

# Carran Waterfield

## Being a Girl and Running Home

I am a solo artist only in that I perform alone. I make all my work in collaboration with other people but, in the main, I stand in the space and give the work to an audience - alone. This could mean I am not a “true” company. It does mean I take all the financial risks and the flack - alone.

At the moment I am feeling great pressure to make an “appearance” of a *bigger than one* company - up the profile, “beef it all up” so to speak. So at the moment I am obediently jumping through funding application hoops: writing, writing, writing, but still, ultimately I am alone, whatever it says on paper.

Soon I shall begin my next creative phase with a plan for shared performance but I cannot let go of my solo work. Why is this? In trying to answer this question I have been led to reconsider the times in my life when I have felt completely debilitated: once as a teacher in 1984 and once as an artist in 1994. I want to tell you about those and other times.

I am the eldest child in a family where I had been given adult responsibilities from an early age, and I played Mother long before my periods started. In this big role I learnt about the fight early on and I saw my brothers and sister as my mum’s and my children. We planned the weekly budget together, devising ways of keeping the rent man happy.

A long time ago my sister ran home chased by a mob of girls. She was a good runner so she got home unharmed. My mum said she would go and sort out the mob or go up to the school or something. It wasn’t necessary, my sister could stand up for herself: in fact she nearly ran the school according to our headmaster. Now she runs a record shop.

A long time ago I left home to study to be a teacher in the posh town of Cheltenham. It was a cultural shock.

We are different, my brothers, my sister and I.

When we are at home my brothers and my sister work and make babies and I make plays: not “proper” work.

It is 1984. I am ill, not physically, although the illness manifests itself physically. I cannot go out of the house and take myself to my “proper job” as a teacher of English in a local

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secondary school - the school where I was a pupil, a school for girls. I am twenty-seven, still a girl and very unhappy in every corner of my being. My sick note says: the patient is suffering from Nervous Debility. I cry all the time and I don't know why. I try to write it down: I can't explain it, I have no words. I am trapped within myself and racked with a fear of finding myself at the end of my life having not "done" very much about anything. I am not quite sure what "very much" or "anything" is. In this state I am questioning everything I have been led to believe as being true for a girl: you need a husband with a supporting job; you need children to make it all happy; you need a sensible job to go back to after the children; you need a faith in God and a place to go to when you die and you need peace of mind from your sins. I am thinking: this is *not* me.

From this experience I make a decision to move from teaching about the written word to just doing it: from doing English to doing Drama. I begin to "play it" rather than "write it". I think: now this will make me happy.

It doesn't. My nun-like calling is more demanding than that. I cry all the time in my new job. I am still a girl at twenty-nine. "Doing it" this way isn't enough.

The new Education Act promises prescriptive and prohibitive, "by the book", teaching; there is a beating in my heart that says there's more to life than this. I know, because I got "my calling" to theatre on a course in 1986 - and I cannot ignore it.

Still acutely aware of the "still small voice" I learned about at Sunday school, I begin to keep a diary - a conversation with "the Lord" and, with Mother Mary-like patience, I await His visitation. I devour pages of the Bible, horoscope-fashion, while my colleagues at school grapple with their own Holy National Curriculum, where

"making it up as you go along" is not attainment targetable and the only way is to go strictly by the script, preferably William Shakespeare's. For me, there is something in being and doing and not knowing which is far more challenging than performing for someone else's set of criteria.

I start to learn about the "what if?"; about risk and breaking the rules and begin my wrestling with the maleness of God and His Word made flesh.

The long story cut short: I leave the classroom with its textbooks and set up Triangle, "doing my own thing" so to speak.

In this I lose my husband, the possibility of children, the sensible job, any chance of maternity leave, my faith and peace of mind. I am no longer "just a girl" and I begin to discover that I have a story to tell but I don't reckon on the amount of words or the way of telling.

I think that having power and gaining an identity has got something to do with making babies. I "give birth" approximately once every eighteen months. I now have six just like my mum. One of them died. This is something of what happened.

It is 1994. I am making a collaborative intercultural piece of work, *Tributaries*. Because it is not a solo piece it is not truly a Triangle production. There are four of us. It's a rectangle! I am working with a Buddhist, a Hindu and an Agnostic. I am refusing to call myself Christian, so I don't know what I am. I cannot marry my former evangelical beliefs with the work I have been making since 1989. I am losing my faith. I am alone.

The brief we set ourselves is to cross cultural and art-form boundaries. I make great efforts to understand, negotiate, collaborate, interpret, translate, accommodate. Yet, in the final playing of the work and in the full force of its reception I am

overwhelmed by a sense of a loss of my identity. I catch a feeling of debilitation, inadequacy and rootlessness which sticks in my throat and holds me tightly in my own world in the playing. And, because I am the administrator of the project, I am alone.

### **EXTRACT FROM MY DIARY**

26 May 1994, the last performance of *Tributaries*.

*I am in London watching the slow, slow death of this sickly child. And someone else has written their view on this illness.*

*In England, the dis-ease of our time and our country is the loss of the whole. The truth is - we are fragmented, fractured, broken, dis-integrated, threatened by the outsider inside us. We can be one thing only or no thing at all. We cannot be all things, for then we are nothing. So the dancer will live in her musical box, the actor on his perch, the singer behind her lectern and the drummer with wrist action only, safely on his stool. We are constipated, stuffed with the sugars of art-form compartmentalisation. The Arts Council writes about the artist's right to fail. The artist feels the failure.*

*This child's parents have made a woeful mess: one of them failed to declare they didn't really want you; in conceiving you, they willed your death. And I, one quarter the parent, have failed to use my strengths: I have allowed myself to play Cinderella once again and stayed this side of the pumpkin, this side of the spinning wheel, this side of the deep, dark wood. In giving my soul I have compromised my life and my art; in sharing all in honesty, I have been deceived and mutilated. In failing to listen to my intuition, I have made a stunted child, sickly, dying and I long for, yet dread, her funeral.*

*And then the struggle with the printed word: the marketing and the leaflets and the brochures and the fliers and the posters and the reviews and the reports and the letters and the cards and the photographs and the videos and this diary - the struggle to make a record of this transient thing called making theatre, making life, making love - without a script, because I refuse to do it "by the book", refuse to predict the outcome.*

*Who then - if we have to concede to the word - who then can write the truth? For all words written down become untruths. The truth is only in the body, in the now, in the present. Nobody tells the truth let alone writes it. But I do believe you can be the truth. When your body burns in flames - that is truth. When your body is lowered into the earth - that is truth. When your body is consumed by water - that is truth. All these actions are truths at the time of their happening. The lies or the untruths come in the recording of these actions for posterity, for heritage, in order to keep. You cannot own the truth; you can only be the truth, be truthful.*

It is 1997, I am forty years old, perhaps too old now for a baby I think, but my first piece of writing (the script for *My Sister, My Angel*) has been categorised, catalogued and placed safely in its cot in the British Library in London; there's an article in the *Times Educational Supplement* about my work on personal stories - right on the edge of the page along with a centrally placed photograph of Martin Sheen from the Royal Shakespeare Company playing Henry V (naturally he gets more space). And a scholar from a prestigious university has written about me in *New Theatre Quarterly*, Volume XIII, Number 51, and I think:



Carran Waterfield in *My Sister, My Angel*. Photo: Damien Grazier

*Three birds with one stone,  
I have arrived and am running home!  
Home to tell my mum.*

In 1994 I had to stop my work as a performer. Somewhere between then and the making of *Godiva* and *My Sister, My Angel* (my fifth and sixth born), along with an unhappy (but economically necessary) return to the classroom, tail between legs, I refound a confidence - but again in a solo situation. With that has come a dawning of the power of the written word and a challenge for me to use it.

I feel fraudulent calling myself a writer. Like most creators of this kind of work, we do it on our feet and build it up with stepping stones. We gossip the words on the way: we speak in the moment and think about the consequences later, when we fall off! But

if you want to make a point you have to write it down. If you want to convert you have to have a script full of words. If you want to convince a funder you have to have a lot of appendices, reams of reports, racks of reviews, piles of plucky projects to keep you going for the next few years as well as your Gospel according to the Main Criteria.

*Too many words, too many words  
Too many words are read  
God is in his heaven  
And I am down here dead.*

The word is the Arts Administrator's tool and my worst nightmare because I inhabit the skin of both artist and administrator: I am at war with myself. And at this moment in time I am spending more time writing and administering than making and doing.

How to find the joy in the words! Why is it that every idea has to be described graphically on paper and talked about incessantly in meetings? It never used to be like this. Once upon a time I could write: "We don't know what we are making: the process will show us that". Now everyone wants to know what it's about before you even make it. They want at least the comic strip version. Why? Well, it's the effect of competition and the capitalistic illness that now pervades every area of the work. Value for money is the name of the game. Writing it all down physicalises the dream and promises the earth for less money. Writing it down keeps it for posterity; builds a treasure on earth and makes it fleshy. My evangelical upbringing has taught me harsh lessons about the *Word* and it's difficult to shake that off. After all, they were mostly men who put the Bible together. If you can say you're a writer, it gives you a lot of clout, literally. It puts you on a fluffy cloud with all the author-ity you ever dreamed of. You see, you can bash with bibles, you can lecture with literature, you can teach in tablets of stone and you can burn infidels if you can prove it on paper.

Because of all of this I am struggling to redefine the position of the script within my work, creating in a country driven by the tradition of the script: "The word was made flesh and dwelt among us". And at that time his name was Jesus but now her name is Melanie. Melanie, my sister, my angel:

*Blessed Be the Queen of Us All!*  
*God Save Her and all Who Art in Her as She*  
*Saileth*  
*For I Name Her:*  
*Rose of Mary (from My Sister, My Angel)*

With my sixth piece I claim authorship and truth despite all I have said about "writing it down". A man in the audience at a recent

education conference said: "I cannot give a critical response to something that says: based on a true story. It doesn't allow me to be objective ..." I think: so, there's a problem with the personally poetic.

In telling my sister's story, I am trying to tell the truth and in doing that I discover the impact of the mythical on the personal when I "trance-tell" the story of the stone baby. In this I discover that my family story is powerful and political. It irritates those who would try to be logical, objective, test the work according to fixed criteria. Because I discover this link with myth it gives me confidence. I have been given a story linked with the intangible, the unexplainable. And objectivity seems out of place somehow. I am thrilled that my mum could be the woman who gave birth to a "stone baby" and the doctors and nurses and all those who felt Melanie might not live could be embodied in a "Tree Mother".

In writing it down, through the myth, I give the story back to itself. The myth which emerged from *My Sister, My Angel* came from a stone - in the moment, from the kernel of the piece. That is enough:

*We are from the earth and the sea.*  
*My mum, my sisters and me.*

In making theatre I think I am giving birth to myself and I hope I will not regret the real thing, I mean, not having a real child, but I cannot be sure, and I am assuming I am one of the lucky ones, because I have had a choice.

#### **POST SCRIPT**

Since the time of writing, I have remarried and also have embarked on a series of performance projects which are not solo in their creation or presentation: *Looking for the Tallyman* (the story of Hector and Gretel) and *Nina and Frederick* (not of Danish descent). These productions are two sets of

non-identical twins. One set performs on the inside and the other on the outside. One set is apparently light and airy whilst the other is apparently dark and sinister. I know both are each other. They are problematic to the system in their refusal to be registered in one box or another so their commercial viability is suspect and a worry to funding agencies. Another set of twins is still in the womb: they are Siamese and nameless, but for the sake of the system we call them *Ruby*.

These “plucky projects” are, incidentally, my war babies - the “spoils” from my battles with administration and the lottery. Whilst the performance work is not solo at present, the responsibility continues solo, I wonder why! There is life after death and there is hope beyond the lottery! “Winning the lottery” for Triangle means expansion and trespass on other people’s property. It has taken me ten years to gain confidence in the solo form, I guess it will take another ten for the same sense in the two, three, hundred handers I have up my sleeve for the future. It is scary, but I remember Eugenio Barba saying to me with prophet-like authority in 1995, whilst I was still reeling from the loss of *Tributaries*, “Carran, you must not always think in such a small way”. I thought, “but I’m a girl and I still live down the road from my Mum”.

Now I think: “I’m a woman and ten

years in theatre full-time must count for something, so I’m planning something big by the canal not far from our house with Cleopatra, a barge, a horse, as many of my past pupils as possible and everything I know about *Lady Godiva* - and that’s quite a lot!”

CARRAN WATERFIELD (Britain) is artistic director and founder of Triangle based in Coventry. Her work includes: *Omega and The Golden Water* (1989), *Married Blitz* (1990), *The Dig* (1992), *Tributaries* (1994), *Godiva* (1995), *My Sister, My Angel* (1996), *Nina and Frederick* (1997) *Looking for the Tallyman* (1998).