

Paula Vogel's 1998 Pulitzer Prize winning, *How I Learned to Drive*, at Elm Grove's  
Sunset Playhouse

When theatre was first conceived, it was considered a part of a citizen's civic duty to attend because it promoted a shared sense of community. The Greeks were able to cleanse themselves of inner sufferings through catharsis, and heal themselves through laughter. They understood many contradictions in the human condition could exist at once.

Euripides, master playwright of Greek tragedies, has often been referred to as "the first psychologist" for the powerful presentations of duality in his stories. Even Plato agreed one was better suited for discourse if not distracted by pent up emotions, so the theatre served a very necessary social function of cleansing and healing the heart so the mind could reason. In ancient Greece, art and politics collaborated in service to the community.

Even today, the best plays are still religious rituals- windows into the transcendent, urging us to feel more than we were previously capable of. The controversial subject matter of Paula Vogel's play, *How I Learned to Drive* is a woman's account of her incestuous seven year love affair with her pouncing, pedophilic, uncle and how she heals from this. The play is surprisingly very funny, despite its tragedy, and is called "an incest comedy." In true Greek style, Vogel includes a chorus who move in and out of playing various roles, while acting as a conscience on stage.

In 1998, *How I Learned to Drive* won the Pulitzer Prize and every prestigious New York critics awards including: the Lucy Lortel, the Drama Desk, Outer Critic's Circle, New York Drama Critic's Circle, and the Obie for Best Play. The *New York*

*Times* called the show, “a lovely, harrowing guide to the crippling persistence of a woman’s memories.”

Kopper Bear Productions is equipped for the sensitivity of the material. Directed by psychologist, Howard Bashinski, the small theatre company has a history of doing “high-quality, low tech theatre.” This often includes producing unusual and underdone works in intimate spaces.

Bashinski is a master director, and intuitively guides actors to make brave choices in their unique characters. “This is possibly the best written play I have ever worked on. You can’t help but become smitten with the writing. The reality is the abuse toward women and children is pandemic. We are a theatre that chooses shows which not only tell a story, but which have strong messages.” Considered a favorite company to work for among Milwaukee’s best non equity actors despite smaller productions, Kopper Bear can be counted on for providing the same social services of ancient Greece by breaking you open and healing up.

*This show is for mature audiences only.* A professional counselor and members of the company will host a talk back after each performance to answer any questions.