

Downrange: Voices from the Homefront

By Tom Quaintance, Artistic Director, Cape Fear Regional Theatre

(This post is a part of series highlighting the work of recipients of TCG's Blue Star Theatres grant program. Cape Fear Regional Theatre is a recipient of Blue Star Theatres grant funding to support its production of [Downrange: Voices from the Homefront](#).)



My wife and I moved to Fayetteville, NC from Los Angeles 4-½ years ago with a 2-month-old baby girl. Neither of us came from a military family, and LA is certainly not a military town. As I was driving into work at Cape Fear Regional Theatre (CFRT), Wallis was taking Miri to the park, Little Gym, Kindermusik, and the library and would come home and say, “You have to hear these stories.”

“These stories” were from spouses who had husbands and wives deployed. Stories of incredible grit, love, resilience, and humor. Some stories were heartbreaking, some were hilarious, all were humbling. I came to CFRT looking for ways to better connect the theatre to the military community, and it was clear early on that “these stories” were going to play a part.

[Downrange: Voices from the Homefront](#) is based on six months of interviews we conducted with spouses from all walks of life. What started with a broad examination on the impact of deployment on military spouses has turned into an extraordinary play on how 9/11 has redefined what it means to be a military family.

One of the primary hurdles to overcome with work of and about the contemporary military is simply getting people to engage with the material. When discussing the play the first reaction from military spouses tends to be: “My life is tough enough. Why do I need to see a play about it?” The first reaction from civilians tends to be: “This is not about my life. Why do I need to see a play about it?” But when we are able to get in front of people and share part of the work with them, they are able to see how accessible, funny, and moving the piece is. The Blue Star Theatre grant allowed us to access the right groups of people and provided the resources to include our actors in our outreach efforts.

Hiring a military liaison helped get us on post for the Association of Bragg Spouses Luncheon and the Military Officers Association of American Luncheon and to a USO Spouse Reset event at the Botanical Garden. At each event we got tremendous response, and each time we were asked if we were going to tour the event to other military communities. Each time I told them to get the word out about *Downrange*, because for the show to have a life after Fayetteville,

it had to first have an impact in Fayetteville. We've been getting a lot of people patting us on the back for producing the play, but whether that translates into an audience remains to be seen.

Having the resources to pay the actors a stipend to take part in the outreach activities has been hugely important. The actors are the best ambassadors for the play, and we were able to get the piece in front of some great groups of civilians. The Fayetteville Ladies' Power Luncheon and the Community Blueprint group put the material in front of a broad cross-section of civilians who are supportive of the military.

When we applied for the TCG Audience (R)Evolution grant that ultimately allowed us to commission *Downrange*, our aim was to transform the way we do outreach to the military by putting that community at the center of the artmaking experience. We have had tremendous support from the military community during the creation of *Downrange*, and we hope that active-duty and retired soldiers and spouses find the work truthful and feel the respect, admiration, and sincere gratitude we all felt in making the play.

What I was unprepared for was how I would be transformed by the experience. Before moving to Fayetteville I was pretty content to know next to nothing about the military. My sense of my duty as an American citizen was basically limited to my duty to vote. "Support Our Troops" was a slogan on a flag pin or a bumper sticker.

That has changed. I believe it is the duty of every American citizen to understand what we are asking of our soldiers and our soldiers' families. It is our duty to give a damn. This is not to suggest a political position on foreign policy. That is a staggeringly complex issue, and it is not what we are trying to address here. Ultimately I'm talking about empathy, and that's what we do well in theatre: share stories that touch our own experiences to help us gain perspective and share stories from people unlike ourselves to help us gain understanding. How can you care if you don't understand? How can you support if you don't empathize? As long as someone remains "the other," he or she is easier to ignore.

There is always a long list of people to thank when bringing a world premiere to fruition. Thanks [to Mike Wiley](#) for his beautiful writing and collaborative spirit and to the outstanding [actors and designers](#) for throwing themselves into this material. Thanks to [Hidden Voices](#) for their fantastic workshops and the many granting organizations that have supported this work. Thanks to the soldiers who have shared their experiences, and most especially thanks to the spouses who have shared their stories. Thank you for your grit, your love, your resilience, and your humor. Thank you for your service. This one is for you.



Tom Quaintance is the Artistic Director of Cape Fear Regional Theatre, where he has directed Spamalot, Return to the Forbidden Planet, The Santaland Diaries, Sweeney Todd, The Little Prince, Pride & Prejudice, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Jesus Christ Superstar, On Golden Pond, Othello, The Best Christmas Pageant Ever and Hairspray. Tom is an Associate Artist at PlayMakers Repertory Company in Chapel Hill, where he directed An Enemy of the People, Shipwrecked! An Entertainment, The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby, and The Little Prince. He also directed The Little Prince at the 2007 Edinburgh Fringe Festival. As the founder of FreightTrain Shakespeare in Los Angeles, he earned a Dramalogue Award for his direction of Pericles. Other Los Angeles credits range from King Lear to The Devil With Boobs. A member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, Tom is a graduate of Wesleyan University (Middletown, CT), with a B.A. in Theatre and Economics, and the University of California, San Diego MFA directing program, where he was the assistant director on the original production of The Who's Tommy. Tom and his wife, Wallis, are the proud parents of Mireille Julia and Annika Christine.

Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national service organization for theatre, and Blue Star Families, the country's largest chapter-based military families non-profit organization, are pleased to support the second round of the Blue Star Theatres Grant Program. Through support from MetLife Foundation, the Grant Program funds efforts that deepen the relationship between participating Blue Star Theatres and their local military community: veterans, children of active duty military, military spouses, and/or active duty military. Each theatre received \$5,000 to support activities that could include talkbacks, outreach programs, sponsored tickets, performances, playwriting workshops, readings, or workshops that focus on military themes and service.



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