



PGC
WOMEN'S
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NEWSLETTER

PGC 50th Anniversary Reflection Piece

By Colleen Ann Fee



Next year, in 2022, PGC will turn half a century old!!! In celebration of our 50th Anniversary, we are inviting people to write "Reflection Pieces" about their time with PGC. Why did you first become a member? Who or what was important to you then? Has this changed over time? How did your encounters with PGC (e.g. staff members, programs, webinars, etc.) affect your writing, career, skills set, et cetera? We would love for you to share your experiences by letting us know what PGC means to you!

Here we have the very first offering of this kind from PGC member, Colleen Ann Fee.

What does PGC mean to me?

I did not join PGC when I became eligible. At that time, I assumed that PGC was like the other professional organizations filling my mailbox with their rulebooks, and I had not yet encountered Rebecca Burton, PGC's Membership and Professional Contracts Manager.

I came to PGC later in connection with my play about widows, *After Love, Life*. I am a social dramatist with an iconoclastic perspective. Social dramatists work like investigative journalists tackling subjects outside their personal experience. I am not a widow. In writing *After Love, Life*, I conducted research, interviewed widows, and drew from my emotional reservoir of accumulated loss.

No one wants to be called widow. No one affixes this qualifier to herself. That is done by others. Here comes the widow, they say, not as welcome but as warning. Beware the widow. Her qualifier denotes something bad—death. A woman affixed with it feels hard done by and unfairly so. Without her consent and beyond her control, she finds herself marked bad. My play, *After Love, Life* aims to debunk the stereotype of the widow and offers cathartic relief of grief.

Age is another qualifier no one wants. To wishful-thinkers who say that age has its own rewards, I reply: You go ahead and enjoy them, I shall take a pass.

We react to our bad qualifiers in various ways. Emotional responses correspond to the widow's five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance. At any stage, one may get stuck, temporarily, even permanently, consigned to greater suffering.

Some qualifiers are so bad we have enacted legislation to protect ourselves from the badness. Qualifiers are not equally bad. Some of the qualifiers affixed to me fall under categories enumerated in the legislation, but I carry other qualifiers which provide me a measure of relief. Some qualifiers are so bad, so thoroughly damaging to those affixed with them, no relief is available except by the restructuring of our societal institutions and social relationships.

Playwrights have a role to play in this social imperative, both as individuals and collectively. PGC is engaged through several initiatives. One of them, *Advance Theatre*, led me to PGC.

Advance Theatre is the brainchild of Diane Brown, Artistic Director of Ruby Slippers Theatre. While I was writing my widows play, Diane attended a PGC conference about diversity in the theatre. The conference was organized by Rebecca Burton, whom Diane describes as a tireless advocate for gender equity.

About the conference, Diane says: Lots of great discussion, but what comes from all this talk? In this case, *Advance Theatre*. As Diane listened to all the great discussion, she vowed to act. Overnight, she conceived a staged reading series by Ruby Slippers which has evolved into an annual national showcase of new plays by diverse female-identifying playwrights. The next day at the conference, Diane sounded out Rebecca Burton for PGC's support. Bingo! Or as Diane says: Voilà! *Advance Theatre* came into being and has been sustained over many years with support from PGC and other partners of Ruby Slippers.

The success of *Advance Theatre*, Diane believes, attests to an enormous need for it. She credits *Advance Theatre* with bringing Ruby Slippers and her work to national attention, deepening and expanding the company's mandate and her artistic vision of inclusivity. We clarified our definition of diversity, she says, and all good things have come out of it.

I was invited to submit to the inaugural *Advance Theatre*. I better join PGC, I thought to myself and dashed off an inquiry. Rebecca Burton replied immediately. That is her mode, immediacy. There's no delaying her. She made the application process easy-peasy for me to complete. Bingo! I became a PGC playwright. *After Love, Life* was juried for *Advance Theatre* and given a public staged reading by a diverse professional ensemble that included PGC colleagues. Two years later, my drama about consent and accountability (*Sex, Drugs & Age*) was juried and similarly presented to the public by *Advance Theatre*. It has now advanced into the U.S.

For me, playwriting is a process of listening. *Advance Theatre* opened a channel that allowed me to hear other playwrights struggling to overcome bad qualifiers by asserting their authorial voices and to hear how my words impact diverse audiences. What I heard via *Advance Theatre* contributed to my maturing as a playwright.

PGC's commitment to inclusivity through initiatives such as *Advance Theatre* means a great deal to me.

Thank you, Rebecca Burton and Diane Brown. Thank you, PGC. Best wishes, PGC members.

Sincerely,

Colleen Ann Fee



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Colleen Ann Fee's award-winning stage works and plays include the lyric drama, AFTER LOVE, LIFE and the comedy, JACKIE TORNADO. She lives in Vancouver, Canada, where she is engaged in script development.

