

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Kristjanna Grimmelt, Co-playwright, Grande Prairie Century Play

Kristjanna Grimmelt is a writer, educator, and the former editor of the Peace River Gazette. She is researcher and co-playwright of the **Grande Prairie Century Play**, a community play which has been in development since June 2012 to celebrate the centennial of the City of Grande Prairie, in 2014.

The concept of the community play was developed by the Colway Theatre Trust (UK). The process involves using a core group of artists to help develop, create, and produce a play with community members, drawing from the history of area. The Grande Prairie Century Play will be performed June 12-15, 2014 at Muskoseepi Park in Grande Prairie.

We had such a great discussion with Kristjanna that we expanded Community Profile for this issue of *All Stages...* and we still weren't able to capture the entire conversation. To read the full interview, visit www.theatrealberta.com/all-stages.

The play is set to encompass 100 years of history: can you comment on the challenges of selecting significant historical details and finding a narrative that links them together?

Choosing which events to include is a process of determining which are most impactful in our area's history, such as the natural human and environmental tensions created by the evolution of our primary economic base: from farming to forestry to oil and gas development. We also looked at stories we heard from residents and tried to weave in different historical events, such as destitute men who came to Grande Prairie during the Great Depression and attended a homestead party.

As for the narrative threads, we are still finding ways to weave our acts together. We do have one family that carries through our first and third acts—starting with an Aboriginal woman who falls in love with an American homesteader after the First World War. We're also weaving small details into each act that connect with characters at another time in history.

The community play model is a two-year process. How has it been seeing the project evolve from the ground up?

Personally, it's been a huge commitment to the project and to the Grande Prairie area. I had only been here a year when I agreed to contribute, first as a researcher and then as co-playwright with Catherine McLaughlin. Sometimes I marvel at how long I've been involved and how well I've come to know this community. I'm also seeing the project emerge from the heart and mind of our Artistic Director, Annie Smith. This has become a huge collective project that new people of all ages are getting involved in. I'm seeing the strengthening of art, theatre, and community in an area that is still very new itself.

The Century Play has held a series of public readings of different acts of the script. How has the public reaction influenced the production?

Our public readings have been extremely valuable and rewarding. Annie, our Artistic Director, organized a team of amazing



Kristjanna Grimmelt.
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volunteer actors to read each Act. They and the audience members then gave us detailed feedback on what they felt was working or not working. The feedback has led to significant revisions and additions to the script.

Given your background in journalism, how have you found tackling the playwriting process (on such a grand(e) scale)?

I do think my work in journalism taught me lessons that every writer needs: that accuracy, thoroughness, and timeliness are critical no matter what the genre. I felt extremely fulfilled when I worked as a journalist and I think that's because I was doing what I loved (writing), completing projects that had meaning for people, and was constantly challenging myself and my beliefs. These are very important things to any writer, I believe, and show us what we're capable of. I try to apply all that I learned to the way I approach the interviews, the playwriting, and the community outreach in this project. **AS**

'Tis the Season...

to gift a play to Theatre Alberta for Christmas

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