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I've had a crush on Clubbed Thumb for a long time and for good reason. It's home to some of the most daring and exceptional artists I've ever encountered. It's produced some of my favorite plays – bold, intelligent, strange, funny, difficult, and singular pieces of work. I learned how to write from reading and seeing those plays.

When I found out that Clubbed Thumb was going to produce my play *Baby Screams Miracle* for Summerworks 2013, it was a dream come true. It was my first full-length production, and the experience was revolutionary. I cannot imagine a more exciting or supportive place to work.

The history of *Baby Screams Miracle*'s development is a good example of the incredible development opportunities that Clubbed Thumb offers. The play was born out of Clubbed Thumb's Biennial Commission contest. The application asked us to dream up a brand new play inspired by a theme and a bunch of different "ingredients" (e.g., a man in uniform, body parts that don't work right, the PBS documentary "Unforgettable Elephants"...) The result was a play unlike any I'd written before.

The Biennial Commission, which is open to everyone and involves a blind adjudication process, was a huge opportunity for me as an early career playwright because I didn't need an agent or a long resume to get my work read and seriously considered by a theater company I admired. Although I didn't win the commission, Artistic Director Maria Striar kept in touch long after the application process was over. (This blew my mind!) She was genuinely interested in my work and continued to support it in meaningful ways. She asked me to write a 10-minute play for a Summerworks kickoff event. She read two of my full-lengths. And then she offered to workshop *Baby Screams Miracle* over the course of 4-sessions with fabulous actors and the fabulous director Portia Krieger. The goal of the workshop was to rewrite the play with actors in the room – an experience totally alien and totally exciting to me.

One of the most special things about Clubbed Thumb is that they understand that each play has different developmental needs. There's nothing cookie-cutter about this company. Their sensitivity to the uniqueness of any given play (and writer) is a big part of why Clubbed Thumb has produced such a diverse and beautifully realized body of work, and why playwrights are clamoring to work with them. In my case, I was welcome to as many readings as I needed to develop my play for Summerworks. Maria and Managing Director Nora DeVeau-Rosen bent over backwards to help us cast the play and were happy to go down all sorts of exploratory roads. If I had an idea about what the play needed – even if it was unformed or counterintuitive – they were ready to hear me out and support me however they could. Maria even suggested a special staging workshop with set designer Daniel Zimmerman given that my play involves a massive storm that demolishes a house. This workshop put us weeks ahead when we stepped into the rehearsal room because we had already developed a strong sense of the physical space and how to tackle all sorts of tricky things like a trampoline flying into a room and tree falling and crushing two people.

Throughout the entire development process, I received dramaturgical feedback from Maria that helped me to unearth and really understand my play. I've watched peers of mine walk out of development opportunities feeling like they lost the play or that it was watered down or

“normalized.” Maria’s notes were insightful and smart and always in touch with the play’s weird heartbeat. I think she understood the play before I did. I never felt pressured to change anything. And I always felt supported in any risks I wanted to take.

Likewise the entire community of artists and collaborators that rallied around the production contributed *so much* heart and insight. Designers, interns, stage management, the marketing and production team, my incredible director and actors – all of these individuals were incredibly generous. And I know that I was only able to work with such a talented team because of the huge amount of love and respect people have for Clubbed Thumb.

My experience with Clubbed Thumb changed my career absolutely. I came in with limited connections and experience and left with a whole network of new relationships. Associate Producer Michael Bulger worked hard to fill the house with enthusiastic crowds every night. Maria and Michael went out of their way to invite industry people to the show and follow up with them on my behalf. I met other artists, producers, and directors I admire. I got my very first reviews and got an agent. I forged relationships with new collaborators, and I felt connected to a community of writers in a way I hadn’t before.

Most importantly – my experience with Clubbed Thumb made me a better writer and a better collaborator. It was like growing 6 inches in 3 months.

Clubbed Thumb is everything that is alive and kicking about theater today. It develops the work of wildly different writers and provides those writers with unique and tailor-made development programs. It takes risks. It produces plays that other companies are scared of producing. It opens its doors to unknown writers. It takes superb care of its playwrights and all its collaborators. It provides what is at once a nurturing and adventurous environment for making work. Clubbed Thumb is a soldier and goddess and I’m so glad it exists and I hope it exists forever because we need it desperately – artists and audiences alike.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Clare Barron". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

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Summerworks 2013