

# Geddy Aniksdal

## Deep Down

When I was little *they* told me that I always had to be different. It was not a compliment. *They* said that I had to be something for myself; that what I had could not be normal. When I now go back home where my parents still live, my old friends say, knowing that I have worked with theatre for many, many years, that *they* always knew that something different would come out of me. Now it is a compliment. Now that I have "made" it; made something for myself, something to live for and from. Something different from what *they* have. *Them*.

I always wanted to be like *them*. I wanted to be normal. I wanted to fit in, to mix in with *them*, to just very naturally slide in among *them*, so that there could be no question as to whether I would take part in a game, or go somewhere or be selected as one of the first. I wanted to belong.

I was very small. I thought I would never be more than one and a half metres tall. Never. I was very round. We had very dark hair, and we were many - in my family.

I was not a good runner. I was not blond. I did not belong to a family who gave their children, or their children's friends, money to buy sweets. I was stubborn. I was strange. I liked to read. I liked to eat. I liked to dare people to do things; they would not and I had to dare myself. As a result I became brave, or crazy, depending on the context. I had two friends (sometimes three - if I happened to have a new trinket, or something exciting to say).

One of them had no breasts like me, one of them stuttered, but sang, like me, and one of them lived very close to me, and laughed a lot, like me. She was also crazy, unusual.

We lived a usual unusual life in a Norwegian factory town in the 1960s. Nothing happened after we quit playing in the woods.

Before we started drinking.

The long waiting to become something or somebody started - with how to dress, how to smile, how to attract attention from the boys, how to walk, how to talk. A long ride towards nothing, it seemed.

*I cried because I understood  
that I was saved,  
I also cried because  
I felt so different.  
I was suddenly not interested  
in being as popular  
as these two girls,  
having breasts  
and being blond,  
from the Big City or whatever  
I imagined them to be.  
I wanted to be myself.  
If that was to be a character,  
so be it.*

A long ride to get in.

Get in where?

I could see what would happen if I stayed: start to work at the factory, quit when I became pregnant, build a house. Have a child. Vote for the Labour Party.

Being outside this pattern finally became a possibility. To disagree, to not want to do, to be different, to say no, to say "fuck you". (Not loud!)

What a character!

Looking back I must have been a lonely young girl - a kind of shyness mistaken for aloofness.

When I was thirteen years old, we visited my grandmother further out on the fjord; we were to stay there over the weekend. A relative from the Big City came with her girlfriend. They were a year older than me, they were blond and they came from the city. They had breasts too. I was still working on reaching more than one and a half metres and my chest was as flat as my back.

It was the first time we visited my grandmother without our parents.

In the cold winter night, we had my grandmother's permission to go and see some "friends" who lived a few kilometres away. We were dressed in miniskirts and nylon stockings. The temperature was minus fifteen degrees. We walked very quickly to the house; it turned out to be a "home alone" party and my relative went over and pressed the bell. A boy opened the door and looked at *them* and looked at me and said "just a minute" and went inside and came back and said to *them* that they were not allowed to let so many people in, that only she and her girlfriend, from the Big City, could come in.

*They* came back to me and said that I could not go inside, but that I had to wait for *them* there since if I went home my grandmother would get angry - so I was to wait.

I waited.

I sincerely thought I was going to die. I felt my legs go numb, I felt my nylon stockings freeze to my legs and thighs, and I lost all feeling in the tip of my fingers. White smoke came out of my mouth. The snow creaked under my feet. I walked over to a house under construction thinking it was warmer there, that the roof would give me some shelter.

I wanted to hide from the people occasionally coming out of the house or new guests entering. They did not have any problem in going inside. But they were also much taller than I and had bumps in the right places.

I felt like the little girl with the matchsticks.

I saw the warm yellow lights inside the house, heard the music and the laughter.

I understood that I had entered the real world. I understood that I was growing up. I understood that not everywhere would be like my parent's home where you could always enter, where my mother would always ask if you were hungry or how it had gone at school or something trivial like that. And I swore to myself aloud in the cold winter evening, with the white smoke coming out from my mouth with every word, that I, Geddy Aniksdal would never be like the small-minded people in that house; that I would never let anyone stand out in the cold.

I thought *they* would never come out. I also understood that *their* notion of time was completely different from mine, since time passes quickly in good company.

I do not remember how the night(mare) ended. I remember walking home, my body like a wooden stick, and I was praying that my grandmother had left her old fashioned storeroom open so that the kitchen would be warm.

When we saw the lights of her house, I was crying. I cried because I understood that I was saved, I also cried because I felt so

different. I was suddenly not interested in being as popular as these two girls, having breasts and being blond, from the Big City or whatever I imagined *them* to be. I wanted to be myself. If that was to be a character, so be it.

I did not get angry with *them*, did not really blame *them* either, I just felt myself sliding away from *them*, as if we were to be two small canoes on the river. I felt myself going upstream.

I felt a great power in knowing something for certain. Not what I wanted, but what I did not want. I believe that many of my actions are a reaction against, not a specific drive towards.

My colleague Trond and I often remember that we did not start in our group especially because we knew we would be actors, or for a strong love of theatre. It was because of the other people who were there, people we trusted, people we could work with, people that we could work up against.

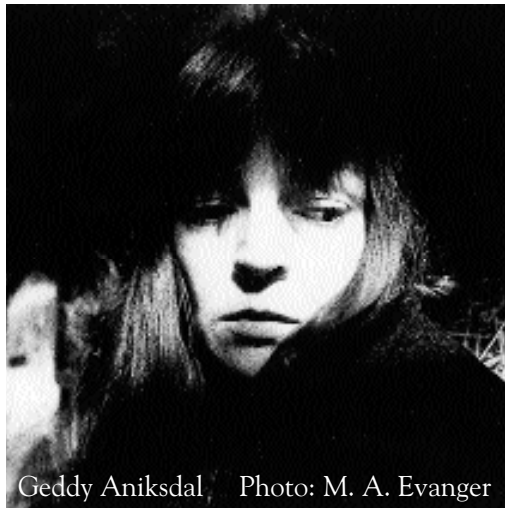
We created our own work, our own culture, our own theatre. *I became us.*

Walt Whitman says in one of his poems; "I am many, I contain multitudes". Working in theatre rewards me with the search for my own character, my characters, which are always a "me", one of the many "me"s, challenging aspects and qualities of "me" in each different work.

If I myself cannot come along, I lose interest and fade quickly. To say it with one of my many "me"s, one of my characters, one of the dreamers in *The Dreamers*:

*I have perceived that to be with those I like*

*is enough,  
To stop in company with the rest in the evening  
is enough,  
To be surrounded by beautiful, curious,  
breathing, laughing flesh is enough,  
To pass among them - to touch any one -  
to rest my arm ever so lightly  
round his or her neck  
for a moment -  
what is this then?  
I do not ask any more delight -  
I swim in it as in a sea.*



Geddy Aniksdal Photo: M. A. Evanger

*There is something in staying  
close to men and women  
and looking -  
on them and in the contact  
and odour of them that  
pleases the soul well,  
All things please the soul,  
but these please the soul well.*

Walt Whitman,  
*Leaves of Grass, I Sing the Body  
Electric*

I have carried these lines with me for the last thirteen years. I know them by heart, and I say them, sometimes, in good company. As for my characters, I am their carrier, and it might be just as much a question of character as a character itself. It just boils down to what I do.

Some character!

GEDDY ANIKSDAL (Norway) is an actor and director working with Grenland Friteater. She has considerable experience as a workshop leader, specialising in ways in which actors can create their own material. She has been an active member of the Magdalena Project since it began.