

I Want a Standing Ovation

By Tracy Villinski

"Mmmmm-ma-ma-ma-ma-ma. " "Hellooooo. " To anyone who isn't in Susan O'Halloran's Theatre workshop, these sounds and phrases mean probably nothing more than the ancient language of Tibetan monks. But to the twelve people who regularly show up at the office on Wednesday nights, these sounds are an exercise in opening the throat and getting the most out of the air in the lungs. In Supe's class we can find a "safe place", begin to learn to talk from the shoulder, project our voices, fill our bodies with a favorite color, loosen up, lead ourselves by an imaginary string tied to the elbow, and dance by imitating the lines on our hands.

The Theatre Group first came to the attention of the rest of the program people when one student raised her hand during announcements at Core Course demanding a standing ovation. Her fellow theatre-mates promptly jumped up, breaking into clapping and loud cheering. Soon after this incident, we were being noticed for our loud, clear questions at Core Course, Seminar, and Precept meetings, thanks to Supe's exercises on projection and breathing.

The Theatre students have been regarded as a community within the larger community of the Urban Studies Program. This fact is very much evident by the ride home on the "el" Wednesday nights after the workshops. We've been known to receive strange looks from the other passengers as we practice ghost stories, breathing exercises, joke about something Supe said, and assume the "hero" position.

The Urban Studies community had the opportunity to share in the theatre ambience at a Halloween party sponsored by Supe and her disciples. With candles glowing, we presented a hair-raising performance of the infamous Tell-Tale Heart. Following this was a brief history of Halloween, five ghost stories told by a few of our members and a small group sharing



time of favorite Halloween costumes, scary moments and different traditions.

Supe has taught us not only how to scare people, but also how to be storytellers. Our assignment one night was to tell an image so vividly that listeners would hear, see, feel, taste, and smell what we described. That night we sat spellbound as our fellow theatre-mates painted graphic images of climbing a mountain, driving for the first time, attempting to resuscitate a drowning victim, waking up with a hangover after a night of drinking, entering a Lakeview apartment for the first time, and being startled by

a smile on a Chicagoan youth.

After the first telling of our images, we practiced relating them in various situations: as if we'd just been dumped, as if we were surrounded by all our favorite people, as if the person we were telling wasn't paying attention, and as if we heard someone being hurt in the next room. By feeling the different emotions, we saw how our narration of the image changed — speed of the words, tone of voice, and body posture. Over the course of the past few months, the twelve of us have learned to move and to listen to our bodies. Working together and individually, we've created dances and movements, becoming aware of our bodies and that of others.

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Of all the lessons and skills we've learned from Supe and ourselves, the most important thing we've discovered is how to project, "I want a standing ovation!" and to accept the applause. This is a lesson we can take with us, wherever we go.

Tracy Villinski is a senior at Macalester College. By graduation in May, she will have completed a sociology core with a Human Services emphasis and a minor in psychology. Tracy plans to become a certified American Sign Language interpreter.