

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY – Acceptance speech by Bluma Appel, the CCA's 2006 Diplôme d'honneur recipient, given at Queen's Park (Toronto, Ontario) on September 15, 2006



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Receiving this recognition is indeed an honour — totally unexpected and totally undeserved.

I consider myself a big time failure. So let me tell you the real story of my life in the world of music, art and theatre.

When I was 6, my Mother decided this wilful child needed a little culture to temper her exuberance so I was enrolled for piano lessons. By the time I was 7 my teacher gave up on me. My first failure

In no way deterred my Mother decided when I reached nine I should try my hand at the violin - six months later my teacher told me not to come back.

My second failure - but not a total failure because I learned to love the sounds and how difficult it was to make them.

So onward — at about 13, I joined some kids who painted after school. It looked like fun! At last I was an artist! I was the worst of the bunch. I might have been a pioneer in abstract while attempting figurative.

Failure 3 But again I learned. This time to appreciate the deft hand. And it helped me build my collection at an early age and led to my owning the Waddington Gallery in Montreal. Also gave me the opportunity to meet Picasso - Chagall - Calder - Jackson Pollack to name a few.

At 15 I became involved with a small acting group. This little band of actors worked in the Montreal YMIHA. The only English theatre in Montreal at that time was the Montreal Repertory Theatre and they did not welcome Jews. So we started our own. It was called the New theatre Group. Rupert Kaplan, one of the greatest CBC producers, Ruben Ship, one of CBC '5 best writers, and Mel Tolken were all part of this small band.

Mel Tolken went on to the U.S. to write the *Danny Kaye Show* with Sylvia Fine, (Mrs. Danny Kaye). He also wrote *The Life of Riley*, and you can still see his name on reruns of *All in the Family*, the first politically incorrect show to hit the tube.

Rubin Ship also went to the U.S. and became a major writer for television and movies.

They both left the U.S. for England because they refused to testify at the McCarthy Hearings of the 50's. The witch hunt was fierce. The theatre was targeted and I knew many that lost their careers and some who lost their lives by suicide. It was a terrible period. Arthur Millar wrote *The Crucible* as a mirror of that time.

So back to the saga of my life in the theatre. I tried acting and soon discovered I wasn't good enough to make an extra in a mob scene. Failure 4

So I thought - why not try directing. It looked pretty easy — just tell actors what to do. Anyone can tell you I am pretty good at telling people what to do.

Well it turns out you not only tell them what to do — but how — when and where to do it. I have no visual imagination so another Failure 5

Well the last hope - producing. That was easy. All that was needed was to listen to everyone gripe, the actors, writers, directors, the technical crew, and of course the unions — by the way you have to put up the money. And because I have the greatest and most generous husband

anyone I have ever been blessed with, I was given free reign and funds to produce. He said, "Let's call it spending, not investing."

Oh - I thought at last I have found my niche and success was at hand.

My first involvement was co-producer) for Jean Genet's Maids in New York - Off Broadway in the early 50's and a few others best forgotten followed. In 1961 produced Olympia Dukakis first play Off Broadway - then one attempt on Broadway. It bombed - followed by another few best forgotten. So the final tally was 100% failures.

Failure 6 What did I learn? - you don't have to be talented to enjoy the arts. And without an appreciative audience there is no place for the artist. So I got an education. You can learn a lot more from failure than from success.

And what fabulous experiences I had through those years.

I was fortunate enough to be in NY in the hey day of American Theatre - was at the openings of A Street Car Named Desire with Marlon Brando and Jessica Tandy, The Glass Menagerie with Uta Hagen, amongst many others. I met many of these people because of a friendship with Dorothy Rodgers, wife of Richard Rodgers.

All in all my failures added up to one great wonderful and exciting life. And along the way I learned to love the arts and their importance to a civilized society. So I started proselytizing — some called it badgering which led to fundraising.

I found there are four steps to fundraising. First you decide on your victims - and then you stalk them - then encircle them - and then entrap them. I started by appealing to their better nature - care, comfort, and compassion. It didn't work too well so I switched to fear, greed and guilt. That got better results. It really comes down to blackmail or bribery. Blackmail — you don't want to look cheap. Bribery — we'll name a theatre after you.

Enough modesty and humility — here are some successes.

In 1972, I created the American Friends of Canada so that Americans could give Canada works of art and get a tax benefit. Among the Board, David Rockefeller - Henry Ford - Armand Hammer.

In 1975 the United Nations Year of the Woman, I was appointed by P.M. Trudeau to act as Liaison to Industry. And I got every bank to put a woman on their Board.

1987 most daunting was getting CanFAR started.

John Paul Getty's formula for success — rise early — work hard — find oil. Worth a try.

This is not an easy country for artists. Each new generation blazes new trails. And that is why this organization is so important!

We do not readily appreciate the young ones with great imagination and talent who take bold leaps into the unknown. So it is essential to have all those in the arts communities there to encourage and support them. This has been your role and without you, this country would have been a cultural desert.

Canada is the most successful and tolerant country in the world. But the world to-day faces a rising tide of intolerance and hatred last seen in Europe in the 30's. I remember that time very well.

And I see the beginning of it happening again. Not over there but right here.

Historically the Arts are the first target. As leaders in the Arts in Canada, all of us in this room have a responsibility for our artists. We have to protect and fight for them—and fund them.

But the artists have an even greater responsibility for us. They are the creators of tolerance and the breeders of diversity.

The Arts light even the darkest times - they are the clarions of civilization.

I still hope to see the time when we live in a society based on shared values, not shared roots — blind to race color and religion.

The artists speak the international language of hope. So let's talk. Thank You.