

coming soon to a theatre near you...



The extraordinary lives
of ordinary women...



Project Description: My Mother's Story

My Mother's Story is a unique theatre project that is created by harvesting the written stories of ordinary women and weaving them into a theatrical collage.

My Mother's Story engages and touches a broad spectrum of audiences. It also connects participants to the theatre, each other, and the community at large.

The Co-Creators of this project, actor/dramaturge Marilyn Norry and actor/playwright Jenn Griffin, were curious about the untold history of 20th century women and sought to redress that silence. They created **My Mother's Story** as, metaphorically, an archeological dig to uncover the private lives of women as told by their daughters and share these stories through to medium of theatre.

This project began in 2004 when Marilyn met a friend at a wedding who told her mother's life story eloquently, honestly, richly... and in five minutes....while waiting for the hors d'ouvres. Marilyn was so struck by the encounter she sent emails to fellow Vancouver actresses asking them to write their mother's story in 2000 words or less. More than 50 women replied. The stories, which highlight the individuality of each profiled mother and the way in which her societal influence and circumstances shaped her life, found release in a show by 20 of the female actor/writers in 2006, created by Marilyn and Jenn. Audiences found it mesmerizing and Marilyn and Jenn have created eight more shows, each telling a different combination of stories, and reaching new audiences. **My Mother's Story: North Vancouver** gathered stories from the community of North Vancouver, cast mostly North

Vancouver based actresses to play the daughter/writers, and sold out through its run.

My Mother's Story is not just a theatrical production; it is an authentic community building process, which takes from six months to a year to create. Each **My Mother's Story** production is a one of a kind, hand made piece designed for the community it serves. The scripts are created from stories written and submitted by women in each geographic area about their mothers. The selection process insures that the final script reflects the diversity, both cultural and otherwise, present in all parts of our country.

The process includes proactive public engagement, local story collection, community workshops, reader's theatre production and community dialogues that culminate in a professional theatrical production that tells the history of the 20th century through women's eyes. It is suitable for general audiences.

Marilyn and Jenn have years of experience developing this project and have adapted their process to the different needs of specific presenters. Many of the stories collected have also been published in books by Mothership Stories Society, the non-profit society that manages all aspects of **My Mother's Story** including an archive of stories and workshops, and can be found at www.mymothersstory.org.

My Mother's Story is an innovative and powerful art making process that galvanizes communities and introduces them to the power of personal storytelling.



My Mother's Story Process

Community to Stage

Workshops to Stage

Marilyn Norry and Jenn Griffin are the creators of My Mother's Story-the theatre project. My Mother's Story is a four-part process that may be adapted to suit the needs of the commissioning theatre.

Phase One: MMS Community Workshops

Since this project engages the community over many months it is recommended the theatre delegate someone with an interest in audience development as liaison to facilitate communication between all parties.

In consultation with us, the theatre issues a media announcement asking people to write their mother's story for possible inclusion in our theatre project. We then work with the theatre liaison to set up three to seven workshops to guide participants through the basics of writing their mother's stories. These workshops target diverse populations that reflect the nature of the community, provide more stories for a richer script, and extend the project beyond traditional theatre going audiences.

Marilyn will run the workshops, which occur in two parts: the writing assignment, followed by readings by the participants of their written stories. These readings encourage more people to complete their stories and create excitement for the final production.

Phase Two: Story Selection

The criteria for story selection are suitably complex. We look for stories that demonstrate reasonable objectivity from the writer and reflect the diversity of the community. Diversity criteria include age, ethnicity, religion, mental health, and economic status. We are particularly interested in stories that defy stereotypes and challenge expectations. We want people in the audience to leave the theatre with a broader view of their neighbours.

Once the stories are selected Jenn has further interviews with these writers to gather more information about their mothers. Some of the most revealing, poignant and hilarious content comes from material sourced through these interviews.



Bio: Marilyn Norry



Marilyn Norry graduated from York University with a BFA in Theatre Performance in 1980 and has been pursuing distinct forms of storytelling ever since. As a Jessie award winning actor (Impromptu at Outrement, Sea Theatre) she's performed in theatres across Canada in roles as diverse as Heidi in *The Heidi Chronicles* (Edmonton Citadel/ Vancouver Playhouse) and Hagar in *The Stone Angel* (Firehall), as well as in many new Canadian plays.

She has extensive film credits with recurring roles in *Battlestar Galactica*, *Reaper*, and *jpod*, as well as playing Mama Rose in *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* and Nellie McClung in CBC's *Life and Times*.

She was story editor on the series *Madison* and associate dramaturge at Playwrights Theater Center from 1996 to 2007, where she also directed many staged readings. In 2001 she was one of the Director participants in *Women in the Director's Chair* at the Banff Center. As a member of the Writers Guild of Canada she has written television episodes and feature screenplays.

On stage her play *One Morning I Realized I Was Licking the Kitchen Floor*: a comic look at depression was a hit at the Edmonton Fringe with subsequent runs in Edmonton, Vancouver, Toronto and Denver.

She was on the board of Workshops in the Performing Arts, producing many workshops bringing master theatre teachers to Vancouver, and was President of the Board from 1998 to 2000. She taught acting at Studio on the Drive from 2000 – 2002. Since 2004 she's been developing the changing complexities of *My Mother's Story*, a project dedicated to telling women's history one mother at a time.



Bio: Jenn Griffin



Born in Edmonton, Alberta, Jenn Griffin has been a Vancouver based actor/playwright since 1986. As an actor, Griffin has numerous theatre, film and television credits including: DaVinci's Inquest, Better Than Chocolate, Shattered, Freeway 2 and the L Word. In 2012, she played the role of "Bern" in the premiere of Yvette Nolan's, The Unplugging at The Arts Club Revue Stage.

As a playwright, Griffin was awarded the Sydney Risk award in 1999- Best Emerging Playwright for her first play, "Drinking with Persephone. In 2009, Griffin was commissioned to write an original operetta; Via Beatrice for Fugue Theatre which received a Jessie Richardson nomination for Best Original Script.

In 2006, Griffin with Marilyn Norry co-created the theatrical version of My Mother's Story, a process of story collecting, script development and workshops that culminate in production. Since then, 7 new versions of My Mother's Story have been produced.

In 2011, "My Mother's Story: North Vancouver" was commissioned by, then Artistic Director of Presentation House, Brenda Leadlay. The highly successful run of this piece occurred in 2012.

Griffin is currently an Associate Playwright at Playwright's Theatre Centre, in Vancouver, British Columbia where she is creating a new work entitled: "The Long Call".



Press Room



The belly laughs are plentiful as are the pains of recognition when we see our experience in these stories. The choreographed stage movement is compelling... As the stories move towards their conclusions, the tears started to flow.

David C Jones Theatre Critic & Director
North Vancouver Oct 2012

My Mother's Story: A heartwarming and heart-breaking performance!

Kelly Jean, Off the Radar Theatre Review
North Vancouver Oct 2012

My Mother's Story is lovely on its own terms... The eight-member acting team is terrific. Jamie Nesbitt's set, in which shelved objects are wrapped in grey cloth, speaks quietly to the notion of memory. And many passages are touching. When I saw this show, there was laughter, but there were also gasps and moans of recognition from the audience-and plenty of tears.

Colin Thomas, Georgia Straight
Vancouver 2012



Audience Reactions



The production gave a hundred years of social history and the role of women over that time... The production provided an understanding of our oneness...the human condition into which we are born, and from which we assuredly depart. The nature of the material touches all...even the guy beside me had his Kleenex out! Kudos to you all!

Michele Gues, Audience Member

Thank you for your wonderful inspired show about the extraordinary lives of ordinary moms. You have inspired me to write about my own funny and inspirational mum. You also sparked a wonderful conversation between my daughter and myself about her two grandmothers and our own relationship. What a great thing you have done!

Gill Homan, Audience Member

I attended My Mother's Story yesterday at the Revue Stage at Granville Island and was so overwhelmed by it in the most positive way.... Thanks for the laughs, the insight and the tears, it was an amazing experience. Any future performances planned?

Judith Bird, Audience Member

I was very moved by the play. It was wonderful to witness, and be in the theatre that featured the lives and stories of ordinary - extraordinary - women. All of our lives are so extraordinary and this was the gift, the homage, that was so brilliantly given by the play..... lovely, important work!

Joy Russell, Audience Member



Community Participant Feedback



Writer, Beate Sigridaughter and “her” actor Eileen Barrett

- It was a scary thing for me to do but I am so proud to have actually written the story.
- I just sent in my submission. Just wanted to drop you a line to say thank you for initiating this process.
- It has been painful, joyful and cathartic putting my mother's life on paper...
- I am very glad that I decided to attend the workshop
- I have enjoyed every experience related to My Mother's Story. I participated in the workshop and wrote “My Mother's Story. I shared it with my Mom, and the production which touched me in so many ways.....This is a BRILLIANT concept and experience.
- Thank you Marilyn and Jenn for your creation and for all the women involved now and in the future.
- Really got pulled into the stories and the pacing and overlapping kept me engaged. I loved how the storylines were well built and interwoven. Great work from everyone.
- The audience was totally locked into the performances and quite a few stayed in their seats after to reflect. Have you documented the show on video? I ordered 2 books. Can't wait!
- I saw the play 4 times - I kept bringing more people to it! And everyone I brought to it there was a lot of silence because I could tell they were reflecting on things. It was very introspective. And I think it makes you think about who you are and where you came from and maybe show a little appreciation and hopefully change us a little way. And, hopefully, be better people somehow, some way.....



MMS Process

Community to Stage

Phase Three: Script Creation

After we select the stories the theatre, in consultation with us, will retain a director. To further community engagement it is hoped that the director and liaison are able to audition actors from the surrounding area to play the roles of the daughter/writers.

Using the original stories in combination with material from interviews, Jenn creates the script with Marilyn as dramaturg. Although we have, for want of a better word a “formula”, we always seek to experiment with form. Each script we create has its own unique structure and tone.

Phase Four: Production

After the first draft is created a staged reading is held with an invited audience. This allows everyone, including the writers, to see what form this tailor made script has taken. The remainder of the Equity workweek is reserved for a workshop with actors and the production team to map out devised sections, find the world the women inhabit, and work on a final production draft.

When the workshop is complete and the final script delivered, our presence is no longer absolutely required. However we will be available through opening to consult on production concerns and are open to follow up on post-show marketing, community engagement, and social media.



MMS

Technical Specifications

MMS Writer's Workshops

- Ads in Community Newspaper - public invitation for people to write mothers' stories
- People to participate in free public writer's workshops
- Venues, chairs and tables for workshops - adequate for number of people involved
- Theatre Community Liaison
- MMS Workshop Facilitator – Marilyn Norry

MMS Reader's Theatre Performance

- 8-12 Selected Community Writers
- Theatre Community Liaison
- Dramaturge – Marilyn Norry
- Script creator – Jenn Griffin
- Professional Actors as required
- Rehearsal Space
- Staging Venue
- Video projector
- Microphones
- Simple Lighting
- Stage Manager - 1 person for sound & lighting

MMS Production Workshop

- 8-12 professional actors
- Rehearsal space
- Script – Jenn Griffin
- Dramaturg – Marilyn Norry
- Director
- Active Production and Sound Designer
- Stage Manager

MMS Full Staged Theatre Performance

- Theatre performance venue & rehearsal space
- Theatre Community Liaison
- Director
- Actors
- Stage Manager
- Sound
- Lighting
- Set design
- Costume Design
- Production designer
- Video projector
- Mix Board



Contact Information



For more information about My Mother's Story
info@mymothersstory.org

For my Mother's Story Press Kit
www.mymothersstory.org/pres

Website
www.mymothersstory.org

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For Magnetic North Theatre Festival
Local: 613-947-7000 x719
Toll Free: 1-866-850-2787 x719

My Mother's Story Creators
Mothership Story Society Creator Producer –
Marilyn Norry
My Mother's Story Projects – Co-Creator, Dramaturge
and Producer – Marilyn Norry
My Mother's Story Projects– Co-Creator and Play-
wright – Jenn Griffin

My Mother's Story Pitch Sessions at Mag North
Wednesday June 12th 10:30 – 13:00
National Arts Centre, NAC Fourth Stage
Ottawa, Ont.

**My Mother's Story Workshop At Ottawa Little Theatre
Transforming Community Stories into Authentic
Works of Theatre Workshop**

Admission:
FREE but registration is required at
info@mymothersstory.org

Thursday June 13th, 1:00 – 4:00 PM
Ottawa Little Theatre, 400 King Edward Avenue
Workshop Information : OLT 613-233-8948

**Invitation to Theatre Presenters to Attend this Free
Theatre Workshop:**
Do you know your mother's story? Where she was born
and what happened next? This three hour workshop, led
by Marilyn Norry and Jenn Griffin gives participants the
basics on how to write the story of their mothers' lives in
a manner that can form the foundation of professional
works of engaging grassroots theatre.

***Presented in Association with Magnetic North and
Ottawa Little Theatre***

