

STONELION: A NARRATIVE OF A KANSAS CITY PUPPET THEATRE

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by
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ABSTRACT

StoneLion: A Narrative of a Kansas City Puppet Theatre documents a vital Kansas City, Missouri, non-profit arts organization from its inception to the year 2014. The thesis includes the company's mission, its evolution from a profit to a non-profit theatre, the process of building and booking performances, and audience's response. I also interviewed three members of the StoneLion personnel. These were Heather Loewenstein, the founding and artistic director, Tim Cormack, senior head puppeteer, and Taylor Gass, puppeteer and office manager. Lastly, I incorporated my personal experience in a case study when I worked with StoneLion both building and performing their 2012 Mother's Day for Mother Earth performance of *Spirit of the North*. Through these interviews, personally archiving documents that feature the StoneLion Puppet Theatre and members of the company, and my first-hand experience working with the company, I was able to address the importance of StoneLion Puppet Theatre's role in the Kansas City community.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences have examined a thesis titled “StoneLion: A Narrative of a Kansas City Puppet Theatre,” presented by Kristen Elizabeth Janke, a candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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INTRODUCTION

I did not ever attend a play as a child. The only plays I had exposure to were the elementary school plays at my small country school. I did not attend these plays as an audience member because I was always a part of the cast. My parents did not attend a theatre production until I was cast in my first play in second grade. My parents never thought about going to a play until their child was in one.

Jump to my sophomore year in high school. Only twenty minutes before opening night of *The Wizard of Oz* (I played the Tin Man) my high school theatre teacher and the pianist took me aside and told me I should consider pursuing theatre as a career. I looked at them in astonishment. They thought I was talented enough to make theatre for a living? It was the best compliment I received to that point.

Fast forward to my freshman year of college in 2005 at State Fair Community College (SFCC) to which I received a theatre scholarship. My first semester I was cast in the children's show musical, written by Sedalia native Samuel Stokes, called *The Humpty Dumpty Mystery* and was directed by Eric Yazell. At the time, I was quite puzzled as to what the genre was and entailed. "A children's show? What was a children's show?" I thought that kind of show was only performed by kids, like the plays I performed in while I was in elementary school.

I soon came to the realization that children's theatre was my favorite genre of theatre. The immediate, unrestricted feedback I would come to discover from the children during *The Humpty Dumpty Mystery* was electrifying! The children were filled with awe and excitement when they saw their favorite and least favorite characters approach the stage. They were

brimming with enthusiasm to join in audience participation sections. Their response to the show was very real and extremely honest.

After each performance, our cast would line up outside the theatre. The kids would file out of the auditorium and have the option to give the cast high-fives and say something to the actors as they left. Some actors were scary to the children, and were therefore rejected because he or she was a ‘bad guy.’ Others received an impulsive hug because he or she was a child’s favorite character. One just does not receive that sort of honesty from an adult audience.

Our cast performed for over 3,000 children during that weeklong run. I realized that our production was the first time many of these kids had seen a theatre production. Those who experienced theatre before most likely saw the children’s show at SFCC the year prior and were returning that year. It seemed as if most of them were excited from the memory of the previous year, eager to see what was in store for them this year. I felt a twinge of jealousy that I never enjoyed the opportunity to attend a children’s show in my youth, and yet I felt determined to make sure future children would have the opportunity to be exposed to theatre more than I was as a child.

The next year’s children’s show was *The Stinky Cheese Man and other Fair(l)y (stupid) Tales* by Kent Stephens, adapted from the book by Jon Scieska, and directed by Eric Yazell. As part of the costume construction for this show, I was tasked with turning a child’s frog Halloween costume pattern into a puppet. This was my introduction to puppetry for the theatre and I was hooked. Growing up, I had watched *Sesame Street* and *Lamb Chop’s Play-Along*, but this was the first time I had made a puppet for a theatrical performance.

After I transferred to the University of Central Missouri (UCM) in 2007, I was cast as Puppet Zenne in the children's show called *Shadow Gets a Black Eye: A Karagos Play* by Enver Sayan and directed by Dr. Julie Mollenkamp. The character I was cast as was a shadow puppet. This was the first I had performed with a puppet onstage. It was an exhilarating experience and I looked for ways to incorporate puppets into my life further down the road.

I took the Children's Theatre course with John Wilson my junior year at UCM. Under the direction of Wilson, we rehearsed and performed *The Poet and the Rent* by David Mamet. We also took trips to Kansas City to see *In Spite of Thunder: The Macbeth Project* by Suzan Zeder and Jim Hancock, *A Separate Peace* adapted by Nancy Pahl Gilseman from the book by John Knowles, both at the Coterie Theatre. The class was also taken to see *Wiley & the Hairy Man*, a Paul Mesner Puppets production. Though all three were great shows, I favored the puppet show.

For my senior capstone project, I chose to direct the play *The Last Nickel* by Jane Shepard for three reasons. The first was because the script was strong and dynamic. The second was because it had two powerful female roles. The third? I was able to build puppets. Five to be exact. With collaboration from a couple friends, we constructed the puppets. We participated in the full ups and downs of the trial and error process in creating those puppets and learned much from that experience. I then directed the actors with the puppets that my friends and I constructed, which gave me yet another experience in the arena of puppetry.

I began my course work at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) under Dr. Felicia Hardison Londré in 2010. She encouraged each of her students to find his and her

own niche in theatre to explore. I took that freedom and applied researching and writing about puppetry when I could in my term papers.

When the time came to discuss a thesis topic, Dr. Londré suggested that I document the history of something or someone in Kansas City. As I pondered on what or who to choose for my topic, I remembered a day a few months prior that I had volunteered to run a puppet-making booth for a company called StoneLion Puppet Theatre. It was at the Westport Community Center and the artistic director, Heather Loewenstein, left a good first impression on me. After her performance, she found me at the puppet-making booth where I was working and introduced herself. Not only that, but she was as genuinely interested in getting to know me as I was to get to know her. Several months later, I decided to ask her if I could write my thesis on her company. She was delighted that I had taken such an interest in StoneLion and I was equally joyful for the opportunity to learn more about both the art and the business of running a puppet theatre company.

During the 2011-2012 academic year, I spent much of my free time at the StoneLion warehouse, where the construction of puppets, the storage, and the business office are located. To my surprise, Loewenstein and Taylor Gass, the office manager, cleared a spare room in which for me to do my work. I began the process by creating an archive of documents that feature StoneLion or members of the company. I continued to gather information by attending many of their performances and playing a hands-on role both in festivals as well as the *Mother's Day for Mother Earth* puppet pageant.

All of these experiences have made it incredibly clear that both children's theatre and puppetry play a vital role in the community and my career. This thesis is the product of my upmost interest within the world of theatre. It focuses on StoneLion Puppet Theatre, the three

company members who have been with the company the longest, and how StoneLion Puppet Theatre fits into Kansas City's community.

There are a few things that need to be clarified for the reader. First, much of the thesis is based upon personal interviews with Heather Loewenstein, Tim Cormack, and Taylor Gass—the three key members of StoneLion Puppet Theatre. Secondly, the writing style used will be colloquial. Finally, I will italicize play, television, and movie titles and underline books titles.

CHAPTER 1

THE MISSION AND THE HISTORY

The Mission

Heather Loewenstein states, “StoneLion Puppet Theatre is a professional non-profit theater company dedicated to expanding the horizons of the young and young-at-heart through the art of puppetry in an interdisciplinary community of ethnic and cultural diversity” (Loewenstein, Mission). The organization remains true to its mission. During the months spent at StoneLion, I was able to observe the inner-workings at the company.

A non-profit company is an organization established for educational, charitable, or humanitarian purposes that is exempt from some taxes and in which no one gains or loses money (Non-Profit Organizations). What is made is then funneled back into the company. For instance, the money made from the puppet shows go to many areas, including: building and repairing the puppets; buying the materials for the set, costume, and puppet construction; lighting and sound equipment; travel expenses; maintenance of the StoneLion building; and paying the actors/designers/construction team a small salary (Loewenstein, interview).

The History

In 1992, StoneLion Puppet Theatre began as an incorporated for-profit company. It ran a regular theatre season of five shows in the Fine Arts Theatre building in Mission, Kansas. It had a one-screen movie theater that was renovated to have two auditoriums. StoneLion shared the venue with Fine Arts Video which had an extensive collection of cult, foreign, and independent films, and an Audio/Visual club that showed midnight screenings of cult movies. In 2002 the building’s lease was sold to another business, so the occupants had to find different operating locations (Butler, “Fine Arts Theatre to Relocate”). StoneLion had

a brief stint at the Rio Theatre in downtown Overland Park, Kansas, before it moved to the new Fine Arts Theatre location in Shawnee, Kansas. The relocation was simple for the theatre company, but the new stage space was problematic. The way the space was configured did not suit Loewenstein's needs. The stage was shallow; the lighting equipment was not as good as Loewenstein's previous location, and the backstage consisted of the hallway between movie theatre screens. Oftentimes there was construction equipment left in this hallway space and many times it would be moved there during one of Loewenstein's performances. Since the hallway was poorly lit, Loewenstein actually ran into a table saw left in the area and injured her leg (Loewenstein, interview). After the incident, she decided that it was time to relocate.

Loewenstein once again packed up and moved locations, but this time across the state line to Missouri. They unpacked at Union Station's City Stage Theatre, but not for long. The situation became a nightmare. As Loewenstein put it, "You can spend all your time trying to market a five or six dollar ticket, which is the ceiling for kid's theatre. If you have a family of four, they are not going to pay much more than that" (Loewenstein, interview). She adds that even when a theatre sells out the house, the company cannot exist on ticket sales alone. There is a lot of fundraising, including a push for season subscribers, donations, and grant writing involved. Add this on top of the tours to area schools that StoneLion was also doing and it was a lot for a small children's theatre to juggle. Loewenstein realized that of all the things they were doing, the school tours were the most successful.

Loewenstein said that she had to step back and really reconsider what she was doing. "I was getting burnt out. We were killing ourselves marketing to a six-dollar ticket against TYA (Theatre for Young Audiences), the Coterie, Paul Mesner, and then Martin City Junior

had just started. We were trying for the same dollar and the same people, because there are only so many people who are going to go out and spend money on that kind of thing” (Loewenstein, interview). At the time, the schools were having large budget crunches. Simultaneously, the laws for transporting children were reconfiguring. The money the schools had used to pay StoneLion Puppet Theatre now went into the transport system, and many schools nixed field trips altogether.

There were several decisions made. The first was to quit running the puppet theatre in a stationary space. The second was to become a non-profit theatre company. The third was to outreach to the public. Loewenstein was interested in providing free shows to at-risk and under-served communities. The company kept doing the school performances, but now they were travelling more to the schools to perform rather than the schools transporting the children to the theatre. StoneLion was reaching “hundreds of thousands of kids” (Loewenstein, interview) over the course of the year.

Loewenstein was a strong supporter of environmental education and StoneLion was drawing in a lot of money from environmental groups such as the AZA, or the American Zoological and Aquarium Association. “Those people were hiring us to build, transport, and perform 300-400 shows per year. I was running multiple stages in multiple cities while still trying to run my company here *and* the touring company *and* I had a baby. I said, ‘The five dollar ticket is going away.’ It was the best decision I ever made” (Loewenstein, interview).

By switching to non-profit status, it freed StoneLion up to pursue more arts-based rather than commercial-based material. The members of the company could now explore building and performing a broader range of puppet styles, from giant puppets out in a vast park or minute puppets in a small tent. Loewenstein explained that the theatre building gives

one a certain aspect to design and perform by, but it is limiting. Since it was ticket-driven, the company had to play to the middle-class, Johnson County households that were willing to take out four kids on the weekend. Once Loewenstein released her company from the permanent theatre, however, they could now explore ideas and concepts that before were only wishful thinking.

Loewenstein, and the company members at StoneLion, have the philosophy that human beings are supposed to give back to the world and help make it a better place. Part of that, she states, is volunteering. There are a certain number of free shows that StoneLion does that the puppeteers will volunteer to do because they want to give to their community. If they cannot for some reason, Loewenstein will perform solo. For example, every year StoneLion performs for Rose Brooks Center for Domestic Violence and for several homeless shelters' Christmas parties. StoneLion also gives free performances as a fundraiser to help other art organizations that are in trouble, struggling, or in need of the company's services as a fundraiser.

Since StoneLion released itself from a ticket system, they did not have tickets to give away. Loewenstein would instead tell organizations such as Operation Breakthrough, which is a childcare center for children of the working poor in Kansas City (Our History), and various daycares that they could bring entire groups free of charge. "It's about giving back and supporting the community" (Loewenstein, interview).

Loewenstein has what is called a "Parks Partnership" with Kansas City Parks and Recreation. Kansas City Parks and Recreation states on their website that their mission is, "To improve the quality of life by providing recreational, leisure and aesthetic opportunities for all residents, and by conserving and enhancing the environment. We will accomplish this

mission by providing quality programming, making the best use of existing resources, developing a supportive and influential constituency, developing effective collaborations and partnerships, and acquiring and preserving natural features” (About KC Parks). StoneLion has a relationship with Kansas City Parks and Recreation because they were already giving a lot of their work for free to the organization. The work they were doing was either grant-supported or it was something they felt compelled to contribute to because they believed it to be for a good cause. When Loewenstein was turning StoneLion towards non-profit, the mission of the Kansas City Parks and Recreation fell perfectly into the direction she was wanting to head. It was a natural partnership.

The partnership with Kansas City Parks and Recreation first began when the non-profit group, Chameleon Arts Consortium, approached Loewenstein. Chameleon Arts Consortium, or Chameleon Arts & Youth Development, states in their mission that they are “committed to inspiring and fostering an interdisciplinary artistic community of racial, ethnic and cultural diversity to serve at-risk youth from urban neighborhoods, artists and the community” (Rehagen). This group had a contract with Kansas City Parks and Recreation that required them to give a certain amount of free programming to the community. Chameleon Arts Consortium had a proposition for Loewenstein: in exchange for letting StoneLion have a free rehearsal room in their warehouse building, StoneLion would help provide free programming on behalf of Chameleon. This was an easy decision for Loewenstein. She could now stop paying to rent a rehearsal space and continue to do what she had already been doing: giving shows to the community.

StoneLion was becoming very successful while Chameleon Arts Consortium went through internal organizational problems. Loewenstein ended up taking on more and more of

the work that Chameleon was supposed to be doing for the community. Eventually the organization disbanded and moved out of the warehouse. Kansas City Parks and Recreation had observed how successful StoneLion Puppet Theatre was in their community outreach, so they offered the contract on the building to Loewenstein. The contract, in essence, stated that StoneLion could use the warehouse free of rent in exchange for free programming to the Kansas City community. Loewenstein was (and still is) required to pay for the utilities on the building, but she assures that it is much more inexpensive than paying rent on such a superstructure.

Loewenstein states that StoneLion goes far beyond the minimum amount of free programming contracted by Kansas City Parks and Recreation. In fact, at the end of March 2012, StoneLion had already doubled what was required of them to give (Loewenstein, interview). To put it in monetary terms, they had already given tens of thousands of dollars in programming for free to the Kansas City community. For example, StoneLion creates and performs a giant puppet show for a series they call *Mother's Day for Mother Earth*, which is showcased every year on Mother's Day in Kansas City. It is a \$30,000 project that they give to the public free of charge. Many times, community centers will ask for shows or Loewenstein will offer a new show that StoneLion is working on to one of the community centers to try it out on an audience. She admits that part of that is for the Parks Partnership, but part of it is not. The great thing about the partnership, she says, is that most other people have to pay to be able to use buildings for performances, while StoneLion does not.

CHAPTER 2 THE PERSONNEL

Heather Loewenstein

It may surprise many that Loewenstein did not start out as a puppeteer. She originally started out as an actor. This is unusual in the sense that most puppet theatres are not run by actors, but by people who were into puppets when they were quite young. Loewenstein is the Founding Artistic Director of StoneLion Puppet Theatre. Her job, to put it simply, is to make sure the company continues to run until the time comes when she is not there any longer. She also is in charge of finding someone to take over when she does step down. “StoneLion is not about me, it’s about the company. It was always meant to continue, change, and grow” (Loewenstein, interview).

Loewenstein was born and raised in Boise, Idaho. As a child, she performed in shows throughout elementary school, middle school (which then was referred to as junior high) and high school. Her first paying job was in the sixth grade at the Idaho Theater for Youth, and she continued performing and teaching classes there until she started college. During her senior year of high school, the young actress started taking theatre classes through Boise State University. Loewenstein actually began her college career as a chemistry major and has quite a few classes under her belt in chemical engineering, but when she realized that she would not be happy doing anything but theatre, she switched her major. She graduated with her Bachelor of Arts in Performance Arts and did a special program through the University of Dublin Trinity College in Ireland in Theatre Performance.

When asked why she chose to study in Ireland, she responded: “I had this awesome teacher, she was actually one of my English teachers and she was taking a sabbatical and she had been taking sabbaticals in Ireland studying Irish playwrights. ... She was doing a paper

on Brian Friel. . . . She had an apartment and friends at Trinity and she offered to put me up if I wanted to go take this program. I got accepted and I went over there” (Loewenstein, interview). It was three months of intensive training and she was awarded a certificate upon the conclusion of the program. She studied Irish theatre, history, and dialect. The dialect served Loewenstein most directly, as it helped expand her range of creating character voices. However, by no means were the other two sections not as equally fascinating and helpful in her career.

Besides Irish culture, Loewenstein was taught the art of mime under Vincent M. O’Neill, was an international “superstar” in mime. He is a talented physical artist who studied under Marcel Marceau, the great French mime of the 20th century (Vincent M. O’Neill). Though his teachings, Loewenstein actually worked as a mime in order to pay bills. She also costume designed and stitched, which she found to be a close second love to acting.

Loewenstein started learning puppetry pretty late in the game, comparatively. Most puppeteers are exposed to the art at an extremely young age. Loewenstein, on the other hand, worked on her first puppet at the New Theatre Restaurant (which at the time was Tiffany’s Attic Dinner Playhouse in the Waldo Astoria area of Kansas City) in the show *Nunsense II* by Dan Goggin. In the production, there is a puppet named Sister Mary Annette. Well, one night the puppet broke and the New Theatre Restaurant needed it fixed. Since Loewenstein was the properties designer, they asked if she could do it. She did not see any reason she could not, and she repaired it with relative ease.

After Loewenstein completed the fix, she thought about how much fun she had with the small project. She then realized that she had never played with puppets as a child. She

had not even seen any live puppet shows, as none had ever visited her school. “I had always watched *Sesame Street* and the *Muppets*, but who hasn’t?” (Loewenstein, interview).

Around this time, Loewenstein was exploring different options in her theatre career. Her history involved performing, creating costumes, and managing properties. Then the repair she had executed at Tiffany’s Attic Dinner Playhouse piqued her interest in the field of puppetry. She really liked the concept of the art form and what was being done on Broadway with puppets. One thing she could not stand, however, was what was being done a lot in children’s theatre where the actors would have to dress up in fuzzy animal costumes and parade around the stage. It scared the children and talked down to them. She experienced this first hand at Idaho Theatre for Youth. In a production of *The Ugly Duckling*, the director decided that the actors should be in mascot-like duck costumes. The idea was that the more duck-like the characters looked, the better the children would understand what was happening on stage. Since she played the Narrator in the production, she was able to witness from the stage how the costumes frightened the children in the audience.

Loewenstein proceeded to call around to all the puppeteers in the Kansas City area. She made an offer: She would give the puppeteer free labor in exchange for an apprenticeship. She received very mixed reviews in spite of what she thought was a reasonable offer. To Loewenstein’s dismay, she found out that traditionally, puppeteers like to think of their art (no matter how simple or complex it actually is) as a trade secret. No one was supposed to know how it was that the puppeteer built his/her puppets or know the tricks used that surprise the audience in performance. When it comes to working with a puppeteer, he/she seems to have an all-or-nothing mindset: a person either taught a trusted apprentice the trade secrets or the person would not take on apprentices. This was very new and off-

putting to the aspiring puppeteer, as she came from a background of theatre where everyone tends to work for everyone else. One learns and builds one's craft by collaboration. A theatre professional gains knowledge and experience by constantly working with different actors, directors, designers, and technicians. This allows the person to explore different scripts, art forms, and ways of communicating. With puppetry, however, she felt like she kept having doors slammed in her face.

Loewenstein did end up working for two of the most well known puppeteers in town, beginning with Paul Mesner of Paul Mesner Puppets, Inc. in 1990. At the time he had just moved to Kansas City and was just becoming established. He upped Loewenstein's offer and paid her to perform and to build. She was very grateful, but she noticed soon after becoming employed by Mesner that he did not build his own puppets. Instead of learning building techniques from him as she had anticipated, she found herself making it up as she went along. She did pick up some tips during performances and was very grateful for the experience, but she found that it was not the place for her and the two parted ways.

That same year, Loewenstein then worked for DoLores Hadley of La Famille Marionettes, who had presented shows at Worlds of Fun since the 1970s. Hadley was known for her phenomenal skills at building and manipulating marionettes to the extent that she has been asked to display the puppets at the Smithsonian Institute. Loewenstein added, "They [the puppets] just moved. You didn't even have to move them because they moved themselves! They were SO full of character" (Loewenstein, interview). She worked for Hadley for two summers as an apprentice. Hadley, like the others, was incredibly secretive when it came to her puppets. Until permission was given, she did not give Loewenstein the opportunity to study her marionettes. Once she bequeathed her approval, the master began to

teach Loewenstein some of her building and performing techniques. Loewenstein pays much homage to what she learned from Hadley as the beginning of her career with puppets.

In 1991, Lisa Hadorn (now Jorgensen) had left Paul Mesner Puppets, Inc. and approached Loewenstein about starting a company together. Loewenstein was still very active in the theatre around Kansas City where she was acting, designing costumes, and working full time as properties designer at Tiffany's Attic. She decided to take this new opportunity to work on during the day while her other jobs had mostly evening obligations. They named their new company MorningStar Puppet Theatre.

Loewenstein and Jorgensen began by building their first show *Gretel and Hansel*, based on the Brothers Grimm's Hansel and Gretel, and toured it to different elementary schools in the area. MorningStar continued for approximately two years. It did not fully take off the ground as the two founders had opposing agendas: Jorgensen wanted to build one show and tour that show singularly, while Loewenstein wanted to continually build and perform new shows and tour. She wanted to establish a repertoire and be able to perform any of those shows at the drop of a hat.

Loewenstein never wants to feel stagnate. In her opinion, theatre is about continuously pushing the envelope. It is about creating variant forms, constructing different types of puppetry, and discovering diverse kinds of theatre pieces using this unique art. There are still shows on the books that have been periodically performed since the mid-1990s, but she is always producing something new.

Jorgensen and Loewenstein dissolved MorningStar, divided the shows created between them, and formed separate puppet companies (Jorgensen began Piccadilly Productions). Now Loewenstein needed to come up with a name. She was adamant that the

company was not to be solely about her. The popular trend is that most puppet companies are named after the main puppeteer. A few examples include: Paul Mesner Puppets, Inc., Lee Bryan or “That Puppet Guy”, Pix Smith Puppetry, and La Famille Marionettes starring DoLores Hadley. It trends as being about that particular person. If the puppeteer passes away or retires, the company ceases to exist past that person’s career. Oftentimes (if the puppets are not put into a museum of sorts) they will be thrown in the garbage. The puppeteer’s art dies with the relatively short life of its existence. Loewenstein did not want to build her company in that manner. Instead, her goal for the company was (and still is) for it to grow and continue operation long after she has left. Loewenstein would be the artistic director, but it does not mean her vision would be the only way.

As Loewenstein was searching for a name for her new puppet theatre company, her friends and colleagues she was working with at the time thought it was foolish not to name her achievement after the brainchild of the operation. They felt that since she created the company, she should have the honor of the company being named after her. She resisted their objections, instead trying to come up with an image. She searched for a logo that said something about the company lasting beyond her. After an exhausting pursuit for the proper title, it was suggested by her husband to name it “Lion Stone” because Loewenstein’s last name means “Stone Lion” in German. She liked it. Loewenstein explains, “It says, ‘We’re here to stay,’ it’s imaginative, it’s supposed to last, it’s strong, it gives a kind of a nod to the founder, but it’s not about me! And that is where ‘StoneLion’ came from. It’s Loewenstein!” (Loewenstein, interview).

Tim Cormack

Tim Cormack has been with StoneLion as a puppeteer for twelve years. During the first performance with the company in *The Magic Flute* in 2003, he was convinced that he completely messed up and he swore that Loewenstein would not ask him back. He thought he had broken the Zarastros puppet he was operating. As it turned out, Loewenstein had painted the mouth of that particular puppet the night before and it had accidentally sealed itself shut. A year after Cormack's first performance with StoneLion, he became the go-to puppeteer for the company. A couple years later he assumed the position of head puppeteer. Cormack currently holds senior head puppeteer status beneath Loewenstein and is followed by Taylor Gass.

Performing has been a major part of Cormack's life, which can be traced back to grade school. His first experiences in performing were at Oldfather's Studios in his hometown of Lawrence, Kansas. The company produced industrial and educational videos. Young Cormack acted in those films until just before he entered the ninth grade, where he worked summer youth programs at Lawrence High School. He continued performing through high school until he went to the University of Kansas, where he decided to major in theatre performance. Three and a half years later he left the university because he felt he was not gaining the knowledge and experience he wanted to get. He immediately began to work consistently in professional theatre and has done so for fifteen years.

The decision to move to Kansas City was a logical one for Cormack, though he has worked in theatres across the United States. Growing up in Lawrence, he was familiar with the drive to the Kansas City and with the city's theatre outlets. He did his first professional theatre in Washington D.C., but came back to Kansas City a year later because the cost of

living in Washington was too expensive. Cormack then did a few shows in Kansas City before he moved to St. Louis, Missouri. The theatre company he was working for went bankrupt a year later, so he moved back to Kansas City. Once again he did more shows in the city before he moved out to California. Cormack came back to Kansas City after two years because his family was having health issues and he wanted to be closer to home. Cormack stated, “It is Kansas City. You yo-yo. You get away and then you come back because everything is cheaper here” (Cormack). Cormack did not have any specific artistic goals after leaving the University of Kansas; he just enjoyed travelling and exploring the country outside of the Midwest.

Cormack was doing a show at Martin City Melodrama, which is a professional theatre that produces family-friendly entertainment in Olathe, Kansas (*About Us*), in 2003. This was when he first became aware of Loewenstein. He knew who she was on the periphery, as several people involved in that show worked for Loewenstein. Loewenstein also had a working relationship with Martin City Melodrama and would sometimes perform puppet shows in that space during the afternoon. One day, a cast member of Cormack called him and said that a puppeteer had backed out of a show StoneLion was rehearsing called *The Snow Queen* and Loewenstein was holding auditions for the replacement. Though he had little previous exposure to puppets, he still decided to audition. At the audition, Cormack said that Loewenstein intimidated him. “She is so intimidating when you first meet her. I had no idea what a sweetheart she actually was, but when I first met her, I was terrified” (Cormack). Loewenstein handed Cormack a mouth puppet and asked him to sing with it. Nervous, he sang “Happy Birthday” with the puppet and he ended up being cast in the show.

The exposure to puppets in Cormack's past was very little. He had watched *Sesame Street* and thinks he might have played with a toy marionette when he was in elementary school, but that was it. So when Loewenstein hired Cormack as a puppeteer, he came in as an apprentice and learned how to operate the puppets from scratch. Through his years of working at StoneLion, Cormack has learned from watching actors audition that some have the natural ability to coordinate a puppet's mouth to the actor's words and some actors do not. If that natural ability to coordinate sound and movement is present in the audition, Cormack says Loewenstein is confident that she can teach the rest of the puppetry skills needed to perform for her company. He realized that he must have initially shown enough natural ability that Loewenstein was satisfied she could teach him the rest.

During Cormack's time with StoneLion, the most important evolution of the company has been exploring more international performances. Loewenstein has performed in Guatemala and Cambodia. Cormack has accompanied Loewenstein three times to perform at festivals in Dubai. Cormack felt as though the national tours have lessened and the local and international trips have increased. The trade-off created a new balance that works for the direction in which the company is heading.

The main reason Cormack has worked consistently with StoneLion for twelve years is for one simple reason: he considers Loewenstein to be his best friend. He stated that they have a solid working relationship that has only grown stronger over the years. They both also understand that they sometimes get upset with each other, which he stated is almost unavoidable when working closely with a person for an extended period of time. He humorously explained:

She and I have a code word. If we are on a tour for several days and it is just the two of us (whether it be Dubai or Arkansas or Lenexa, Kansas) and one of

us turns to the other and says ‘Tallulah Bankhead,’ it means ‘I love you but you are upsetting me. Please go away so I can cool down.’ The other person will think, ‘You know what? I understand that. Okay, goodbye. I am going to give you some time because I am irritating you.’ We do not have to say it often, but we have had to say it before. I do think we have hit that level to where we do love each other and we would do anything for the other and that all comes with knowing each other’s boundaries.

(Cormack)

Cormack acknowledges that this type of work relationship is rare to acquire and he feels very fortunate.

Cormack stated that the other reason he has stayed with StoneLion for so long is because he finds the work to be fun. “I have said for a long time that I do not get paid to do the show, I get paid to do the load in and load out” (Cormack). Carrying the heavy set pieces and the various equipment is not what he finds enjoyable. Doing the show, talking with the children, and playing with the children are the best part of the process.

When asked what StoneLion has meant to Cormack, he smiled and answered, “This is going to sound cheesy, but to me, StoneLion means family. They say you cannot choose your family, but for the most part, I would have chosen these people” (Cormack). He added that he would want them even on the worst days the group has had, simply because even in those days he can find redeeming moments that make it all worthwhile. That is what a family is to him. A group of people who stick with each other through thick and thin.

Did Cormack foresee himself doing children’s theatre? Not necessarily. He stated that his goal in life was just to be a working actor. Pairing that with the fact that he has always gotten along well with children, it just made sense that StoneLion ended up being a great fit.

StoneLion is not just any children’s theatre company though. In Cormack’s opinion, it is better than any other children’s theatre work he has done. He finds StoneLion to be far more comfortable because he gets to have more of a one-on-one interaction with the kids

before and after the show rather than just performing for them. He enjoys getting to talk to the kids, answering their questions, and letting them touch the puppets.

Cormack felt that choosing a favorite kind of puppet to operate is very difficult. He stated that each kind of puppet has its own redeeming qualities, but that even two puppets made the exact same way will work differently for each puppeteer. Rather, he said that he has some marionettes, some mouth puppets, and some rod puppets of each that are better for him to work with than others. The examples he used were from the show he wrote titled *The Emperor Penguin's New Clothes* and a seasonal marionette show titled *The Boneyard Jamboree*. In *The Emperor Penguin's New Clothes*, he finds his polar bear mouth and rod puppet Beauregard far more expressive than the identically built polar bear mouth and rod puppet Bruno. In *The Boneyard Jamboree*, he enjoys manipulating the green alien the most, finds the witch to be fairly difficult, and the belly dancer to be the most complicated of all. All three of those are marionette puppets, but each has its own quirks that make operating it unique. To sum up, he has some puppets that he likes more than others, but it is according to each individual puppet rather than a certain genre of puppet.

Taylor Gass

Taylor Gass is the office manager for StoneLion Puppet Theatre, and has been for about ten years. She is also a puppeteer and a builder for the company. Other than *Sesame Street*, Gass's only other exposure to puppetry before being hired at StoneLion was a local public television show in Des Moines, Iowa, called *The Floppy Show*. The show starred self-taught ventriloquist Duane Ellett and his dog puppet Floppy and ran from 1957-1987 (WhoTV). Gass remembered the duo performing at her father's work Christmas parties and taking school trips to be part of the audience during the taping of the television segment. Part

of the show included kids getting up on stage and asking Floppy a riddle that the dog was never able to answer, but the kids always knew what it was. Gass recollected being very shy and not having the nerve to tell the riddle and admiring her older brother who was selected to tell it and brave enough to do so.

From a young age, Gass was a fan of the arts. She started piano lessons in kindergarten and took dance classes throughout elementary school. Her first play was in fourth grade and she continued to be involved in plays and musicals throughout high school. She remembers that while as her family would watch basketball games on the color television in the living room, she would watch an opera on PBS on their tiny black and white television in the back room. Her parents would take Gass and her brother to the symphony as well as to watch her cousin's ballet recitals.

Gass received her undergraduate degree from the University of Northern Iowa in Theatre Performance. After graduation, instead of going to a big theatre market like New York City, Chicago, or either of the coasts, she decided to move to Kansas City. Gass had connections in Kansas City, though not in theatre, that she could use to get started. She wanted to give herself a couple of years in this smaller city to see how well she fared before possibly moving on to one of the bigger theatre areas mentioned above. Gass primarily worked on the community theatre level in Kansas City at first. She worked consistently and she never felt that it was the right time to leave Kansas City.

Eventually, Gass worked with a couple people at Martin City Melodrama who also worked at StoneLion Puppet Theatre, such as Alyson Schacherer and Tim Cormack. They encouraged her to audition for Heather Loewenstein, the artistic director. Gass ended up not being able to make the audition Loewenstein held, so she assumed the company had already

been cast. Cormack, a puppeteer for StoneLion, was one of the people who urged Gass to audition. When she told him that she was not able to make the audition, Cormack told her to call Loewenstein anyway and set up an appointment.

With no knowledge of how StoneLion operated, Gass showed up to the appointment thinking that it was just a meeting with the artistic director to see whether their artistic visions meshed, not an audition. Being the actress she is, Gass had her headshot on hand as well as a monologue and song at the ready just in case. “We were just sitting there chatting when [Loewenstein] asked, ‘Do you have a song ready?’ So I got up and she put a puppet in my hands and I did it.” (Gass). Loewenstein was leaving for Tacoma, Washington, that weekend to cast a StoneLion zoo show to be performed at Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium. She told Gass that she would let her know if Gass would become part of the company when she got back from Washington in two weeks. But Loewenstein ended up calling Gass that following Tuesday to tell Gass that she wanted to work with her. This, Gass said, is how she got on board with the company.

Gass explained that when a new puppeteer enters the company, the actor is given one puppet show to perform (Gass’s first puppet show was *Pinocchio*) to see how well the other company actors harmonize with the newcomer. If successful, the newcomer will be given another show and the process repeats until the new actor is successfully integrated in the loop. Gass added, “I like to say that she cast me once and then never got rid of me” (Gass).

After Gass spent several years with StoneLion, there was a transition with the office staff. Gass stepped in to become the office manager in what was supposed to be only a couple months position, but it ended up being a yearlong commitment. The actress was then cast in a show with another theatre and she realized that she could not do both the new show

and fulfill the office manager responsibilities, so Loewenstein let Gass resume her previous status as strictly a puppeteer so she could also perform in the other show in which she was cast. Then in 2010 StoneLion experienced another office manager transition. Loewenstein asked Gass if she would be interested in taking on the position in addition to being a puppeteer again and declared that it would be a big commitment. Gass, though at the time pregnant with her daughter Avalee, accepted the position.

Gass found that one of the biggest advantages to accepting the fulltime position of office manager and performer at StoneLion was that Loewenstein let her bring her daughter Avalee to work. She was able to avoid the cost of a babysitter, have her child constantly exposed to art, and still able to work. In addition, Gass found that many people might find caring for their child while working quite challenging. Since StoneLion is a children's theatre, however, Gass explained that if a client heard her child in the background while she was on the phone, the client would understand and it comes across as endearing rather than unprofessional.

Gass stated that since she began at StoneLion, the company had evolved most by its increase in number of shows in the repertoire and by narrowing its focus on environmental issues. By the time Gass started, StoneLion had already turned non-profit and was performing at elementary schools and community centers. The environmental aspect was part of the shows before Gass started with the company, and she articulated that with the increase in performing at community festivals and the now annual *Mother's Day for Mother Earth* event, there came to be more opportunities to teach issues that were important to Loewenstein.

The company still performs many plays that are solely for the joy of puppetry and theatre, but Gass noted that many of the clients now want a show that has an environmental aspect or a message that the children will be learning. According to Gass, one of StoneLion's best-selling shows is *Stellaluna* by Janell Canon. Other than the possible message "don't eat bugs" (Gass), Gass says that it is just a cute, fun story and that people enjoy the adaptation of the book. *Backyard Buggin'*, on the other hand, is a story teaching kids how to build a healthy backyard sanctuary and why it is important to do so. *It's a Jungle Out There* teaches what it means to be an endangered species, the difference between 'endangered' and 'extinct', and what kids can do to help the animals. *Rainforest Crunch* is a journey through the Amazon with Felicia Flash in an effort to find an evasive endangered monkey: the golden lion tamarin. Along the way, Felicia and the audience meet and learn about many of the creatures in the Amazon rainforest.

Gass feels StoneLion has transitioned according to societal wants and needs quite well in comparison to other theatre companies in the area. She admitted that she could not say 'better' than others, as she did not know the inner workings of the other theatre companies in Kansas City. Gass observed that StoneLion was steadily continuing to grow while some other arts organizations were struggling to get work. She speculated that this is Loewenstein, as she had created a variety of shows for the repertoire ranging from holiday shows to curriculum-based messages and from simply fun to environmental initiative. Gass also believes that the culture Loewenstein has created within her company is a nurturing one.

What has influenced Gass to stay with the company for so long? Her immediate answer was, "We are a family." Gass added, "Just like with any family, you love each other

and are frustrated with each other and are inspired by each other! Actually, I probably would not still be in Kansas City had I not found StoneLion” (Gass).

When Gass was in her undergraduate schooling, she admitted she was not a fan of children’s theatre. She had taken the children’s theatre class that was offered, but she was not interested in pursuing it as a career. Gass said, “At the time, I was a ‘serious actress’ and I was going to do ‘art’” (Gass). She did not consider it to be an art form worthy of her time. Now she has a completely different perspective. “I actually find it more challenging to do children’s theatre. When you do shows for kids and they like it, you will know. If they do not like it, *you will know*. They are the most wonderful and brutally honest audience there is” (Gass).

Gass will sometimes take an occasional gig elsewhere, but she said that most of the time she does not need to do so because she is artistically and organizationally fulfilled working at StoneLion. Office manager turned out to be a great fit for Gass. She admitted that she finds a lot of joy in the office work, which includes dealing with contracts, scheduling shows, and overall time management of StoneLion. But Gass also enjoys that she gets to do a little bit of everything with StoneLion rather than being locked in to a singular series of tasks. Besides her roles as a puppeteer and as the office manager, she also gets to build puppets and to work with the public. Overall, she is very appreciative of the widespread opportunities given to her at StoneLion.

Until Loewenstein put a puppet in Gass’s hands for her audition, Gass had not operated a puppet in her life. Gass explained that Loewenstein does not look for people with puppetry experience; she looks for rudimentary skill within actors, dancers, and singers. Loewenstein will observe the person with the puppet to see if the performer is having fun

with it or if the puppet seems to overwhelm the person. If the former is happening, then the artistic director will take a chance on the performer and build his or her skill level from there.

Gass's experience in building puppets came out of performing. A puppeteer is sent to every show with a repair kit in case a puppet needs mending. Once she learned how to fix puppets on the fly, she felt confident enough to delve into the building aspect. She stated that some people help Loewenstein build and do not perform, some perform but do not build (only repair when needed), and some people, like herself, enjoy both building and performing. Gass said that Loewenstein gladly helps company members and volunteers alike on their path to build on previous knowledge or to learn a new skill altogether. Gass also gives credit to her fellow company members, including Laura Burkhart and Glenn Lewis, for inspiring her growth in StoneLion and as an artist in general.

Gass explained that Loewenstein and the company members of StoneLion are very collaborative when figuring out how to build a new show. Just as theatre provides daily challenges, so does building a puppet show:

When you build a show, you think the puppet is going to work a certain way. So you build the show with this in mind. Sometimes, though, you realize fairly far in the build process that the puppet will work better another way and you just have to go with it. The people collaborating with you on the show will help you make those changes. When it comes down to it, it is all just trial and error.

(Gass)

The work environment that has been established at StoneLion is one of trust, ease, and professionalism. One does not make a mistake; one just discovers an alternate means to an end.

A favorite moment of Gass's is what she calls the "awe" moment of a StoneLion Puppet show. She said that it never fails that each audience will let out an audible "awwhh"

when they see a puppet that they find especially exciting. “When we do the giant puppet show for Mother’s Day, we have audiences of thousands and you hear the “awwhh” through everyone and it is *cool!*” (Gass).

In the United States, puppetry is overwhelmingly considered to be for children’s theatre. But if one travels to Europe, for example, one would see that it is not just that genre. It is an established art form for all ages. Though Gass loves *Sesame Street* and what it teaches children, she felt that its popularity is what got the art form pigeonholed into children’s theatre in the United States.

Gass enjoys performing for the young audience because she feels that she is communicating happy, positive stories. She has performed in shows that have relayed some deep, dark, political messages. Gass acknowledges that there is a place for that kind of show in theatre, but she has found that her place in theatre is to perform for and inspire children.

CHAPTER 3

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

The Scripts

Heather Loewenstein writes most of the scripts StoneLion Puppet Theatre performs, but members of the company also write some either in collaboration or individually. The two most frequently performed in the repertoire are *Kachina Drums* and *The Emperor Penguin's New Clothes*. Phil 'Blue Owl' Hooser wrote *Kachina Drums* in tandem with Loewenstein. *Kachina Drums* is the collection of Southwestern Native American Indian stories sung and danced by a coyote, a Pueblo clown, the sky, and the Earth that communicate the importance of being true to one's self. Tim Cormack wrote *The Emperor Penguin's New Clothes*, which is a twist on The Emperor's New Clothes by Hans Christian Anderson. This version involves penguins and polar bears that show us greed and vanity will not pay off.

Cormack admitted that he is better at creating a show on the writing end rather than the puppet-building end. He has tried his hand at building puppets but feels it is not his forte. "I have tried to build and you know, you realize what your skills are when it takes you five hours to build one tiny puppet that is not even functional" (Cormack). Throughout his time at StoneLion, he found that he is much better with words than he is with wire. Cormack has assisted Loewenstein with rewriting song lyrics that were not working well with the rest of the text, adding or subtracting performance bits in the plays, and troubleshooting with Loewenstein on fixing parts of a show that are not working cohesively.

The authors of the children's books that some of the shows are based on have come in and collaborated on the script for performance. One example would be Rhett Ransom Pennell, the author of Excuse Me, Are You A Dragon?, came to Kansas City from New York

and wrote the script with Loewenstein. This book-turned-musical tells the story of a bored young king who sent a knight to bring a dragon to town to create excitement.

Though Loewenstein is always open to working with new authors and playwrights, she tends to write most of the plays herself. “Primarily I write my own because most theatre scripts don’t translate to puppetry, and most puppeteers don’t share their scripts” (Loewenstein). When they do, the scripts unfortunately are not the professional quality she would prefer. They tend to be little plays aimed towards pre-school teachers to perform with classes of four and five year-olds.

Loewenstein’s inspiration can come from anything. People will suggest books, ideas, and concepts to her. Loewenstein is also an avid reader of eclectic literature. The artistic director is constantly seeing the theatre work being done in the Kansas City area. Sometimes though, the idea is handed to her by the person (especially the environmental companies) hiring the company to perform. For example, the Kansas City Zoo might contact Loewenstein and tell her that they want a show about pandas. The zoo will be bringing pandas from China in the next year and they want to advertise/educate the zoo-goers in a fun and eye-catching way. She takes the idea and writes a show to highlight the information the zoo wants her to feature while also creating an enticing show with action and a storyline that children and adults alike will appreciate.

Some commissioned work is more difficult to develop a play from than others. A prime example was the commission Loewenstein received in summer 2012 from The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art to develop a piece to promote a sculpture garden event highlighting six sculptures. “Their idea for me was to come up with a giant puppet show to feature these six sculptures...not really dramatic. So I had to figure out a way to do that to fit their

parameters that still is artistic and entertaining. That sometimes is the hardest thing” (Loewenstein, interview). She goes on to say that it is much easier to find a book that she enjoys and contact the author and see if he or she will give StoneLion the rights to use the story. From this point, the author, Loewenstein, or the two in collaboration can adapt the script for puppet use.

For *Down the Drain*, Loewenstein got the idea for the show by simply observing her surroundings. “I was driving down Troost and saw someone toss a coffee cup out of the window of a city bus. That act inspired me to explore the adventures of a rat and that rat looks at what we throw into the sewers or floats there” (Houx, StoneLion).

Bubba and Trixie is a show based on the book by the local author Lisa Campbell Ernst of the same name. Loewenstein met Ernst previously, as the children’s author had a daughter who frequented StoneLion’s puppet shows. When Loewenstein asked whether the company could turn her book into a puppet show, Ernst agreed and Loewenstein wrote up a contract and paid her a copyright fee. The same happened when StoneLion adapted Stellaluna by Janell Cannon. Each of these collaborations has been performed on an individual basis instead of going through a publishing house and paying the copyright as most plays do. The main reason for this process is the fact that most plays are not written for puppetry.

What makes a puppet script unique from a play script? Loewenstein states that it is the elements of imagination and fantasy. “I am not saying that play scripts do not have imagination. If humans can act it out, let them. If it is something that is pure imagination or fantasy, however, let a puppet do it” (Loewenstein, interview). Puppets are also action oriented and do not do well with standing and talking. For example, if a character is sad, a

play script can have the character sit and talk with another character about why he/she is sad. On the other hand, a puppet would not be very interesting in that situation. A puppet script would need the characters to physically portray the sad emotion primarily through movement. This being said, there are some play scripts that could easily be adapted as a puppet script.

Loewenstein has contemplated getting the rights to certain well-known scripts and has tried several times, but it has never seemed to work out. For example, in 2001 StoneLion was working to adapt The Legend of Sleepy Hollow by Washington Irving as an adult puppet show. She said, “I had gotten the script to do it and we were supposed to do it with actors and puppets as an adult piece. But that one fell through for that particular reason: because it is copyrighted. Let’s face it: Disney did it, it’s *really* copyrighted!” Loewenstein went on. “So I got a script and I started working with them on adapting it for puppetry as opposed to it just being staged, and we went back-and-forth-back-and-forth-back-and-forth. We never could clear the copyright on it, so it never happened” (Loewenstein, interview). She had also contemplated the children’s book The Wonderful Wizard of Oz by L. Frank Baum. Though it is now in public domain, the 1939 MGM film *The Wizard of Oz* has made obtaining permission to do a version of the story nearly impossible. Another story she has yearned to do is The Lorax by Dr. Seuss, but again, with the high price tag on the copyright, it became unreasonable for StoneLion to invest.

Loewenstein directed a production of *The Jungle Book* based on Rudyard Kipling’s 1894 collection of stories at Kansas City Community College in 2000. Dr. Charles Leader, the head of the theatre department, hired Loewenstein. Since Leader was a friend of the playwright/librettist John Franceschina from Penn State University, the college was able to

obtain a special arrangement with the man and the copyright to his script. Since Loewenstein was in direct collaboration with the playwright, the college was able to produce a one-of-a-kind original adult version of *The Jungle Book* with twenty-four actors and puppets. Although this was not a StoneLion production (Loewenstein worked individually as a guest artist) she was able to relate this experience as a way that enabled her to portray a copyrighted story through puppetry.

When StoneLion creates a play based on a popular story or fable, the members tend to stick with the ones that lie in public domain. If the potential play does not fall in this category, StoneLion tends to back off. A few public domain stories the company has developed into puppet shows are *Wind in the Willows*, the Native American fable *Kachina Drums*, and *Who's in Rabbit's House?* based upon the Masai folktale.

Another puppet show Loewenstein created based on a folktale was *SPELUNK! Saving our Springs*. There is an ancient Aztec legend that says that as the Aztec empire grew in population, they migrated from caves in what is now known as Colorado to the southern region now known as Mexico. When Hernando Cortés conquered them in 1521, they fled back north to their caves with their treasure. That is what spurred Cortés' search for the legendary Lost City of Gold and later on the miners and prospectors in what became the Colorado Gold Rush in 1859 (Loewenstein, interview). Loewenstein incorporated most of the legend correctly, but changed certain parts for the show. For example, she had Felicia and Nathan, the lead puppets, search for the Aztec gold in the caves along the Missouri River instead of in the caves in Colorado. She did this so it would make the story more applicable to the elementary children who reside in Missouri. So, as the children explored the underground cave system with Felicia and Nathan, they were subconsciously learning about

Missouri caves while simultaneously intertwined in an adventure of trying to find Aztec gold. Though this is not historically accurate, Loewenstein said that the point of the story is not about finding the gold, but finding the strength within each one of us to change the world (Loewenstein, interview). Besides, how many treasure hunters only looked in the place a previous treasure was found?

Many times Loewenstein will conceive a story from scratch. Her creation *Monkey's Dream* is a show about a monkey that falls asleep and gets a wish granted by the moon and wakes up on a giant banana. This nonverbal play explores a range of emotions and ends up overcoming his fear of the unknown. *Fun in the Sun* is a marionette review that has flamingos, flames, mermaids, etc. that celebrate the sunshine. *The Lab Rat Science Show* teaches the audience the scientific method, magnetic attraction, and the three states of matter through zany rabbits, rats, and guinea pig.

Touring

StoneLion Puppet Theatre travels the country taking their repertoire on tour. Loewenstein does not travel across the United States as much anymore, however, since the birth of her son Bryce Loewenstein in 1998. Before that, she could take off whenever she desired. She did not necessarily want to stick around Kansas City at the time, so Loewenstein was free to explore and experience new places and venues. Now the national touring tends to be restricted to the summer, when the company has gone to Alabama, Oklahoma, and Tennessee, to name a few. During the summer of 2012, the company made several day trips to towns and cities across Kansas. Every two years in October, the Smithsonian Institute will bring Loewenstein to perform for two days at the National Air and Space Museum, but jobs like those are sporadic.

Although StoneLion tours, Loewenstein does not consider the company to be a touring company in the sense of consistently being on the road. In the past she had looked into acquiring trucks similar to those used by the Broadway touring shows. It was decided that though she loved to travel, she didn't want to be on the road that much.

Loewenstein will occasionally do large touring zoo performances and that company will perform approximately 300 shows. Instead of using the Kansas City company, Loewenstein will go to the city where the show is to be performed and hire local actors and dancers. As mentioned previously, Loewenstein tends to work with performers with little to no puppetry experience over puppeteers because the actors and dancers possess the physicality and vocal sound she desires for performance. Loewenstein will cast and direct the actors and then return on a regular basis to make certain the show is running the way it should. StoneLion will also build the puppets and set and take them to the location of the tour. Though she would not be in that particular city every day, the artistic director still keeps a very active hand in the show's process.

StoneLion used to travel nationally much more before the recent recession. The major theatres that would invite companies from out-of-state to perform now have much smaller budgets, including the Smithsonian Institute. Large cuts in government funding for the arts have damaged the arts' ability to spread the nation's culture across the United States. The decrease in outreach spending has greatly impacted StoneLion Puppet Theatre's touring opportunities, as the theatres and institutions do not have the means to bring them in. If the puppet company is brought in, it is usually for a short period of time.

Grants

In 2001, StoneLion Puppet Theatre became incorporated as a non-profit theatre. Many people tend to assume that the theatre truly began then, but Loewenstein holds firm that it was only a change in the direction the company was going in and how it was funded. Instead of ticket sales, they are now funded by grants.

The first grant she applied for, the Neighborhood Tourist Developing Fund, she received. Loewenstein acknowledges the fact that she obtained a lot of help during the starting stages of this process. Actually, with the exception of one grant she wrote in 2012, she has received funding. It was no surprise to Loewenstein that the streak would end. She went on to say that she had ventured out into some odd areas in an effort to apply for grant money that year. Loewenstein relayed that she has to carefully pick and choose which grants she wants to apply for, as she also has to focus on managing payroll, and writing, building, and performing shows. There are only so many hours in a day!

Loewenstein says that she will get an idea for a show, and then look for an applicable grant to apply for. If she is able to obtain the grant, then that is what will fund the project. She stated that this is the way most people choose the grants they decide to apply for.

One grant that Loewenstein receives is from Johnson County Stormwater Education. This grant pays for StoneLion to take their environmental shows that educate people on water pollution, such as *Down the Drain* and *SPELUNK! Saving our Springs*, to schools and community centers at no charge to the client or community. All Loewenstein has to do is call or email her contacts and ask if and when they would like one of the environmental shows about water pollution to be brought to the area. Grants like this one are incredibly beneficial to low-income and inner-city schools, as they provide students and communities with fun, interactive, and free entertainment and education.

When Loewenstein wrote the Johnson County Stormwater Education grant, she said that she wanted to write a show about “the molecular structure of nonpoint source pollution and tailor it towards the educational values and core curriculums of the Kansas school system for kindergarten through sixth grade.” She added, “Then I make art out of that! It sounds really boring, but I will make it funny and no one will realize that they are learning about nonpoint source pollution for the core curriculum” (Loewenstein, interview).

Sometimes the members of StoneLion are given a grant specifically to educate the public on a topic. One such example would be Johnson County Stormwater Education’s having given StoneLion a grant to develop a show to teach the Johnson County, Kansas, community about a mandate enacted January 2012 that no longer allowed citizens to dispose of yard waste in the landfills. Instead, the community members must drop off yard waste at specified locations or compost it themselves (“Yard Waste and Composting”). The company members of StoneLion realized they did not know much about the topic themselves, which provided a learning opportunity for the company as well. The culmination of the grant and research was the play *Water World*.

Loewenstein does much of the grant writing, but she also has help from outside organizations. One such organization is the Missouri Arts Council. The Missouri Arts Council awards grants to non-profit organizations in order to cultivate appreciation of the arts, development, and growth to community members (Missouri Arts Council). It includes StoneLion on the touring roster it publishes each year. Many schools and organizations apply for grants through the Missouri Arts Council and are able to hire StoneLion in this way.

The Puppets

Puppets are grouped into six different categories, according to the way they are operated. In no particular order, they are hand or “glove” puppets, body, marionettes, rod, shadow, and Bunraku (Blumenthal 37). The following will outline the characteristics of each category.

Hand puppets, like most of the types, have a fairly self-explanatory name. The operator moves parts of the puppet by putting a hand inside it—wearing the puppet like a glove—and uses the puppeteer’s fingers to move the head and arms. This type is commonly used in early elementary classroom settings and is seen in the form of many of Jim Henson’s Muppets™.

Body puppets can completely cover up the puppeteer, though that is not always the case. The puppet may use part of the handler’s body to complete its entirety. For example, the puppeteer’s index finger may be used as Pinocchio’s growing nose, or the handler’s arm may become the puppet’s leg (Blumenthal 40). The puppet, rather than encompass the operator, may attach to the outside of the puppeteer for maneuvering purposes. This way, the handler is visible to the audience. Usually the person is costumed in a way that complements the puppet. The puppeteer’s facial expressions are to supplement the facial expressions of the puppet as the person’s body movements accentuate the puppet’s movements. A popular example of body puppets would be the characters of Timon and Pumbaa in the Broadway production of Disney’s *The Lion King*.

Marionettes are a type of puppet that is operated from the outside rather than the inside. These are manipulated from above the puppet by string or cord. The complexity of the system of strings for a marionette can range from one to over twenty-four. These strings are

attached to various parts of the puppet's body and strung up to a stick, plate, or bar that the puppeteer uses to manipulate its movement. This type of puppetry tends to be the most prominent in Western popular culture. Ranging from Disney's 1940's adaption of the story of Pinocchio of the same name to the 1947-1960 children's show *Howdy Doody (Stories of the American Puppet)* to the 2004 satirical comedy *Team America: World Police*.

Rod puppets are mainly operated from below the puppet, though they also may be operated from above. A stick or a rod is the central way of moving the puppet as it is either connected centrally to the bottom (such as the Javanese *wayang golek* puppets) or from the top (such as the Portugal *boñecos* puppets) (Blumenthal 51-52). Often there will be additional thin wands to control the arms and/or legs. In Western culture, people tend to associate rod puppets with a style invented by Jim Henson called "hand-rod" puppets, which he used when creating the Muppets™. He combined two main styles to create the operational style he desired. The rods are connected to one or both of the Muppet's™ wrists and manipulated by the secondary hand as the primary hand operates the mouth and face. This style can be seen with Kermit the Frog and Miss Piggy.

Shadow puppets appear to the audience only as shadows on a screen. This may include opaque cutouts or translucent figures to let color shine through. Some are solid figures while others are intricately carved to show designs. These are usually two-dimensional figures constructed out of sheets of wood, cardboard, metal, or plastic. Shadow puppets are operated by one rod either below or connected directly behind it. The limbs of the puppet may be operated by another rod, left swinging, or may be stationary. Shadow puppets may be three-dimensional as well. They are a common family and community practice in many Eastern cultures. Many people in Western culture commonly associate

shadow puppets with the silhouette figures one can create with making shapes with their hands and projecting the shadow onto a wall, such a rabbits or dog (Almoznino 14).

Bunraku-style dolls incorporate a medley of the previously mentioned types of puppetry in order to operate. Bunraku, or by its original name Ningyo Joruri, is a traditional form of Japanese puppet theatre. Each doll uses three puppeteers. In Japan, an apprentice spends much of his career, as much as ten years, learning the intricacies of just the legs. This is a hands-on method. He would eventually move up to operate the left hand, which has a complex system of control-rods. After approximately another decade he would reach what would be the epitome of his career: the head puppeteer. This is when he operates the head of the doll, its facial expressions, and the right arm. This section involves a complex system of internal strings (Adachi 29). The puppeteers wear black clothing in an effort to blend into the background. Sometimes the face is left exposed, but many times it is covered as well.

Loewenstein incorporates a plethora of puppetry styles into her work. She uses marionettes, mouth puppets, hand puppets, finger puppets, Bunraku, shadow puppets, black-light puppets, giant puppets, light-up puppets, rod puppets, mask puppets, direct manipulation, and mascot (or body) puppets as her official (or semi-official) styles. “The style of puppetry used depends on what is best for that certain character. We use a blend of styles within one show and use a singular style in others” (Gass). StoneLion performances tend to feature a cabaret style of puppetry, which means that the performers are fully visible on stage manipulating the puppets. When performing in this style, the puppeteers dress either all in black or in a color according to the background of the play. In *Stellaluna*, for example, the puppeteers dress in blue to represent the sky. “The kids stop seeing you [the puppeteer]” (Gass) and tend to focus on the puppet.

An exception, though, would possibly be *SPELUNK! Saving Our Springs*. It not only uses the Bunraku style, but it also utilizes rod, hand, and shadow puppets to tell the story.

It is the only show that StoneLion has created that uses the Bunraku style of puppetry. Gass stated that because the actors are dressed completely in black clothing (including their heads and hands) that it seems to be a bit unnerving to the very young children and the special needs audience members (Gass). The performers give a preshow talk to the audience about the Bunraku style of puppetry that will be used, explain the actor's costuming, and put on their masks in front of the audience so they can see the transformation.

Stellaluna uses hand puppets. The hand puppet of the bird or the bat is on the arm of the puppeteer and at one point the puppeteer will 'fly' it over the audience. But the puppeteer does not just move the arm with the puppet; the puppeteer has to become the hand puppet with his or her entire body. *Bubba and Trixie*, on the other hand, is a rod puppet show. These puppets are smaller than the hand puppets in *Stellaluna*, operated from below the puppet, and the puppeteer is hidden from the audience during this performance.

The seasonal shows, such as *The Boneyard Jamboree* and *Twas the Night Before Christmas*, are the ones in which the marionette puppets tend to be used the most. They seem to work best for StoneLion for revue shows. The marionettes work better with dancing to music rather than speaking. Loewenstein also finds that these puppets work better with smaller crowds, which are usually populated at a festival or a holiday party. Gass finds the marionettes to be her favorite, partly because she enjoys the way they move and partly because these shows have a limited run each year. These elements combined make them even more special for her to operate (Gass).

Body puppets also include mascot puppets and Loewenstein has built her fair share of these as well. For Crown Center in Kansas City, Loewenstein built all of the mascot body puppets, such as the Snowman, KC Bear, and Perry Penguin. Loewenstein's company actually has a mascot puppet that they do not use anymore named "StoneLion." In past zoo performances they have used a body puppet that represents a young adventurer named Felicia riding her friend Karma the Elephant.

When asked how one would clean a body puppet, or puppets in general, Loewenstein responded by saying that it is the same method used to clean Shakespearian Restoration costumes in summer stock: Febreze or a spray bottle mixed with gin or vodka and water. Some parts of a puppet may be able to be dry cleaned, but spraying the puppets down with these mixtures tends to be the more efficient route, in terms of both time and money. The Febreze kills the germs and will leave a light, fresh scent and the alcohol eliminates the germs and leaves no scent at all.

Building a Show

When Loewenstein builds a show, she and the other members of StoneLion keep in mind that they have a wide variety of clientele with various space requirements. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art asks the company for giant, roving puppets for their front lawn to attract thousands of visitors. Loewenstein also has shows on standby that they can bring into major theatres, complete with light plots. These shows require the use of several moving trucks for traveling and hauling. They are quite expensive to build and produce. The clients that hire StoneLion to produce these large shows will pay, on average, \$50,000 for Loewenstein to build them their own show.

The festival shows are medium-sized puppet plays, but these shows do not have a strong plotline. They are designed to allow people at the festival to be able to walk up and start watching the middle of the production and still be able to enjoy it. StoneLion also include puppet-making booths, face-painting booths, environmental information booths, etc. with these festivals. Puppets for the Planet festivals, for example, cost around \$10,000.

Loewenstein has many other shows available that are built with an average school's budget in mind. These are also medium-sized shows, but these fit into a gymnasium or a cafeteria. These require a couple of moving vans to transport the puppets and equipment. The Kansas City Young Audience's Arts Roster advertises this size of show, aimed toward the schools that are not grant funded. This helps Loewenstein tremendously, as it allows her to focus on the clients that rely on grant-funded arts programs. The medium-sized shows have a standard cost to the clients of \$400-\$500.

Finally, there are what Loewenstein calls the "tiny shows." These are built for small library rooms, daycares, and preschools that have limited budgets. These shows cost around \$150 a piece.

When Loewenstein builds her shows, she makes sure that she has a broad range of material to present and that the company is turning the shows over. There are clients, such as Crown Center, that have been booking StoneLion for twenty years and ask them to perform two to three times per year. Loewenstein makes certain that when her company performs at Crown Center, they always have something new to present. Some theatre companies will create a repertoire of shows and target them to one grade level and every year. Loewenstein understands this approach and commends it, but feels that StoneLion ends up being hired more often because of the variety of new shows they create each year as well as being open

to an entire elementary school. Also, the school districts appreciate this because they feel that they are getting the optimum benefit from the money they spend on bringing in StoneLion to perform.

The Sets

Of all the areas, though, Loewenstein admits that when it comes to building the scenery, she tends to hand that task off to other people. “I do some set building. Honestly, that is what I give off more than I do anything else. I don’t work with wood as well as other people do” (Loewenstein, interview). She adds that she has worked with quite a few set designers in the past, but she most consistently works with Laura Burkhart. Burkhart has been StoneLion’s resident set designer for fifteen years. Glenn Lewis, who also as the Unicorn Theatre’s Technical Director, designs and builds many of the sets for StoneLion as well. Alex Perry, who ran the scene shop at the now-defunct American Heartland Theatre, has also partnered up with Loewenstein to build her sets. The first StoneLion scenic designer Loewenstein paired with was Gary Mosby, and they worked side by side for many years. Mosby is currently the Master Carpenter at Kansas City Repertory Theatre as well as the Resident Designer at the Unicorn Theatre. When they paired up in 1987, however, they accessed each other’s talents. Loewenstein would use Mosby to build her sets and Mosby would use Loewenstein to sew the soft goods needed for productions he was building.

Booking Performances

There has been an evolution in StoneLion Puppet Theatre’s history in the way the company began booking performances to the way the shows are currently procured. When the company first began, they advertised by printing brochures and flyers and sending them to potential schools and businesses. Loewenstein would also cold call potential clients and

customers. Being a new puppet theatre meant spreading the word any way possible and hoping that someone would take a chance and hire the company. Without a name or reputation previously set, Loewenstein had to take every opportunity to connect with people as she could. She would occasionally perform a free event for a potential client she believed would hire her back for future advertisement endeavors. StoneLion occasionally continues to do this today. For example, when Kansas City's Sea Life Aquarium had its grand opening on April 6th, 2012 (Sayers), StoneLion had roving puppets during the television interviews. The aquarium was not able to pay StoneLion for their presence at the grand opening, but they were very interested in signing a long-term contract with Loewenstein to perform their environmental show *Down the Drain* which mirrors what Sea Life Aquarium is about: preserving aquatic wildlife. Performing for the grand opening was a way to create a working relationship.

Booking conventions have not worked well for Loewenstein in the past. The only exception she mentioned would be a library convention. "There is a lot of money in libraries with children's theatre. Many children's performers make the majority of their living out of libraries" (Loewenstein, interview). Since libraries are government-funded, they tend to have more money to spend on the arts and education than smaller individual companies do.

Loewenstein currently does not advertise by mailing out flyers and brochures or cold calling people. She will occasionally participate in publicity and she continues to send out StoneLion email blasts (a single sending of an electronic message to a mass of people simultaneously) ("email blast") to keep her customers updated, but she has stopped actively pursuing clients. Loewenstein will call or email clients she regularly works with to ask if they would like to book a date or dates for the upcoming year. Also, if she has an idea for a new

puppet show, she will contact those clients and let them know about it. Why would she stop advertising? Frankly, it is because she already has too much work. Loewenstein expressed pride in the company's success:

We are unique and really blessed right now because we have been doing this for so long. We have gained a reputation for delivering what we have promised and doing it well. That is the best advertisement that you can get. When people like you, they will tell other people and they will hire you back. We have clients that have hired us for twenty years. Every year we will be at their event or at their school. That, to me, says something about the work that we do. I am really proud of that.

(Loewenstein)

If StoneLion is asked to do a contract with a large client now (such as The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art or a zoo) it is because the people in charge of publicity and event coordinating have heard about the company through word of mouth or have attended a prior performance. The potential client will contact Loewenstein and ask her to give a presentation. After the presentation, Loewenstein and the new client would discuss what StoneLion could do to fulfill the client's vision.

What Loewenstein will charge for a show depends upon a couple things: the size of the show and the financial budget of the client. When a minimally funded group approaches Loewenstein about one of her puppet shows, she always offers the show at a discounted price. As mentioned previously, there are also instances when she will offer to give free performances to groups that need it. There are some clients, however, that she will charge more than the standard price. She explains that some groups are very difficult to deal with. Loewenstein knows from experience that her team will have to jump through many hoops with certain people, the show will be difficult to set up, the people will be rude and difficult to accommodate, and the parents will not restrain their children from disrespecting the puppets and set as well as the performers.

Sometimes a customer will seemingly emerge from out of the blue. For example, EarthWorks, Inc., has a home location in Perryville, Missouri. They are “committed to protecting the environment by using safe and practical methods in production and fabrication” (Welcome to EarthWorks, Inc). One day a representative of the company called Loewenstein to set up an appointment to meet and discuss the possibilities of working together. Loewenstein obliged and now has another client.

As StoneLion’s office manager, Gass has an alternate perspective on booking performances. When people call Gass to inquire about booking a performance, there are several steps she has to go through to feel out new clients. She found it easiest to explain by using an example of a preschool. The first thing she will ask is if the preschool has a specific date or dates in mind. Next she asks if the school has a particular theme that week. If so, Gass will go through possible shows that might fit in with that theme. Another pertinent question she asks is about the preschool’s available performance space. “Sometimes they have these huge performance spaces, like a gym or cafeteria, and sometimes all they have available is their small classroom cramped with their desks, books, and toys. That is why we have created shows for different sized spaces, to work with individual needs of the clients” (Gass). She will also ask whether the client has viewed StoneLion’s list of shows on their website and whether the client has seen a StoneLion show before. Finally, she has to figure out the client’s budget. She has found that many clients call and want one of the bigger shows, but do not have the space or the budget to bring in that show. Gass will then suggest a smaller show that fits the client’s available performance space and budget.

The prices of the puppet shows vary not only by the size of show, but also in accordance to an individual organization’s funding, or lack thereof. “Just because somebody

is from a lower income part of town does not mean they deserve the arts any less than someone who can pay full price for it” (Gass). Gass is of the same mind as Loewenstein, believing that children who are less privileged deserve exposure to art the same as anyone else. There is a particular daycare that StoneLion gives free performances to because the daycare would not be able to afford it otherwise. Loewenstein uses this daycare when she needs to test a new show on an audience or the daycare will be a new puppeteer’s first performance. It is mutually beneficial for the two organizations.

There are also organizations that contact StoneLion for performances that fall between receiving free shows and paying full price. With these, Gass will tell them what a particular show usually will go for and then try to give them a price break. First she has to make sure that the performers will get paid, as they are making a living from this. She has to confirm that the travel expenses, the insurance, and the utilities will be covered as well. After checking StoneLion’s budget, Gass and Loewenstein will give the needy organization a break if possible.

The Audience

When asked about audience response to the puppet shows, Loewenstein considers most of her audience’s reactions to her company’s work to be positive, otherwise their clients would not hire them back nor would the company continue to be as busy as they are. She does state, though, that one cannot please everyone all the time. She is quite used to receiving responses from both ends of the spectrum.

Loewenstein addressed the schoolteachers who are required to attend the performances with the kids. “This is something I tell my performers. When you are out there and you are looking in the audience and some teacher is grading papers, it does not

necessarily mean that they do not like what you are doing. It's just that they are so overworked. They are thinking, 'This is the time I don't have to teach.' This is the time that they have a babysitter" (Loewenstein, interview). She continues on, saying there is going to be about half of her adult audience during these school performances that are going to be this way. She is not offended by this. The schools have started taking away planning periods from the teachers, so these individuals are overworked, overstressed, and some are just going to be bitter and tired of teaching.

"Besides, we are here to play for the kids" (Loewenstein). She writes and performs for the kids, not the adults. Loewenstein says that if she and her performers do their jobs right, the adults will enjoy it and come back because the children will want to come see it again. For example, even if they do not necessarily enjoy *Blue Fish* (which is targeted toward two to five year-olds up through second grade) because it is a show that teaches counting and colors, they will bring the kids back because the children have had a great time and a learning experience.

It is stressed that one has to know who one's audience is. If a ten-year-old went to *Blue Fish* with his little brother, then the older child might be bored with the show. StoneLion is hired to perform their festival shows all over the Kansas City area, and many times they play to all-adult audiences. Loewenstein says that they constantly need to keep in mind that they will not be playing to the exact target audience and that there will always be extenuating circumstances.

In stating that, Loewenstein also admits to having received a few unusual responses. For example, she had a school get up and walk out of the theatre in the middle of *Dinobones: That Rockin' Mesozoic Musical*, a puppet musical StoneLion performed in March of 1998.

She relayed that a right-wing Christian school brought their students to the performance, only to take the kids away during the brachiosaurus's song "Evolution Revolution." The kids did not want to leave, but the adults ushered them out of the theatre anyway. Loewenstein still wonders why, if an organization or school does not believe in that school of thought, one would bring people to see a show about dinosaurs. It was clearly stated in the advertisements for the show that the musical would "focus on the science behind the prehistoric creatures" (Orr 8). "I think that art is supposed to elicit some of that. And if you are not, then you are playing it too safe" (Loewenstein, interview).

When asked if she has or would like to perform any puppet shows geared toward adult audiences, Loewenstein responded with a definite no. She said that she has been asked many times, especially by the Kansas City Fringe Festival, if StoneLion would perform an adult puppet show. She declines each time, but said that the company does participate in the Kansas City Youth Fringe Festival. "StoneLion does not do adult puppetry. I enjoy adult puppetry, I have seen a lot of puppet slams, but that is just not what StoneLion does" (Loewenstein, interview). It does not fit with the mission of the company.

In 2011, Loewenstein did finally agree to do a piece in the Kansas City Fringe Festival in conjunction with the Westport Center for the Arts. It started out as a staged reading of classic material done with puppets. She thought that it had the potential to be quite comical. However, in the meetings that the group had without Loewenstein present, they decided to go in a more adult-humor direction that involved sexually suggestive content. Loewenstein backed out of the project immediately. She said the group is mad at her to this day for her withdrawal, but she had been upfront about the mission and content that StoneLion is associated with and that group did not honor the agreement made. StoneLion

has had continued success as a children's theatre company by maintaining a family-friendly vision. If Loewenstein varied from this principle, even once, everything she had established in the Kansas City community could fall apart.

Loewenstein believes that when a children's puppet company crosses over into the world of adult puppetry, many things can go wrong. She knows of several companies that did just that and encountered trouble. There is even one in Kansas City, she said, that lost thousands of dollars worth of programming because the company decided to do an X-rated puppet show. By doing this kind of work, a mixed message is sent about the mission statement of the company and of the subject material being delivered. The adult audience is then not ever sure if the content is ever fully acceptable to bring children to watch or not. "If StoneLion shows up somewhere, everyone in town knows that it is okay to take their kids" (Loewenstein, interview).

Now this is not to say that members of StoneLion are discouraged from adult puppetry. Quite the contrary, as Loewenstein has told her performers that if any of them would like to go out and do an adult show, she would help them in any way she could. She will support them, help them build it, but she cannot help them write it. It is not that she is against the content, but Loewenstein says that her sense of humor is simply not 'adult.' She does not get adult jokes most of the time and she finds a lot of the jokes to be mean. Loewenstein clarified, "Adult puppet theatre does not have to be blue. There have been many pieces, in fact some of my favorite puppet pieces I have seen, have not been necessarily geared toward young kids. But they are also not what most people would consider to be 'adult' or 'off-color'" (Loewenstein, interview). She simply does not write in that suggestive

manner. Her performers are free to go participate and do it, but she emphasized that StoneLion's name will not be on it.

After every StoneLion performance, the company holds a talkback session. The time is set aside for the children to ask questions about what they just witnessed. Normally, the questions revolve around how the puppets work. Sometimes, though, company members are thrown curveball questions. When Loewenstein was asked about the content of those inquiries, she explained that usually the questions are asking something very technical about an environmental subject, such as an animal or a plant. "For example, I do not know off the top of my head exactly how many eggs a ball python can lay or in what month they do that. I am just honest about it. I tell the kids that I do not know and when I get home I will look it up. And that they should too" (Loewenstein, interview). Loewenstein relayed that she tends to be able to answer more of the technical environmental questions than her company members. As a nature-lover, she is constantly watching nature programs and reading environmental articles. The company members are encouraged to research the animals and environment in the puppet show they are performing in order to have a base knowledge to field questions, but as Loewenstein performs in a majority of the performances with the members, she takes on the more difficult inquiries.

Other types of questions the company members sometimes encounter that throw a kink in the talkback sessions are personal questions. There are times when Loewenstein performs with a male performer and the kids will ask whether the two of them are married and whether they have kids. In these situations, she advises her company members to tell the audience that the two of them are just friends and to move on to another question. She

understands that children are curious about these topics, but she also realizes the need to deflect those questions to avoid crossing the professional/personal line.

Finally, some questions are not questions at all. A child may venture off into a story and the company members are then tasked to figure out how to turn it into something they can answer. “Q & A is an art form unto itself in how to get the questions from the kids and how to cut off the stories without it becoming an embarrassing situation in front of that child’s friends” (Loewenstein, interview).

The solution StoneLion has come up with is to send a company member, without a microphone, out into the audience to vet those queries. The children are told to sit quietly in their spots and to raise their hand if they have a question. If the company member comes across a child telling a story or asking a personal question, then the situation can be handled quietly. This method also saves time for both the performers and the audience members by being able to move on to appropriate questions. Loewenstein will preface the question-and-answer session by reminding the kids about the words with which a question begins. She will also announce that though stories are very interesting, there is not enough time for everyone’s stories. This way, Loewenstein says that she is setting up the rules, teaching them what a question is, and she is still positively reinforcing the fact that their stories are great.

One of Gass’s favorite parts of the question-and-answer sessions is when she gets to perform the rod puppet show *Bubba and Trixie*. She likes to ask the kids how many people they think it takes to put on the show they just witnessed. “I always get numbers, such as: three, 10, 30, 100! I love the kid’s imaginations. They have no concept in relating that tiny space to the number of people that could actually be behind there. I tell them that was just me and they are always in awe” (Gass).

Another question Gass answers a lot is how the puppeteers come up with the different voices for the characters. She enjoys discussing this topic. Gass tells the kids to think about stories they have read or when they have used their imagination to play. Then she has them think about the characters in those books or in those pretend environments. What do those voices sound like in one's head? She relayed that she finishes her answer up with a possible low register gruff voice and a contrasting high-pitched silly voice to give the kids a couple examples. The children usually grasp the step-by-step instructions and realize that they can do it as well.

As for Cormack, he enjoys talking with the kids after a show and inspiring them to do puppetry on their own. He asks if they have any stuffed animals, dolls, or action figures at home. Most answer that they do. He then asks the kids if they ever make their toys move and talk to each other. The kids again usually answer that they do. He then explains that what they are doing at home is puppetry; it is a style of puppetry called direct manipulation.

Cormack recounted one of his most memorable audience experiences. Loewenstein and Cormack had performed *The Boneyard Jamboree* for a preschool. This show is supposed to be a non-scary play in which a variety of puppets are made to dance to music. Well, the two puppeteers brought out the first puppet of the show. Cormack considered this puppet to be one of the least scary of the non-scary puppets, but the preschoolers that were sitting three feet away from the stage thought otherwise. The entire preschool crowd began screaming, crying, and trying to run away from the stage. Cormack and Loewenstein had to recalculate quickly. "After that first number we convened backstage and were frantically discussing, 'We cannot do the witch, we cannot do the snake... What can we do?!' So yes, that one ended up being about a ten-minute show" (Cormack).

Cormack then paired two box-show audience experiences. The first was when he performed *Who's in Rabbit's House?* outside during a festival. During this show, Cormack is hidden from view in a box as he manipulates the puppets from underneath. With a box show, the puppeteer is not only hidden from the view of the audience, the puppeteer cannot see the audience either. When he began the performance, Cormack had approximately twenty kids in the audience. He performed the play as usual. Cormack heard some audience reaction but not much during the run and did not think much of it. When he emerged from the box after the show to thank the audience for watching, however, he was surprised to see an estimate of 100 people applauding his performance.

The other show during which he was hidden from the audience was *Excuse Me, Are You a Dragon?* Cormack and Loewenstein were performing for an audience of 300 kids and teachers. When they emerged from their box space after the show to do their regular question-and-answer session, there were only twenty people left in the audience. They immediately were wondering what in the performance had been offensive enough to warrant so many to leave during the show. The puppeteers learned later on that the busses had come early to pick up many of the students and the teachers had filed the kids quietly out to the busses as to not disturb the performance.

Evaluations and Feedback

Loewenstein gives out evaluation forms in every school where they perform in order to receive feedback. She reads each one and has them all stored in a file cabinet. The forms are valuable to her because they provide insight on what is successful and what needs work. The number one complaint she reads on the evaluations is sound issues. This includes the music being too loud, performers hard to hear, and/or a microphone cutting out during the

performance. Loewenstein recalls that most of the problems signaled on the evaluations are technical rather than content issues, though they have received some of those as well. Of the content concerns, most suggest that the content was either over the kids' heads or that the show's content was too young for their grade level. Loewenstein will gauge these responses accordingly. "The show is rated for kindergarten through sixth grade, so some of it will be over the top of a kindergartener's head. Or, the show is rated for kindergarten through fourth grade and the teacher decided to bring her fifth graders to the performance" (Loewenstein, interview).

Teachers sometimes give suggestions for shows on the evaluation forms, but the top comments about what the teachers enjoy are how neat they find the puppets and how much they appreciate the talkback sessions. Loewenstein has deduced that the teachers find value in their students seeing the art performed and being able to comment on it as well as question it immediately after the performance because the students then think about it as they leave the performance space. The main idea of the show has the opportunity to be reinforced. It may be to read a book, to do one's own puppet show, or to make one's own puppets. The point may also be to have the audience contemplate how they affect the environment and how they can make changes to have a smaller carbon footprint.

StoneLion sometimes receives nonofficial evaluations in the form of cards, pictures, or posters that kids make and send to the company. Many times this feedback comes from a class project whereby the kids either sign a card thanking StoneLion for the performance or they draw their favorite moment from the show. Cormack stated that these tokens of appreciation not only help validate the company's work, but they also point out what is working well in the production and what is not. For example, when Cormack and

Loewenstein were performing a show in Dubai, they had a puppet that bounced in place on its horse as the scenery scrolled behind it like a cyclorama. A member of the audience pointed out afterward that the cyclorama going backwards was the best part, which meant that the puppet was riding the horse backwards. It was something that Cormack and Loewenstein had done on accident, but since it was such a crowd pleaser, they made sure to have it happen purposefully from then on.

Mother's Day for Mother Earth

The work for which StoneLion Puppet Theatre is most known is their annual *Mother's Day for Mother Earth* puppet pageant. It all began when Loewenstein had an idea for a play that would involve giant puppets. She felt that a great location for this kind of production would be the lawn of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. The Nelson-Atkins traditionally held a Mother's Day event inside the museum and out on the grounds. Loewenstein asked the museum for permission to use the space and those in charge agreed to let her, as it sounded like a great event to fill their vacant Mother's Day event slot. Loewenstein thought that *Mother's Day for Mother Earth* was both catchy and appropriate for advertising the overarching theme of the play. On Mother's Day in May 2008 StoneLion presented *Spirit of the Wood*, which became the first giant puppet pageant both presented by StoneLion and to be performed on the Nelson-Atkins lawn.

Where did the concept of performing a puppet pageant come from? Loewenstein gave credit to the company, In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and to The Giant Puppet Project, in Siem Reap, Cambodia. In the Heart of the Beast (HOBT) produces a May Day parade every year with large puppets built and performed by members of the community. The company's mission statement declares,

“HOBT uses water, flour, newspaper, paint and unlimited imagination to tell stories that explore the struggles and celebrations of human existence. Drawing inspiration from the world's traditions of puppet and mask theater and its lively roots in transformative ritual and street theater, HOBT creates vital, poetic theater for all ages and backgrounds” (MayDay). Loewenstein found that their mission was similar to her own, which was to build puppets as eco-friendly as she could and to make performances as accessible to the members of the Kansas City community as possible.

There are a couple differences between the two companies though. StoneLion’s giant puppet performance is more geared toward spreading awareness of environmental issues than is In the Heart of the Beast. The latter uses some eco-friendly ideas, but they are more focused on celebrating the coming of the spring season. In the Heart of the Beast also performs a parade followed by a play while StoneLion only puts on a play.

In the Heart of the Beast begins a series of sixteen workshops in their performance space on the first weekend of April and invites anyone from the community to come and help build the puppets. The company draws over 50,000 participants and spectators for the event (MayDay). This event can be paralleled with the practices of medieval drama: groups from the community build their own puppet to have in the parade just as the medieval guilds would finance and mount the play assigned to them in a play cycle. For example, In the Heart of the Beast may have a group of scuba divers be the manipulators that would move a giant turtle puppet on the lake for a performance, just as a medieval shipwright’s guild may have financed building and producing the mystery play *Noah and His Sons* (1425-1450 C.E.) in the Wakefield Cycle (Brockett, 37).

Loewenstein wanted to do something in Kansas City similar to what In the Heart of the Beast was doing in Minneapolis, Minnesota:

I wanted to do something like that for this community because it seems like we are so disjointed. There are all of these separate areas in the city that are really insular. Whether it is Kansas City, Kansas (they don't cross the bridge) or Kansas City, Missouri (they do not go over there) or Johnson County, Kansas (does not come here). It's the same with the theatre groups: they don't support each other as much as they could, though the Fringe Festival is breaking some of that down. But overall, the organizations do not do that.

(Loewenstein)

Loewenstein then got the idea to try to get these different communities within the city involved in a unifying project: the *Mother's Day for Mother Earth* event. Her goal was to have groups come into the workshop at StoneLion, build their own puppet, and be that puppet in the play. She relayed that though it has been somewhat successful, she is still struggling with getting the different groups involved in this way. Loewenstein has been fruitful in integrating kids to help build the shows, such as the picnic blanket for *Picnic for the Planet* in 2009. During the events StoneLion would hold throughout the city at various festivals, community centers, parks, and schools, kids would decorate their own squares for the picnic blanket and then the company's members would sew the squares together (*Picnic for the Planet*). The same idea was used for painting butterfly wings, decorating fish, and building stanchions throughout the various *Mother's Day for Mother Earth* events that have been held. This way, there is some aspect of community building with these different groups: kids, community volunteers that are not artists, community volunteers that are artists, etc. that come together and help build this giant play for the *Mother's Day for Mother Earth* event.

The second major influence for Loewenstein was The Giant Puppet Project, Siem Reap. It is the largest community arts project in Cambodia. “Puppets are created to include unique educational, cultural and ecological themes such as road safety, endangered species, hygiene, local cultural appreciation and environmental awareness. The giant creations are produced through fun and creative workshops, charging and encouraging the imagination of the children” (Giant Puppet Project, Siem Reap). This project has two phases. The first is to hold three weeks of workshops and involve as many children from the community as possible, including schools, ‘street kid’ organizations, landmine survivors, etc. Each of these organizations then goes on to create its personal giant puppet for the parade, which is the second phase. The children build them in the style of Chinese dragon puppets that are lit from the inside. The children get to display their hard work in the night parade while being cheered by the thousands of people in the audience (Giant Puppet Project, Siem Reap).

One day, Loewenstein would like to have a parade attached to the play or to have a parade instead of the play. Logistically, though, it is much harder to put on a parade and much more expensive than to do a play. The main factors include shutting down streets and getting security set up for this type of event. She speculated that this is partially due to the reputation of the St. Patrick’s Day parade, which is known to be a bit rowdy and the crowd tends to include drinking alcohol during the festivity. When Loewenstein traveled to Cambodia in 2012 to participate in the Giant Puppet Project in Siem Reap, she learned much about their culture and how it differs from United States culture. One thing that Loewenstein relayed about the major difference was that “In Cambodia, there were no police and 60,000 people in the street and nobody got hurt” (Loewenstein, interview). This would be an unrealistic expectation in the United States.

The average number of performers for StoneLion's *Mother's Day for Mother Earth* performance is thirty-five and the estimated audience count is 4,000 and growing every year. Loewenstein declares that she would like to have at least 200 members of that audience to be in the show. She stated that figuring out how to incorporate more people from the community was her main reason for participating in The Giant Puppet Project in Siem Reap, Cambodia. How did they get so many kids to be in this parade? She was able to answer that question, but she also admitted that their methods would not be cohesive in Kansas City.

In Cambodia, The Giant Puppet Project would get non-governmental organizations, such as schools, orphanages, landmine survivors, etc. to commit to the project. These organizations would bring their groups to The Giant Puppet Project's workshops and for two days these groups would build their own giant puppet. When Loewenstein was there helping in 2012, The Giant Puppet Project had twelve groups with thirty members a piece participating, equaling 360 children participating in the parade that year. The organizations would bus the children in at night to the location where the parade was designated to start and with supervision, the children would ready their puppets for the parade and then march down the designated streets. People who come to watch the spectacle sometimes are overwhelmed with the visual opulence of the puppets and the jovial spirit of the evening and pour in to the parade and walk with the children in celebration.

“Trying to get the schools here to do something like that...the liability, the commitment, the money that is involved is so different from what Cambodian society is” (Loewenstein, interview). She further commented that Cambodians do not have to pay liability insurance; they just have to make sure that they don't lose any members of their group. No one will sue if a child gets hurt in the parade. In Cambodia, people would donate a

bus to take the kids to the parade and back. In Kansas City, an organization would have to fundraise to pay for a bus if it cannot afford it. Finally, the fact that the parade is at night is the biggest reason why Loewenstein predicted it would not be possible to do in Kansas City. She did not foresee parents being comfortable with their children marching through the streets at night, even under supervision.

Loewenstein is still trying to figure out whether it would be possible to keep the concept of doing the parade at night, only doing it with groups within the Kansas City community. She would like to keep the idea of having the parade at night because of the unique artistic visual experience that is exhibited. Loewenstein has speculated that if she took all of the money the company has set aside for the Puppets for the Planet Festival and the *Mother's Day for Mother Earth* performance and did a night parade through the Crossroads Arts District on a First Friday (the first Friday of every month is an arts celebration, usually showcasing the opening of new shows in the art galleries, but is also open to a multitude of art forms showcasing their work), who would watch it? She has thought of Crossroads because it already has a fine art crowd established. Would there be any families that would come out, would they let their kids stay up that late, and would it not turn into an event where people would drink a lot of alcohol and turn it into an event not appropriate for children? Loewenstein has observed that many night events in Kansas City tend to find an audience that will involve alcohol in their celebrations, making what could be a family-friendly environment turn into something more adult-themed.

Loewenstein then wondered: if StoneLion put the parade on during the day and on a weekend, would enough people be interested in coming to it? Loewenstein believed that the puppets would not have the same effect as they would have if they were paraded at night and

would be lit from the inside. She admitted that the papier-mâché puppets made by a large group of children would not look very good when the mask of darkness and the spectacle of lighting them from the inside are not instituted. “Without lighting them up and displaying them during the day, they look alright. But when they are lit up at night, they are truly phenomenal” (Loewenstein, interview). She then wondered whether it would be okay that the parade’s audience was adults only, but she also admitted that she could not stop thinking about how the parade could be more family-oriented. After all, StoneLion has a family and community-driven mission statement. Where could StoneLion hold this event and have families come out at night and be okay with it?

Loewenstein has come up with an idea to fuse her light up puppets with the community. She has created a twelve-foot-tall puppet she has named “Dead Betty” for a new festival that StoneLion offers called *Day of the Dead*. It is offered throughout October and the first half of November. This festival will last from one o’clock in the afternoon to approximately ten o’clock in the evening. The festivals help parents in feeling safe to bring their children to the day festivities as well as the afternoon and evening parades that feature the giant light-up puppets. The light-up puppets are constructed similarly to the giant pageant puppets are for *Mother’s Day for Mother Earth*. The structure is made of bamboo that is twisted and tied to the desired shape and covered with papier-mâché, only these are wired with lights inside. StoneLion has constructed three of these giant light up puppets so far: Dead Betty who is a twelve-foot-tall skeleton in a skirt for the new *Day of the Dead* festival show, a dragon, and a lion. Cormack also commented that the puppets look great in the daylight, but when a car battery powers the lights at night, they look incredible.

CHAPTER 4

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Case Study

I discovered StoneLion Puppet Theatre in 2011 through an advertisement on the right-hand column of my Facebook page. I clicked on the advertisement for three reasons. The first was that puppets from a young age have fascinated me. The next was that I saw the company was from Kansas City and I had not heard of this puppet theatre; I had only known of Paul Mesner Puppets. The final reason I entered the advertisement was that I wanted to see one of the company's shows.

Since I had the following Saturday free, I volunteered to work a puppet building station for the company at the Westport Community Center. This also happened to be the premiere of *SPELUNK! Saving Our Springs*. I met Loewenstein and Gass after the performance and found both to be quite delightful to talk with. Several months later I asked Loewenstein if I could write my thesis on StoneLion and she agreed.

The production on which I was able to work with them the most was their 6th annual *Mother's Day for Mother Earth* event in 2012 called *Spirit of the North*. When I was not in class or at work, I was at StoneLion's warehouse helping the company build the puppets. Many of these pageant puppets varied between ten to twenty feet tall and wide, so they needed to be built as light yet as sturdy as possible. Loewenstein learned from her trip to Cambodia as an invited artist to help with The Giant Puppet Project that they used bamboo for the structure of their puppets. She applied that building technique to her designs and with success.

Loewenstein learned by trial and error how to twist and tie together the bamboo to make a sound structure. Once she created the shape she desired for the puppet, the next step was to begin the papier-mâché process. That is when I and many other volunteers began our process. Much of the work I did was the papier-mâché of the Mother Nature puppet, the Greenhouse Gas Monster puppet, and the orca whale puppet. I spent several afternoons gluing pieces of tissue paper to the outside of the bamboo structure of the puppets. The puppets needed to have enough layers to resist ripping, as they would be handled by many hands, would be stacked in the trucks used to transport the puppets to and from the warehouse, and would need to withstand wind.

Though it was warm and breezy most of the days in April (which helped the glue on the papier-mâché to dry) it still was a time-consuming process. Once I was finished with what I could do on one puppet, I would move on and begin the papier-mâché process on another puppet. I would continue this process throughout the afternoon until either Loewenstein or myself was ready to leave for the day.

After the papier-mâché was dry and ready for the next step, Loewenstein and other employees and volunteers would begin painting some of the puppets. I was tasked to paint the base color of the Greenhouse Gas Monster, which was a black body with white eyeballs. Loewenstein and others who had more experience painted the more intricate parts of the puppets.

Many of the puppets were either draped in cloth or were covered with cloth. For example, the Mother Nature puppet wore a dress that would cover the person operating it from underneath. Over the orca whale puppet's base of papier-mâché, black and white cloth was sewn together and stapled to the puppet to create a smooth outer finish.

Once the building process was mostly finished, Loewenstein was ready to try out the puppets to see if they worked the way she envisioned. For example, the giant human puppets such as Mother Nature and Father Winter needed three people to operate. One person would be attached to a backpack-like harness underneath the puppet. This person bore most of the weight of the puppet, which was why it was essential to Loewenstein to find ways to make the structures as light as possible while simultaneously keeping them sturdy. The backpack puppeteers operated the heads of the human puppets by large rods. The other two puppeteers each operated a hand. Those people would also be the eyes and ears for the backpack puppeteer, as that person's visual and audio senses are restricted from the inside.

The puppet I helped operate was the orca whale. The puppet was twenty feet long and required four people to operate it: one for the front to hold and manipulate the mouth, two for the middle section (I operated the third section from the front) and one person to support and flip the tail. During the rehearsal process, we first practiced walking in step and with similar strides. Since our puppeteers ranged from five foot three inches to six foot four inches, we then needed to figure out at what height each of us needed to hold our bamboo pole for the orca whale's sections to look even to an audience.

Once we felt somewhat confident in accomplishing these tasks, Loewenstein began to give us notes on how to make the orca whale (Loewenstein named it 'Whalon' and our four person team named it 'Terry,' so we combined the names and it became 'Whalon Terry') look like it was swimming. It took a while for our team to get the hang of moving Whalon Terry so that it looked as if it was moving in a fluid motion. Each person had his or her own idea as to what each member of the team should do. Through a lot of trial and error, we figured out what worked best. The front two puppeteers would move to the left in a slight

ripple effect as the back two puppeteers would move to the right with a slight ripple effect. We then would switch and repeat. We added the tail flip as well as a dive toward the audience. The front puppeteer would open the mouth throughout the dive for an added effect. Through the rehearsal process, our team synced very well. We knew our individual roles with operating our sections and were able to adapt if one person got off.

Though the building process for the puppets lasted a couple months, the rehearsals for *Spirit of the North* lasted only a week. StoneLion company members made up the main characters, such as the Greenhouse Gas Monster and the polar bear. The secondary characters, such as Whalon Terry, Mother Nature, and Father Winter, were made up of an adult cast of volunteers and StoneLion company members. The tertiary characters were made up of a children's chorus that would come out at the end of the show, sending the message that the children are our future.

On the Monday evening before the performance, Loewenstein had the cast/crew meeting, assigned the cast to the puppets, and blocked the show without the puppets. Tuesday consisted of getting the cast members walking with their big puppets for the first time and fixing small details. For example, the puppeteer who operated the front quarter and the mouth of Whalon Terry found he needed the pole taped where he held it because the bamboo gave him splinters. On Wednesday, Loewenstein worked the blocking with the puppeteers who operated the smaller puppets. Thursday was working the blocking with the big puppets. Friday marked the first full run-through with all the puppeteers with the puppets, minus the children's chorus. On Saturday, the adult cast had a 9:00am call with the run starting at 10:00am. The adult cast had a lunch break at 11:30am and the children's chorus rehearsal was at 12:00pm. The adult cast reconvened at 1:00pm for a final run-through of the

show with the children's chorus. The performance was on Mother's Day, May 13, 2012. The cast and crew call was at 12:30pm and the show ran from 2:00-2:30pm.

Though I had performed on stage since the age of five, I had not performed in front of such a large crowd before. The approximate attendance of the show was 4,000 people. It was a very exciting sight to behold. The show was performed at Brush Creek Amphitheater in Theis Park in Kansas City, Missouri. The surface we performed on was a flat, concrete base and the audience sat on the hill's incline down to the edge of the stage.

As the puppeteers for Whalon Terry, we were hidden underneath the bridge near the amphitheater. When we emerged from the underneath the bridge of our music cue, the audience gasped and awed. We 'swam' to the edge of the stage and 'dived' along the front row of the audience, which elicited audible and physical responses. We 'swam' back to the bridge on our next cue that would bring us back onstage for the end of the show.

As the puppeteers for Whalon Terry, we were dressed in white tops, khaki pants, and white shoes. The white in the costumes suggested the match of the white underbelly of the whale. During the performance, we were instructed to smile. It sounded like a simple instruction, but it turned out to be more difficult than one would think. Though the puppet was made of bamboo, the twenty-foot whale was still heavy. We also had to hold on to the puppet during wind gusts, as the giant puppet would catch the wind like a sail. All the concentration it took to operate the puppet could momentarily distract one from smiling, instead bearing a furrowed brow and set jaw. We found it slightly overwhelming to keep a smile on our faces during rehearsals, but our Whalon Terry team could not help but smiling when we experienced the audience's reactions on the day of the performance.

After the performance, crewmembers gathered Whalon Terry's stand from beneath the bridge and brought it to the stage so we could set the puppet down. The audience was invited to the stage space to gently touch the puppets and talk to the puppeteers. I found this to be one of my favorite sections of the day. I highly enjoyed talking to the children and adults alike about our puppet, the show, and the StoneLion company. Most were surprised that the cast was not made up of professional puppeteers; rather the cast and crew were overwhelmingly volunteers from the community.

Just as with any show that tours, there is a load in and a load out. This process, depending on how many people helped, took approximately thirty to forty-five minutes to unload the puppets from the truck and assemble/to disassemble the puppets and load into the truck. The technical director Glenn Lewis led this process. Once all the puppets, set pieces, sound equipment, etc. were loaded, the cast and crew headed to StoneLion's warehouse building to help unload it all from the trucks. Lewis and Loewenstein took the lead on where to place the items. This process took about twenty-five minutes. Afterwards the cast and crew were treated to pizza and beverages.

Working on *Spirit of the North* from beginning to end was a wonderful experience. Loewenstein along with the rest of the company members showed me that StoneLion is a very nurturing group. They welcome people with open arms. I found a group of people that has taught me much about puppets, the art of puppetry, how to run a successful business, and that it is very possible to have a work relationship with people who are also close friends and family. I have worked on two more *Mother's Day for Mother Earth* puppet pageants since the one in 2012 and am planning to participate in the 2015 performance. I do not live in Kansas City any longer; thus I do not get to visit nearly as often as I used to, but when I do

see Loewenstein, Cormack, and Gass, I can always count on a big hug that makes me I feel as if I never left.

With the encouragement and guidance of Loewenstein, I am currently planning to use the information I have gained from this research and writing process to incorporate puppetry and children's theatre in future career opportunities. Though much information was gathered and documented in this thesis, there is room to expand. Future research areas could include a pictorial history of StoneLion, interviews with past company members, or interview clients and audience members of StoneLion performances.

APPENDIX A

ALL PERFORMANCE PRICING: Pricing dependent on number of performances, season and travel expenses. Please call or contact us for more information and booking specials.

Address: 2025 Tracy Avenue Kansas City, Missouri 64108

Phone: 816.221.5351

Website: stonelionpuppets.org

Regular Repertoire

Backyard Buggin'

Written by: Heather Nisbett-Loewenstein

Music by: Jack Sharman

Run Time: 25 min

Target Age: All Ages

Maximum Audience: 500 Curriculum: Environmental Science, music, art, theatre.

Felicia Flash wildlife photographer, and her sidekick Karma, the elephant, are back from another globe trotting journey and are ready to relax in their OWN backyard. As usual, adventure is never far away from this wacky duo. A peaceful nap under the shade tree takes Felicia into an amazing ecosystem under her lawn chair. We are talking bugs. BIG BUGS... as she shrinks to bug size...or our stage grows to make the audience bug size.... Green Darner Dragon Flies, earth worms, tree frogs, slugs and more. Discover the critters in your own backyard, what it takes to create a backyard sanctuary and why it is so important to help out. Backyard Buggin' was created with educational assistance from The Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium in Tacoma, WA.

OPTIONAL COMPANION WORKSHOP: Butterfly turn about puppets - stages of a caterpillar or Stain glass rod puppet butterflies. Additional fee required.

REQUIREMENTS:

Staging: 20 X 20

Electrical: One 110 outlet

Other Requirements: A smaller set is available taking 16' by 16' in space. The backdrop is much simpler but is more versatile.

Blue Fish

Written by: Heather Nisbett-Loewenstein

Run Time: 25 min

Target Age: PS - 2nd grade
Maximum Audience: 75

A smaller show for a smaller audience this tabletop puppet show, Blue Fish explores the underwater world of a little fish so blue that his “room” is so messy. How can he fix it? Will his friends help? Numbers, colors, personal space and safety combine to create a spashingly good time! A brand new show tailored for the preschool audience. Interactive, core valued and entertaining for the smallest of our friends. Developed with a round table of ECE professionals.

REQUIREMENTS:

Staging: 6 X 6
Electrical: One 110 outlet

Bubba and Trixie

Adaptation by: Heather Nisbett-Loewenstein
Based on the book by: local Kansas City author Lisa Campbell-Ernst
Original music by: Jack Sharman
Target Audience: PS-2nd grade

Bubba is a scaredy-cat caterpillar too afraid to leave his leaf until he meets the fearless Trixie, a crimped wing ladybug. Amazing adventures happen until winter sets in and Bubba must make a new journey....into a butterfly. A story of true friendship and facing your fears.

REQUIREMENTS:

Staging: 6'x6'
Floor level
Indoor or Outdoor
Electrical: One 110 electrical outlet

Down the Drain

Written by: Heather Nisbett-Loewenstein
Music by: Jack Sharman
Run Time: 30 min
Target Age: PS - 6th grade
Maximum Audience: 500
Curriculum: Environmental science, art, music and theatre.

Felicia Flash, wildlife photographer, and her sidekick, Karma the elephant, are at it again in their latest wacky adventure. Following a sewer rat down the drain opens up a new world for our duo as they discover what our watershed is, its connection to the ecosystem and how we can make a difference. Al, the rat, is upset when once again thoughtless humans decide to

use his storm sewer drain as a trash can. Not only that, but he is put in danger when an oil barrel lands on his head trapping him inside as it floats out to sea. Can our dynamic duo save him in time? What and who do they meet as they travel from stream to river and where do they end up? Join us for the answers to these and many other nail-biting questions as we go...down the drain! Marionettes, rod and mouth puppets with lots of audience interaction! Sponsored in part by MARC and The Missouri Arts Council, a state agency.

OPTIONAL COMPANION WORKSHOP: Missouri river fish and habitat puppets.
Additional workshop fee applies.

REQUIREMENTS:

Staging: 20 X 20

Electrical: One 110 outlet

Other Requirements: This show is a bit larger than some of our others. 20' by 16' is a possibility but the more room the better. A gym or cafeteria works best.

The Emperor Penguin's New Clothes

Adapted by: Tim Cormack

Directed by: Heather Nisbett-Loewenstein

Music by: Jack Sharman

Run Time: 45 min

Target Age: PS - 6th grade

Maximum Audience: 500

Curriculum: Literature, arts, music, theatre and values

The Emperor has nothing new to wear so a contest is announced. Tailors from all over the frozen land come to bring him their latest creations along with two shifty polar bears intent on duping the kingdom out of all its riches. These wily bears concoct a fantastical tale of a magical cloth that only the very intelligent can see...so of course the Emperor demands they make a fabulous costume out of it for only him. Just what does he end up wearing? Come join StoneLion Puppet Theatre and find out, but please: clothing is required. Vanity and greed never pay off as demonstrated by StoneLion Puppet Theatre's newest production, The Emperor's New Clothes, loosely based on the Hans Christian Andersen tale. This rendition is a zany musical full of singing penguins, wise walrus and lots of charm.

REQUIREMENTS:

Space: 16 X 16

Flat surface

Electrical: Two 110 outlets

Excuse Me Are You a Dragon?

Original children's book by: Rhett Ranson Pennell

Adaptation by: Heather Nisbett-Loewenstein

Original music by Ken Lovern

Run time: 45 min

Target Age: PS-6th grade

Maximum Audience: 600

Sometimes you just shouldn't get what you ask for. Little King Edwin is bored and thinks his kingdom needs more excitement in the form of a dragon. Off goes poor Sir Gordon to fulfill his quest. Knights in shining armor, singing banshees, silly ogres and of course a dragon make up this full-fledge puppet musical.

REQUIREMENTS:

Space: 20' x 20'

Floor level or raised stage

Electrical: Two standard outlets

Indoor

Fun in the Sun

Created by: Heather Nisbett-Loewenstein

Run Time: 28 min

Target Age: PS - Family Audiences

Maximum Audience: 500

Celebrate with StoneLion in this lighthearted marionette review celebrating sunshine with a beach party! Dancing flames, mermaids, flamingoes and even a hula competition. It's Hot Hot Hot! A great way to enliven your own festival or party!

REQUIREMENTS:

Space: 16'x16'x8'H

Raised stage for better visibility

Indoors or outdoors

Electrical: One 110 outlet

I'd Rather Be a Hummingbird

Adapted by: Heather Nisbett-Loewenstein

Music by: Jack Sharman

Run Time: 40 min

Target Age: PS-4th grade

Maximum Audience: 400

Curriculum: Environmental Science, music, art, theatre.
Teaching Guide available. Based on the folktale by Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai "The Tree Lady of Kenya."

Sometimes problems seem too big or overwhelming for one individual to make a difference. Little Nigel the beaver is learning the work of the big beavers when disaster strikes in the form of a forest fire. All the creatures of the forest run away or stand panic-stricken waiting for someone else to solve the problem. Only the little hummingbird dares to help. Nigel learns he wants to be like the hummingbird and do the best he can no matter the size of the problem in this musical adaptation using local species; beaver, gees, bears and more. This local rendition of the African tale is an homage to the fact Wangari Maathai studied environmentalism in Kansas before returning to Kenya.

OPTIONAL COMPANION WORKSHOP: Hummingbird rod puppets. Additional fee required.

REQUIREMENTS:

Staging: 16'x16'x9'H
Electrical: One 110 outlet
A fog machine is used in this production.

It's a Jungle Out There

Run Time: 25 min
Target Age: PS-Family
Maximum Audience: 500

Join Felicia Flash, wildlife photographer, and her sidekick, Karma the elephant introduce you to dozens of endangered species and wildlife from across the globe in this cabaret musical extravaganza. Orangutans, Javanese tigers, binturongs and gibbons swing to the beat of the music while hornbills and dog-faced fruit bats fly into the audience. Intricate marionettes, fun mouth puppets and even a life-size bear sing about conservation. *Jungle* is part of StoneLion's animal conservation series that has played since 1986 in zoos across the country including Zoo Atlanta, Cheyenne Mountain, CO, Kansas City, MO and Metro Washington Park, OR. Metro-Washington Park in OR and thousands of schools and festivals.

REQUIREMENTS:

Space: 16'x16'
Raised stage
One standard electrical outlet
Indoor or Outdoor

Kachina Drums

Written in collaboration: Phil (Blue Owl) Hooser and Heather Nisbett-Loewenstein

Run Time: 45 min

Target Audience: PS-7th grade

Maximum Audience: 800

Curriculum: Social Studies, Navajo and Hopi Culture, values, art, music, theater

Companion Workshop: Kachina Mask workshop; Teaching Guide available

Mischievous Coyote, silly Koshare, Father Sky and Mother Earth dance and sing to the beat of Southwestern Native American Indian drums. These stories of communication focus on the importance of being true to yourself and thinking of others.

Masks, direct manipulation mouth puppets, Indian sign language and Kachinas will delight all.

Chosen as part of The Smithsonian Institute's 2003 Season.

Tours in Metro Kansas City under Kansas City Young Audiences and Arts Partners

www.kcya.org

REQUIREMENTS:

Space: 16' x16'

Floor level or raised stage

Indoor or Outdoor

Electrical: One standard outlet

The Lab Rat Science Show

Written by: Heather Nisbett-Loewenstein

Music by: Vaughn Shultz

Run Time: 45 min

Target Age: 2nd-6th grade

Maximum Audience: 400

Curriculum: Science, music, art, theatre

Teaching Guide available

"Science, Science ooh, don't be a guinea pig, Science Science, ohhh It is the way we live."

An experiment goes terrible wrong....for the humans. The Animals think it's just fine as they take over the lab in this wacky fast paced musical with Einstein R. Rat super genius, a crazy guinea pig trying to take over the world and a passel of singing rabbits. The scientific method, the three states of matter and magnetic attraction are encompassed in forty-five minutes of fun, blacklight and music.

OPTIONAL COMPANION WORKSHOP: Hummingbird rod puppets. Additional fee required.

REQUIREMENTS:

Staging: 16'x16'x10'H

Electrical: One 110 outlet

A fog machine is used in this production. If space can be darkened, black light and strobe lights will be used.

Monkey's Dream

Conceived by: Heather Nisbett-Loewenstein

Music by: Jack Sharman

Run Time: 30 min

Target Age: PS - 4th grade

Maximum Audience: 200

Curriculum: Art, music and theater.

Looking for something different? Try a non-verbal puppet journey!

What do monkeys dream of? Find out in this imaginative non-verbal Bunraku puppet show.

A tiny monkey falls asleep dreaming and the moon decides to give him his wish.....What will our little friend do when he awakens to discover himself on a giant banana? A beautiful piece of puppetry exploring a range of emotions and the conquering of the fear of the unknown.

OPTIONAL COMPANION WORKSHOP: Monkey rod puppets. Additional fee required.

REQUIREMENTS:

Space: 6'x8'x8'H

Floor level or raised stage

one 110 electrical outlet

Indoor only

The Ogre's Tail

Written by: Heather Nisbett-Loewenstein

Run Time: 25 min

Target Age: PS - 3rd grade

Maximum Audience: 100

The true story of the Three Billy Goats Gruff. What happens when tall tales are spread either out of fear or to make yourself look better? Find out as the truth is revealed about the poor misunderstood troll with a toothache and a trio of confused and fibbing goats. Will our Princess learn not to judge by appearances alone.

OPTIONAL COMPANION WORKSHOP: Fairytale hand puppets—learn simple stitching and while creating your own fairytale hand puppet.

REQUIREMENTS:

Staging: 6'X6'X8'H

Electrical: One 110 outlet

Rainforest Crunch

Written by: Heather Nisbett-Loewenstein

Run Time: 25 min

Target Age: PS-3rd grade

Maximum Audience: 75

Crunch, boom boing...into the Amazon with our intrepid wildlife photographer. A storm knocks Felicia Flash off her course in her search for the endangered Golden Lion Tamarin. Help our explorer find this illusive monkey while she encounters the creatures that call they Amazon home. Toucans, Rhinoceros beetles, Emerald tree boas, monkeys and more. An amazing interactive experience of puppet fun.

REQUIREMENTS:

Space: 6'x 6'

Floor level or raised stage

Indoor or Outdoor

Electrical: One standard outlet

SPELUNK! Saving Our Springs

Written by: Heather Loewenstein

Original Music by: Jack Sharman

Run time: 35 min

Target Age: K-5th grade

Maximum Audience: 400

Curriculum: Environmental Science, Social Studies - Hispanic, drama and art.

What does ancient Indian treasure, a lost map, and a deep cave have to do with saving the world? Come find out in StoneLion's latest adventure. Nathan Ready is always ready for adventure and this time he drags his friend Felicia into the search for the ancient Aztec treasure rumored to have the power to solve all the earth's problems.....along the way they go spelunking into an amazing underground world full of shadow puppets, light up puppets, original music and just plain old fun! Cultural Arts, geography, indigenous wildlife, and storm water environmental education all wrapped up in action packed adventure. This bilingual production is most appreciated by K-5th grade and their families.

REQUIREMENTS:

Space: 16'x16'

Electrical: Two standard outlets
One hour before and after the production is needed for set up and clean up

Starry, Starry Night

Run Time: 25-30 min
Target Age: PS-4th grade
Maximum Audience: 75

Simple astronomy and constellation stories with wacky Professor Van Gogo. The moon, the stars and more with music, madcap mayhem and audience participation. Discover what a star is, explore our sun the red giant and the constellations of Cygnus the Swan and Draco the Dragon in this highly original production hand puppet show. A regular favorite at The National Air and Space Museum in Washington D.C.

REQUIREMENTS:

Space: 6'x 6'
Floor level or raised stage
Indoor or Outdoor
Electrical: One standard outlet

Stellaluna

Written by: Janell Canon
Adapted by: Heather Nisbett-Loewenstein
Music by: Jack Sharman
Run Time: 45 min
Target Age: PS - 3rd grade
Maximum Audience: 500
Curriculum: Literature, Environmental Science, values, drama and art.

This show by StoneLion Puppet Theatre is not just for the birds. We are talking Stellaluna. An amazing highflying adventure. Crash! The little bat Stellaluna is separated from her mother during a night of foraging and lands in a nest full of birds. Mama bird happily adopts her, but Stellaluna just can't change her "batty" ways. A great tale of acceptance adapted from the book by Janell Cannon.

OPTIONAL COMPANION WORKSHOP: Go Batty! Create your own fruit bat puppet while learning batty behaviors and habits. An event filled hour of fun. \$85 with a show. \$125 without. Includes materials for up to 20 puppets.

REQUIREMENTS:

Staging: 20 X 20

Flat surface
Electrical: One 110 outlet

The Toy Box

Run Time: 25 minutes
Target Age: PS-Family
Maximum Audience: 500

Stuffed bears, dancing rabbits, jack-in-the-boxes, sock monkeys, marching soldiers, space aliens and more. What will come out of StoneLion's toy box next? A journey through memories as these delightful marionettes remind you of childhood days. *Audience participation and just plain fun.*

REQUIREMENTS:

Space: 16' x16'
Raised stage
Indoor or Outdoor
Electrical: One standard outlet

Tumbling Weeds

Run Time: 25 minutes
Target Audience: PS-Family
Maximum Audience: 500

Over a dozen intricate marionettes bring the spirit of the old West to life. Thirty minutes of fun in this cabaret style marionette production. Yipping Prairie Dogs, cowpokes and chickens, rattlesnakes, bald eagles, timber wolves and Mariah the wind all highlight this foot stomping good time.

REQUIREMENTS:

Space: 16'x16'
Raised stage
Indoor or Outdoor
Electrical: One standard outlet

Who's in Rabbit's House?

Adapted by: Heather Nisbett-Loewenstein
Run Time: 25 min
Target Age: PS - 4th grade
Maximum Audience: 100

Curriculum: Social Studies- African folktales, literature, drama and art.

Optional Companion Workshop: Create your own rabbit rod puppet...with his mystery guest (a cranky caterpillar) in this hour-long hands-on workshop. Led by puppeteers from StoneLion. Additional fee required.

Based on the Masai folktale, Rabbit has a new guest...one he doesn't want! But he can't figure out who it is, or where it is - all he knows is he wants it out! Join all the other village animals as they hunt for clues, solve the riddles and give their ideas on solving this mystery. Interactive Puppet Fun! A recommended show for Getting Creative at your Library!

REQUIREMENTS:

Staging: 6 X 6

Flat surface

Electrical: One 110 outlet

Wind in the Willows

Adapted by: Heather Nisbett-Loewenstein

Music by: Vaughn Schultz

Run Time: 40 min

Target Age: 2-5th grade

Maximum Audience: 400

Curriculum: Literature, music, art, theatre.

More car crashes than Nascar! Mr.. Toad can't get enough of those new fangled motorcars and ooohhh the trouble he gets into! Mr. Mole, Mr. Rat and Mr. Badger take it upon themselves to try and turn that Toad around, as friends always should, in a fast paced musical based on the classic tale by Kenneth Grahame. Bunraku puppets and interactive fun.

REQUIREMENTS:

Staging: 20 X 20 X 8'H

Raised stage or floor level

Electrical: One 110 outlet

Indoors only

APPENDIX B

ALL PERFORMANCE PRICING: Pricing dependent on number of performances, season and travel expenses. Please call or contact us for more information and booking specials.

Address: 2025 Tracy Avenue Kansas City, Missouri 64108

Phone: 816.221.5351

Website: stonelionpuppets.org

Seasonal Shows

The Boneyard Jamboree

Only available late September-October 31.

Run Time: 25 minutes

Target Audience: PS-Family

Maximum Audience: 500

A fantastic non-scary Halloween spooktacular for audiences of all ages. Pumpkin man, the invisible couple, spooky scary skeletons, Martians and ghosts all make an appearance in this cabaret show full of trick marionettes that are a sure treat! This long-standing favorite is the perfect addition to your Harvest celebration.

REQUIREMENTS:

Space: 16' x16'

Raised stage

Indoor or Outdoor

Electrical: One standard outlet

Calaca Marionettes

Only available October through the first part of November.

Created by: Heather Nisbett-Loewenstein

Run Time: 20 min

Target Age: All ages

Maximum Audience: 500

Curriculum: Social studies—Hispanic cultural

The Latino tradition of El Dia de los Muertos, The Day of the Dead, is celebrated in this cabaret marionette puppet show with dancing skeletons, marigolds and flames using traditional and contemporary music.

Giant light up skeleton puppets are an optional add on to create an amazing festival!
Additional fee required.

OPTIONAL COMPANION WORKSHOP: El Dia Masks. Additional fee required.

REQUIREMENTS:

Staging: 16'x16'x9'H
A raised stage is needed for best visibility
Electrical: One 110 outlet
A fog machine is used in this production.

The Magic Cauldron

A perfect addition to Irish Festivals and St. Patrick day celebrations.

Created by: Heather Nisbett-Loewenstein
Run Time: 25 min
Target Age: All ages
Maximum Audience: 500
Curriculum: Social Studies—Irish culture, art, drama, music

Travel to the mystical isle of Ireland in this Celtic cabaret marionette and rod puppet show. Dance a jig with leprechauns as dragons fly overhead in the audience. Come stir the pot and see what happens. Fairies, mermaids, selkies, and shamrocks with traditional and contemporary music will have your toes tapping and your face smiling.

REQUIREMENTS:

Staging: 16'x16'X8'H
Raised stage is needed for best visibility
Electrical: One 110 outlet
A fog machine is used in this production.

Snow

Only available November-January annually.

Run Time: 25 min
Target Age: All Ages
Maximum Audience: 500

Oh the weather outside is frightful but our puppets are so delightful! A wintery treat of trick marionettes singing puppets and cool music. Dance with Penguin Shuffle, sing along with I Want to be Your Teddy Bear, watch our Ice Skating mice or bounce along with Frosty. Just

Let it SNOW! Perfect for PS-4!

REQUIREMENTS:

Staging: 16 X 16

Raised stage

Electrical: One 110 outlet

Twas ETC.

Only available November until December 24.

Written by: Clement C. Moore

Adapted by: Heather Nisbett-Loewenstein

Run Time: 30 min

Target Age: All Ages

Maximum Audience: 100

Santa is off doing a practice run so Mrs. Claus decides to get her friends together for a wacky storytelling session of Clement C. Moore's famous poem Twas the Night Before Christmas. A wonderful addition to your holiday party, preschool event or library.

REQUIREMENTS:

Staging: 6 X 6

Electrical: One 110 outlet

Twass the Night Before Christmas

Only available November until December 24.

Written by: Clement C. Moore

Adapted by: Heather Nisbett-Loewenstein

Run Time: 30 min

Target Age: All Ages

Maximum Audience: 500

Curriculum: Literature

Santa's workshop comes alive with intricate toy marionettes, including a charming larger than life dollhouse, which opens to reveal a re-enactment of Clement C. Moore's famous poem, Twass the Night Before Christmas. An amazing intricate show with the true spirit of the holidays.

REQUIREMENTS:

Staging: 16 X 16

Raised stage

Electrical: One 110 outlet

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VITA

Kristen Elizabeth Janke was born on August 25, 1986, in Springfield, Missouri. She was educated in a public school and graduated from Hickory Co. R1 School in the top 10 of her class. She received a theatre scholarship to State Fair Community College in Sedalia, Missouri where she graduated with her Associate of Arts. She received another theatre scholarship to the University of Central Missouri in Warrensburg, Missouri, from which she graduated cum laude, in 2010. Her degree was a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre Performance.

In Fall of 2010, Ms. Janke began work toward her master's program in theatre with an emphasis in theatre history/dramatic literature. She began teaching at State Fair Community College in Fall of 2012 as well as a beginning a second degree to receive her Master of Arts in Communication at the University of Central Missouri that she will complete in Spring of 2015. Upon completion of her degree requirements, Ms. Janke plans to continue her teaching career in post-secondary education.

Ms. Janke is a member of Missouri Community College Association, UNIMA-USA, Theatre Communication Group, Theta Alpha Phi National Honor Fraternity, and Delta Epsilon Iota Academic Honor Society.