

Telling Our Story

We are story-tellers. We spend our lives -- when we can -- creating a narrative to enlighten, amuse, educate or simply entertain others. Sometimes they are big stories, with grand themes and universal relevance. Sometimes they are small stories that attempt to find resonance in a very particular tale.

Our life is also a story. Sometimes it seems like a romantic comedy, sometimes it seems like something out of Aeschylus. Sometimes we feel as if we are the authors of our own narrative; sometimes we are clearly at the mercy of some all-powerful whimsical Re-Write Man. We are not fully in control of our own story (otherwise why would those directors foolishly keep choosing someone else for the jobs we covet?) but we definitely impact the narrative arc. We have chosen to be actors and stage managers and that has set all sorts of plotlines into motion. I have no idea where your story is going just as I have no idea where my story is going (though I'm hoping for a Nobel prize -- and maybe some Nilla wafers.) I just encourage you to keep going, to keep trudging the Road of Theater. I tell you that your story is appreciated, that not only are there happy audiences behind you, there are happy audiences ahead of you.

One reason to feel good about your story is the greater story that you are part of: the Story of Actors' Equity. The Story of AEA is a fabulous one. It is a story of Triumph, a story of the little guys outwitting the fat cats, of the seemingly powerless imposing their will on the powerful by means of banding together.

We have brought dignity, respect and professionalism to our trade. We have achieved decent wages and working conditions. We have made the Equity Card a badge of honor and achievement. Not content with making life better for professional actors and stage managers, AEA has brightened the lives of soldiers through the USO and the Stage Door Canteen. AEA has fought against such social injustices as racial segregation, the McCarthy-era black list, and marriage inequality. AEA has demonstrated its compassion and great heart with the spectacularly successful Equity Fights Aids.

AEA's Story is one we can all be proud of. Let us tell this Story to the world. And let us keep telling this Story. AEA's Story is not over. We are merely at the act break (and who knows, maybe it's a Shakespearean five-acter.) Many plot threads are unresolved. It is an exciting time. I personally can't wait to see what happens next.

In this Story of AEA we are the authors and audience as well as narrators. The rest of the story is not only not yet told, it is not yet written. Let us bring the improvisatory ability of an actor and the problem-solving skills of a stage manager dealing with an emergency to the challenges of dealing with an uncertain economy, rapidly evolving business models, and game-changing technology.

An outline of our future Story of AEA has at least two hooks: organizing and communication. We will bring new work and new producers into the fold of professional unionism. In addition to organizing work, we will organize ourselves, bringing focus and commitment to our goals. To do this we will rely on communication.

Telling our story IS communication, and a large part of our communication will be telling our story. We will tell our story to ourselves so we know our history, so we are clear on not only where we come from and where we are, but also where we plan to go. We will tell our story to our bargaining partners and to our potential bargaining partners so they know the value we bring to a production. We will tell our story to the general public so they know who we are, who we have been and what we go through to do our story-telling. And we will tell future

Equity members: those hoping and praying right now to get that card, those youngsters dreaming of a future life onstage someday, and those yet unborn who will rise to take our place.

We will let them know about AEA. We will celebrate those who have brought us to this point. We will celebrate the AEA of today: we few, we band of 50,000 brothers and sisters. And we will celebrate the outline of our future and lay the groundwork for that yet-more-glorious narrative. We will do what we were born to do.