY. Uh, Ed I never told you it was my first anything. I really don’t want to talk about this . . .

ED. Well, I could just tell you’d never done it before.

DANNY. What? HOW can you tell a thing like THAT?

ED. I just knew you had never bought condoms. The checkout girl might see what she is ringing up *(laughs)*. I remember my first time buying them. They used to be behind the counter, you know, had to ask the pharmacist for them. Boy, talk about embarrassing *(chuckling)*. That pharmacist would stare you down and you just knew he was going to print your name in the daily newspaper for all the world to see. But it got better after that and . . .

DANNY. You know, you shouldn’t have run out and bought these just on my account.

ED. I didn’t. I like you, but not that much. No, these came from my supply

DANNY. (*Almost spilling his coffee.*) Your supply? Not to be mean or anything, but I just assumed you were done with that . . . stuff.

ED. (*Chuckling again*) Ah, the arrogance of youth. Snow on the roof doesn't mean there isn't a fire in the furnace. Did you think the tools quit working after some imaginary expiration date or something?

DANNY. Well . . . no . . . but . . . I don't know. I guess I just thought . . . even if you still were . . . I mean at your age . . . condoms?

ED. Oh, yes. My buddy Gary lives over at the Shady Vista retirement community, and let me tell you what. There is nothing going on in your little co-ed dorm that isn't going on over at the Shady Vista. Anyhow, do you know what two of their members were treated for just last week?

DANNY. (*Seeing Julie coming over to the table.*) Uh, let me guess.

ED. (*Just as Julie arrives*) CHLAMYDIA! Two of 'em mind you.

DANNY. I am so sorry, Julie, uh . . . he gets a little excited about his pecan pie.

JULIE. No problem. Enjoy. (*She fills their coffee and exits giggling.*)

DANNY. Ed, please, this is getting embarrassing.

ED. All I'm saying is it's a jungle out there, Danny my boy. No matter what your age! (*He reaches into his pocket and pulls out an envelope of money.*) Ah, before I forget, here you go.

DANNY. Thanks, Ed.

ED. It's been a pleasure. You just let me know if you're in the painting mood next summer. I'll have a spot waiting for you. (*Ed digs into his pie.*)

DANNY. Will do. I need to run an errand, if you don't mind.

ED. Have at it. And don't forget what we talked about.

DANNY. Oh believe me it's a moment ingrained in my memory forever! (*Danny exits.*)⁷

It was important to discuss the relevance of issues such as sex and sexuality and then play with them during the improvisations so that we could draw on the most pertinent and dramatic topics

⁷ Shirley Huston-Findley, Jamie Morris, and Alex Paolino-Gibson, *Letting Go*, 2009, 16-18.

for the final script. The discussions also allowed each of us to confront our own prejudices, and they brought us closer as an ensemble, working to fight against negative or harmful socially constructed ideologies and labels.

Ultimately, everyone agreed that the main message of the script would be breaking down or “letting go” of stereotypes, especially regarding issues of age (both young and old) and aging. With that in mind, the scenarios were developed into more cohesive episodes. As the script matured, we brought the drafts to our weekly sessions, read them aloud, and gathered feedback. Collaboration became one of the most important tools for solidifying the involvement of the company members. Many of the participants relayed that it felt so good to be given a voice in the development and writing of the script. At this point in the process we detected a palpable sense of ownership of the entire project.

During the rehearsal process, however, our love of collaboration turned problematic when actors, particularly the elders, found it difficult to move from collaborative writers to performers, which was understandable. Our challenge became walking the fine line between encouraging input to solidify a script that met the general needs of the overall production versus serving the individual performers. For example, one of the scenarios woven into the final text did not come from our improvised scenes; it came from a ten-minute play written by a student in the playwriting class conducted during the first semester. Senior theatre major Alex Paolino-Gibson had developed a moving story involving two elderly women, one of whom, Ruthie, was in the early stages of dementia. Ruthie had decided that she would meet the end of her life the way she wanted. Her lifelong friend, Harriet, provided the tension against her desires, and they engaged in a comical and touching debate. Because of its obvious link to our overall theme, we wove Alex’s script into our scenarios and cast two of our elders in the roles. In addition, Alex joined

Jamie and me as a co-director/writer. Because the elders had been integral in developing the other scenarios, they did not hesitate to see themselves as collaborators in this scene as well, including rewriting lines and circumstances. They sometimes changed them without the input of the author or a director involved. As a result, we spent a significant amount of time during rehearsal negotiating whose role it was to determine changes at this point in the process, coming to terms with the moment when total collaboration must end for the sake of the greater production.

Over winter break, we wrote the final script. It takes place in Moonpenny's Cafe (as opposed to Starbuck's), a setting that allowed for a variety of characters and an assortment of situations involving the owners, employees, and patrons in a series of vignettes. The story revolves around 60 year old Margaret, owner of the café, and her granddaughter, Lizzie, whom Margaret raised from a very young age following the death of Lizzie's parents. We encounter them in the summer just prior to Lizzie going away to college. Lizzie's story is compounded by her boyfriend, Danny, who tries to pull her away from her college dreams towards marriage. Therefore, Lizzie struggles to "let go" of both the security of Margaret, and home, and her relationship with Danny, which is a pivotal situation to which we believed both our students and elders could relate.



Moonpenny's Café, Margaret, Lizzie and Julie getting ready to open.
 Jamie Morris, *Letting Go*, The College of Wooster, 2009

Rounding out the people in the café are the wait staff, Julie and Steven. Their story runs in and out of the play, providing transitional moments and an additional opportunity for “letting go” of preconceived notions. Steven, who sees himself as a ladies’ man, pursues Julie throughout the piece. Desperate to get a date with his gorgeous co-worker, he tries everything from romance to humor, only to discover in the end that Julie is already in a relationship.

Steven and Julie, alone in the café, finish clearing the tables. There is an awkwardness between them. As Julie takes off her apron Steven approaches her.

JULIE. Steven, I’m flattered but . . .

STEVEN. Aw, come on, Julie. Just one date. You might be surprised at just what a terrific guy I really am.

JULIE. I have no doubt you’re fantastic, but I don’t think Stephanie would approve.

STEVEN. Stephanie?

JULIE. My girlfriend.

STEVEN. Oh. I didn't know you were . . .

JULIE. Gay?

STEVEN. I mean not that it matters, it's just you don't look. . .

JULIE. Like a lesbian?

STEVEN. No, I mean yes, I mean. . .

JULIE. Don't judge a book by its cover!⁸

Letting go of preconceived notions occurred again in a scene involving three middle-aged women: Barbara, Mary, and Evelyn. As the women gather for coffee and dessert, we discover that they are in the midst of discussing which tattoo each of them has chosen for their shared moment of liberation. When the ladies ask Julie for her opinion regarding one of the tattoos, Julie turns Steven around, lifts up the back of his shirt to reveal the exact same image engrained between his shoulders. Impressed with the vision (and the view), the ladies come to a consensus, finish their dessert, and move on with their lives.

Two final vignettes rounded out the initial script: the story between Harriet and Ruthie and a scene focusing on family conflict in which 60-year-old Stanley finally confronts the emotional abuse he has received for years from his wife, Bethany. Paralleling their dysfunctional relationship are his son, David, and David's girlfriend, Jessica. All four have gathered at Moonpenny's to celebrate Stanley and Bethany's anniversary: however, despite the champagne, Stanley and Jessica choose to "let go" of their abusive partners and begin again.

With a complete script in hand, we began rehearsals in January, after holding open auditions for the college students and community to round out the cast. The result was a cast

⁸ Ibid., 47-8.

comprised of a wide variety of ages. All of our elders from the class stayed on, although one chose to work behind the scenes as an assistant stage manager. Only one student decided to stay on in the spring as a performer. This left us with 5 elder roles and 6 student roles to fill. The open auditions turned out to be a blessing in disguise. We found ourselves casting several people who had never acted before, and they brought a freshness and willingness to learn and try new things that we never could have expected. In addition, one student auditioned by telling us a true story about the trauma she experienced when she discovered that her parents frequently smoked marijuana. Her account was original and fit so well with our theme of breaking down stereotypes that we actually wrote a role for her in the script from her audition piece. We wove her character in as Lizzie's confidant who, while helping Lizzie sort out her challenges, reveals her own story of struggle and acceptance.

While the casting process proved fruitful, the rehearsal process challenged us in ways we had not necessarily expected. We tried to maintain an open and collaborative environment, while having to make some decisions that not everyone agreed upon for the sake of progress. Another difficulty we encountered involved convincing primarily untrained performers that they were representing characters and not themselves. For instance, the actors portraying Harriet and Ruthie struggled with this distinction. Both actors found some of the lines and character traits problematic and responded by saying, "I wouldn't say that" or "I wouldn't do that," depending on the circumstances. The character of Ruthie, for example, was written as a sassy, loud, rambunctious 89-year-old who had no misgivings discussing many issues, including sexuality. Here are the opening lines of the scene where they have met as part of a book club to discuss *Wuthering Heights*.

RUTHIE. Y'know I just don't get it.

HARRIET. (*Looking up from her book.*) What don't you get? Heathcliff is clearly mad with lust and then to have Catherine say those things, why it's just . . .

RUTHIE. (*Waving her hand*) No no, not that. I meant how in the hell Catherine didn't just jump Heathcliff's bones whenever he came into the room. Honestly, I felt that way about Charles, even after I married him and had children. Though I didn't get a chance for heel throwin' once the kids could walk. A shame, those were my good years.

HARRIET. I don't think you could throw your heels up without breaking a hip now. And watch your language. We're in public.

RUTHIE. Bah, it's the eighties. Madonna is dancing around in a wedding dress touchin' herself. I can sure as hell say "hell" whenever I want. Doubt that'll be messin' with virgin ears. You may be an uptight ol' bird, but you're no virgin, m' dear.

Harriet pauses as she adjusts her shirt before looking back up to Ruthie.

HARRIET. It's 2009.

RUTHIE. (*Beat*) What?

HARRIET. It's 2009. Remember? We were just talking about how they elected a black man. Remember? We couldn't even imagine that forty years ago.

RUTHIE. (*A pause, she seems to ignore Harriet's words*) Well. I've always loved the blacks.

HARRIET. I know, dear. Anyway, we were talking about Heathcliff and Catherine.

RUTHIE. Right. I just don't understand how she keeps her hands off of him. I mean I'd have jumped him the first chance I got.

HARRIET. You've jumped many men, Ruthie, so perhaps you're not the moral or sexual compass by which we should be judging that relationship.⁹

From the beginning, the actor playing Ruthie struggled with the “sex talk” and “cursing” because she was concerned with what her husband and friends might think of her. As a result, we asked her to spend some time writing an autobiography for her character, detailing the history that led Ruthie to this point in her life. When finished, she shared the autobiography with us, and we discussed the many ways in which Ruthie, the character, was different from Valerie, the

⁹ Ibid., 36-7.

actor. By separating herself from Ruthie, and justifying Ruthie’s characteristics and choices, Valerie was able to embrace both physical and psychological choices for the character that translated into a wonderfully funny and truly touching rendition of the woman on stage.

The nine-month process culminated in a traditional theatre production and a documentary film entitled *Boomerang! Come Play With Us*, which was shown each night immediately following the performance of *Letting Go*.¹⁰ The film was the result of footage gathered throughout the process—interviews of company members, rehearsals, improvisations, and discussions of the script—that provided us with vital anecdotal evidence and physical proof of the impact that our process had on the company members. Throughout the documentary, performers explained why they joined the company and/or what their experience with theatre had been. For example, Lynn (80s) stated,

I had this kinda little void in my life, was deeply involved in theatre for years and years and years and then this thing called age crept up on me. And I realized I couldn’t do the things I used to do, and this opportunity came along a year and a half ago. [I] joined it, and when Shirley put the call out again I said me first! And I’m here, and yeah it’s gonna fill another void.¹¹

Company member Julie (50s) told us, “I had ‘em laughing one Friday night. I said this is the best Friday night I’ve had in a long time, and the students thought that was pretty funny, and probably pretty sad too, but . . . that’s the truth, um, so, it’s been a great experience.”¹²

In another section, members talked about what they hoped to gain from the experience. For example, Don (80s) shared how much fun he had doing improvisation and watching the students thinking and responding to one another. His spouse, Emily (80s), added,

¹⁰ The documentary can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vh7OLQAXBU8>

¹¹ Lynn, Personal interview, March 2009.

¹² Julie, Personal interview, March 2009.

It helps stretch your mind if you're an elder that doesn't have much contact with young people anymore. Like we don't have any grandchildren, and once we quit teaching ten or twelve years ago . . . you've lost contact with uh, youth and so it's nice to just be around them and find out how they live. We come in here and we have free time before we start, and Don and I are sitting here reading books, everybody else is texting somebody or looking at the news on their telephone, and it's just amazing all the technology today.¹³

Lynn (80s) stated that she hopes “the students will see that people who are over thirty, over fifty, and in their seventies, are viable, versatile, vertical!”¹⁴ Jess (20s) remarked, “We don't give them nearly enough respect . . . as a generation. Like, they know a lot. They've been through so much that we can never even know so we owe them so much respect.”¹⁵ All of these statements affirmed what we already knew from the Cohen study: art enhances lives. Moreover, the enhancement worked in both directions: both elders and students gained from their experience as company members. Some members highlighted the benefits in a powerful way, such as Bastiaan (20s) who admitted that, “Every time I come out of the rehearsal, I feel really happy and relieved from all my stress. It gives me the opportunity to take up a challenge.”¹⁶ Valerie (70s) tells a very touching story about how theatre saved her life when her first husband died, and how that experience inspired others because she was able to continue on. She told us, “You never know what the reaction of somebody out in that audience might be. Somebody may be going through something and you may lift them out of that problem for a little bit, and that means a lot to me.”¹⁷

¹³ Emily, Personal interview, March 2009.

¹⁴ Lynn, Personal interview, March 2009.

¹⁵ Jess, Personal interview, March 2009.

¹⁶ Bastiaan, Personal interview, March 2009.

¹⁷ Valerie, Personal interview, March 2009.

Essentially, the film gave the audience a true sense of the process, purpose, and message of *Boomerang*. After viewing the film, audience members had a clearer understanding of how theater can support mental and physical wellbeing, especially in an intergenerational setting. They made several comments after the show: “That was so moving!” “Powerful, very powerful!” and “Can I get involved?” Of course, we responded with a resounding yes.

Moreover, our qualitative data indicated results similar to Dr. Cohen’s findings: involvement in creativity in general and the arts specifically is important in enhancing the wellbeing of elders. Much like our cultural emphasis on physical exercise as an essential element in healthy aging, Cohen asserts that the “importance of understanding creativity in relation to aging is profound.”¹⁸ Our intergenerational production experience afforded those involved an opportunity to gain insight into the significance of Cohen’s statement as we witnessed elders exhibiting an increase in morale and a decline in levels of harmful stress, as well as an improvement of self-worth or increased sense of value as a result of their involvement. Coming at a point in many of their lives when being elderly often means losing value, several company members instead found their own voices through the words of their character, filling a void in their lives and creating a general sense of happiness.

Finally, and true to our mission statement, the data suggested that the production experience aided in bridging the generational gap between the elders and the students by providing a space in which mutual respect was expected and collaboration between campus and community was embraced. In an age when being older often signifies being needy, despite more and more of our aging communities becoming increasingly significant to the sustainability of single-parent households or taking on the role of guardians, building awareness and compassion between age

¹⁸ Gene D. Cohen, *The Creative Age* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000) 6.

groups through intergenerational theatre becomes a proactive way of building rich and thriving communities for us all.