

“This has nothing to do with politics. I’m frightened.”
(Lyman, *Other Desert Cities*)

The more I’ve read, ruminated over, sat with, and watched this play over the past few months, the more I’ve come to see Lyman’s utterance as the key to understanding the story.

Because *Other Desert Cities* is full of red herrings. It acts like a comedy in places. But it’s not. It purports to be about some old guard, right wing Republican parents and their liberal sort-of-celebrity offspring. Which it is, but it’s not. It renders each of its characters very trustworthy *and* extremely unreliable narrators of the past – sometimes in the same speech. The conversation that’s being had is *rarely* the conversation that’s being had.

So while the Wyeths talk about novels, politics, country clubs, Hollywood, and the like, what they’re *really* talking about is their fears. Fear for their childrens’ safety. A fear that Christmas will be ruined. The fear of being left alone. The fear of never writing again. The fear of losing control. Fear of confrontation. And on and on. But like all of us, they’re experts at hiding, cloaking, deflecting, pretending: whatever it takes to avoid looking and feeling vulnerable about what terrifies them.

There are plenty of literary, cinematic, and even Scriptural suggestions that fear - not hate, as we sometimes suppose - is the opposite of love. When we’re afraid, we are paralyzed from acting, or we act rashly. We distance ourselves from others, or hold them too close. We withhold life-giving words, or thrash people with harmful ones. *All* of this protects us, keeps us safe, holds us together, saves face – but it doesn’t teach us how to love. Love is always a harder, bolder, willful choice, requiring truth and courage. And in the end, that only happens when we bring our fears into the light of day, face them down, and become free to both give and receive love.

That – in the end – is what I think *Other Desert Cities* is about. The fate of the Wyeth family hangs in the balance. For years, fear has caused them to cover the past with a Hollywood patina, never looking too closely at what went on. But the game has gotten old for Brooke; it’s time to start having the conversation that hasn’t been had. Will they rise to the challenge? And if so, how will they now love? This is the story our production hopes to tell.