

M.J. Kang / BLESSINGS

HOW BLESSINGS CAME TO BE

Ahhhhhhhhhhh! After eight months of hibernation, eight months of deciding never never to write plays in my whole entire lifetime, I received a call from Andy McKim, the associate artistic director at Tarragon Theatre. (I had sent Tarragon a draft of an earlier play, *Noran Bang: The Yellow Room* about a year before.) Andy was wondering if I would like to be a part of their annual Playwrights Unit - a group of six to seven playwrights who over the course of a year, meet once a week to provide feedback and support to each other as they individually create a play. Urjo Kareda, the artistic director, and Andy McKim facilitate. Tarragon is the theatre to be associated with if you're a playwright in Canada. So after eight months of hibernation, I enthusiastically agreed to be a part of the Tarragon Playwrights Unit in 1995.

Blessings grew out of a writing exercise to write a ten minute play for the Ten Minute Office Plays at the Tarragon Spring Arts Fair. Tarragon commissions a bunch of plays from their group of playwrights for their annual festival. (My secret wish since I was seventeen was to write a ten-minute office play. It's called an office play because the stage is Andy's office.) Sally Han directed. Sandra Oh, Jean Yoon, and Paul Lee acted in the simple watercolour of a young girl trying to make amends with her estranged father. It did well at the festival. Andy and Urjo encouraged me to keep writing *Blessings*. So I did.

Blessings Blessings Blessings. It hasn't been a blessing writing *Blessings*. It's been more of a curse! But I finished a first draft, and a second draft, and an eighth draft and even a twenty-third draft for the public reading in December 1995 at Tarragon. When Urjo called me after the reading, to meet with him and Andy, I thought it was to chastise me for killing all the trees.

The meeting started at eleven in the morning on December twenty-ninth. I was out on the streets, wandering at eleven twenty.

During those twenty minutes, Urjo and Andy told me that they wanted to produce *Blessings* on their main stage as part of their 1996/97 season. In the fall. November-December 1996. To be directed by Sally Han.

They liked *Blessings*. Written by me. *Blessings* by M.J. Kang — me, in their season brochure. At Tarragon.

It didn't register until the afternoon. I didn't believe it until I called Andy later that day... just to make sure.

I was only twenty-one then. Now at twenty-two, I feel like I deserve this opportunity. Ahhhhhhhhhhhh!

One thing I am so so so so so grateful for while I've been writing, re-writing, and banging my head on my computer, is the tremendous amount of support I've been given. Urjo, Andy, Sally, my family, Mallory Gilbert, the Tarragon Playwrights Unit 1995, Kim McCaw and everyone at the Banff Playwrights Colony, all the actors who've ever read, auditioned or played any of the roles - especially to Wendy Noel and Maralyn Ryan, to the guy who dumped me and broke my heart therefore giving me a lot of time to do my re-writes, and to everyone who has ever attended all the public readings and workshop presentations of *Blessings*.

— M.J. Kang