

Interview with Loren Kellen by Mike Klein

My only personal interaction with Loren was a memorable two-hour interview in his garden on May 1, 2008. He was very hospitable, gracious, funny, and inspiring. I'm sending along the transcription of that interview so that you can pass it along to whomever might benefit from reading his words and remembering his voice. May the grieving find consolation in stories of his life.

Be peace, Mike Klein, Ed.D. Justice and Peace Studies, University of St. Thomas

Mike: I was in one of the meetings and Sandy Spieler walked over and said, "I know you've done a lot of interviews already but you have got to interview Loren." And she didn't give me a lot of explanation about why she thought that but just that I think you've been around the parade for a long time and you have this unique role in the parade too. So I think what my question is for you, to start us off, is how you got connected to the May Day parade? Where did this all begin?

Loren: I think it was like the third parade – it may have been the second parade. I just saw it coming down the street. I was riding my bicycle somewhere and I saw it coming down the street and I just stopped and I said, "Whatever I'm doing can wait – this is just too fantastic to not take the time for it." The images were unlike anything I'd ever seen before and the realization that local people did all of this stuff by hand made me just want to be a part of it and so from that time in way or another I've been involved in creating the festival ever since – every year. The only thing in my life that I can say I know where I was on that day in that year – Christmas, no. Pick your holidays – no way do I have any kind of continuity like it. It is the greatest continuity of any event.

Mike: And you'll know next year on the first Sunday of May too.

Loren: Yeah – barring catastrophe. Yeah – right.

Mike: Well part of what I'm interested in – the way that I'm studying this is about looking at it as both ritual and as democratic action, of getting people to participate in creating something new. And one of the authors called the gifts of ritual is that sense of order – is that sense of having something to look forward to, of marking time, of knowing where you're going to be on that day.

Loren: I have friends who have been in nearly as long and yet every year long before the day comes we start talking about, "Oh, what an idea for next year, what an idea for next year." As opposed to like a religious ritual which is the same or in my religious experience, it's the same all the time – that was part of the essence of it. Where the part of this ritual is that it's new and creative every time but yet it follows in this continuous format. Like I've been bringing the sun across Powderhorn Lake for... this will be year 24, I think, that we've had a sun come across and I've been part of that for 24 years. So every year we bring the sun across but it's different every

year – it's kind of like doing a dance because you do the same move over and over and over but it's never the same twice. To enhance the images, to try different things, but it's always bringing the sun across – slightly different ways. A lot of the audience, I think, doesn't even really understand that we don't just bring out the same old puppets every time except for the sun image itself. The boats change, the paddles change, all the accompanying images change but it always culminates in bringing the sun across to wake up the tree of life.

Mike: The ceremony itself is remarkable right there on the shore of the lake and then all of a sudden it seems expanded when you see that coming around the island and all of a sudden it's like the stage is suddenly the whole world and not just that little bit of grass. Can you tell me about the start of all this? You said 24 years ago the first sun.

Loren: Well prior to that for several years, Heart of the Beast was preparing for a major touring show called The Circle of Water Circus and so the first raft, which literally was three pieces of plywood hooked together with truck inner tubes underneath for floatation and there was two aluminum canoes strapped on to the side of this whole big thing – so we had four paddlers carrying the river puppet across and, as I said, we were using the May Day parade as a way to build imagery and to build ideas for this grand tour that we were going to be doing in which was The Circle of Water Circus. So in we built this raft and it happened, basically the day before and we just did it. And for a number of years that worked and so every year somebody would have to go get new inner tubes because they'd have holes, they'd get lost and it was just pretty chaotic.

Mike: I imagine that first year you knew it would float but not sure just how well or what was going to happen.

Loren: Right. We didn't understand the challenges of the wind but we always got the river across for those first three years – 1981, 1982, and 1983. Or in 1983... the themes of those parades and festivals were water and so then it was very appropriate to have the river puppet be the thing coming across. And then once we completed that cycle for us – it was such a great idea of bring something across so we decided what was the image going to be and then... I can't say who said it, but the sun became the image and it's been the sun since then, like I said on a variety of boats or a variety of formations of canoes and what not.

Mike: And this year I think I saw someone painting large dragon shaped heads.

Loren: Phoenix.

Mike: They are phoenix – that makes much more sense.

Loren: Yeah, they're phoenix heads. We tried to tie in the flotilla image with something from the parade. Not always, but generally something from the parade inspires what we do in the flotilla. Last year, for instance, there were turtles – turtles were a big image in the parade and so... well for instance the lead boat that came across last year was one giant turtle with Scott Vrieland blowing a conqshell on the turtle's back and then all of the other boats all had their turtle imagery and I made and painted paddles in the form of turtle feet. So that was a significant thing – to start making our own paddles so that they could become a real part of the total image. In my mind it's always... once I started realizing that hey, I can make and paint paddles then they became the rays of the sun dancing and splashing on the water. Sometimes that imagery is more successful than others because – well, let's see, as of now we have 32 paddlers and in total I've probably made 200 paddles just for my own curiosity of building things to say, "OK, I can make it a little better or I can make it a little different." Like some of the main paddles I wanted to be different than the accompanying boat paddles to distinguish the sun line as opposed to the rest of the flotilla.

Mike: One more element that helps to shape the whole ritual.

Loren: Yeah, right. And to make that image a complete unified image as opposed to different paddles that people bring from home and there's a black graphite one over there and really nice cedar handmade one over there.

Mike: An old oar that somebody brought with.

Loren: Yeah, right—and busted junk in-between.

Mike: Part of what I'm curious about is the way that rituals change over time but also how they start to solidify or become more fanciful or even more formal—than kind of informal and ad hoc when they began. And I wonder about that with this one—like you said, there are some elements like the sun coming across that's been around for a long time now and it changes every year. Could you imagine next year somebody saying, "Let's not do the sun, let's do something else."

Loren: I have imagined that but I think it would take more than one person just saying that—there would have to be a huge wave because so many people have taken part in it over the years and so many people

expect it. When we're out on the water and there are many thousands of people cheering for the sun on the shore, I just can't imagine any other image right now that would evoke that kind of response. Part of the thing is, no matter who you are and no matter where you are on the planet, it's the same sun for everybody – it's a universal image. It goes back to the Greek mythology, into every ancient history there is acknowledgement of the powers of the sun and here in Minnesota, it becomes especially significant around this time of the year. We get so tired of winter and it's just like, "Come on sun." And those first sunny days that come out, just do something to our spirits that I can't imagine that there's another image that... all the immigrant population can identify with it, whether they're here for their first day and they don't speak any English, they can still understand this, where any other image that I can think of to put on a boat and carry across, I can't think of anything that would be quite so meaningful.

Mike: Even the Tree of Life is visceral, there's a sense of spring and new life coming, but it takes a little bit of a step to take it in and to see the meaning and to feel that ?

Loren: Right. Maybe years ago or something, the City Pages had a headline a week or two before the May Day parade that was... it said, "Here Comes the Sun". Big block letter and then a big visual image below it – the full front page that was out, the whole deal. "Here Comes the Sun" – City Pages, that was it, that was the entire front page and that just... that to me was just the epitome of the grand public recognition of the flotilla. And the essence of the whole parade and festival because it's all... we've chosen May Day, this time of the year, when the sun is so important, to do it. If it were a fall festival or a mid-summer festival or mid-winter festival, it would not have the same kind of feeling where this... we're sitting here feeling it right now, here comes the sun – right? Especially after a colder than usual winter – it's like, "Oh, yeah!" That kind of... they didn't have to say much of anything else in that article. I don't even remember the article – I just remember that image on the front. "Here Comes the Sun" – it was just that recognition that... for me, the essence of the finale of the parade and the whole – this is what it's all about. I know some people take that to the Tree of Life, but different people have different opinions about what is this finale. They blend together and in our minds you can't have one without the other, but just because I've been so much focused on the sun, for me it's the sun image.

Mike: And I wonder too, the Tree of Life is carried in the parade, it's in the ceremony, so it's present throughout the day – the sun makes that glorious kind of momentary appearance and it's got the cheer coming from the crowd – there's something almost startling about it. It's just a bright shining moment more than a...

Loren: It's a good word to describe it – STARtling.

Mike: There you go – an unintended pun but maybe that’s a good way. I’ve got to say too I’m really glad for the phoenix imagery – it’s meant a lot to me personally. I’m working with Section 5 and I’ll be carrying a phoenix totem – 12 feet high on my back.

Loren: You’re part of it, you’re connected to it.

Mike: And I’m marveled that I ended up with that image because for a lot of personal reasons, it’s the perfect image for me this year as a sense of reawakening and rebirth and all that. And it’s earlier in the parade, in Section 2 there are phoenix images, in Section 5 there are images, and I know it’s coming too in the flotilla. Personally it holds a lot of meaning and I hope people see that through the progression of the day too.

Loren: I think that whether people rationalize that kind of stuff – those connections, I think it comes through whether they can actually verbalize the steps or the connections on a deeper level, it affects people. They may not be able to make that description or may not be able to talk about it so much, but the fact that they are there and they’re taking it all in visually, it affects people and I’ve talked to many people who say, “Oh, yeah, the parade was especially wonderful” and to try to get people to verbalize the stuff – it’s hard, I think because the affect is so deep. For me, personally, my life over the past some years has been the sun image, the sun image, and I can’t begin to describe how deeply that has been a part of my life. I’ve got the physical stuff around me all the time – literally year around. From past parades, from ideas for future parades, when we built the Sunliner – the boat that we have now, this will be it’s 5th year – I designed it and built it in my back yard. The boat before that, so this is Sunliner #5; Sunliner #4 was a response to the chaos of the rubber inner tube raft – so that I built in my back yard... my brainstorm and I just basically built the entire thing somehow knowing in my mind that it would work.

Mike: A little engineering by imagination.

Loren: Yeah. I said OK – plastic barrels, making pontoons. We had talked about could maybe someone donate a pontoon boat or some such thing – well that didn’t happen. But I was able to go gather up... purchase some and I think the first few barrels just came by way of free stuff here and there and then it was like once we got the idea and the realization that this is going to work and so it tends to have eight paddlers because there’s eight barrels with cutouts for the paddlers and then along about that time – that was the same era when I came up with making the paddles and to have everything connected. Then we could paint the thing and it started to become more than just a platform – it was part of the whole image. And then when I made the current Sunliner – I’ve got to give things name – so the Sunliner, it evokes a Caribbean cruise or something. And that’s kind of the way it is. So this one is made much more of a design from the mind rather than just taking existing parts – with puppetry I see that there

are two different ways of going at things. One is to take what you have and let it kind of determine the form and the idea of what the product is. The other way is to create an idea in your mind and put it down on paper or whatever, and then do whatever it takes to make that image come to realization. And a lot of times I really like just taking whatever is – and that’s the barrel boat because that’s what is. But the current Sunliner is more of the later form which is creating the image on paper and designing it. And so the parts of it are like a Russian egg, wooden eggs, where one nests inside the other – because storage was a big problem for a long time. This monster boat that we had was made out of barrels and so this was a response to that storage issue plus the idea of having something that we could paint and do whatever we wanted – we put screws in anywhere without any restrictions on it except that it has to float.

Mike: Sure – no holes in the bottom.

Loren: Well actually we have a couple minor ones but we can manage those – they’re manageable. So when this one came around, like the wood and whatever on the other one was failing and so then everything that we build as humans has some kind of life span – sometimes it’s pretty long.

Mike: But all more or less temporary.

Loren: Yeah. But the idea is that they keep on going.

Mike: One of my interests in trying to do this – actually, let me say first, one of my challenges is just what you said before. This is very visceral and it’s sometimes hard to describe and even subconscious and it’s more of an embodied reaction to the parade and the festival and the ceremony. And I’m trying to write about it. It’s ridiculous in some ways. I mean I’m so grateful for the opportunity to do this but I’ve really set myself up because there’s so much. I mean even one visual scene of the parade or the ceremony or just the flotilla, could take 100 pages just to describe it well or to try to put across the feelings that it evokes.

Loren: Oh yeah, the flotilla itself involves a crew of 50. Fifty people to do this thing that takes a couple of minutes.

Mike: 50 yards across the lake – wow. So part of how I think I’m trying to respond to the challenge of putting this on paper somehow is to capture stories and metaphors almost in a poetic sense of trying to name something in a small way that describes a lot of the bigger stuff without having to literally name everything.

Loren: Oh yeah, the book that I’m reading at the moment is a history of Greek myths and the descriptions that the authors have is much like you’re saying – because no way can he describe the whole thing. It’s just literally impossible, you have to live it.

But you can create something that carries on those ideas to many generations down the road and I think how those original historians, the Greek historians, wrote of these things are much like you in that they were describing ritual events to keep this stuff alive for future generations. And so, in a much larger way, the book is created...just these very basic elements and brings some idea of how those rituals fit into those people's lives and what's 34 years compared to how many thousands of years of honoring the elements from 500 BC or from 1000 BC onward to the temples to Apollo and Athena and the annual rituals that they went through.

Mike: Yeah – and yet at some point in history it was the 34th year of honoring Athena.

Loren: Right. And for the individuals who did the... there were humans who played the role of Apollo in these rituals or whoever – pick your God or Goddess. And we've created these puppets to stand in for the sun in our ritual of bringing the sun across. Like I sometimes tell the... we have an assembly with all the paddlers and sun carriers and sun runners and whatever, and one of the things that I like to say is that, "Remember that we are carrying on a long world-wide tradition." The Greeks – or not the Greeks, the Egyptians had boats that carried sun images 4000 years ago. So it's not a new idea.

Mike: And in some ways, this manifestation might be years old but May Day...

Loren: Right – the grand idea, the grand idea. Before there was even a word for May, there were people celebrating the return of the sun.

Mike: Probably from the earliest, coldest human who had been waiting for the sun to come again.

Loren: Yeah, because they didn't have the concept necessarily of a very, very predictable annual cycle and then when they started being able to predict that – that's kind of when the real rituals of those things started happening because by the stars and whatever, they knew, the time is very close because they didn't have calendars given away by the insurance company and the real estate company and they didn't go to the bookstore and buy a calendar with fancy pictures on it, it was all very direct recognition of what was happening.

Mike: This brings me back to the conversation that we had before we started the interview, we talked about technology and how it kind of fills our lives and all of these things and as you're saying now too, the cycles and all of that are all laid for us, they're explained, they're given. So what does this ritual do for people who live in such a technological age where everything is explained and laid out?

Loren: I think that people let go of their connection to the technology because people get so tied up in it that that seems like the only way to be and to see that there is another way. I think a lot of these things don't get verbalized but just by the fact that they happen, puts something deep inside people's minds about knowing that it's not all about the cell phones – you can turn the cell phone off, you can leave it at home. You're in a parade, you can't answer the cell phone.

Mike: There's a liberation in that, isn't there?

Loren: Yeah. Like I said, just by the fact of doing these things, it takes you away from all that stuff – if you work in an office, if you are connected to that cell phone all day long, or you're connected to your vehicle all day long. How many parades are there that don't have vehicles in them? That's been part of the essence of this whole thing – it's all hand made, hand carried...any other parade – you know, small town parade, 4th of July parade, Holidayz – you name any of those things and they're all centered on vehicles moving stuff down the street. Maybe they're not centered on it, but the vehicles moving stuff down the street is a huge part of it.

Mike: The foundation of it.

Loren: Yeah. I had two ideas for the parade this year before things got rolling. One of them was the recognition of the Chinese year of the rat and sometimes we incorporate that imagery and sometimes we don't. Sometimes we pay attention...like when it's the year of the dragon, that's an obvious one and the year of the cock, we had that in the parade. Sometimes it fits in and sometimes it doesn't. And then I came up with this realization about how every parade has automobiles in it – every small town parade has cars. It's the politicians in the convertibles, the beauty queens waving, everybody has got the queen of their local festival or whatever it is, she's always in the parade. Local big wigs, whoever, they're all there in the cars. And so when the first section of the parade came up to be, "The Rat Race", it combined those two elements – the year of the rat plus this totally ever present imagery of the automobile and it just made me laugh. I'm not on staff so I didn't take part in bringing that stuff together, but I talked to people in the winter and to see that come together – it makes me laugh again right now. That is funny.

Mike: I sat in on all those artist sessions and that was probably the most debated image of the parade.

Loren: That says something about how powerful it is – because if it's not that powerful it won't get debated.

Mike: Well and part of the debate was the negative image that the rat has for much of western society – something with the plague and with pests and all of that - and the positive image of change that it has with the Chinese calendar and with other Eastern cultures. There was a lot of tugging about how do we represent this – is the rat race too negative to appreciate the Eastern influence. It was a great discussion.

Loren: I am really pleased that it came to be and right away, the first day I walked into the theatre and saw this stuff, I said, “OK, no question what section I’m going to be in this year – no question at all.” Well also I was born in the year of the rat so this is...

Mike: Your home in so many ways. Now tell me, were you involved with the community planning at all – the big gathering of the community?

Loren: Not this year. I have been in the past and sometimes I do go to those things and sometimes I don’t, for various reasons. But I guess if I had any influence this year, which I’m told I did have some, it was talking to people who I knew would be there and who would be on staff who would kind of make those final decisions and I just would kind of walk up to them and say, “Here I’m planting a seed in your mind because it’s long before May Day and there’s a lot of snow on the ground yet, but just think about the obvious things.” Like to me, the Chinese calendar is always a great source for images and there’s a reason why that kind of calendar has survived for so long – there is meaning to it. People say, “What are you?” Just like some people have the zodiac kind of imagery – which is also a very powerful set of images. But there is some actual crossover – at least the ideas of those kind of images of what’s... how you are what you are. Just based on the randomness of your birth – how do I identify with the year of the rat just because I was born in the Chinese year of the rat, on the other side of the planet? We take them on once we are exposed to the ideas and so we become them more, perhaps, than if we had never heard of them.

Mike: They influence in some ways and we become more influenced maybe as we start to understand them. This leads to one of the last questions I have to put out to you. As I said I was really looking at ritual as one element of how I would study the May Day parade and the other is about participation and democracy and how does this create a space for people to find voice and to take some action to do something about it. And I’m curious about how... and I’m trying to be thoughtful throughout about how my presence asking these questions in the context of the parade, might shape things, might help just the year of the rat – it may something about you before you even know what it’s about but then as you start thinking about it, maybe it also shapes a little bit of who you are. I’ve wondered as I asked about participation and democracy and rituals how that has shaped the way that the artists are thinking about the parade or how they participate or other voices are represented.

Loren: I think that any time a question is asked, no matter where it comes from, it requires or elicits reflection on the issue. And the wisest person can be influenced by the question of the small child who doesn’t have a clue of what’s going on but asks the question that makes the old person think about all these basic elements of the world just... I have a friend who is raising four children and his philosophy from the beginning is to never talk baby talk to the kids, whenever they ask a question to answer the question in as honest and factual straightforward way as possible, and if it required research to do it and so that’s the kind that I see... it’s like you’re the child in this situation and you’re asking the questions of why is this, what is that and you can just imagine a little kid, “Why is the sky blue? Why is the glass green?”

Mike: I’ve felt very much like that this year.

Loren: And some people will just say, “Well that’s just the way it is.” Then other people like this father would try to get to the root of the issue and he learned from it and it does, in fact, alter his path because the child sees things in a different way, or the inexperienced person... the child mind sees things in a way that the adult mind doesn’t see. And therefore, it makes us examine our assumptions of “how should this be?” “How should that be?” It makes us think, “Oh, gosh – what is this? Why am I here? What’s the purpose of all this?” And the ultimate answer in my mind about the purpose of all this, the whole May Day and all of it, is the connections – social connections. This whole Heart of the Beast community – I use the description my chosen family. We’re born by chance into a family that we may love, we may have or whatever, we may want to be with or we may not want to be with them, but in this kind... this is the greatest community building thing that I know. There are many other ways of building community – religious organizations and whatever, but I think that this concept is more universal than religious ideas or political parties or however else you may choose your associations. I think that this is a little more open, it’s all generations – the kids are in it as much as the adults. In your religious situation, no way are the kids in it as much as the adults. In the political world, no way are the kids in it as much as the adults. It’s like whatever you got, this is valuable... I see some of the kid’s masks that just look like a blob with paint smeared on it in three different colors or maybe twenty different colors, and it’s like, “What is that?” And they’re like, “Oh, that’s my kitty.” Whatever.

Mike: Yesterday there were some teenagers in the studio making a robot from the science fiction movie “Cloverfield.” And they were convinced that it fit in the last section of the parade even though you could see those artists looking at it like, “Ahhh, I’m not so sure.” But, they’re not disallowed, they’re not told that can’t happen, and then there’s a dialogue that starts – so what does this mean for you and how does this fit in.

Loren: Yeah, how did you get from that story in the beginning to this? Or how do you put this into that story? Looking at it from both ways – from the product to the inspiration or from the inspiration to the product, how does it work?

Mike: And somehow all stories are welcome.

Loren: Yes. Oh man – because the kids have the simplest, but yet most poignant, stories about what they see going on and some of the kids have been so inspired. Like when Heart of the Beast first got that building in I think 1987, some of the first events there attracted some of the local young boys and we thought, “Oh my God, this is going to be big trouble.” They were in running around – this was going to be a disaster. But then some years later, some of those kids are the responsible leaders of the next generation of puppeteers. That’s one thing about the whole ritual part of it is now people know to come and there’s going to be something creative happening and we can plug in – we don’t have to pay a fee, we don’t have to be part of any ethnic group or religious group to walk in the door, all we have to do is walk in the door and we can partake. Where virtually all these other things that you can take part in, you have to somehow or another have some kind of background or some kind of belief to be able to feel like you can walk in the door and plug into it. We’re saying any ethnic group, any age, it’s universal – anybody can walk in and get work if that’s all you want to do. And the people who just walk in the door and look take away something whether they know it or not. And then some people just walk into it and they’re hooked. It’s like this is the one time of the year when I get to be creative and even though my art is not museum quality or whatever, however you want to judge the quality of your work – it’s acceptable. Everything from that thing that the three year old just kind of has the freedom to do, to some of the most astounding images that would...you could say that if they weren’t paper mache they could be in the grandest museum on earth. But we say, “Ah, they’re paper mache” so then somehow or another, that pulls it back just a little bit. But the reality is the creative mind that puts that together has the same kind of qualities as Michaelangelo sculpting, it’s just a different form.

Mike: And in this case, no Plexiglas or guard or alarm system between them, right?

Loren: Right – yeah. Like museums it’s like, “You can’t touch it, you can’t do it, this is out of your realm.”

Mike: Edifying...

Loren: Right – where this is totally hands on and in today’s world with everything being on the video screen or pre-packaged music...all these things, to be able to hands-on take basically earth, which paper and corn starch is pretty darn close to raw earth and the clay is raw earth and create

something that comes out of your mind – maybe it’s stimulated by something that somebody says or something that somebody else has put down but to be able to pull out something that you don’t even know that you could do or that you would want to do is just... it ends up some of the most beautiful things. Because I’m doing this thing over and over again, it’s not all pleasing to me. Sometimes I don’t know what I’m going to do when I start and I want to do it, it’s like, “Oh my gosh, this is incredible.” And other times, if you plan it too much or have too much of a preconceived idea, then it can be disappointing...then it becomes like constructing – just going through the motions of constructing something as opposed to exploring in your own mind – let it happen or explore it.

Mike: This sort of creates the space for that doesn’t it?

Loren: Yeah.

Mike: A bounded space but an open space where you can step in and just let that happen.

Loren: Yeah, some of the... there’s always like a seed from something that somebody else has done. That’s the way we work – we don’t like totally create no matter how free you think your mind is, it’s always influenced by something. And so you’re taking that very basic seed which you can’t always identify but there’s always a seed out there somewhere that put you on this path to get to this point to say, “OK, yeah, this is how the sun image is going to be.” Or for everybody else – for whatever they’re creating, this is how it is and sometimes we can identify because we’ve had ah-ha moments that we want to materialize that idea that sprung into our mind but other times it’s hard to say where these ideas came from. But there’s some pretty powerful stuff happening all the time.

Mike: Yeah. In fact, I think I mentioned this when we first met. I was an art major way back when and so I’ve been doing sculpting for the parade – for some masks. And as I was sculpting a face for section two, I realized I was literally making a face that was about something in my head that I had been wrestling with. And all of a sudden under my hands, that face was showing up – it wasn’t my intention and it had nothing in particular to do with that section of the parade, although the more I think about it the more maybe it did. That change of heart metaphor really does work with what I’ve been wrestling with and it all just came out in front of me because I wasn’t trying too hard, I wasn’t thinking about it so much.

Loren: Yeah. One of my methods is to draw something – a quick sketch on a piece of paper and then put that away and then do it. It’s like OK, here’s the idea, here’s the seed, and then let the materials and the process bring out the final product.

Mike: This has been a very good conversation, a great depth and wonderful ?? to what we've been talking about. Is there anything that you feel like I'm missing here or that you want to say that I haven't asked you about about May Day or about the sun flotilla or anything else? Some idea rolling around yet that we didn't quite get to?

Loren: I think just one comment on the whole process and that is that... I just said it right there. It's the process. I remember a realization at one point – we were just discussing threatening weather and it may not happen, what happens... you know. And somebody said, "Well that's not that important that the parade happens or that the ritual happens – that's not all that important." The bigger thing out of all of this is the process and all of the connection that's going on here – that's way more important than that first Sunday in May. Every day leading up to that, all of that work, all of that interaction is way more important than that actual date. And that really stuck with me – because it's like oh yeah, you don't have to create the greatest things here, it's like it's the grand scheme, it's the big process and I've had people come up to me that I had no clue who they were and say, "You influenced me on this thing way back when and look what came of it."

Mike: And really I thought when I started this and even a few years ago when I first started getting connected with the theatre, I thought it was the parade itself, the festival, the ceremony, that was the transformative thing – the thing that mattered most. And it became clearer even as I started this study that it's the community building, the relationship, it's the space to create – it's all of that stuff in the middle that seems to be so important. And a wonderful celebration at the end hopefully bringing it all together but how much more important to be together in that process.

Loren: That's the essence – to be able to just say OK... like I said earlier, anybody can walk in the door and partake and you don't even have to do the clay thing. Some people are just organizers and all of these elements of it – whatever you can and want to contribute. Cash – if that's all you got and it looks like it's a good thing, put your cash in or put your time in or put your... whatever energy you got in whatever form. Yeah – I'm sure that there are many things out there that create good feelings for all kinds of people, but I can't think of anything in my life... even like in the off time, the people who I consider my friends, my chosen family, the big chosen family but then there's the people that I see regularly. They're all connected in it somehow and it's like the most valuable thing on-going...

Mike: I understand. Everybody I know and I love, I say, "you've got to come see this, you've got to come be a part of this, you've got to try this out."

Loren: But try as you may, some people won't see it the way you see it. Everybody needs their own revelation, their own inspiration. For some

people it's religion and for some people it's politics and for some people it's gardening – whatever works.

Mike: Well this definitely works. Thank you so much for the chance to have this conversation.

Loren: All right – thanks for asking these questions. It helps me put stuff in perspective.

Mike: I'm really eager to just be a part of May Day this year. I don't want to have the notebook with me, I don't want to be trying to capture anything – I think I've done that so far and I'm looking forward to just celebrating on May Day.

Loren: And that's the beginning of the process for next year. Oh, I wanted to do this differently... here's one more thing, yeah, regarding the flotilla and being part of that which I may have touched on a little bit earlier, but most of the staff people and the people that are building the parade are basically creating a new story every year. And Dan Newman, who is kind of the lead guy on the Tree of Life, we talked a little bit about how... but more on the sun rather than the Tree of Life – Tree of Life is pretty much the same. The sun thing gets a little different every year and so the idea of creating something once for the parade and either you get it or you don't, you might have regrets about how this didn't work or that didn't work or how it could be different. But by doing the same part over and over, you get to take the same story line and create a new way of telling that story over and over and over. I can imagine it would be a little bit like the difference between reading a kid's book verbatim – the same every time because you're reading the same words. The difference between that and having the story in your head and telling the story over and over.

Mike: And performing the story.

Loren: And it becomes different every time you tell it then and I think that that's kind of how I see how the sun or the flotilla works for me. There's that different cast of characters, you do the different imagery, it's doing that same... here we are, coming across the lake carrying the sun again. But it's a different telling of that story every time.

Mike: Which gives you some space to reflect what's going on this year and what's going on in the lives of the people who are there.

Loren: Yeah, and every time going through the rehearsals and... like I know that there are some very experienced paddlers on the flotilla and then there are people who don't know how to hold a paddle at all and it's like, "OK" – makes me think about the basics. What makes paddling work? And to tell that part – to stand there and say... it makes me think about how the paddle works. How do we steer this boat?

How do we make it go where we want it to go? How do we make it end up in the right place at the right time? And paddling with eight paddlers is a very different thing than paddling with two paddlers. In the big practical world, there's no boat like it because boats tend to be long front to back just because that's the most efficient way to move through the way, where our purpose is to have a broad front and that's makes this whole steering thing a very different process. So when I'm paddling in whitewater on a river, it's a very different kind of paddling but yet it's paddling in the water and so I kind of have to tell people to forget about what you know about paddling your canoe because even the smallest boats are made out of two canoes so they're pontoons and so there's people on four corners instead of this kind of line.

Mike: Different pivot points.

Loren: Yeah. Unless you have a very much rockered whitewater canoe, you cannot make it turn on it's own axis – you know, peak to center point. Where these kind of boats literally – the Sunliner has eight paddlers and a half a dozen more people on board and so we've had as many as people on this craft, but yet we can make it turn, pivot, on it's center point.

Mike: Makes sense.

Loren: You can't do that with an ordinary canoe.

Mike: I know – I'm a paddler. In my family there's solo kayak and a large canoe, and we have a small old sailboat that we have to paddle out to get the rudder down and every craft is a totally different experience. I have to think about what I'm doing when I'm moving from one to the other otherwise I just keep going in circles and you end up going nowhere.

Loren: Yeah. A few years back – like three or four years ago, just by... I had built the Sunliner, the first year it was kind of exciting... oh it was the second year of this current Sunliner – the SL. So the first year was easy and what makes it easy is the wind conditions. So the second year was an incredibly strong wind and kind of out of the front starboard and what that meant was that the one side of the boat had to basically provide all the power because if the other side provided the power, the boat would go in circles. And just by random chance, all the strong paddlers were on the side that didn't need the power and all the... if you were to divide the crew right down the middle – put all the strong paddlers, all the weak paddlers and not discounting anybody's skills, but realistically all the weak paddlers were on the side where the strong paddlers should have been. It's like, "Oh my gosh." I didn't think of that. I didn't analyze that upfront.

Mike: I bet that was a long trip across the lake.

Loren: It was a long trip across the lake – yeah. And then what saved the

day or how it all come together was just remembering the concept that we all have to paddle together because everybody was trying to do their own thing – people were saying, "Oh this is not working so..." And some people were trying to do stuff and so I just had to say, "Everybody, take a breath. OK – everybody all together now." And so, the concept of all working together and doing their part – because we were actually moving backwards. The wind gusts were coming down off the hill and we were really struggling and the people on shore were getting ready to come out and help us get in and I just waived them off and I said, "No, we're going to get this." And the crowd – it was the most incredible response of all time of the crowd, because the crowd could see that it was a struggle. Sometimes with theatrics we say we create the struggle – the struggle was there for us so we didn't need to create it. So once we all got going together and I called it out, "Stroke, stroke, stroke." And everybody got together and the weaker paddlers basically they got it and everybody else said, "You guys just ease up – look like you're paddling." And that's a skill – to keep the motion going but all the work is done on the other side. Once we got to shore – that was the greatest cheer. I said, "Ok, that's it – I don't have to ever do anything again."

Mike: What you thought was going to be the worst year for the sun flotilla probably felt like the best by the time you got there.

Loren: By the time we got done – because we did it. But the lesson it was was that we all had to work together because if each one of us paddled separately thinking we are powerful, there's not much power in an individual in a situation like that. That's one of the things I've learned – eight people on the boat, you've got to work together or there's no control.

Mike: That's a great metaphor for the entire process.

Loren: Yeah – and then you expand that out. For everybody – the whole thing, it's all about working together because if people are trying... going for individual glory or whatever, it takes away from the whole. That concept of everybody's got their role – it's not the same role by any means but everybody has got their role and it changes. The role changes depending on grander schemes because there's always a bigger scheme whether it's the weather, whether it's more people, whether it's... whatever it is, there's always a grander scheme. And for you – for any person who hasn't seen the parade, the flotilla or whatever, to say, "OK, I'm going to showboat here." Well on a calm, clear day you can probably do that but when it comes to where the grander forces are pushing things one way or another, then that's the test of can you work together. All right – that's enough.

Mike: Thank you.