



Claire Chafee '72

Playwright

Since graduating from MCS, Claire Chafee has become a distinguished playwright. Following high school, she attended Oberlin College, where she earned a B.A. in Theatre; she graduated with honors from The Drama Studio in London; and she received an M.F.A. from Brown University. Claire has taught playwrighting at San Francisco State University, the Playwrights Foundation, the San Francisco Bay Area Playwrights Festival, New College of California and San Francisco's American Conservatory Theatre (ACT). As part of her Brown University Fellowship, she held classes with women in the maximum security division of a correctional facility in Rhode Island. Readings of her work have been held at the Manhattan Theatre Club, Lincoln Center, the Circle Repertory Company, the Trinity Repertory Company, the Iowa Writers' Workshop and Intersection for the Arts.

In a field where women, and lesbians in particular, remain a distinct minority, Claire has been a shining star, receiving numerous tributes for her plays. *Why We Have a Body* won the Dramalogue Award, the San Francisco Bay Area Critics Circle Award and *New York Newsday's* Oppenheimer Award, and it was given an extended seven-month run at The Magic Theatre in San Francisco. The play has since been performed in cities across the country, as well as in England

and Australia, and it was published in *Best Women's Plays, 1993* (Smith & Krauss), *The Actor's Book of Gay and Lesbian Plays* (Penguin), and *Here to Stay: Five Plays by the Women's Project* (Applause Books). Subsequent plays include *Even Among These Rocks*, published in Brown University's *NuMuse Anthology*; *A Practical Guide to the Night Sky*, a musical in collaboration with composer Beth Custer, commissioned by the Berkeley Repertory Theatre; *Five Women on a Hill in Spain*; and *Darwin's Finches*, nominated for Best Original Script by the Bay Area Critics Circle in 2004.

Critics have described Claire as a feminist playwright with a sense of humor, commenting on her light touch and spontaneous, whimsical gravity. She blends truthfulness, poetry and passion with playfulness and wit, a combination of technique and style not often encountered in feminist writing.

There is a photograph in the school's archives of Claire on a spring farm trip, intently tapping a sugar maple tree with a hand brace-and-bit. It is a job which requires great precision, for the probe must reach just the right depth in order to extract the sap needed for boiling-off. Hers was a banner maple syrup year. Likewise, Claire has mastered the fine art of deftly tapping her characters and themes to achieve both personal and universal resonance.

MCS is grateful to Claire for the spirit of activism she has brought to her life's work, and very pleased to honor her with a "Living the Dream" Mentor Award.

I think of Manhattan Country School as a small part, as one piece, of the Beloved Community, a community that is free of violence, racism, and hate. Thank you for making a lasting contribution on generations and generations of young people.

Congressman John Lewis (2002)
Former chair of SNCC,
accepting the "Living the Dream"
Mentor Award