

#ThrowbackThursday: Artist-Investigator Krista DeNio with Berkeley Food and Housing Project

Posted on [June 8, 2017](#) by [Tierra Allen](#)



[Cal Shakes 2014-2015 Artist-Investigator Krista DeNio \(right\)](#) returned to Berkeley Food and Housing Project for a residency to recognize women's joy, grief, and power. All photos: [Jessica Eve Rattner](#).

Choreographer and theater maker Krista DeNio explored how veterans can use performance to heal traumatic grief as a [2014-2015 Cal Shakes Artist-Investigator with Berkeley Food and Housing Project](#). In the fall of 2016, DeNio returned to Berkeley Food and Housing Project, spending eight weeks with residents of their North County Women's Shelter. She talks about the process and the piece the women shared at a community holiday party, titled We Will Survive:

Making "We Will Survive" at the Berkeley Food and Housing Project was an intergenerational, community-building experience. Working with these women and children was an incredible gift and yet another demonstration of the power inherent to storytelling and theater making.



The women came together for this group as cohabitants of the women's shelter. Some were already building community with one another. Others had never met or interacted much, since they lived on different floors or had been there for different lengths of time.

Our group varied tremendously in age, race and background from a young Mexican- American immigrant family including a daughter age 4, daughter age 17, and mother in her 30s to another young African-American mother in her 30s, with a son age 3, and a baby on the way to a young Caucasian mother and her son, age 6 and several other women in their 30s, 40s, 50s and 60s.

We shared about our greatest experiences of JOY and GRIEF through writing prompts, theater improvisation exercises, and vocal and movement practices to open up our creative wellspring. We excavated some of our deep grief, while celebrating some our greatest triumphs, in order to source our literal and metaphoric power. Together we wove a written and performative tapestry to share out with the greater community.



SAMPLE LESSON PLAN:

7-7:15 — Arrival, introductions, food

7:15-7:30 — Conversations in Pairs

Name

Place of birth

One thing that brings you greatest joy

One thing that brings you sadness

7:30-7:40 — Who has a song to teach us?

7:45-8 — Movement warm-up

8-8:10 — Writing prompts (5 minutes each)
Describe one of your greatest griefs in this life
Describe one of your greatest joys

8:10-8:20 — Share writing

8:20-8:30 — Underline phrases, images, words that stand out in your writing

8:30-8:45 — Gestural phrases made from those words
One gestural phrase for Grief
One gestural phrase for Joy

8:45 — Closing

Over the course of the class these women began to support one another's processes through reflection and commonality. They shared joy surrounding motherhood and shared grief surrounding not being mothered and other challenges that brought them together in this time and place. They began to care-take one another and one another's children, to community build in subtle and powerful ways, as a part of the weekly group gathering. For me and I think for these women—the culminating performance piece was a powerful act, in which each of them could bring forward aspects of incredible life journeys, individual wisdom, strength and clarity—but even greater than that act, I believe, was the community built in the process. I give thanks to each of these brave and powerful women and children for their willingness to engage in the radical act of being seen.



PERFORMANCE EXCERPT: (names changed to respect privacy)

Liz:

My greatest joy? Well, I think getting my nursing license. In 1982. It's been 35 years. I worked in San Francisco, San Jose, as a Hospice Nurse. I've worked in many places. Being compassionate. I am a Care-taker.

My biggest grief? Losing my independence. I've been up here 16 months. But I'm on the mend. I'm taking care of myself. Taking care of others.

Susan:

Even here... She makes sure the house and kitchen are clean. She helps with the kids.

Anne:

She has helped me time after time.

She knows what's wrong with me before anybody else and she helps me.

She takes care of everyone.

ALL: *She's a doer, a care-taker, a real keeper.*

...

Gloria:

*Para mi, la familia es lo mas importante!
Mis hijos, mi esposo.*

Krista:

*When I asked Amparo more about her family, she began to cry.
Her parents are still in Mexico. Her husband is also homeless here.
The whole family works hard, every day....
It wasn't easy getting here from Mexico either.*

Gloria:

*Todo comenzó con dos aviones allí y luego tuve que cruzar la frontera.
Las cosas que me estaban poniendo de vuelta eran el miedo y el estrés y la
presión de cruzar. Pero las cosas que me ayudaron fueron mi fe, mi religión y
que quería traer a nuestra familia de nuevo juntos.*

Marcela:

*It all started with two airplanes there and then she had to cross the border.
The things that were putting her back were fear and stress and the pressure to
cross over. But the things that helped her were her faith, her religion and that she
wanted to bring our family back together.*

Mira:

*I have watched her go to work and come home and do her family's laundry and
getting all the kids going off to school. She comes home from working all night,
and does all these things. Just watching another single mom do all these things
lets me know I can continue too. I am proud of you Amparo.
You keep me going!*

ALL: *You keep us all going!*



Krista DeNio is an interdisciplinary choreographer, director, performer, writer and educator, and Artistic Director of kd>>moving ground. She is committed to engaging performance work through interdisciplinary collaboration that bridges performance work, education and activism toward a socially just world. Krista is a House Artist at [CounterPulse](#). As a lecturer, she has worked most recently with U.C. Berkeley's Theater, Dance and Performance Studies department, and as a visiting professor and collaborator in Empathy Lab, a course developed in collaboration with Anthropology professor Lochlann Jain, at Stanford University. Krista teaches dance and performance making throughout the Bay Area and country. She received her BA in Dance/Dramatic Art and Interdisciplinary Studies Field Major, Development and Human Rights from U.C. Berkeley and her MFA in Theater: Contemporary Performance from Naropa University.