

I am a creature of traditions. Just look at my history of careened-through and stuck-to careers: acting, host to as many traditions and superstitions as there are plays and cultures; sailing tall ships, where hand-me-down skills earn high regard; storytelling, which embodies the spirits of uncountable traditions; writing; photography; movement; even paper-light origami, which I taught in trade for decent cash, comes with a hefty weight of history.

Performing art has its own traditions and associations whether I'm onstage or sitting in the audience. Shakespeare in the Park (Central Park, in this case) is laced with packed thermal flasks and the sophisticated company of Australian memoirist Virginia Lloyd. Any show with a fight reminds me of my dear friend Rick Sordelet, while "Wicked" brings reminiscing of my late friend Dennis Paver (that was the last show he worked).

ESSAY BY SEÁNAN FORBES

"Traditions flavor our lives. We can cherish them, share them and pass them down—just like any other heirloom. If you're in Kansas City, then traditions are easy to build."

Most of the time, as with Lloyd and Shakespeare, there is food involved with long-standing traditions. Broadway shows mean my friend Paulette and the actors' menu at Sardi's. Concerts in the park mean a trip to Zabar's and a chilled bottle of white wine. Traditions are a portable entity.

They are also important because they can remind us of who we are. They keep history alive in us, and not just in theory. For me, a visit to the Nelson-Atkins often leads to a visit to Tea Drops (4111 Pennsylvania Ave.).

I keep hoping to see "Romeo and Juliet" at the KC Shakespeare Festival. (I'd like to be in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" there, but that's another play and a different essay.) Bella Napoli (6229 Brookside Blvd.) and Jasper's (1201 W. 103rd St.) could provide Italian take-out to bring to Verona. Let the Shakespeare company pick the play; you choose the food, drink and companion, and you have a perfect evening out. This

season's over, so you have the entire winter to dream, perchance.

I have a passion for repertory theatres, and KC Rep is particularly shiny. I could see tying "The Christmas Carol" in with one of Megan Schultz Garrelts' deconstructed holiday desserts at Bluestem (900 Westport Road). A hit at Grinders Pizza (417 E. 18th St.) or one of Blanc Burgers' many locations for something suitably sanguine before seeing nearly anything at The Unicorn is also in order.

The Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts, which is enough to give New York, DC, LA and London a case of arts-envy, begs for an established tradition of opening or closing night attendance. A visit to one of Kansas City's fabulous restaurants will serve as the overture. I fancy The Rieger (1924 Main St.). It has a nice balance of drama and dinner, especially when dining at the chef's table where you're practically starring in the kitchen scene. Wherever you go let the restaurant know you have theater tickets when you book a table. They want you to book seats for a meal and a show again and again.

Traditions flavor our lives. We can cherish them, share them and pass them down—just like any other heirloom. If you're in Kansas City, then traditions are easy to build. You have scores of combinations. Choose an art form. Frame it in an evening of food, drink, conversation and company, and hang it in a life that's richer for knowing that where you are is just the right place to be. ■

