

I have seen every episode of MASH, from all eleven seasons, in chronological order. My parents got me hooked on MASH when I was still a preteen in middle school. The idea was proposed and agreed upon, and DVD boxed sets were purchased. After soccer practice, or orchestra rehearsal, or whatever it was I had going on, we would gather around with dinners on tray tables and we watched Alan Alda play Hawkeye Pierce almost every night for about a year.

I don't know why my parents chose to share MASH with me at such a young age. My dad is always sharing television shows or movies that he likes. It could have been only that he remembered some funny bits and wanted me to be in on the jokes. After all, my parents didn't know back then that I'd become an actor. But whether or not they meant it to, MASH had a profound impact on me.

The play I'm currently acting in over in the Meadows School of the Arts is well known for being both funny and thought provoking. One of my dear friends after seeing the show told me, "It's hard to find a show that gives ya both the giggles and the thinks." And he's right. It's hard to find that perfect mix of the giggles and the thinks. Before MASH, I had never seen a television show that could be both a sitcom that follows the antics of hilarious characters, and a drama that explored the moral complexities of politics and war. MASH was my first introduction to violence that was not gratuitous – it used tragedy and violence only insofar as it served its greater purpose. It toed the line between two conflicting messages: Don't take yourself too seriously, but investigate your beliefs carefully. It portrayed war as what it really is, a collision of political ideals and individual physical reality.

As the artist in me blossomed, I looked to MASH and to Mr. Alda as examples of how art can be accessible without being reductive, how it can be thought provoking without being tedious. Most of all, MASH instilled in me a sense of artistic and social responsibility. It is my responsibility to make conscious art, not thoughtless art. It is my responsibility to make my art mean something to a larger community.

Mr. Alda interacts with the world around him deliberately and conscientiously. He is fully aware of the impact he can have on others through his art and in his contributions to the scientific community. He exemplifies artistic and social responsibility. And though I understand little about science compared to some of my fellow President's Scholars, I understand this: in a day and age when Americans take to the streets to defend the scientific method against a government seemingly bent on erasing facts and eradicating research, awareness and responsibility become one and the same. To be responsible, one has to do little more than be informed. Alan Alda stands with this university and with all institutions of learning against ignorance, the true enemy of progress.

I hope I can be a part of something as formative and INformative to someone else as MASH was to me. I hope I can make art that is not necessarily realistic, but that is truthful – that tackles difficult questions with perfect simplicity.

I look forward to Mr. Alda's Tate Lecture this evening. And I know, because I learned from the best, that he will afford us all the perfect balance of the giggles and the thinks.

Jo-Jo Steine