

# VICTORIA RAE MOORE, A FIERCE LEADER

BY JEAN-MARIE MAUCLET

Victoria is the one before last member of TiP about whom I am now writing a page or two. Gwylène will come last, this time.

Why did it take such a long time?

Fact is: it has been hard and would have been unsatisfactory to freeze-frame Victoria's quicksilver-like itinerary at TiP.

This essay can only be a snapshot, then.

It is a snapshot.

\* \* \*

Victoria is the only young mother who ever asked me to watch her child.

Victoria had me watch her 3 year old daughter for almost three hours!

And I must recognize that it was a truly pleasant experience! At three, the child already has her way with words, gestures, smiles and frowns, articulated around a will to get what she wants ... and it works! Of course, with a stranger, she will not throw a fit immediately. Forceful, yes. Insistent, yes. But gracefully so! That is it. Victoria is graceful ... Oops ... I am writing about Moraya, not her mother - [no scripting, please]. Moraya is graceful! No scripting, of course, but how not to see bits of one in the other? With difficulty, from what I have been able to experience within these three hours of dancing in circles, on my knees, hands marionetting as I sing silly verses about an old farmer named Mc Donald, and - get this - playing the harmonica without shame or ridicule! Oh Man, I had not played it for ten years! What a liberating experience! Thank you Moraya.

This babysitting episode is anecdotal, yes. But very meaningful. In that Victoria, when she was hired by TINYisPOWERFUL, presented herself as a PR person. That babysitting day at least, she did a great Public Relation job on me!

"Jean-Marie, when I work with Gwylène, now, can you watch Moraya? It will take us five minutes!"

This was a lie!

But she had succeeded.

A PR's job is to introduce ideas, proposals, to one or more parties and get them to imagine how beneficial it will be for all to listen to each other and transact successfully. Can I say that I

have rarely seen anyone as clear-spoken as Victoria? How - in a meeting where dialogues turn antagonistic - she cuts through the noise with authority; reminds us all of the topic at hand; nutshells precisely, often verbatim, the position of one party, then of the other; invariably states that both opinions have contributed to the progress of the conversation! She may even propose a compromise ... or maybe a recess. Why not meet again, when we are less tired? After all, we have only been at it for one-and-a-half hour or two.

Compromise is not consensus though. I am not one for consensus. But Victoria does not necessarily seek consensus. She offers peace!

Not bad, is it?

Now, Victoria is the executive director of TINYisPOWERFUL. When I wrote 'quicksilver' earlier, it was in reference to the ability she has to switch role. TINYisPOWERFUL met her as Public Relation. She was hired as Coordinator. We all became scared to lose her as Mother, not so long after her arrival. The next promotion to Executive Director is routine in our un-corporate world. Now, she seems to enjoy being Ambassador extraordinaire, as she ever-further travels America. She has become the face of this TINY collective. This is not me saying it. It is the former head of Alternate Roots, Carlton. He is adamant about it: she is a very good ambassador.

Well, the ambassadorship is a self-appointment. I suppose it comes with the directorship and its executive duties. It also comes because of Victoria's clear understanding of her duties. Although TiP still has a hard time defining a crisp business profile, its executive director remains confident and brave. Even when she is not so confident, Victoria remains brave. And clear in her speech. Sometimes, you may wonder where she gets her self-assurance. For this reason, she is a POWERFUL executive director. Since we know her and work with her, we have seen her go through thick and thin with a family so extended that there is not a week without a development, somewhere, adverse or not. We have observed her in Zoom moments of worry, fatigue, exhaustion. But give Victoria a few seconds to regroup her thoughts and she will be back on track.

I found a good example of this aplomb at the latest Tuesday creative team meeting. She and Rayn were fresh from a trip to Chapel Hill, where they had been invited to represent TiP at a Place Making conference, partly sponsored by the Donnelley Foundation, if I understand. I first asked Rayn for a rundown. In

their wise mind, Rayn hesitated: they had not yet processed the experience. Then I asked Victoria. Her answer: besides the many events she attended, at one point she was proposed an empty slot of time on the general workshop schedule! She immediately gauged the opportunity and volunteered a Question-Relay session with other SouthArt attendees. Her PR instinct had already made a cohort of this surely disparate group: what a chance to network with other Southern artists, activists, educators, and grassroots! This further triggered an other idea: to ask SouthArt to sponsor a yearly gathering of the 'Emerging Young Leaders of Color', an already existing cohort. Such a potentially rich way to generate artists collaborations and a positive promotion of TiP.

Of course I wanted to know more. TiP has made the Question-Relay dialogic format an important tool in the arsenal we are building to expand and strengthen our outside partnerships: an ART TOOL.

The session was to take place right away. I imagine her spontaneously organizing the room around two empty chairs. Since she did not have a particular topic with which she may be fully comfortable, she made up an open topic session! After the usual initial silence, she explains, the dialogue started and carried on beautifully!

There is a lesson for me here: not to be single-minded as far as what the Question/Relay format should be, how a session should develop - any format, any development. Also, to acquire a better feel for the context and keep a flexible mind. When I noted this experience in my diary the next morning, I wrote "I will have to report this in my essay on Victoria." So, here it is ... All to Victoria's credit to have such a presence of mind. Actually, this is an other application of her ability to synthesize meandering notions into meaningful thoughts, disparate public conversations into coherent narratives. At how many meetings have I turned to Victoria to help me make sense of ... what was going on, basically? Intentionally I would interrupt and ask her to help me understand where we were at - for the benefit of all as well. Every time, she has done it without delay, without hesitation. Such is one of the benefits of Victoria's talent: it keeps the room calm, aware, and purposeful.

I further believe this is what women often bring to the table: mindfulness, flexibility, timeliness, a sense of the moment and of place. Sounds like clarity! With a very unique, subtle determination.

To finish this live portrait-turned-eulogy of TiP's executive director, let me pan the camera from her to a wider frame. Yesterday, Gwylène and I, we had two art-related New Yorkers for lunch. Of course we talked about TiP and the collective. When one of our guests equated the collective to 'a group', I objected. The difference, I insisted, is that a collective has heart, big heart - and big purpose. It is because TiP has heart and purpose that I feel freer to be laudatory about the members of the collective, when I write this series of essays about them. For the purpose of keeping the flame warm, the empathy vibrant, the vision inspiring. To make 'mutual care' as deliberate as 'self care'.

But I will not let anyone believe that mutual care has come naturally to a child of the Second World War. My family culture did not make me a free spirit. A defensive rebel, more like! In the last few years, I have been gently pushed to open up, lifted forward by some of the members of the collective. They have showed me a friendship which could only be reciprocated with my own warmth. I thank them much for that. I have been transformed. Liberated. Victoria is one such friend.

JEAN-MARIE MAUCLET, 2022

*"Art is a quest which, on its path, destroys taboos and pushes limits. Never do it alone. It has to be creative."*

You said this to me and I wrote it down, not knowing when or where I would see it again. Yes, I am a writer and dancer and business person, too, I suppose.

Collaborations explorations between artists writers and more

An exchange

*#thisisanessay*

*#thespacebetween*

*And what makes someone great or visionary? Is it, in best form, found through partnership, collaboration, brain bouncing? And what is a zine? Maybe these essays?*

*So what is The Tale of Charleston?*

*I appreciate the way you spell Mariah and the special time you spent caring for her. Maybe she'll be coming around more and either way thank you for pushing and supporting; challenging and extending; affirming; giving so much.*

*You said essay turned eulogy as if marking a point in legacy....*

*What more can I say?*

*I'm thinking now of the jacket and yes, the bleachers. And for some reason, Ira Glass.*

*Jean-Marie, I have no interests in responding directly — challenging, questioning, "correcting." I've never been much for essay writing, either.*

*Thank you for taking time to understand and appreciate my art forms because, yes, for me leadership is an art form.*

*An attempt to understand conversations between artists, linguists, creators, makers, facilitators, dancers. And yes, visionaries.*