

Gilly Adams

Performing Words

*If you bring forth what is within you,
What you bring forth will save you.
If you do not bring forth what is within you,
What you do not bring forth will destroy you.*
Gnostic Gospels

I hear my voice in the space. It sounds strange to me and for a moment I'm afraid that it will wobble or falter but I seem to be carrying on. Something I say provokes laughter and suddenly I know that it will be alright. I can do this after all. At last I'm fulfilling the challenge I set myself several years ago - inspired by other women's stories about their work and lives - to make a performance piece of my own. I'm a director and workshop leader so this is not my natural habitat but it feels important to understand first hand what others go through and to say some of the things that are meaningful for me.

When I really began working on this piece, rather than dreaming and speculating about it, I couldn't find a form that worked for me. I attempted to write a script, but it felt false. I considered different ways of performing my words but these felt artificial too as if I were pretending to be someone else or to have acting skills that I do not possess. Finally I made the connection with the personal story-telling skills that I teach in different projects and realised that I just needed to tell the stories from my life as simply and economically as possible. I reminded myself that when I make a speech in public, I write notes on pieces of card and use those as prompts rather than conceiving the whole speech in advance. This felt like me so I wrote down the headlines from each story that I wanted to use and began gradually to connect them together and identify key facts that it was important not to omit.

Then I began the process of talking the stories out loud to myself as a way of rehearsing so that they had an order and a structure that I could repeat but I never wrote them down as a script. Finally I decided that I would sit in a

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Gilly Adams in *Looking for the Meaning*. Photo: Janica Draisma

chair and talk to the audience as intimately as possible, standing up only at the end when I placed myself in my family tree and honoured the different roles that I play in my life.

I knew as I finished this "performance" that this was a milestone for me, a significant life event after which nothing would be quite the same again and the euphoria that followed confirmed this sense of having achieved a goal that allowed me to move on. It's rare though, to recognise a milestone at the time. It seems to me that more often we identify key events and moments much later when we have the distance to understand that particular choices we have made or things that have happened have reverberated down the years that have followed.

My piece is called *Looking for the Meaning*, a thoroughly clumsy title, but one that exactly reflects the content. In assembling the stories that I wanted to share I found myself pursuing my perennial quest to understand what my life is about and that involved teasing out recurring themes and

rites of passage.

From the perspective of nearly sixty years, events rearrange themselves into different patterns from those that appeared at the time and there is also a sense of the irrevocable. Some doors can never be reopened. *Looking for the Meaning* has three distinct strands: love, the absence of children, and work. I could perhaps have assembled the stories differently since the division between the personal and the professional is arbitrary at best. The voice I heard in the space - mine - is one of the encouragements I need to continue my quest, in search of the meaning in that precise instant and place where my personal and professional life are one.

GILLY ADAMS (Britain) is a director and workshop leader. She was Artistic Director of Made in Wales Stage Company for more than a decade. Currently she directs and produces plays for BBC Radio. Gilly Adams has been an active member of the Magdalena Project since the beginning. She also works with the celebratory arts company Welfare State International.