

## BOOKEND 1: WHY ARE WE HERE?

Janet Brown

Symposium Chair

I'm Janet Brown, and I'm really happy to have been involved with the Robert E. Gard Foundation, and to have chaired this Symposium, with George Tzougros, Jennifer Armstrong, Ann Brusky, David O'Fallon and Maryo Gard Ewell on my team. I'm grateful that you could all come for these two days at Wingspread. It's an emotional time for many of us, as we look back upon our careers and at our mentors who taught us what community arts was about; and as we recognize the young people who will carry on the work in the democracy that can be, and should be, the arts in America.

I was touched last night by readings from Robert E. Gard embedded in Maryo Gard Ewell's welcome. I did a lot of public speaking when I was in S. Dakota, and I ended almost every speech with the prose poem that closed Gard's *The Arts in the Small Community* book, written 50 years ago. It was one of the first writings that made sense to me, as I worked in a state with almost no professional arts organizations at the time, and where my job was to help create arts activities in S. Dakota communities, most of which were under 10,000 population.

I had been working in New York City for Joe Papp at the New York Shakespeare Festival; and when I returned home to work in S. Dakota I gained a new reverence for the people who worked for community arts out of love, out of their desire for their children to have important experiences, simply because it was important. They became the real heroes to me.

So we're here honoring our many heroes and ancestors, and seeing how they can walk with us into the future.

How shall we start this Symposium? Let us reflect. We were not the first people here, and we are grateful for the Native Americans who cared for the land. We are grateful that we work with artists, who offer life and truth and beauty, and we recognize the importance of that in a time when they will become increasingly important in the world. We recognize those who will come after us, as we recognize our ancestors who ignited ideas that have guided us.

We've organized this Symposium accordingly. First, we'll look at the history of the community arts movement in America, and then reflect on where we are today - what we bring forward and what we discard. Then we will talk about the future. It seems that today, one reality, one paradigm, is dissolving into another – and how we fit into this transition, for the Gard Foundation sees as one of its roles, to convene a conversation at times like these.