

# Notes from the Director/Dramaturg

*"I hope people experience a moment of joy in their own personal loss, a chance to dance with their beloveds in another dimension that only the stage can provide"*

- Paula Vogel

Paula Vogel wrote *The Baltimore Waltz* in the summer of 1989 in response to the death of her brother Carl Vogel, who died of AIDS-related pneumonia. Paula, the youngest of three children grew up in the suburbs of Baltimore, MD with her mother, father and two brothers until their parents divorced when she was just eleven years old. This divorce led to what Paula could only describe as "a very painful adjustment." Carl became Paula's protector and was known to declare that he was her father. It was Carl who cared for, guided, and encouraged Paula to do well in school and it was through this encouragement and support, that she would then go on to attend Bryn Mawr college, and then Catholic University and Cornell to becoming one of the most notable female playwrights known today.

She said,

*"I was seized by a panic that someday I would have to use the past tense to speak about Carl:  
"My brother was ..."*

However, in theatre she found comfort in knowing there is no past tense. She says a writer will always be able to write in the past tense, but in the theatre, the characters in plays are always living in the present moment until their impending future at the fall of the curtain. This realization on Paula's behalf was that her brother would be able to live on for as long as this play is read or performed. She says:

*"I still talk to my brother daily: Driving my car, watching my plays, each day when I open my eyes and when I close them. I still love my brother. As long as I have breath, that love will remain in the present tense."*

This and the processing of grief are the central themes for *The Baltimore Waltz*.

When my grandfather died I felt a numbness like none other and no hug, apology, or card could lift it. I cannot recall my last words to my grandfather, I would hope they were something like, "I love you papa" but nothing comes to mind. My grieving process was filled with tears, nightmares and a lot of denial, but the theatre has always been able to fill my heart with immense joy. I still have the nightmares, I still become increasingly sad when I think of him. He meant the world to me and no matter how painful losing him was, I have found comfort, solace and acceptance in his death, and just like Paula did with Carl, I too have found a way to keep him here in the present.

This is for my papa, James Wiley Robertson, Sr. and Carl Vogel . . . may you always live on in the present tense.

- Nigel Semaj B.