



PGC
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NEWSLETTER

PGC 50th Anniversary
Reflection Piece:

"What the Playwrights
Guild of Canada Means
to Me"

By Lezlie Wade



This year, in 2022, PGC turns 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, etc.? We would love for you to share your experiences by letting us know what PGC means to you! Here we have a third offering from PGC member, Lezlie Wade.

"What the Playwrights Guild of Canada Means to Me"

When I was little, people still said things like, "Children should be seen and not heard." And because I believed that adults knew best, I sat quietly at tables and in living room chairs observing human behaviour. I watched my mother grow stiff between the shoulder blades at a careless remark from an aunt or uncle. I observed the family dynamics between my father and his four brothers when they would compete at a dictionary game, or baseball, or for my grandfather's attention. I didn't know it at the time, but that was the beginning of my writing education. Observing + opinion = an idea. At least that's how it started for me.

My oldest cousin, who was an actor long before I even thought about a life on the stage, gave me a copy of *The Zoo Story* by Albee when I was about eleven. "It's amazing!" he said. "It will blow your mind." The way he went on, I was actually afraid to read it. After much procrastination, I finally sat in a dark corner of my room one night and, after finishing it, thought about how powerful a play could be. Limited set, two actors, and words with an impact. I may not have seen myself in any of the main characters, but I felt like someone observing from another bench nearby. I felt, in fact, perhaps the way the author did when the idea first came to him. In the dark of my room (I often read by candlelight because it made me feel like Emily Dickinson), I wondered, could I be a writer? Could I be a playwright?

I'm getting around to what joining the Playwright's Guild of Canada meant to me, but I have to set the stage. To say I wanted to be a writer was almost as difficult as saying I am a writer. To begin with, I couldn't find many plays written by women and therefore didn't think women could be playwrights. Writers always seemed to be men who drank a good scotch and, in real life, spoke like characters from a Mickey Spillane novel. I was no David Mamet or Sam Shepherd. I didn't feel like my prose was raw and gutsy. There was a club that I didn't belong in. It was Theresa Rebeck and Paula Vogel who gave me the courage to even think about dredging up things "unladylike." Here were plays about female experience without pandering or sentimentality. The impact these

writers had on me was profound, but still, I was daunted. Even if I had something to say, how would I ever get produced? I dabbled with ideas (many still half-written in my filing cabinet) and instead pursued a career as an actor. Every time I considered writing, someone would shoot me down. I even had a roommate at one point tell me straight out that he wasn't interested in the female experience and would never read anything by a female writer. Is it any wonder so many of us use *nom de plumes*? Little did he know that I was secretly, quietly, putting thoughts on paper every day. No one could stop me from writing. In fact, if I'm honest, I'd have to say that his misogyny actually inspired me to write even more. I just had to find the courage to share it and that was something altogether different.

Then, one summer, I was approached by an artistic director to write an environmentally-based one-woman show for elementary schools. I went home that September and wrote *Poor Lydia is Lost*. I still remember what it felt like to hold the completed script in my hand. The sheer satisfaction of creating something for performance was profound. And that was it! That was my foray into playwriting. Did I think of myself as a playwright? I did not. I couldn't give myself permission. Even when my adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* was produced at Theatre Orangeville, the Globe, Theatre Sudbury, and Carousel Theatre in Vancouver – even then, I did not dare call myself a playwright. It wasn't until I joined the Playwright's Guild of Canada that I finally allowed myself to even consider such a thing. Isn't it amazing what joining an organization like that can do? The acknowledgment that comes from being accepted gives a person validation, which is crucial when starting out. Hell, it still matters to me now.

I think we all struggle with some form of identity, which, in this business, is so important. Our stories matter. So, to be with playwrights, amongst playwrights, supported by playwrights, has meant the world to me in terms of my place in Canadian arts. The writing process is solitary and my life somewhat introverted (more so with COVID) so, I find comfort in knowing that the Guild is looking out for my best interests, whether it's in terms of opportunities, royalties, advice, information, or support.

Now, in an ironic twist of fate, I'm heard, even if I'm not always seen.



Lezlie Wade is a playwright, lyricist, and librettist. Her five-hander musical *Christmas Carol* has been produced at Theatre Orangeville, Carousel Theatre, Workshop West, and the Globe Theatre. As a lyricist, Lezlie is an alum of the prestigious BMI workshop in New York. Her musical, *The Remarkable Journey to Tianguo*, was shortlisted for the Tom Hendry Awards and is optioned by the Somerled Foundation where it was part of the Bound for Broadway series. It was also chosen for the ASCAP Dreamworks workshop and presented to Stephen Schwartz, Stephen Flaherty, and Dick Scanlon. *Tianguo* was also workshopped at AMTP in Chicago and is slotted for a Canadian Premiere in 2023.

Most recently Lezlie wrote an updated musical adaptation of *Hansel & Gretel* for Yellow Door Projects with her collaborator, Scott Christian. Lezlie and Scott are currently working on a musical adaptation of *Macbeth*, which will be workshopped this winter/spring at St. Clair College.

Wade's play, *Rule of Thirds*, was workshopped at Road Less Traveled Productions in Buffalo, NY. Her musical, *Dead Reckoning*, with Scott Christian, which was developed at La MaMa, and part of the La MaMa playwright reading series was made into a short film and selected to be part of the USA film/fest.

Learn more about Lezlie by visiting her website, here: <https://www.lezliewade.com/>

