

On April 7, we at the Folklore Project lost our dear friend Rosemary Cubas to cancer. The last issue of this magazine described the fight against eminent domain abuse and the unjust takings of peoples' homes in too many Philadelphia neighborhoods. This fight was Rosemary's passion. With great sorrow, we lament her passing: we are among the many people who miss her dearly. It was a privilege to have known her.

Rosemary was here, in our new home, present even while she was battling cancer — her last battle, fought, like others, with courage, strength, humor and love, her eyes wide open. Her life was with others, in community, in struggle.

Rosemary treated people with real respect. She listened. And she truly heard: she knew enough about peoples' situations to put their stories together so that they began to add up. And she got people to listen to one another's stories, to create a kind of common wealth of experience, a community currency reckoned in a kind of value that people could know to be true, believe in, and build on.

Describing the process of learning to fight bureaucracies, Rosemary told me, "We had to unlearn writing and talking from the heart." Saying this, she was ruefully acknowledging how ordinary peoples' knowledge (and ways of talking) are too often disrespected: she was also describing what she liked about the idea of folklore: a way of valuing (and paying attention to) the terms in which people describe their own experiences. "I would have liked to have been a folklorist," she mused once.

"You are one," I insisted.

Rosemary's brand of activism and folklore involved carrying a vision of justice grounded in respecting ordinary peoples' capacity to name and righteously change their situations. She consistently acted as if basic human rights, freedom and justice, started with listening to people, paying attention to the stories behind the stories, and assuming that respect was everyone's due. She will be greatly missed. And her voice and example will be in our minds, hearts and actions.

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Four examples of recent work fill this issue. Lakhon kohl, all-male Cambodian masked dance drama, is danced today by artists who are the first generation to bring the genre back to life after the genocide of the 1970s in Cambodia. Only a handful of dancers in the U.S. know lakhon khol, and the performances that will occur as part of PFP's Dance Happens Here weekend program, on May 26th and 27th, represent a small effort to invest in the life and development of this art.

Suzanne Povse is a top skilled tool and dye maker. Her stories, shared at one of our artist salons, represent her first attempt to go on record with her experiences as the only woman on the shop floor for most of her 28 working years. Her writing is a contribution to occupational folklore, offering a window into the realities of working women's lives. And it is a reminder that culture is not only a matter of ethnicity, but of work life as well.

We recently gave away Tom

Morton's beautiful photographs of ODUNDE (which had been on exhibit in our first-floor gallery), trading them for peoples' stories about the images. In doing so, we stimulated a process where people talked together about who should own goods that were in many ways community property. We were tutored by people who shared what they knew: knowledge, stories, lived experience. Giving away photos— or, more properly, exchanging them, returning them, keeping them in circulation— multiplied value: the process deepened relationships between and among those who have participated in ODUNDE, including PFP staff, built knowledge, stimulated stories (making more powerful art) and good history-telling. Ultimately, it brought people together to share what they cared about.

Our newest exhibition, "Community Fabric" is also an experiment, just as the offering of photos was. We accepted work from everyone who applied and our gallery walls are filled with a stunning variety of pieces claiming various connections to community traditions. Excerpts in this issue from interviews with two participating artists represent some of the stories behind the creation of these objects.

What is truly remarkable is how all of the people included in this issue have persevered in exploring what have been minority traditions, difficult paths. We are honored to be allies in their efforts.

— Debora Kodish