

## The Creative Process As Therapy, and How it Relates to the Show "Caged"

By Estelle Condra

On a chilly October evening in 1995, I was amazed! I attended a play entitled "CAGED" that moved me to laugh and to cry. It provoked more emotion, thought, and total enjoyment than I dreamed possible from a live dramatic stage performance. I have never been a "play person" and went to see this because my dear friend, Estelle Condra (who is the writer and the actress), invited me.

This powerful presentation overwhelmed me and I am delighted that each of you now has the opportunity to see Estelle in "CAGED" at this year's conference. She will perform this inspirational one-woman show at the Looby Theater on Monday, November 25, during the 2:30 - 4:40 p.m. session block. Transportation will be provided.

The creative process Estelle went through to get this work to the stage is especially interesting. She shares that process and an overview of "CAGED" for you in the following article.

--Janet Clough, Program Chair for Arts and Humanities



"Caged" was the private ramblings of a troubled soul. The fear of losing my sight almost drive me crazy. If I had not discovered journaling, I believe I would have had some severe psychological problems.

peutic concept must focus on therapy and healing, not on whether your thoughts or feelings are "right" or "wrong."

### JOINING TOGETHER

One summer I was asked to do an inspiring theater piece for the Governor's School for the Arts at MTSU. Having worked for the Governor's School for many years, my repertoire of one-woman shows was exhausted. I feverishly looked for new material but was unable to find anything suitable for the student audience.

One afternoon, as I sat knitting, an idea suddenly stood as if written in neon lights right in front of me: MY JOURNAL. Do something from your journal, said a voice deep inside of me. I knitted on as if I did not hear. Once more the voice spoke quietly from the inner regions of my soul. I gave many reasons why it wouldn't be a good idea. I judged myself and made a negative self-evaluation; much like students in my creative classes. Luckily, as I quickly found out, the deadline was approaching and I was forced to pursue the idea of creating something from my journal. Before I knew it, I was looking at the phases of my life as I had journaled them over the years.

The challenge now was to use the creative process in joining together my journal and my theatrical skills so that the end result wouldn't be a boring, long-winded life story, but an energized performance. I accepted my own challenge and began working. This project, which developed into my show "Caged," has matured and evolved constantly over the

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### JOURNALING

"To journal is to shed your thoughts and feelings in private." This has definitely been true for me. Journaling is a way to purge from myself many unhealthy thoughts and feelings that I would otherwise keep inside.

It seems that when I sit down to write about myself what bubbles up are often troubling things that I want to keep private. Yet in my journal they are out in the open and I have rid myself of unhealthy emotions that, left inside me, would fester and fume, causing hostile and angry behavior.

After I have journaled, I can read what I have vented back to myself with a new vantage point, attaining a new attitude on the things that made me miserable or gave me joy. A fresh light illuminates my darkest secrets and they do not seem so somber anymore. I have also relived joy through reading what I have written and discovered things that truly made me happy.

I started journaling a long time ago while attending workshops on self-actualization. I found that writing my fears, my happiness, my hopes, my dreams, and my goals was very healing and helpful.

My journal writings have done more than help me to reflect and heal. They have sparked the cultivation of my show. At first

### ACTING OUT

Though I am not a drama therapist, my years of teaching and leading creative drama workshops have taught me the therapeutic value of "acting out." I have witnessed the benefits, especially in adults, of letting go of a feeling and acting it out. Afterwards one feels free and unencumbered by stress, and can get on with his or her life. Drama therapy has become a very important tool in helping young and old get on track.

### THE CREATIVE PROCESS

The creative process provides remedies beyond what we as laymen understand. Without going into detail, let me just say that when I create, whether I am sitting at a loom in a recreation center or in a quiet corner with my knitting needles, I am peaceful. Peace of mind is a luxury very few people in this hurried world allow themselves. A peaceful mind is fertile ground for a creative idea begging to be developed.

When I create or lead a creative process workshop, one of the most harmful issues that I come across among the participants is self-evaluation and criticism. These should be avoided in order to create freely. They kill the sparks of creativity and hamper the journey of self discovery. The creative process as a thera-

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past four years. In preparation for performances, many stage techniques aimed at aiding myself and other blind performers in feeling comfortable and safe on-stage come about.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE PLAY

"Caged" is a theater piece consisting of a series of dramatic occurrences. The audience meets me as a little girl waiting for the birds to roost in the sweet thorn trees. I become fascinated with the flight of birds and practice flying whenever no one is looking. The story begins in South Africa where I am exposed to African folklore and the rhythm of the tribal drum. This rhythm is woven throughout my life journey.

As I grow older, I sense impending doom and imprisonment. I sense that the sisters of fate are pursuing me with their scissors, to clip my wings and to put me in their cage. The cage in this play symbolizes the capture and imprisonment by fate. The clipping of the bird's wings is the metaphor for my oncoming loss of sight. The plot moves forward as I try to escape fate by consulting eye specialists, faith healers, homeopaths and witch doctors. I go to amazing extremes and experiment with unusual "cures."

The Toynbee Theater School in London awards me a scholarship and while I am study-

ing and acting there, I consult more eye specialists in Europe. This leads to an unusual experiment of "retraining my brain to see," but alas, the experiment fails. I return to South Africa. I cannot escape the clipping of my wings and find myself caught and caged. However, I learn to exist inside of the cage, learning that a cage can protect me from things that I do not want to confront and from negative attitudes of society.

The love interest in the play happens when I encounter someone who opens the cage door and challenges me to dance. I move to America and find the struggle for independence and sense of self overwhelming and decide that being caged is better. I return to my cage and in my captured state I at last confront myself and my own psyche. The dramatic climax comes when I accept my blindness and break through the bars of the cage to make a new life as a well-adjusted blind person.

The plot moves with a steady inner pace displaying the incidents and characters that peopled my life: my mother, the eye specialists, my teachers, my athletic coach, my roommates, my lover, my snow-skiing instructor, and my husband. Though this is a one-woman show, it is not the telling of a tale, it is the showing of a life. I climb and run, I dance and jump. You will see me run at a track meet and dance portraying a part in "Private Lives." You

will be transported to a London sidewalk where I dodge traffic as I painfully try to adjust to new lenses.

This is a theater piece that provokes thought and stimulates insight. Though sometimes exotic, it finds a touch point with each human experience and every human in the audience. You will see the struggle and feel the tension grow as the tribal drum beats its relentless rhythm to a crescendo, where my human spirit takes flight to soar free.

The creative process employed in performing this work is always evolving, therefore, you will see a totally different show than the students at the Governor's School for the Arts saw over four years ago. I know that four years from now the show will look different once again...to me that is the mark of true creative growth and that is ultimately my goal. On the 25th of November you will see the same show that I will perform in Atlanta for the Association of Theatre & Accessibility during the Paralympiad.

I am grateful to perform the results of my creative process for you. You will experience and share with me the journey from the first words in my journal to a full stage production. I want to invite you to ask questions afterwards and I hope you will take advantage of the opportunity to come on stage and see the different technical devices that I use to help me move safely around the stage. Enjoy the show!