

Mom's the Word

by

The Mom's the Word Collective

GLOBE THEATRE 2006/2007
STUDY GUIDE



“I took the long flight into motherhood. I will
live it.”

-“Linda”, *Mom’s the Word*

THE STUDY GUIDE

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I. CHARACTERS

Robin – Robin is practical, realistic, and down to earth. She has a dry sense of humour and takes no bologna. She has a newborn and a two-and-a-half-year-old.

Alison – Alison relates the stories of her premature first born in a clear and unsentimental way. Her life's experiences have in no way dampened her sense of humour. She has two children, a boy five years old and a girl two years old.

Linda – Linda has the ability to commit 110% to both her quest to communicate and the ridiculous. She has two sons, aged two years and six months old.

Jill – Jill is a self-proclaimed bohemian who struggles with low self esteem. She was in her thirties when her first child was born. She has a boy and a girl, twenty-two months apart.

Deborah – Deborah is an edgy comedienne, who does not pull any punches with the bleakness of her stories. She has an infant and a two-year-old.

II. THE PLAY

Audience Advisory – some mature language and content

Time – Current

“I laughed and cried for an hour, and I’m just a wicked stepmother.”

- Barbara Crook
Vancouver Sun – January 1994

This version of *Mom's the Word*, is based around five women who come from different backgrounds, but who become linked upon giving birth. Robin cannot understand what the big deal is about “sharing” the experience of motherhood. That is, not until she gives birth and then suddenly finds she is “a member of this giant club”.

The play, which is filled with poignant parenting moments, begins with stories of pregnancy, birth and the early days of motherhood. The mothers struggle with the shift from multi-faceted, very unique individuals to overtired, overworked, undervalued mothers, not to mention the impact this new arrival has on their relationship with their partners. It continues on with stories of the trials and tribulations of raising preschool aged children.

The audience is taken on a rollercoaster ride of emotion through the various monologues, from laughter to tears and back again. The stories are like a series of snapshots into their best and worst moments as mothers.

These stories portray a strong sense of sincerity in the wonder these women feel towards being a mom. They constantly second guess their actions, wondering if they have warped their children's development. They feel inadequate, paranoid and undervalued. At the same time, the moms feel they have the greatest job and are grateful to be part of, and witness to, the many great, and not so great, moments in their child's development.

III. BACKGROUND

Mom's the Word Collective

"It all started at my table on Bowen Island," says Linda Carson. "I was super pregnant and had a toddler, and I was wondering why I still had no idea what I was getting into. I had babysat kids. My sister had kids. But I was in shock at what my life had become." As a result, Carson began a writers' support group in early 1993. All of the women knew at least one member of the group and that was about it. The original six actor/writer/moms began to meet on Saturday mornings and shared their highs and lows of motherhood. Carson hoped to translate these stories into a theatrical piece.

After a year of sharing these moments of motherhood, they finally put together an entry for Vancouver's Women In View Festival in January 1994. The resulting one-act play received a standing ovation and prompted the collective to re-write the work into a full length play. They presented the new version at the 1995 Women In View Festival and then produced it themselves for an eight month run at Vancouver's Arts Club Theatre. The show then toured British Columbia and Western Canada. The show received the Jessie Richardson Award for Best Play and Best Ensemble Cast.

Although the original cast members appeared in most of the performances of the show, replacement actors were trained to replace a cast member with a family or professional commitment. According to Barbara Crook, freelance writer and critic, the original moms were so committed to the show that they went "onstage with strep throat, after dental surgery, or in the case of one member, in the throes of clinical depression."

The pressures of success eventually resulted in serious tensions that threatened to pull the collective apart. A weekend spent in individual and group counseling helped the moms turn things around and allowed them to revive the original spirit of the group.

In the spring of 1998, the collective presented the show at the Melbourne International Comedy Festival and then handed the show over to an Australian cast. The show began to be performed by other performers and went on to be performed across Canada and the world. In addition to Australia, where it is the number one show, it has been performed in Glasgow, Manchester, London, Chicago, Minneapolis, Germany, Norway, South Africa, Mexico, Italy and Ireland. It has been translated into several languages, including French, German, Norwegian, Spanish, Afrikaans, and Italian.

The collective has now created a sequel to *Mom's the Word*, entitled *Mom's the Word 2 – Unhinged*, which relates tales of parenting in the teen years.

"It's about belonging, and finding a place in the world, ultimately, and connecting with other people, and that's what we hope the characters do with the audience, because we feel like the audience is the sixth character in the play."

Tb News Source – 22 Feb. 2007

IV. THE PLAYWRIGHTS

Linda Carson – Linda, a graduate of Studio 58, has been a professional actor, clown, writer, and teacher for the past 20 years. Upon graduation from Vancouver's Studio 58, Linda wrote and toured her one person play *Dying to Be Thin* (Jessie Richardson Award – currently touring to high schools in Ontario). Linda went on to co-create *Mom's the Word*, with five other actor/writers (Jessie Richardson Awards for Best Play, and Best Ensemble Cast). Linda's latest acting credits include Carousel Players' production of *The Last Drop* by Kim Selody, MTYP and Carousel Players' production of *Where The Wild Things Are* (2006 tour of Japan), Carousel Players' production of *Patty's Cake* by Tim Webb (Dora Award) and *George and Martha* by James Marshal adapted by Linda Carson. Linda now lives with her family in Ontario, where she continues to write and act.

Jill Daum – Jill is a graduate of the Studio 58 Acting Program. She has been working for a quarter of a century as an actor in theatre, film, TV, and commercials. Being a part of the *Mom's the Word* and *Mom's the Word 2 – Unhinged* Collectives continues to be a fantastic adventure that has taken her all over the world. She lives on the west coast of Canada with her husband and their two children, Harlan and Hattie, where she is a runner and a marathon mother.

Alison Kelly – Alison has been making her living as an actor, writer and theatre instructor for the past 20 years. She is a graduate of Studio 58 where she presently teaches. Alison is the co-author of three other plays including the award winning international hits *Mom's the Word* and *Mom's the Word 2 – Unhinged*.

Robin Nichol - Robin has been stage-managing, directing, work shopping and occasionally creating new Canadian plays for more than 20 years. She has a BFA from the University of Victoria, a MFA from the University of British Columbia and was the Associate Artistic Director at the New Play Centre in Vancouver for 3 years. The rest of the time she has kept busy freelancing, teaching and reproducing. She was Associate Director for productions of *Mom's the Word* in Glasgow, Manchester and in London's West End. She is currently teaching acting for the Theatre Department at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops.

Barbara Pollard – Barbara is one of the original author/performers of *Mom's the Word* and counts being part of this collective as one of the luckiest things to ever happen to her. Barbara performed in *Mums 1* in Scotland in 2002, enjoyed an extensive run on the

West End Stage in 2003, made her third professional trip to Europe to direct *Mums 1* in Ireland, followed by a return to Scotland to star in *Mums 2 – Unhinged*. Barbara was part of the Stratford Shakespeare Festival company for 5 years as well as Vancouver's Tamahnous Company for 3 years. While there she was nominated for her first Jessie Award (*The Real Talking People Show*) which also went to the Festival of the Americas in Montreal. She has worked as an instructor/director for the University of Victoria, Columbia College, Douglas College, Take One Talent Agency and Vancouver's famed Studio 58. Barbara has also directed for the Rocky Mountain Shakespeare Festival (*As You Like It*) and co-directed at the Vancouver Playhouse (*Amadeus*) and Tamahnous (*Top Girls*). She was guest artist at UBC twice: first as Sabina in *Skin of Our Teeth* and recently as Emily Carr in *Song of This Place*. She has extensive film and television credits, most recently in a pilot for NBC called *The Evidence*.

Deborah Williams – Deborah is a writer, director and actor. A graduate of Studio 58 in Vancouver, she has worked on stage for the past 24 years. She is currently juggling touring the hit comedy sequel, *Mom's the Word 2: Unhinged*, writing a book and putting dinner on the table. Deb is also a media personality and comedian, seen and heard regularly on national radio and TV. Deborah continues to be an avid gardener, reader and floundering mother of two fabulous people.

V. GLOBE THEATRE'S PRODUCTION

i. Design Notes

Laura Hale returns to Globe Theatre as the Costume and Set Designer for *Mom's the Word*. According to Laura, the challenge with the set for this production was in creating a setting that would enhance the women's stories. The space needed to be a place where anything can happen. The goal was to present a bright, colourful, crazy and fun setting.

In consultation with director, Ruth Smillie, the design for the floor became a series of photographs strewn about as if a scrapbook has exploded. Laura says that she had some difficulty sourcing images to represent each of the women's children from birth to age 5, especially since she had not met any of the actors. She chose a mix of current and vintage photographs to help establish the characters and hopefully evoke memories for the audience. Through the chaos of the images one can find a path that each of the mothers has taken in their journey through motherhood.

Laura wanted to have costuming that would be representative of every kind of woman. She relied on basics, such as blue jeans and plain black shirts to provide the "uniform" of a current, hip mom. Individual personality for the characters is achieved by the use of add-ons, such as bright coloured trench coats, accessories, etc. Fancy dresses, although used as props in the second act, are hung on the walls in the gangways to add colour.

ii. Cast and Company

Director – Ruth Smillie - Ruth is in her ninth season as Artistic Director of Globe Theatre. Prior to moving to Regina, Ruth was the Artistic Director of Catalyst Theatre in Edmonton for ten years. She was a Visiting Fellow at King Alfred's College in Winchester in 1994. Directing credits at Globe Theatre include *Just So*, *Cinderella*, Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, *A Man for All Seasons*, *The Secret Garden*, *Last Call*, *Honk!*, *Elizabeth Rex*, *Grace*, *The Wizard of Oz* (with Michael Kennard), *Amadeus*, *Old Wicked Songs*, *A Perfect Ganesh*, *Cruel Tears*, and *Cosi*. Ruth was director and dramaturge for the Globe Theatre/National Arts Centre production of *The Velvet Devil*. In the fall of 2003 she directed *Eos: The Dream of Nicholas Flood Davin* for the University of Regina. In 2002, Ruth received the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal for her contributions to Saskatchewan culture. In 2004 she received the YWCA Women of Distinction Arts Award. In 2005, Ruth Smillie was awarded the Saskatchewan Centennial Medal. She is the mother of three excellent kids: Emmaline, Tom and Lucy.

Set & Costume Designer – Laura Hale – After spending 5 years as Head of Props with Globe Theatre, Laura is thrilled to be back working with the great team at the Globe. She has recently relocated to Saskatoon to serve as “Artist in the Community” with the Meewasin Valley Authority and was the “Art at Work” resident artist for the Jeux du Canada Games held in Regina in the summer of 2005. Laura works as a freelance designer, visual artist, land based installation artist and community art projects initiator. Laura is very excited to be part of the 2007 Globe Theatre season and a big thanks to all who contributed to the creation of *Mom's the Word*.

Lighting Designer – Elizabeth Asselstine - Elizabeth returns to the Globe Theatre to design lights for *Mom's the Word*. Earlier designs at the theatre have included *The Coronation Voyage*, *Elizabeth Rex* and last year's production of *Trying*. Other recent theatre credits include Tapestry New Opera Works' *Opera to Go*, *Anne and Gilbert* in Summerside PEI and *Candide* at Toronto Operetta Theatre. A member of Associated Designers of Canada, she teaches at York University the rest of the time.

Alison - Julianna Barclay - Julianna is very pleased to be making her Globe Theatre debut with *Mom's the Word*. Julianna grew up in Regina and attended the University of Regina. Past stage credits include: *Klank* (Hatch Festival for New Emerging Artists – Harbour Front Theatre); *The Blue Orphan*, *The House of Pootsie Plunket* (Catalyst Theatre – national and international tour), *Twelfth Night* (Citadel Theatre), *The Hobbit* (ATP), and *A Christmas Carol* (Theatre New Brunswick). Julianna now makes her home in Toronto. She dedicates her performance to her darling ten year old daughter Zoë.

Linda - Darla Biccum – Darla is an actor and singer who is proud to call Saskatchewan home. Previous theatre credits include *George Dandin*, *Cinderella*, Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (Globe Theatre); *Hockey Mom*, *Hockey Dad* and *A Doll's House* (Persephone Theatre, Saskatoon); *Caberlesque!* (BSide Productions) and *Marg Szkaluba (Pissy's Wife)* (BSide Productions/Globe Theatre). Television credits include *renegadepress.com*, *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, and *Corner Gas*. Darla dedicates this show to all the moms in her life – especially her own.

Jill - Audrey Dwyer - Audrey Dwyer is happy to be at the Globe Theatre. Theatre credits include *The Babysitter* (Theatre Direct), *Tideline* (Factory Theatre), *Blue Planet* (LKTYP), *Danny, King of the Basement* (Roseneath Theatre/MTYP), *The Tempest* (Persephone Theatre), *Patty's Cake* (Carousel Players; Dora Award for Best Outstanding Children's Production), *The Crucible* (MTC). Film/TV credits include *State Within* (Michael Offer), *Da Kink In My Hair* (Global), *Man of The Year* (Barry Levinson), *Where The Truth Lies* (Atom Egoyan); *Haunting Sarah* (Lifetime); *A Marriage of Convenience* (Elizabeth Productions). Audrey is a graduate of the National Theatre School of Canada Acting Program. She thanks and sends all her love to her mom and dedicates her performance to Miranda Fisher.

Robin - Melissa Hande - Melissa has worked in stage, film and television in Alberta, British Columbia, and Saskatchewan. Favourite Saskatchewan productions include: *Cosi* (Globe Theatre), *Proof* (Persephone Theatre), *Romeo & Juliet* (Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan), *Random Acts* (Dancing Sky Theatre), *Buz 'Gem Blues* (Saskatchewan Native Theatre) and one season of *Prairie Berry Pie* (APTN). Thank you to all mothers for their dedication and perseverance. I hope to join you some day.

Deborah - Esther Purves-Smith - Esther is very happy to be back at the Globe Theatre where she was last seen as Margaret in *The Glace Bay Miners' Museum*. Other favourite theatre credits include *Lion in the Streets* (Sage Theatre), *The Glass Menagerie* (Theatre Calgary), *Betty's Summer Vacation* (Citadel Theatre), *Popcorn and Perfect Pie* (Alberta Theatre Projects), *Shopaholic* (Lunchbox Theatre), *Problem Child* (Great Canadian Theatre Co.), *Zadie's Shoes* (Art Club Theatre), and most recently *Urinetown* for Ground Zero Theatre/ Hit & Myth Productions. Esther gives thanks to her moms, Liz and Fen, and to her daughter/educator Stella, and would like to dedicate this show to Honey Gran who really made it possible to be here.

Stage Manager – Sheila Crampton - Sheila runs Performance Productions in Saskatoon with partner Jack Getzlaf, where they provide lighting, sound, and staging for all types of live events. She is a technical production graduate of the National Theatre School in Montréal. Globe Theatre credits include *On the Line*, *The Hobbit*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Wit*, and *Strawberries in January*.

Assistant Stage Manager – Esther Howie – Esther is happy to be back at the Globe Theatre this season. Her previous Globe Theatre credits include: *Just So*, *2 Pianos 4 Hands*, *Cinderella*, *Trying*, *Twelfth Night*, *Wingfield on Ice*, and Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*. She has also had the wonderful opportunity to work with Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan last summer. Esther would like to thank her family and friends for their continued support. Enjoy the show.

VI. TICKET INFORMATION

The Student Matinee for *Mom's the Word* will be held on April 25, 2007. The performance begins at 1:30pm. Tickets are \$12 plus GST per person. The Student Matinee is sponsored by Imperial Oil Foundation.

Talkback Tuesday for *Mom's the Word* will be held on Tuesday, April 24, 2007 at 7:30pm. Following the show, there will be an opportunity for patrons to meet the actors and artists, and to discuss the show. Talkback Tuesday is sponsored by Enbridge Pipelines Inc.

Contact Karen Jurzyniec at karen@globetheatrelive.com or 924-2822 for more information regarding the student matinees or Talkback Tuesday.

VII. SOURCES

Mom's the Word – 5 Cast Member Version, Mom's the Word Collective – copyright 2004, reformatted Jan 2007

Mom's the Word by the Mom's the Word Collective, copyright 2000 Talon Books, Vancouver, BC

Personal interview with Laura Hale, Costume and Set Designer, April 2007

Talonbooks.com – Mom's the Word by Linda Caron, Jill Daum and Allison Kelly DRA01300

tbsource.com – preview of Magnus Theatre production – Feb

Theatre – FFWD WEEKLY by Nikki Sheppy July 9, 1998

The Uniter (U of W), Issue 10, November 16th, 2006 by Ksenia Prints

www.canadiancontent.ca – article by James Hörner

VIII. ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION

The script of *Mom's the Word* has been written as a series of monologues. Why would the authors choose to write it in this manner? What challenges would this present to the actors on stage in presenting their stories?

How would you describe the set for this production? What purposes did the kitchen island serve? What locations does the bench help create?

What did the ultrasound image on the wall in the main entrance represent?

How do the actors give the illusion that they are not acting, but are truly relating a true story about themselves?

How was lighting used to enhance the stories?

What belief/beliefs about motherhood in our society is/are reflected in the title, *Mom's the Word*?

Why were the playwrights so dedicated to the writing and performing of the show?

Put yourself in the shoes of your parents. What stories could they relate about your childhood? What challenges do you feel your mother, and/or her contemporaries faced in the raising of you?

Globe Theatre's Student Matinees
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