

# Child's Play Touring Theatre

## Our Co-Founder - Victor Podagrosi



**Victor Podagrosi**, A Creative Legacy - Remembering CPTT'S Co-Founder, the driving force behind Child's Play Touring Theatre, died of a heart attack on September 24, 1995, during a company board meeting. He was 41. Victor dedicated his life, his art to validating the "voice" of children. Today, his voice lives on in these, his own words, which capture the magic of what was, is, and will continue to be Child's Play: "I think the heart of what we

do is encouraging kids to view themselves as writers. Sometimes they pour their heart into what they write, and it turns out to be just one more piece of paper they bring home. The work chosen for one of our plays may be the first time a child's work is chosen as exceptional. Schools have not been set up to achieve creative imagination. So much emphasis in school is on reading, but writing is just as important. This is a life's work for us. It just doesn't get boring. It is wonderful."

"Children's writing has a freshness and innocence. It has surprises that an adult would never come up with. Childhood experiences are universal, and presenting universal truths makes great theatre."

"The theatre began when I was teaching at a junior college, and I was asked by some folks to do a performance with some of my students from children's writings at an awards ceremony for young authors. I was so completely turned on by the material and the audience response that I knew immediately that I had found my life calling."



"Of course, the children whose stories and poems we select for performance are tremendously excited, but we are really trying to reach out to all the children in our audiences. Watching a play or hearing a song that one of their classmates has written really brings home the idea that they can write too."

"For children who watch us, work written by kids is infinitely more entertaining. Grownups can only pretend to know what kids are thinking, but children understand each other. They listen with special interest because they recognize themselves in the piece we do."

"Every kid has got a different story to tell. I've probably read 70 or 80 thousand stories and I haven't read the same one twice."

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“Kids are a great audience. They let you know when they’re bored and when they’re excited. You see that glow in their eyes. They don’t have the politeness of an adult audience who will just sit there. If they’re bored, they’ll chat with each other. If they’re excited, they’ll stand up and yell. They’ll literally bounce up and down on their chairs.”



And in the voice of those who were touched by his vision:

“The field of children’s theatre has been enriched by the work of Child’s Play and by Victor’s tireless effort to bring the thoughts, feelings, hopes and dreams of children to vibrant stage life. Although many companies have followed in Child’s Play’s footsteps in the almost 20 years since its founding, we are mindful that your company was the pioneer and set the standard for this work. There are literally thousands of children in the world who have known the joy of seeing their own writings come to life, as a result of Victor’s dedication. There are also many young artists (actors, musicians, designers, etc.) who got their start working with Child’s Play. The impact of that experience

on their creative lives cannot be measured.

“The legacy of your company has made such a unique contribution to the illustrious history of children’s theatre; Victor’s spirit will continue to live on in the company’s performances and in the spirits of all the children he has touched.”

“Reading thousands of children’s books written by professional adult authors, I realized with some shock that children write better children’s stories than adults do. Victor was right, No surprise really. By then I’d learned: Victor was always right. He was a terrific director, arts administrator, and carpenter. He had an astonishing eye for staging. He was a genuinely funny actor with impeccable timing and an extensive knowledge of stock vaudeville gags.”



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“Victor was an extremely demanding boss. As a director, he was the tough coach, always asking for that extra something I didn’t think I had in me and helping me find it. But I always respected him because he asked so much more of himself than he did of anyone else. On the road, after an exhausting three-show day, we’d all head for a restaurant or a bar. Unwinding with Victor was marvelous. He was a great company: relaxed, with a gentle, piquant wit.

He loved chatting with the wait-staff, but even off-the-job he never lowered his standards: he’d set up an imaginary tip-meter on the table at the beginning of the meal and monitor wait-service with a running commentary. Was he kidding or not? The tip always reflected performance.”

“It was his profound generous nature which drove Victor to devote his considerable artistic gifts to inspiring others to create. Choosing to validate the work of children, that most impressionable of audience, he gave his own work maximum impact. Like all great teachers, his work outlives him, *So Long, Mr. Smile*.” “At your outdoor performance in the Children’s Museum in Brooklyn I saw Victor do *Super Bear*, and realized that he could have done anything. He was a stupendous actor. I’m talking stage and theatre; I’m talking *Hamlet* and *Lear*. He had a quail of genuine sincerity and believability and such a grace for a man his size. What he did was make everyone feel, and that is no small task. It was his choice to do what he did with his amazing talents and gifts, and he chose wisely by investing in children. Victor was a true believer and a soul who knew what it meant to give. The lesson he leaves me is realizing that giving is not a loud and showy affair, but simple quite thing, done without fan-fare, that you only realize what he’s done when gone. But he’s not really gone - not in the real place where it counts - in our hearts. He is not gone in our remembrances of him, or in the legacy he left, or in the lessons we only now can learn.”



“The greatest joy in life is creating; Victor splurged on it! He will always create, and always be loved by so, so many. As one of the children put it so wonderfully, ‘He’s helping the angels write plays in Heaven.’ He’s already created heaven on earth.” “Vic, I liked you here when we were doing the play. It’s sad to see you go. So I made a good-bye song: Victor is my friend. I hate it to go to an end. There would be a lot of money I’d spend, to see Victor my friend.