

*Martin Furey's Shot*  
Interview of playwright Maureen Gallagher

**TimeLine's Artistic Director PJ Powers (PP) recently chatted with playwright Maureen Gallagher (MG) about TimeLine's production of *Martin Furey's Shot*.**

*(PP) Maureen, how and when did you begin writing Martin Furey's Shot?*

*(MG)* I began writing this play in the late 90s. I was inspired by articles I had read (particularly one in *Time* by Scott MacLeod) about photojournalists who covered the terrible violence that was taking place in South Africa between 1990 and 1994. Some of these photographers suffered injury, loss of life and great mental distress from their efforts to tell the story. It intrigued me – what the life and emotional experience of a war photographer is like – and what it means to us to see these images. How do they affect us, are we able to keep looking at them, and then what? I started reading a great deal about photojournalists who cover conflict. Also, I was and continue to be very moved by the story of the struggle for freedom and equality in South Africa, which resulted in Mandela's release from prison after 27 years and his election as president in the first non-racial democratic election. I was interested in the juxtaposition of these two stories.

*(PP) Can you set the stage a bit for us about the story and characters in Martin Furey's Shot?*

*(MG)* The play is fictional about a Chicago photographer, Martin, who is passionately committed to "telling the story" through his images. He struggles seeing all he sees then returning to his life in Chicago. Other photographers in the story are Sam, who is African-American and an experienced photojournalist, and Arthur and Lev who are South African. With them and with his girlfriend, Kathe, who is a teacher in a city school, Martin has closeness and fun in his life. He lives an exciting life, dashing off to assignments around the world. But when he receives a big prize for a photo at the same time that tragedy strikes, he starts to spin out of control.

*(PP) I've been amazed by how many contacts you've made while working on this play with photojournalists from literally all over the world. Each day it seems you tell me about another famous photographer who has been helpful and supportive of your play. Can you share a little info about the research you've done and people you've talked to?*

*(MG)* In researching what it is like to go off to other countries and cover war, I talked with photographers like Stephanie Sinclair who is from Chicago but now lives in Beirut. She spent two years in Baghdad covering the current war. Also, Kendall Hunter, a Canadian photographer and writer now living in Switzerland who worked in South Africa. Scott MacLeod has been kind enough to show continuing interest in the play. *Chicago Tribune* photographer Ovie Carter, Pulitzer Prize and World Press Photo Award winner came to our rehearsals and talked of his experiences covering the continuing struggle of African-Americans in Chicago, as well as his travels to Africa and India reporting on famine. Alex Garcia, also of the *Tribune*, and also a winner of a Pulitzer and World Press Photo Award,

came and shared his experiences and thoughts on the work. He and photojournalist and editor Laura Husar Garcia have been instructing the actors on how to use their cameras correctly.

*(PP) And you've also done a fair amount of traveling yourself to really get a sense of the work these people do.*

*(MG) Yes, I had the opportunity to travel to South Africa twice. I learned a great deal from talking to friends, some are former freedom fighters who are now working regular jobs in the New South Africa. Victor Matom, a photographer and freedom fighter who covered the years of the struggle is now, in addition to his photographic work, running a school of photography for children in Nomzamo Park, a squatter camp in Soweto. He took me all around the township to meet people and show me the ways that they are working to improve their lives. I learned the most from Victor, a great photographer and humanitarian.*

*(PP) I know that it is really important to you that we honor and highlight the work of actual photojournalists in the production of Martin Furey's Shot. This is resulting in what will be TimeLine's most technologically ambitious production to date, I would say, and numerous photos will be incorporated into the show and projected onto the large and elaborate set. Can you tell us a bit about the photographers whose work is being featured in the show?*

*(MG) I contacted photographers such as Pulitzer Prize winner Greg Marinovich and João Silva, who have written a book about the period called *The Bang Bang Club*. João currently covers Iraq and other big stories for *The New York Times*. Greg is now a documentary filmmaker. He has graciously allowed us to use his photographs. We also received much help and support from PictureNET Africa, an agency for many South African photographers, including the late Ken Oosterbroek. We are in touch with Ken's family. His brother, who lives in the U.S., is coming to the show.*

*(PP) As you've become quite close with many of these photographers in the last couple year is there anything that has been particularly surprising about how they approach their work?*

*(MG). What is interesting about most of these photojournalists is that, contrary to the opinion some have of them as thrill seekers, they are quite complicated in their feelings about the work. They like being witnesses to history, and they are often very dedicated to making a difference with their photos or, at the very least, documenting events lest the world not see them and not know. They are also quite open about the questions that arise in their own minds when they are so close to conflict and suffering and can do only their job – taking pictures.*

*(PP) After a few years of hearing the play in your head and putting it down on paper, what's it been like to actually be in a rehearsal room and have a production come together?*

*(MG) This experience, having the play produced at TimeLine, has been a joy. Director Anna Bahow, whom I credit with championing the play and is now doing such a great job of creating the production of it, all the actors, designers, stage managers, and the TimeLine company are supremely professional and fun to be with. I'm lucky. After all the years of being an actor and "on the other side of the table," I find it amazing to watch the actors make my words and actions their own and breathe life into them. I keep thinking, "I love them." And I feel such a responsibility to give Anna and all of them the best script I can give them and then just get out of their way.*

*(PP) Well, thanks for the nice words, and believe me, it's been a joy to have you at TimeLine for the last year working on this show. Do you have any immediate thoughts about future writing projects? Obviously you are quite known throughout the theatre community as an actress, but do you think Martin Furey will open the door to more plays with Maureen Gallagher, the playwright?*

*(MG) Yes, I definitely want to write more and hope to have more productions. I love acting; I would never stop doing it, but I'll pursue writing too. I've found this whole process so challenging and stimulating - the ultimate flow activity. I've learned a lot and want to keep learning. I've been working on a play that has to do with the American South. It's quite different in style from Martin Furey. I also have some ideas that involve stories in other places and times, and in each case I'll want to do the research that will allow me to enter that world. I know for sure I want my next play to have more roles for women! Sitting alone with a blank page is difficult but good. Ultimately being in a rehearsal room with a group of artists working on the play is too much fun not to want to do it again.*