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The Ware Trilogy

Mother Hicks

The Taste of Sunrise

The Edge of Peace

By

SUZAN ZEDER

Dramatic Publishing Company

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The Ware Trilogy: Mother Hicks, The Taste of Sunrise and The Edge of Peace

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The Ware Trilogy

is dedicated to ALL the citizens of Ware

Producers, directors, actors, musicians, dramaturgs, designers,
children, adults, parents, teachers, grandparents,
students, professors and Jim

who have all come to dwell in these plays

GLOSSARY OF ASL TERMS

American Sign Language: A visually perceived language based on a naturally evolved system of articulated hand gestures and their placement relative to the body, along with non-manual markers such as facial expressions, head movements, shoulder raises, mouth morphemes and movements of the body.

Audio Description: An additional narration track transmitted through headphones for blind and visually impaired audience members and those with a variety of cognitive disabilities. It consists of a narrator talking through the presentation, describing what is happening on the screen during the natural pauses in the audio, and sometimes during dialogue if deemed necessary.

Deaf Artist Collaborators: Although these plays clearly call for Deaf performers to play Deaf roles, there are wonderful benefits to be had from the involvement of other Deaf artists in the production team. A Deaf lighting designer will know how to effectively light the stage for sign language but will also provide invaluable insight into how to make “hearing” concepts visual. A Deaf director or co-director assures that assumptions are not made as to what Deaf audience members will and will not understand and will provide invaluable insights in all aspects of the production process. The involvement of Deaf collaborators will make the rehearsal and production process a “with them” not “for them” undertaking.

Fingerspelling: The process of spelling out words by using signs that correspond to the letters of the word. Often used for people’s names, titles, places, brands, etc.

Home sign: The gestural communication system developed by a Deaf child who lacks input from a language model in the family. This is a common experience for Deaf children with hearing parents who are isolated from a sign language community.

Sign Language Interpreter: A person trained in translating between a spoken and a signed language. This usually means someone who interprets what is being said and signs it for someone who can’t hear, but understands sign. A necessity during the rehearsal and production periods where Deaf actors and other artists are involved. Even if a Deaf person is an accomplished lip-reader, it is crucial that competent interpreters be involved to be sure that communication is clear and effective for both Deaf and hearing individuals

Name sign: A special sign that is used to uniquely identify a person, just like a name. This ensures that no one else in the community already has the same sign name or that the same sign has a different meaning. A person often “receives” a name sign from a Deaf person. It is often a combination of a letter or letters from their name and a sign that tells something special about that person.

Sign Language Gloss: Since ASL is a visual-gestural language, not a spoken consecutive language, it can only truly be recorded in video and not captured in writing. Many writing systems have been developed for ASL, but it is difficult to capture handshape, location, palm orientation, movement and non-manual signals in a written word. For that reason, when scribing ASL, many people rely on the linguistic convention called “glossing,” which means writing a word in your native language for each sign that appears. This is not a perfect system, but it can be useful when discussing the syntax of other languages, signed or spoken.

Sign Language Interpreters in Performance: In a traditional set-up, interpreters are often kept to one side, which sometimes means that audience members who are Deaf or hard of hearing must choose whether to watch the action onstage or the interpreter to the side. But interpreters can also be placed in proximity to where Deaf audience members are sitting so that both the interpreter and the action onstage are in their line of sight. This requires careful thought and adequate lighting.

Shadow Interpreting/Interpreters: Interpreters who are integrated into the action onstage. Sometimes they wear appropriate costumes and make-up and are in character at all times as they are as much a part of the action as any other characters. Shadow interpreters may also be dressed in black or neutral colors so that they might interpret for more than one character by shifting body positions. All shadow characters should be integrated from the very beginning of the rehearsal process and not added in at the end. Use of shadow interpreters requires very careful blocking and effective lighting.

Surtitles: Translated or transcribed dialogue projected above a stage or displayed on a screen. Surtitles are used to translate meaning into the audience’s language. Captions must be integrated into the overall design of the production so not to be distracting and timing is crucial to keep pace with action onstage and to keep words in sync with action.

Foreword

I didn't set out to write the plays in this trilogy. They came to me one by one and demanded to be written. First came *Mother Hicks*, the character and then the play. When I was researching *Wiley and the Hairy Man*, I became fascinated by the WPA manuscripts and oral lore collected in the 1930s. I was struck by the number of witch tales I found that were "told as true" and how in a time of crisis otherwise good people seek solace in scapegoating and try to find explanations for the inexplicable in the supernatural. Next came *Girl*, an "orphan child of an orphan child." I have always been inspired by the dignity and depth of young characters who meet adversity with humor, grace and courage. But nothing could prepare me for the day I first sat down to work on a new play for Seattle Children's Theatre and a young man strode into the theatre of my mind pulling a wagon. He came downstage and began to sign in the visual poetry of American Sign Language. Tuc had arrived.

I have followed these characters through three plays over more than 30 years of my life and theirs. They have taken me to the roaring '20s, through the Great Depression and finally to the very end of World War II. Each play held within it the necessity for the next one and the one after that. I had to write *The Taste of Sunrise* to give Tuc his own play and to find out how a simple farm boy came to have the soul of a poet. I had to write *The Edge of Peace* to unravel the mysteries of the two previous plays and to bring all of the characters safely home. Over time, I came to know all the townspeople of Ware: Clovis, the shopkeeper; Alma, the undertaker's wife; Ricky, *Girl*'s sidekick; and Izzy, the town hysteric. They revealed themselves to me in their longings and their losses, their dreams and moments of despair, their joys and quiet celebrations. I have seen them born, watched them grow-up, mourned with them and gloried in their successes. I truly do not know whether I have created them or they have created me. The town of Ware is more real to me than my own hometown.

I have received scores of letters from companies who have produced these plays in professional theatres, colleges, universities, high schools and community theatres. I have seen productions with lavish budgets, modest means and shoe strings. But in every production there is a common core of caring, a recognition that these plays ask much of those courageous enough to produce them, but give back ... a community.

I have been deeply moved by how many actors, directors, designers, even crew members told me that their experience in production has been life changing. This is largely due to the presence of a Deaf actor and other Deaf artists. Time after time, I am reminded of the absolute necessity of casting the Deaf roles with Deaf artists, not because it is politically correct to do so, but because it is vital to the dramaturgical integrity of each play and essential to the success of the rehearsal and production process. Sometimes this means that a company or school may have to search far and wide to find a Deaf actor with less experience than they might wish, but the payoff is enormous. I have been moved to tears by Deaf actors able to capture the soul of Tuc even though it is their first time onstage. That's life changing, not just for the actor but for everyone involved!

Now, finally all the plays are together in one place. It feels like a family reunion. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Seattle Children's Theatre and to Linda Hartzell, who initially commissioned each play, to Anchorage Press for taking a risk on the first two plays and to Dramatic Publishing Company for bringing them all home to each other. I wish to thank every producer, director, dramaturg, designer, actor, musician and audience member who has ever participated in a production of any of these plays and express my appreciation to all who have studied or taught them in classes. And finally to acknowledge the enormous contributions of my beloved Jim, who has been by my side and in my heart always ... you are all citizens of Ware.

There is magic in these plays, not of witchcraft but of community, communication and compassion. I am unspeakably grateful that they chose me to write them.

—Suzan Zeder, 2017
Santa Fe, N.M.

Introduction

“Journey through a remarkable trilogy of Ware; unknown pieces of American history in hearing and Deaf cultures. I have seen as much as Tuc sees: sign language is beautiful language, is part of languages, culture language Deaf people use to communicate, to live.”

—Elbert Joseph, who played Tuc in *The Ware Trilogy*

By May 1983, when Poncho Theatre premiered *Mother Hicks* in Seattle, renowned playwright Suzan Zeder had already broken new ground with her award-winning plays for youth that dealt with mature themes. *Step on a Crack, Wiley and the Hairy Man* and *Doors* invigorated the world of theatre for young audiences (TYA) with a rich blend of realism and fantasy as well as experimental theatrical styles. Zeder’s early plays were as compelling to adults as they were for youth, and they laid the foundation for a new chapter in the evolution of TYA. That chapter began with the opening of *Mother Hicks*. The depth and complexity of the characters and the challenges they confronted raised the bar for what was possible. This Depression-era play about a spirited orphan child called “Girl,” a mysterious midwife known as Mother Hicks, and a *seemingly* insignificant Deaf man named Tuc caught the imagination of people around the world.

The plight of three complex “outsiders” and their evolving relationship with residents of Ware, Illinois, was so compelling that virtually every artist and audience member who either worked on or saw a production of *Mother Hicks* became profoundly invested in the story. The play marked a departure from everything that had come before it, including Zeder’s own work. *Mother Hicks* raised more questions than it answered, pushed multiple boundaries, defied audience expectations and demanded that theatres become more inclusive and accessible. For Bobbi Wolf, executive director of Wolf Performing Arts Center in Bryn Mawr, Penn., the effort was well worth it. “Directing *Mother Hicks* was one of the richest experiences I have had in theatre—rich in talent, friendship and respect. The cast learned from each other and embraced differences. The story ... fills an audience with compassion, understanding and acceptance.”

Why did people have such strong reactions to *Mother Hicks*, and how did Zeder alter our perceptions of TYA? It was not unusual for plays that dealt with mature themes for protagonists to struggle against tremendous odds. Any

stage adaptation of a Dickens novel delved into a dark world full of obstacles. Through perseverance, goodness of heart, and the help of others, the hero/heroine was ultimately rewarded in a manner that satisfied audiences. A sense of “justice being served” prevailed. Zeder places Girl on a different trajectory in a precarious world that is anything but fair. Girl’s depth of character—strengths, weaknesses and quirks—quickly pulls us into her reality. We are deeply invested as she navigates a host of devastating circumstances using every resource she possesses. The stakes for Girl are high, and her quest for identity is so strong that it leads her to commit a dangerous act, nearly killing herself inadvertently with a knife. Girl’s actions are deeply disturbing, yet rooted in a carefully crafted sequence of dramatic events that ring true. This is the stuff of great drama most often reserved for adults.

In *Mother Hicks*, Zeder discards the notion that young people need to be protected from pain, loss, suffering and grief. She avoids sentimentality at every turn. She trusts audiences with long stretches of silence that hold us at the edge of our seats. Gone are assumptions about short attention spans. Also, Girl takes self-reliance to a new level, particularly for a female protagonist. While she occasionally receives help from others, she is essentially left to her own devices to find her way in the world. Girl forms bonds with Tuc and Nell Hicks and, in the process, gains insights that help her separate gossip and superstition from fact; she grows.

The ending of the *Mother Hicks* was also jarring compared with standard TYA fare of the early 1980s. Girl is heroic. She is a good person whom we care about. Like every heroine in every play for young audiences, she deserves a happy ending. She does not need to become a princess or to be adopted by rich parents for us to feel satisfied. Girl simply wants a home where she belongs and a name. We want that for her, too. Zeder stays firmly grounded in the harsh reality of the world of the play. There is no happy ending in the traditional sense. Girl is forced to let go of fantasies that have comforted her and begins to come to terms with disappointing truths. Although not what she wants, it is what she needs at that moment. The play may feel unresolved, but it is not unfinished, ending when each major character has an epiphany that allows him or her to move on. In fact, the feeling of “wanting more” is precisely why the play stays with us. The unresolved struggles of Girl, Tuc and Mother Hicks enter our psyche and continue to stir.

Following the success of *Mother Hicks*, Zeder could have easily moved on from the characters she had created. Indeed, she continued on her path as a prolific playwright and was awarded an endowed chair in theatre for youth/playwriting at the University of Texas at Austin. But thousands of audience

members and theatre artists could not quite let these characters go. Luckily for us, neither could Zeder. The decision to write a prequel was courageous. *Mother Hicks* had become an iconic play, read in virtually every TYA class. It was produced worldwide, despite the fact that it was not a “name” piece and that it presented a host of challenges (e.g., an American Sign Language [ASL] coach and ASL interpreters were required). Zeder knew that she was mining new ground with *The Taste of Sunrise*. She received guidance from several people who were Deaf and support from Dr. Victoria Brown and the faculty at Galludet University, the nation’s premiere educational institution for Deaf students. She also worked closely with Billy Seago, Seattle Deaf actor who had played Tuc in multiple productions of *Mother Hicks*, so that the spoken translation of Tuc’s ASL was as accurate a reflection of the character’s thoughts as possible. His story had to be seen, heard and felt with all the color and richness that it deserved. Zeder dove straight to the heart of a world that was unrelenting, gritty and poetic beyond words.

While all three plays in *The Ware Trilogy* are seen through Tuc’s perspective, *The Taste of Sunrise* is clearly Tuc’s play. As such, one *might* be tempted to categorize it as a TYA play about a protagonist with a disability. There is a body of work, some quite powerful, in which young protagonists have a physical challenge that defines their journey. To summarize this genre in *very* general terms: a main character with a disability desperately seeks understanding and acceptance from people who are misguided or even cruel. By overcoming a series of obstacles, the protagonist proves their self-worth to those who had mistreated them and to themselves. As we empathize with these brave protagonists, we are relieved that those who mistreated them realize their actions were unjust. *The Taste of Sunrise* transcends this model, and brings us into uncharted territory. Much of the world of the play remains as misguided as it is unjust. Therefore, while fighting for acceptance and understanding is important, coming to terms with multiple internal struggles is ultimately more essential. Tuc’s power and strength can only come from within. Given the magnitude of his external battles, Tuc must fight long and hard before he can begin the process of internal healing.

The fact that Tuc loses his hearing as a result of scarlet fever and is sent to a school for the Deaf where ASL is forbidden is central to the play. But Zeder’s deep understanding of Tuc’s inner life allows us to empathize with his struggles without pity. The multifaceted Tuc is intuitive, loving and vulnerable. He has a sense of humor and a stubborn streak. He confronts danger and has the capacity to help others. Although his deafness causes many of the struggles he faces, it does not define who he is. Tuc is a loving

son who has a painful confrontation with his father and must deal with guilt and grief. He is a caring friend to Maizie and is devastated by choices she makes. In his deepest despair, he discovers the ability to connect with Nell Hicks, a hearing woman. They find a way to communicate, which allows him to begin on an arduous path of healing. Tuc is first and foremost a human being with dreams, fears, needs and desires. He is also Deaf.

The Taste of Sunrise, like the other two plays in the trilogy, is intended for and is accessible to everyone. It is a bilingual play in which spoken English and ASL are intermingled in ways that make communication itself an exploration. No other a play in the TYA canon has done more to introduce the world of theatre to audience members and artists who are Deaf. For theatres producing *Mother Hicks*, Zeder is clear about her intentions for the casting of Tuc. Any actor who plays the role should either be Deaf or hearing impaired. In her author's notes for *The Taste of Sunrise*, she moved from urging the casting of a Deaf/hard-of-hearing actor as Tuc to requiring it for producing the play.

Zeder has maintained her stance on this point with full knowledge that some theatres will decide not to produce her play due to lack of resources and support. She is well aware that the plays in the trilogy are difficult to produce, particularly *The Taste of Sunrise*, which not only has several Deaf characters but also Maizie, the hearing child of Deaf parents, who must speak and communicate through ASL simultaneously. The process, known as SimCom, is a nearly impossible task for any actor. But it is precisely that frustrating task that exemplifies Maizie's dilemma: she is pulled between two worlds, belonging to neither. In her author's notes, Zeder acknowledges the many challenges inherent in producing the play and articulates the reason one would choose to take it on. Personally, I have directed scores of plays during the past 30 years. Of them all, *The Taste of Sunrise* was by far the most difficult and the most rewarding.

Actors fall in love with the roles in Zeder's play. Perhaps because there are so few role models for people who are Deaf, actors playing Tuc feel a particular responsibility to do the role justice. Generations of people have had life experiences similar to Tuc's. They may relive traumatic episodes of their lives while watching the play. For young audiences who are Deaf, the play brings them into the crucible of the history of Deaf education through the visceral medium of theatre. As role models, Deaf actors can inspire people who previously assumed they had no place in theatre to audition for a play. Given the stakes, actors playing Tuc may feel both excitement and anxiety as they rigorously examine each moment of his complicated journey.

Ben Featherstone, a student at Brigham Young University who played Tuc in *The Taste of Sunrise*, shares what he gained from the experience: “I learned the power of hope, the need to love, the desire to endure, the feelings of sorrow and pain, and the thrill of discovery. *The Ware Trilogy* has this amazing ability to grab all of us by our hand and gently lead us through all these emotions as we watch the characters experience and overcome different challenges. This story is perfect for all members of any family, and this story can be shared and applied in any circumstances of life you are in right now.”

Director Julia Ashworth recalls Featherstone’s growth as an actor: “From his earliest memories, Ben wanted to be onstage. He auditioned in junior high, but after being assigned to ‘filler’ roles, he stopped.” Ashworth convinced him to audition. While he was inexperienced and terrified, she saw “a glimpse of who Ben could become as an actor. Since then he exceeded all expectations. Ben told this story with an honesty reserved for few actors at the college level.” Featherstone won the Irene Ryan National Acting Scholarship Audition for Regional XIII and was the first Deaf actor to compete as a national finalist at the Kennedy Center’s American College Theater Festival.

Kevin Purcell of The Stage Company in Carbondale, Ill., relates a powerful turn of events for the actor who played Tuc at his theatre. “Sam Butler left his job as a mechanic in Texas for two months to come and do this role with us. Sam also played Tuc in our 2014 *Mother Hicks*. He has grown as an actor and as a person in that time. He is not only a good actor but also a fine advocate for the idea of everyone learning ASL. His brother and his family came to watch the play. Sam and his brother have been estranged for eight years, his brother never wanting to learn sign. After the performance his brother’s wife said, ‘Sam, you are right, we need to learn sign and we both want to very much.’ We shall see how this develops. But the play enabled a powerful moment for Sam and his family.”

Elbert Joseph, a professional actor, played Tuc in all three plays as part of the first complete production of *The Ware Trilogy* staged in Boston in 2015 thanks to a collaboration between Emerson College, Wheelock Family Theatre and Central Square Theatre. Of Tuc, Joseph writes: “I love his heart, his strength and his courage. He became a man on his own terms, moving between Deaf and hearing cultures. Immersing myself in his life helped me realize I am not alone in this struggle.” Joseph won a special recognition award from the Independent Reviewers of New England for his performances in the trilogy.

In the following review, the critic recounts the affect Joseph's performance had on him. "My heart is full and my head is spinning as I sit down to capture my thoughts and emotions after having attended the opening performance of *The Taste of Sunrise*. If this is Tuc's play, then it is also certainly Elbert Joseph's play. ... [The] actor's expressions and movement and stage presence are so compelling and so clear that there is never any doubt what thoughts and feelings and intentions he is radiating. This is one of the finest performances by an actor I have seen on a Boston stage. In leaving my seat following the standing ovation and the deaf community's enthusiastic waving of hands to indicate applause, I found myself part of an instant community," wrote Al Chase of *The White Rhino*.

Zeder's plays invite community between Deaf and hearing worlds, not only onstage but also in every facet of the production. At Wheelock Family Theatre we were fortunate to have Deaf and hearing artists both onstage and as part of the artistic staff. During a production meeting, lighting designer Annie Wegand said through an interpreter (and I paraphrase), "So, the play starts with wind, water, birds and thunder. I can show thunder with lights, but how do we show wind, water and birds?" As co-director I replied, "Tuc signs those words." "Yes," Annie continued. "But in the script it says we hear those sounds. Part of your audience will be Deaf. How can we *see* wind, water and birds?"

The implications of Weigand's question hit us, and we embarked on a brainstorming session that transformed our vision of the play. There was fire. There was dirt. Elements were central to Tuc's memory of his father and of home. After much debate, leaves blown on stage became the visual representation of wind. We added a drawer to the set containing water; a blue light flickered each time it was opened. One trap door was filled with dirt that Tuc and Jonas could dig their hands into. Another trap door was opened and illuminated with red light whenever fire was used. These visual images enhanced the play for Deaf and hearing audiences alike. This is one of countless examples of how Deaf members of our artistic staff improved the overall quality of the production by sharing their perspectives.

My co-director for *The Taste of Sunrise* was Kristin Johnson, a theatre artist and ASL coach who is Deaf. Her insights during the rehearsal process were invaluable. She offers a window into the play's power and resonance: "*The Taste of Sunrise* incorporates multiple aspects of humanity, including disabilities, diversities and cultures. Each actor and production team member contributes his/her own personal experiences, passion and compassion,

making the play realistic in its emotional truth. Tuc and I have had similar life journeys, and our experiences are not uncommon. Many Deaf people had experienced family separation, confusion of Spoken English acquisition, minimal deaf education, limited literacy, and oppression from the majority society. Suzan Zeder's craftsmanship truly reflects common experiences members of the Deaf society have had."

Roughly thirty years after *Mother Hicks* premiered, Zeder completed *The Ware Trilogy* with *The Edge of Peace*. *Mother Hicks* takes place primarily in the town of Ware, and the townsfolk play a major role. *The Taste of Sunrise* includes multiple locations, and the residents of the town are seen briefly. *The Edge of Peace* brings us back to Ware, which in a sense has grown up since we left it. The play is set in 1945, during the final stages of World War II, and the children in *Mother Hicks* are now young adults. Some things in the town have changed. Notably, in addition to Nell, a few people have learned some ASL and converse with Tuc. Girl is a pilot for the Women's Air Force. But peace has yet to arrive in Ware or abroad. Ricky Ricks is missing in action, and his younger brother fantasizes about warfare. Fragments of information give way to rumors of a German soldier on the loose, being helped by a spy. Radio transmissions in German emanating from the home of Nell Hicks places her squarely under suspicion. In troubled times, the need for a scapegoat has not changed.

The play is remarkable as much for what occurs as for what doesn't. Girl and Maizie (now Margaret) inhabit the same location for the first time since Girl was left on a doorstep as a baby. They meet as grown women, and for Margaret there is a moment of recognition. We seem to be on the brink of a cathartic moment. Girl is poised to finally discover the truth. But easy tears of joy have no place in Zeder's trilogy. She ends the scene with our expectations dashed. Tuc pleads with Margaret. His desire and ours could still be fulfilled. Margaret has reasons for keeping her secret, just as her younger self had reasons for the action that caused Tuc so much anguish. Margaret's choice reminds us that people we care about can make decisions we vehemently disagree with and that even cause us pain. But our lives are our own, and we must make and live with the consequences of our decisions. Ultimately, we discover the reason Girl, Tuc and Nell Hicks must reunite at this point in time and understand the multiple meanings of the play's title.

In July 2017, the Stage Company, located 25 miles from Ware, Illinois, presented *The Edge of Peace*, having recently produced *Mother Hicks* and *The Taste of Sunrise*. It's hard to estimate the extent to which a trilogy that continues to touch the lives of so many people who have never heard of Ware,

Illinois, before means to those (hearing and Deaf) who grew up there. Michael Eudy, the real-life grandson of Clovis Eudy, the owner of the general store in Zeder's trilogy, provides a glimpse: "*Mother Hicks* and the trilogy have sparked many conversations, memories, and tales for family and friends, as more are becoming aware of the attention it has brought to Ware. ... Seeing it tonight with my dad and watching this play of fiction is really surreal. I and others can recall the store, drive past Dug Hill and remember the Ware of 1981 when Suzan would have driven through. My father's generation was born and just old enough to remember the actual time when these plays would have 'or did' happen. The stories told in them are deep and timeless. I hope others don't miss out, as they tell a common tale for many."

A trilogy written by one of the most influential playwrights for family audiences is a gift. While each play stands alone as a riveting piece of theatre, the trilogy performed in its entirety, spanning the turbulent years of 1917 to 1945, reveals what is only possible by observing these characters over decades and at different critical junctures. It captures their shifts in perspective occurring suddenly in moments of crisis or evolving slowly as a response to forces from outside and from within. Zeder's characters grow through moments of deep connection, understanding, love, pain, grief and loss. As theatre artists seize the opportunity for growth inherent in the challenges of these plays, *The Ware Trilogy* will continue to introduce audiences to an inclusive world that embodies all the richness and contradictions of life.

—Wendy Lement

NOTES REGARDING ASL USAGE

The correct and artful use of sign language is as important in all of these plays as any of the words I have written. This is one reason why I insist that the Deaf roles are always played by actors who are either Deaf or hard of hearing and fluent in American Sign Language (ASL). Beyond this, however, there must be someone who will translate the words of Tuc's narratives and dialogue into sign. This is often done by a "Sign Master," or by a collaborative team and the actor playing Tuc. It is also crucial that the signs be accurate as well as artistic.

Over the years I have considered commissioning a definitive translation of my text into ASL and have decided not to do so. Partially this is because of the benefits of collaborative creation so that the sign vocabulary is "owned" physically, emotionally and poetically by those who created it, rather than replicated from a single source. Also, I do not wish to do ANYTHING to make it easier for companies to produce these plays without using Deaf artists in Deaf roles, something that happens all too often despite my admonitions to the contrary.

When I first wrote *Mother Hicks* more than 30 years ago, I called for Tuc's narratives to be spoken by the chorus who also played the townspeople of Ware. In this collected version of the trilogy, I have changed this so that there is a single character, Voice, in all three plays who serves as Tuc's alter ego and his voice in the hearing world.

In addition to the sign text for Tuc, there are many opportunities for the creative use of sign language. I have seen productions where shadow signers are provided for every character. This makes the play totally accessible to both Deaf and hearing audiences. This works best when both performers are actually playing a role, rather than one simply interpreting for the other.

In scenes where Deaf characters are onstage, it is crucial to find a way that both words and signs are used. If all characters in a scene are Deaf, they would not speak. Their words should be voiced by Voice and ensemble members seen in shadow. If hearing characters are also in a scene you might use "SimCom," where a character simultaneously signs and speaks. This is VERY difficult to master, as ASL and English have different syntaxes. But this can be used when a character is interpreting for a Deaf or hearing character, or in a very intimate scene, such as Maizie signing to her baby.

At the end of this volume, you will find a glossary of terms associated with various approaches to the integration of sign into productions. I encourage you to look at the challenges it presents as opportunities for artistry rather than obstacles to be overcome. Once you have had an intimate experience with the beauty of sign language in its many manifestations, you will be forever changed!