



Quarterly Newsletter of the International Centre for Women Playwrights

Spring 2005

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## Greetings From The Editor

### Editor's Note

Thank you for joining or choosing to continue your membership in the International Centre for Women Playwrights. One of the ways in which ICWP supports women playwrights from around the world is by publishing the quarterly newsletter *Seasons*. In *Seasons*, you'll find process articles, reports on members' production and play development experiences.

Thematically, the idea of place looms large in this issue. Margaret McSeveny finds out how location influences the writing of a range of ICWP member playwrights; Shirley King has also surveyed the membership, to find out in what sorts of "rooms of our own" we prefer to write. The results demonstrate that there's no one 'right' way (or place) to write (about), but a myriad of productive ones.

On the craft front, Maureen Brady Johnson shares an exercise she uses in teaching writing, as well as in her own playwriting. Robin Rice Lichtig charts the development of New York City's ICWP-founded play-reading circle the Manhattan Oracles, and Eliza Wyatt charts the development of her play *Flowers of Red*, based on the life, death, and cultural afterlife of Rachel Corrie, and Brenda Shoshanna reflects upon her experience of self-production.

The usual features are all here: the "Play Doctor" column, by ICWP's agony aunt Rebecca Ritchie, and a list of current calls for scripts. Finally, scan the list of new ICWP members. Perhaps you'll find some names that ring a bell, or newcomers in your geographic area.

Best wishes,

Rebecca Nesvet  
Guest editor

**LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION**  
**edited by Margaret McSeveny**

Which real-world locations have inspired ICWP members' plays?

*Donna Spector:*

Once when I was in the subway station at Broadway & 110th St. & the sun was streaming down like columns in a Greek temple, I conceived of my play "Seductions," a contemporary comic version of the Demeter/Persephone myth – "Mort" steals "Pia" away from her mother Dolores's Vermont estate & takes her down into the subway station as a prelude to the underworld.

*From Katherine Burkman:*

When Donna did Persephone and Demeter in a subway, my group, women at play, developed something similar, beginning with the myth/building idea. We did a high rise and had Hades in the basement, Zeus in the penthouse, and Sisyphus running the elevator. We also started a play with a glass gallery and beauty salon next to it and wrote for the spaces, TALKING TO GLASS.

*From Rebecca Nesvet:*

My current play, THE GIRL IN THE IRON MASK, is an adaptation of a certain Alexandre Dumas novel. There is a scene on a prison island. I imagine it being part of the ruins of Aberystwyth Castle – a little dark stone room with a high, tiny window through which the sea is visible in the far distance, a cracked stone floor, mold and kids' graffiti. I took some photos of this place last time I was there. I will be in San Francisco next year and plan to visit Alcatraz if I have time to get a better idea of the environment of this scene.

When writing THE DIAMOND NET (2003), which takes place during the first world war, I worked on it partially at two war memorial sites, in Aberystwyth and Machynlleth. Very chilling. When I needed names for soldiers – there's a scene in which a list of the dead is read out – I took most of the names off the memorials.

I've written a one-act play, STUDIO TALK, inspired by an art show [Gustav Metzger retrospective, 1999] in the MOMA Oxford. The space there was really important. There were benches and mirrors so it looked like a ballet studio, and the play ended up taking place in a ballet studio but being about the art show. That piece hasn't ever been staged. It was fun to write, but I've never marketed it.

*From Faye Sholiton:*

I've often started with location and/or situation before I know the players. I knew, for example, that I had a gold mine in a box of old newsletters that once found their way to my desk, when I was working as a newspaper reporter. The newsletters, which were circulated among hometown troops during World War II, contained the youthful

voices of many people I now knew as my friends' parents and my parents' friends. It would be more than a decade before I decided who wrote those newsletters and what was going on in her life, then and now. What emerged was V-E DAY, a play in which an exhausted caregiving daughter has a chance to meet her mother as a young woman, for one day.

The artist's dictum says that the sculpture is already in the stone. Sometimes the stone suggests a human shape. Other times, it suggests a specific world. Writing plays is taking the chisel and discovering what's already there.

*From Robin Rice Lichtig:*

One week on my way to a writing class, I passed an elderly Chinese gentleman making incredible violin music at the N/R stop at 42nd Street. Then one week, there was a young rock musician with his electric guitar on the opposite platform. The two musicians were yelling back and forth at each other, each claiming the air space. "Go further away! Go away! This is my spot!" The Chinese man yelled across the tracks. "It's free air!" the black-tee-shirted one yelled back.

This was my inspiration for a full-length play: PLAY NICE!

Several weeks later, the young musician had disappeared and the Chinese man was being interviewed by a roving tv reporter. Apparently he was a famous musician back in China. Now he's either reduced to playing in the subway – or he likes the acoustics.

The play had a residency at the Cleveland Public and readings at three NYC theaters, but is still looking for a premiere in case anyone's interested!

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## **Shoes on the Highway** **by Maureen Brady Johnson**

Have you ever seen a shoe on the side of the road as you drove along? Have you wondered where those individual shoes on the roadside came from? I've seen a sneaker in a ditch, a work boot on top of a guardrail, a baby shoe on the gravel at the side of a culvert, and even one vivid red spiked heel on an entrance ramp. About two years ago, I began taking pictures of these shoes. I now have at least 40 different pictures of shoes and my collection continues to grow.

The reason I chose to collect all these photographs was to use them for a playwriting exercise. The pictures are the inspiration for a project called, *Shoes on the Highway*. Using a visual cue for writing a play, like photos of random shoes, can be challenging and thought provoking. I'm sure that the visual cue of a glass unicorn inspired Tennessee Williams or that the sights and sounds of small town America helped Thornton Wilder create *Our Town*. Symbolic objects laden with meaning can be found in any play you pick up. I found these singular shoes curious and hoped that my class of advanced playwriting students would find them just as provocative in the creation of their plays.

I asked my class to look at a few of these pictures and brainstorm about how they thought the shoe got there. Then, through character creation, imaginative storytelling and strong conflicting objectives, they would write a ten-minute play about how the shoe got there. At some time during the play, the shoe would end up on the highway. As a final project, the plays would be presented in a dramatic reading session in our black box theatre.

The *Shoes on the Highway* project was a three to four week unit that I taught to my 11th and 12th grade playwriting class. There were 10 students in the class and the project took about 15 to 20 class periods, with 45 minutes of meeting time per class. The unit could be taught to an Acting One class or an English class. The students just need to be able to look at the picture of the shoe and imagine who would have worn the shoe, what kind of person would have thrown it onto the highway and what event or conflict would have resulted in the shoe ending up on the side of the road. In other words, the students need to be able to visualize, imagine and write.

The first thing I did was to choose three of my shoe pictures to show to the class. The pictures that I chose were a work boot in the snow, a tennis shoe in a ditch and a child's shoe on a patch of gravel. I chose these photos because I thought it would be easy for the students to imagine the conflict or the character in relation to these pictures. The pictures themselves were sharp and clear and the roadside was visible in each picture.

Before I showed them the first picture, we talked about seeing shoes on the side of the road.

“How many of you have seen a shoe on the highway or the side of a road?”

Every student had seen at least one shoe.

“What type of shoe was it?”

Tennis shoe, high heel, hiking boot.

“Specifically, where did you see the shoe?”

On ramps, country roads, parking lots and even on the island that divides the highway.

“How do you think they got there?”

They talked a bit about what might have happened to result in a shoe being thrown out a car window or falling off of a garbage truck. The discussion and brainstorming about possible scenarios got more imaginative the more we talked.

“What if a kid didn’t like the shoes his mom or dad bought him and chucked them out the window?”

“What if the shoes were an expensive present from an ex-spouse and the parent, in a fit of anger, knowing the ex was trying to buy the love of her children, threw them out the window?”

“What if there was a tragic car accident and someone’s shoe was left behind?”

During the discussion, there was no shortage of ideas.

Then I showed them the picture of the work boot in the snow. I asked them to write a few sentences on a sheet of paper about the work boot and how it got there. Students wrote their ideas on a sheet of paper. We did the same thing with the other two pictures, a tennis shoe in a ditch at the side of the road and a child’s shoe on a patch of gravel. We then shared the ideas that we had jotted down on paper individually, aloud in a class discussion. We talked about character, story line and possible conflicts.

For example, one student imagined that the tennis shoe in a ditch had been left behind after a car accident. She suggested a story about how a girl had been driving the family car too fast after an argument with her friend and had flipped the car over in the ditch. She wanted to start the play with the friend finding the shoe as she visits the highway to lay some flowers there in remembrance of her friend.

Another student took the picture of the child’s shoe and suggested that a 3-year old had flung it out the window.

“What was the driver doing?”

“The mom, who was busy with trying to stop an argument between her kids in a car, didn’t notice that her little kid had thrown the shoe out an open window when the car was travelling at a high speed.”

“Would the mom stop the car to go back for the shoe?”

“I don’t know.”

“That’s something to think about.”

I passed out copies of the following grid

1. Exposition:
2. Conflicting Objectives:
3. Initial incident:
4. Complications:
5. Crisis:
6. Climax:
7. Falling Action and Conflict Resolution:

The class was given an assignment to write a ten-minute play. The information on the grid and written character descriptions had to be used as the basis for the play. The play must show what part the shoe had in the conflict and how it could end up on the highway. After all, the point of the play was to answer the question, “How did the shoe end up on the highway.”

I brought out all of the shoe pictures (15 to 20) and passed them around the class. There were pictures of a sandal in the snow, a sneaker hanging on high-tension wires, a red dress shoe near a storm drain and a large black boot surrounded by old pop cans.

There are a few other requirements for this ten-minute play. I asked them to limit the number of characters in their play to 3 or 4 and to remember to give them strong conflicting objectives. The play did not have to take place in a car or on the highway but could be set anywhere as long as they answered the pivotal question about how the shoe got on the highway.

Writing a ten-minute play presents its own challenges. An excellent article to use as a guide for writing a ten-minute play is *10 Tools for Writing 10-Minute Plays* by Gary Garrison, published in *Dramatics* magazine, January ‘02. This humorous article has some serious advice on how to tackle this incredible, immediate art form made famous by the Actors Theatre Louisville.

The students had a week to finish the ten-minute play. When all the students finished their first draft, we spent the next three classes reading each ten-minute play out loud and critiquing it.

After one rewrite, the *Shoes on the Highway* plays were given a dramatic reading by my theatre students at a lunch time event in our Black Box theatre. The class was required to be in attendance to hear the audience's reaction to their plays. The audience, which packed the Black Box, also helped to critique the plays by answering a short questionnaire about the plays.

“Does the dialogue sound believable?”

“Are the characters well-defined?”

“What is the conflict?”

“Is the storyline easy to follow?”

“What was your favorite part?...your least favorite part?”

The young playwrights a lot of valuable feedback for their rewrites.

After this performance, the playwrights had another week to read through the comments and rewrite their plays. Then they turned them in for a grade. I tried to impress upon them that in the real world of playwriting, another couple performances would give them more opportunities to rewrite and perfect their plays. Because of time constraints, we only had one dramatic read-through.

I was amazed at the creativity of the classes' ten-minute plays! They range from the extremely sober to the completely wacky to absurdist and futuristic. “Monument” spoke of a teenager who was determined to leave one of her friend's shoes at the spot where she was killed in a car accident. Two spirits oversee the process and there is a surprise twist with the main character at the end of the play. “Bad Trip” “Common Soles”, “Baby Shoes” and “Worn In. Worn Out” all have the common thread of shoes being flung out the window of a car. The characters that do the flinging are different and unique, as are the reasons for the shoes ending up on the highway. “Midnight” is about the deceased father and grandfather of three female characters. His profession was a shoemaker. “At Burger King. In the Future”, is a play about a robot that goes crazy when his blind date doesn't work out and he flings his shoes out the door at Burger King. “The Truth about Love” is about a group of people who are about 2 inches in height. They find a shoe and want to use it as a home. These plays are absurdist and fantastical plays about love and, what else, shoes.

Since I've shared this idea of shoes on the highway with students, parents and friends, everyone tells me their stories about the shoes they've seen along the roadside. They have even thought about stopping their cars and taking a picture to add to my growing collection.

One parent shared a real life drama with me that involved some kids throwing shoes at a barefoot, homeless man in downtown Cleveland. The man, who was tired and hungry, just walked past the shoes and there they remained, on the roadside. What a character!

There's a story for every shoe on the highway. It's out there waiting to be discovered.

**Maureen Brady Johnson** is the author of *Shoes on the Highway: Using video and audio cues to inspire student playwrights* Heinemann Publishers July, 2005. This article was originally printed in *Teaching Theatre*, a publication of the Educational Theatre association.

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**Manhattan Oracles Develops**  
**by Robin Rice Lichtig, *et al***

About a year ago, members of ICWP in the New York City area experimented with forming a group for the purpose of reading our scripts out loud as they developed, and benefiting from each other's feedback. Half of the group met weekly during the day and half met in the evening. We named ourselves Manhattan Oracles. Gradually, the daytime group dwindled. Those who were left moved over to join the evening group. Flexibility – a key component of the group. (Members are: Liz Amberly, Karin Diann Williams, Laura Henry, Donna Spector, Chris Cragin Day and Robin Rice Lichtig. We have three non-ICWP members – men – for balanced feedback, and two actors who are both excellent cold readers and insightful commentators.)

There have been several bumps in the road as writers tried us out and we tried them out. We are very aware that what we have now is a special, balanced group with just the right number of members. We trust each other's opinions; challenge each other; keep each other "honest." All Oracles decisions are made by the group as a whole. We discuss the way we format feedback and try different approaches. We take turns moderating feedback for each other, and are very mindful of when a writer has had enough. Each of us is responsible for bringing actors in when our work is scheduled to be read. We maintain a file of headshots – and many in the group are good reader/actors. We don't limit the length of material which can be read like many groups do, but schedule a week at a time (full-length readings need to "book" a few weeks in advance).

I have belonged to many writing groups. In fact, when Oracles started, I belonged to five groups. Gradually, I let membership in all but one (creative non-fiction) of the other groups lapse, finding that Oracles was by far the most valuable. We plan to do readings at public venues like the Drama Book Shop, but we are not interested in producing ourselves. The focus is on developing the scripts.

– **Robin Rice Lichtig** (5/05)

*From Oracles member **Karin Diann Williams**:*

I think the most important factor in the success of Oracles is that we have gathered a group of writers who genuinely like and are interested in each other's work. For me, it is often as productive to think about and critique the work of others in the group as to have my own work read. I learn so much from everyone. It's not that all of us write in a similar style or share the same subject matter – we cover many different styles and genres – but all of us seem to be on the same wavelength most of the time. We are able to understand the artistic aims and intentions of the work we hear, and, even more importantly, to offer passionate criticism. This sometimes results in conflict. Even the most constructive criticism can sound harsh at times. But I think it's important to realize the harshest criticism stems from a belief in the fundamental possibility of the work, a belief that the work has a chance to be successful. I really look forward to hearing the work of group members, and watching it grow over time.

In the past I've participated in groups with very good writers whose work I just didn't respond to, and I don't think those experiences were nearly as productive.

*From Oracles member **Laura Henry**:*

The best thing about Oracles for me is hearing my words out loud without any fuss. I used to wait until I had a full (and coherent) draft before I even attempted to put a reading together. Waiting to get the play "good enough" for a reading takes me an awfully long time. Because Oracles is a casual gathering, I get an opportunity to hear the words out loud long before I'm ready for a more formal THIS IS A PLAY type of event. With Oracles, I've found that because I'm hearing it sooner, I'm actually writing it better sooner. The comments are always terrific and, magically, everyone reads well – also big pluses. Because I receive so much, I am actively aware of trying to give back. I think that's one of the things that makes the group work. It's easy to give when you always seem to get what you need.

*From Oracles member **Chris Cragin Day**:*

If I were to narrow my experience with Oracles down to one characteristic that has been most beneficial to me, I would probably say it is the diversity of perspectives, artistic taste, and talents. All of the writers in Oracles have a very distinct voice. Hearing all of them on a regular basis, and learning their peculiarities, has helped me to find my own distinctive voice as a writer, and also challenged me to experiment with other forms and styles of writing. This artistic diversity also means that each member gives feedback on my work from a very different perspective. I feel I am getting a whole spectrum of response to every piece I have read. And that is good, because that is what an audience is!

*From Oracles Member **Donna Spector**:*

Coming from years of a rigidly-controlled playwrights' workshop, I appreciate Oracles' supportive atmosphere and openness to experimentation. I would never have been able to bring my new play "Burying Mother" to my former workshop, because it intentionally breaks all the rules of a "well-made play."

In Oracles we have experimented with different ways of giving feedback and have found it most helpful to ask the playwright what he or she needs—answers to specific questions and concerns or just general comments. After each reading a moderator is chosen to lead the discussion. The playwright remains silent until the feedback session ends or until he or she has heard enough.

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**FLOWERS OF RED DIARY**  
by Eliza Wyatt

*Flowers of Red* will open August 5th at the Studio Theatre, Roman Eagle Lodge, Edinburgh, written by eliza wyatt, directed by Terry Adams with Catherine Lake and Maya Sondhi, through August 28th.

**Week One.**

Troubleshooter@edfringe.com have confirmed the forty word blurb, hooray, first step, we're in the catalogue! Anne Borthwick said she'd try and include my web-address, so warm feeling of personal support, unasked for but totally appreciated. *Flowers of Red* is a play based on (and inspired by) the martyrdom of Rachel Corrie who died trying to defend homes in Rafah, Gaza. It is a work of fiction, a meeting between a young Palestinian girl and an American volunteer, the night before the bulldozers arrive.

I have got my favourite director, Terry Adams, to direct and the Komedia to produce. I feel positive about the political aspect of the play and hopeful about it as an artistic endeavour.

Naturally I was devastated to learn, many months after I wrote the play, that the Royal Court in London are going to produce a docu-drama taken from Rachel Corrie's actual writing: a one-woman show in her own words. Then I stopped being an egotistical maniac and realized any mention of the situation in Gaza will further the cause of the innocent and now I can't wait to see the show.

**Week Two**

An amazing number of articles are suddenly being written about Rachel Corrie and Rafah, Gaza. I'm proud of this kind of publicity, interest in the cause by theatre people such as David Hare (whose journey to Israel I found so moving when he recounted it on stage) and Danial Day Lewis, recently risked life and limb by covering the situation for an article in *The Sunday Times Magazine*. A full frontal picture of Rachel Corrie, *The Guardian Magazine*, Friday and a very satisfying article by Katherine Viner. More information for those who want the real story can be found on her web-site, [www.RachelCorrie.com](http://www.RachelCorrie.com). The media seem to have got the message out for these Peace Heroes. Another American woman, who died in Iraq, Marla Ruzicka, memorialized in an article in *The Independent*. There could be articles still to come about Tom Hundall, the non-violent protester, shot in the head in an impromptu-style execution.

Sobering fear! Researching the Rachel Corrie web-site, found a picture of her printed in the *Seattle Weekly*, back at the time of her death, March 2003. She is wearing a headscarf, but it looks like they have blocked it in as black. A black headscarf makes her look like a Palestinian, or a Middle-Eastern woman perhaps married to a Moslem. In other words, not your heartthrob American girl. To have purposefully done this is

sabotage of a sort, and I hope I'm being paranoid. Go to the web-site and judge for yourself.

### **Week Three**

Overcome with emotion at seeing *My Name is Rachel Corrie* at the Royal Court. They put it in the small Jerwood Theatre upstairs, so of course it was completely sold out but I waited in line for the few tickets they release on the day of the performance. Before the performance, I bought the book, which is the actual words of Rachel Corrie but I would like to point out, not written by her for publication as a book. We do not know that she would have approved. Probably not the photograph on the cover of the book, which is Rachel at ten. An innocent child playing. As a feminist I have objections but Terry reminds me that even the Pope is commemorated with a boyhood picture. So it may be a current trend. I'd certainly recommend the book, her journal entries reveal a startlingly clear self-awareness. Anne Frank springs to mind.

Seeing the play explains the photograph. The play ends with a video clip of the real Rachel Corrie, not the actress. She is making her debut as an activist by reading a paper on the War on Poverty, some of which has got to be written by her mother. The play lasts about seventy minutes, begins with the young adult bouncing around in her dorm and ends with a depressed Rachel writing home from Gaza. Seeing the text come alive in the skillful hands of the actress, Megan Dodds, takes you straight to the heart of the action. You leave the theatre, not sure whether Sloan Square will be under mortar attack. I am awed by the sight of a young Antigone in action.

### **Week Four**

Excited about casting. Love seeing my characters come alive; Roberta and Samia in different physical and spiritual dimensions. An actress I particularly liked, has to be rejected on account of her age. It is close quarters, the Studio Theatre, That influences the casting. Terry Adams auditions every applicant politely and carefully and I compliment him on the smoothness of the casting process. 'Only professional', he says. But I have had all sorts of disastrous casting experiences. We have chosen Catherine Lake to play Roberta and Maya Sondhi to play Samia. Fortunately we were in agreement on both. They have the script, now to inform their agents of every last detail.

Sent the contracts from the Komedia back to Tim with a note of thanks for them having confidence in the piece. David Lavender, AD of the Komedia, was the one who handed the script to Tim Hawkins who runs the venue at Roman Eagle Lodge. Tim asked me what made me write the play besides the obvious one, I mentioned Antigone and Elia Suleiman's wonderful film "Divine Intervention". On a more personal note, I do not think it an accident I wrote the first draft while alone in New Hampshire campaigning for John Kerry.

## ROOMS OF OUR OWN edited by Shirley King

Having a room of one's own means the world to some playwrights. Others make creative use of alternatives. Mostly we're a flexible group of multi-taskers, carving time from our busy lives to write. But no matter where we write what truly matters is this: WE WRITE.

**MRINALINI KAMATH** works in her favorite cubicle or on a squishy couch in a writers' loft in Tribeca. "Since there is an art opening here every couple of months, there's also a good deal of interesting art on the walls, that, strangely, doesn't distract me. Unlike home, where there are piles of laundry and other things vying for my attention, I actually get a fair amount done here."

**THELMA GOOD** can write anywhere. "I have worked best in all sorts of places over the years. At a school desk that my mother gave me with a sloping lid, at my university desk, on numerous trains, several kitchen tables, in cafes and bars, at the beach, up a mountain, in a garden, a museum, at a dining table and when ill, or cold or unable to sleep – in bed."

**SANDRA de HELEN** claims the entire house as her writing space. Retired from her day job, Sandra's time is her own. "So, when I write, I write wherever I feel like it." Sandra has also written at writers' retreats, the beach, on mountains, in planes, trains, automobiles, museums, libraries, cafes, cemeteries; in bed, on the sofa and at the kitchen table.

"But truthfully, I miss those old days of needing my own precious writing space, when I carved it out of the attic or the basement or the family room and guarded it like a hungry crocodile against intruders. I am grateful to be able to still be writing and having new ideas, and I hope this continues for years to come."

**MARYJANE CRUISE** solved her writing crisis by changing the scenery. "With each new play I try to write in a different room...My first play, a musical, took me eight long years to complete. I wrote it in my den, which overlooked a beautiful garden. However, during the writing of that musical, I struggled for months on the lyrics to a song. I just couldn't nail them. So one morning I took my lap top into the laundry room, shut the door and literally didn't come out until dinner time. When I did re-enter I had the best song of my life written. So, sometimes the view doesn't have to be great!"

**ALLISON WILLIAMS** writes on a purple couch in a colorful setting. "I painted my office celery green with orange window frames and baseboards and closet doors, which I suspect I will be tired of in six months but in the meantime makes me feel warm and Spanish...I always write on the couch, with a blanket over my legs in the early morning and a cat on the blanket and the laptop making a warm spot on my thighs."

**KATHY BURKMAN** spent years writing at the kitchen table but now has her own space, and says she loves it. After Kathy's children moved out, her husband converted one bedroom of their home into an office.

**EVIE JONES** appreciates her large study with views over the woods and pond. "Nothing but duck noises and humming of two computers, with file cabinets, bookshelves, and easy access to the kitchen for tea. I never missed a deadline when I made my living at it, squashed in the corner of a noisy newspaper office. Either way, I've had it good. Words are my happiness."

**KATHY COUDLE KING's** laptop computer sits on a big oak roll top desk in her basement sanctuary. "Knotty pine walls, lots of books to keep me company, and a fireplace to keep me warm in the winter. It's the nicest room in the house, not necessarily the neatest...stacks and stacks of papers and books that need filing all around the floor."

**JASON GROTE** found writing in cafes too distracting and now works mostly at home on a Powerbook G4. He writes, "My wife (who is a fiction writer) just joined the Brooklyn Writers' Space ([www.brooklynwriters.com](http://www.brooklynwriters.com)) and loves it."

**JILL HUGHES** has a room of her own in her Chicago condo, sparsely furnished and copiously neat. "I am often distracted by email and the Internet so sometimes I wish I had something more isolated, but I am happy with the arrangement for now."

**LISA SOLAND** says she seems always to be searching for that perfect spot. "I like Aroma Cafe in Studio City...There is a room, a very special room that is midway through the building...and this is what I call 'The Writing Room.' There are always many writers in there...and many tiny, unique tables that rock and back forth when you place weight on them. I love it, actually. I always come away with something written, even if it's not what I've planned."

**MAUREEN BRADY JOHNSON** writes in her family room at five a.m. in longhand on legal pads. "I write until 9 when everyone else gets up. I take time out to watch the sunrise. When my legal pad is full, I transfer my writing to my computer in a small bedroom upstairs...I can get lost up there when I am writing because there is no clock to tell me what time it is...When I do break, I print off a copy of my fledgling work and badger my family for a quick reading and critique...then back to work."

**REBECCA NESVET** considers a notebook her space to write in, doing most of her writing in fits and starts of "dead time." "I keep the writing for the first complete draft of each whole play in one or two notebooks, so that scenes, research, sketches, etc., are in one place until I type the play up. (Yes, the downside is that if I were to lose a notebook, I'd lose the unique MS of the whole play.)"

**ROBIN RICE LICHTIG** has what she considers the most incredible writing room imaginable. “To get it, I had to bide my time until I could afford it (50+), leave my beloved gardening and painting in the country, not see my kids or grandkids as often as I’d like, and quell guilt over abandoning my dear husband in another state. I also gave up cooking, cleaning (pretty much), lawn mowing, pruning, house fix-it stuff and answering the doorbell.”

Robin writes in a New York City apartment with a huge room overlooking the Hudson River. “There’s a doorman who knows not to buzz me unless I’m expecting someone. I have more privacy and uninterrupted time to work than I ever had in a house in the suburbs or country. There is no one to break my train of thought but Mr. Turbo Cat – and he’s learning to leave me alone until late afternoon. I never thought I’d find myself here. I am in heaven!”

On the other hand, **SHARYN SHIPLEY** enjoys distractions. “I’m with Dickens. I work in the main room of my house with kids around when possible (they’re pretty grown up now) TV on, dog at my feet, cat under my fingers. The views out the windows are woods and sky. Papers drift around like snow. I write solely on a computer with many, many drafts, all numbered. I store things on a tiny thingymajig with a 124 mg capacity. I work best in places with lots of people and crowds, although I’m okay alone.”

**DIANE GRANT** usually writes in the bedroom formerly occupied by her college-student daughter. A friend’s negative opinion about the first draft of one of Diane’s plays made her lose heart for a while. But one day while working her box office job “I suddenly realized that I’d been taking myself far too seriously and started rewriting on the spot, with phones ringing and pizza delivery men knocking on the window and mothers discussing nannies and gardeners and the traffic jams on the 405. It was heaven and the best writing space I’ve found so far.”

**JO J. ADAMSON**’s writing space is truly a room of her own, a home office furnished with exactly what she needs in the way of inspiration. “I start work each morning at 7 o’clock. The house is quiet; the children are grown and my husband is working. Before I enter the first character on my computer, I greet the players in my mini light picture of ‘Rick’s Cafe.’ There James Dean, Humphrey Bogart, Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe share a place frozen in time. A safe harbor where they will never be a substance abuser, die of lung cancer, make a last desperate phone call to an aging actor or meet death in a 1955 Porsche Spyder.

“I turn my attention away from ‘Rick’s Cafe,’ (count my lucky stars that I have a supportive spouse, can live where I want to, and do the work that I love) and begin another writing day.”

For **VANESSA LeBOURDAIS**, who with her husband has a two year old daughter and also runs a theatre company, “the best place we write is in our theatre’s touring van, on the road. I hold the pen. That’s how we started – we met doing a children’s tour in a van and he helped me with my first play, which became our play, Gremlin. We’re thinking that whenever we want to write and don’t have a tour together, we should take a road trip.”

**TERRI FEBUARY** wishes someone would invent a waterproof notebook and ink. Her inspiration comes in the shower.

“If I can remember my creative thought long enough, I dry off very quickly ignore the wet frizzy hair dripping down my neck and go to my computer in a red room with cream colored trim and high ceilings. It reminds me of red velvet cake. “Windows look out at the driveway and the front yard full of azalea bushes and two ancient magnolias. Our daughter’s cat walks across my keyboard or lays in my chair behind me, which causes me to have better posture while writing so I don’t smush her.”

Terri also uses a loose leaf notebook with photos on the front and back cover of her children and family. “This is what I carry to workshops and the coffee house. It isn’t waterproof so I don’t allow it to shower with me.”

When **JUDITH PRATT** got her BA in theatre, “knowing it wouldn’t make me a living, I learned typing and speedwriting. Now they are essential to all my writing work.”

Judith writes in her study, with help from her two cockatiels, who sit on curtain rods and pad around on the floor. “The window above my machine looks out over the Ithaca Valley and hills...a window is essential to keep my energy flowing. For the endless gray winter, I have a giant light box behind me. To get good play material, I have to go somewhere else and write in my journal. The living room will do, but a cafe, a waiting room, a library, those are better. To actually write a script, however, I need to sit here.”

**NANCY GALL-CLAYTON** can and does write on anything – “paper napkins, notepads I keep in the car and nightstand drawer, tiny spiral notebooks that fit into pockets and fanny packs, and any other surface that can be written on and saved.” But she also enjoys writing on her computer.

Nancy’s third-floor writing room, in a house built in 1896, “has seven curtainless double-pane windows that let me see sky, treetops, and birds when I want to rest my eyes or look at nature.

In this room are “stacks and stacks of envelopes of every type, reams and reams of paper, mostly white, but half a dozen bright and cheerful colors, too, mailing labels,

ink cartridges, folders, and so on, all of it making me feel very writerly. I have two filing cabinets and a beloved glass-topped desk used by my mother, Mary Clayton Gall, who died in 1958 when I was 12.

“What have I left out? My rocking chair, a 1926 Singer sewing machine, and a 75-year-old ‘tavern table’ has 8 to 12 folders on it of pending projects. And of course, Beta, the sweet dog who sleeps contentedly in any room I occupy.”

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**DOING THEATRE WHEREVER YOU ARE**  
**by Brenda Shoshanna**

I've heard it said many times that a play isn't finished until it's performed, interacts with an audience, evokes and receives many responses and settles itself in the public's heart. Of course this is a dream all playwrights share. Unfortunately, however, many of the plays we love and labor over, many of the characters we live with, who come to us to write their stories, are never fully born. They do not see the light of day. They live in our minds and on our pages. We send them out to be read by literary managers, artistic directors and anyone else who wants to take a look. Even when letters arrive in return that are positive, expressing interest, there are usually many hurdles to the play actually coming to life.

There is an unspoken law in theater that it's difficult to get our plays on, that the opportunity to work is rare. Somehow unspoken laws, deeply accepted and believed have a way of turning into truth. I've accepted this situation for years now. I keep writing plays because I have to, because no matter what other work or writing I do, there is nothing more powerful and life changing for me than the live interaction between characters, coming to life on stage.

By and large I would say I've been fortunate. I worked for some years as playwright in residence at the Jewish Repertory Theater and had other plays produced elsewhere as well. Yet, years would pass when new plays were written and not see be staged. Even plays that won an award, would often slip quietly into the draw. Or, perhaps a play would have a reading, sometimes a few performances, and then fade out into the night. Needless to say this is disheartening. It can easily take the energy to do this work away.

I actually never planned to turn all this around and do what I am doing now. The idea came to me quite unexpectedly. A young man called after having seen an article I'd written about theater and told me about a one man show he was writing and performing. He was taking it to neighborhood Jewish Centers he told me. This was an observant young man who would perform only for men. He asked if I knew a good coach for him. I was taken aback. What a wonderful idea, I told him. I used to do that as a young girl, just write plays, act in them, direct them and get the neighborhood Y to give us the auditorium for a Sunday afternoon.

"That's what I have in mind," he murmured. "Do you think it will be hard?"

"Of course not," I encouraged him. "In fact I don't see any problem at all. It will be wonderful. People will be so happy to see your show."

I thought back to my early days when I did exactly that. It wasn't hard then. It was natural, fun, exciting. There was always some place we could put the show up. People in the neighborhood were always happy to spend some time seeing something live right at their doorstep. And admission was affordable. Twenty-five cents in those days. What a far cry from today. This young man took me back to the ease and delight of "doing" theater, doing all of it naturally.

I searched for a coach for him. We talked some more. I wanted to greatly encourage him. I didn't want anything get in the way of his vision. I remembered, I used to be like that. As we talked, I told him about a one woman show I'd written a couple of years ago that got a wonderful response from theaters, but no production.

Then, of course, it hit me. Why not? What's the problem? There's no problem if you don't make one. Act in it yourself. Get some direction. Then just make few flyers, make a few calls. Go to where the audience is waiting. Go to neighborhood centers, synagogues, and churches, Y's. Why not? Do it for fun.

Some of the old excitement started returning. I can just perform this anywhere I like. Why do I have to travel the old, trodden paths of theater submissions? Energy started to come to me. I stood up tall. I would perform my own play.

I hadn't acted for many years, but began performing the play for anyone who wanted to see. First time, I did it in my apartment when some guests arrived. They liked it a lot. I was encouraged. I did it alone, fine tuned details. I did it again unexpectedly at a friend's party, just mentioned I was doing a one woman show, was anyone interested in seeing some of it? People were excited to see it. Okay, the play went on. They thanked me so much for making the party so special, for giving them such a treat. This was amazing. Soon, I realized, there would be no stopping me.

I got a couple of offers then to come to neighborhoods and do the play there. Great. It's not hard to be produced, I realized. Theater is wherever you are. There are no impediments to performance, except what we put there. There are Y's, churches, synagogues, schools, colleges, senior residences, homeless shelters. Who wouldn't love a play that came right to the door?

Before I went further, I decided to find a director to help me fine tune the process. I found someone wonderful. We are in rehearsal now. The entire experience is not only thrilling, it frees me, it frees the play, it puts the power back in my own hands and opens endless vistas for the play. It also brings theater to so many who need, love and want it, but for whom it may be inaccessible now, for many reasons. After the play, I will offer a live discussion about it. By the way, the play is called Where Prayers Come True. It takes place both on the Upper East Side of Manhattan and in a small, ancient synagogue, hidden on a side street near by.

The magic and joy of theater is back in my life. The sense of endless possibilities and endless people to reach. Actually, it's all so simple. You can do this too. Why not try and see?

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**THE PLAY DOCTOR**  
by Rebecca Ritchie

The Play Doctor is in! All playwrights are welcome to submit questions on structural and craft issues for diagnosis by **Rebecca Ritchie, JD**, at [rtritchie@att.net](mailto:rtritchie@att.net).

*Disclaimer:* Please note that the Play Doctor did her residency in The Well-Made Play. All comments reflect that bias.

**Dear Play Doctor:**

*I'm writing a play in which the central character, Centralia, dates men who are missing "the relationship gene." She falls for an engaged guy, F'Ance, the son of an Irish pig farmer, who is planning to marry the boss's daughter, Frigidita, for money and security. I have to find a way to turn F'Ance into a decent guy.*

*Should I have F'Ance leave Frigidita at the altar to marry Centralia? Or should I have him go through the ceremony for all the wrong reasons?*

Dear Playwright:

It's a little hard to diagnose your play, because all you've given is the barest sketch. There's a guy and two girls in some kind of a triangle, but you haven't fleshed out any of their needs or desires.

Start with Centralia, whom you've identified as the central character. I'm perplexed. Centralia has no decision to make or dilemma to work out. That's the definition of a central character.

Examine the situation you've posed. Only F'Ance faces a choice: Whether to marry Centralia or go through with an unwanted nuptial with Frigidita. But we don't know anything about F'Ance. Aside from his heritage as the son of a pig farmer (Please!!!), who is he? What does he want from life? What does he need in a relationship with a woman? Does he really want a woman, or is there something more alluring back on the farm? Is he domineering? Kind? Affectionate? Bullying? Self-effacing? Strong-willed? Allergic to ham?

We need to know the same things about Frigidita and Centralia. Who are these women? What are their backgrounds? What do they do for a living? Would either of them have a baby toe removed surgically to fit into a four inch heel? You need a back history for each character and real emotions and desires that underpin the conflicts: Between F'Ance and Centralia, Centralia and Frigidita, Frigidita and F'Ance, F'Ance and, well, we'll leave the pigs out of this.

With only three characters in the play, each one needs a choice or decision to make – and the choice must be between two mutually exclusive paths. Frigidita may want a man who is warm, compassionate, and empathetic, the polar opposite of her cold, demanding and unresponsive father. She may be torn between the need for F'Ance's

attention and comfort, on one hand, and on the other, the security of her father's material wealth augmented by his sly, albeit virtually indecipherable, sense of humor.

Centralia may want F'Ance only because she can't have him, since he's engaged to Frigidita. Perhaps she is torn between the fear of commitment and the need for connection. You can bring in her childhood in a foster home in Irkutsk, where she was neglected emotionally by a couple of geriatric Eastern Siberian automobile parts assembly plant workers who needed to keep Centralia healthy – but could not muster the energy to love her – to insure their monthly child support payment from the government.

Centralia loved these two bland old illiterate, inarticulate cognitively impaired and pathologically dowdy foster parents, but she received no return on her considerable emotional investment and is frightened that the same lovelessness will mar her relationship with F'Ance.

Each character must face a choice based on his or her history and deeply felt emotions. The decisions of the subsidiary characters must drive the decision-making of the central character, F'Ance. When, for example, Frigidita presses F'Ance to marry her despite a bad case of chicken pox that very likely will leave her sterile, F'Ance realizes that Frigidita never really wanted children, since they will detract attention from her, only her. And when Centralia confesses that, although she loves F'Ance, she can only marry him if he is well and truly out of reach, F'Ance determines to fight for Centralia's love, overcoming her insecurity and vulnerability, and promising a lifetime of wedded bliss in bunk beds from Ikea.

Without a clear understanding of the needs and desires of the three characters, the choices they face, and how they are torn between two mutually exclusive paths, you haven't got conflict, and you'll never have a play.

Go back to the keyboard, Oh, Playwright, and start building a convincing, emotionally sturdy cast of characters.

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## OPPORTUNITIES

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### THE WELLS INTERNATIONAL ONE-MINUTE PLAY FESTIVAL

*Sixth Annual International One-Minute Play Festival, Wells BC 7:00 Friday, July 29th 2005*

The ArtsWells Festival of all Things Art ([www.imarts.com](http://www.imarts.com)) is proud to present the Sixth Annual International One-Minute Play Festival, and is looking for entries. There is a cash prize of \$75 for first place entry, \$50 for second and \$25 for third. There is also an eventual plan to publish a collection of the plays from this year's and previous festivals. We hope to publish all entries, although subject to the wishes of the entrant.

Last year saw a huge increase in entrants from across North America and that is evident in the list of winners from last year's event. Notable entrants included Academy Award Winning Director Arthur Hiller, Illustrator of the Cartoon Strip Shermans Lagoon; Jim Toomey, Classical Guitarist; Liona Boyd; The Canadian Comedian Ensemble The Arrogant Worms; Author of Hard Core Logo Michael Turner, and the list goes on.

We have four entry formats: Silent, Performed, Video/Audio and Excuses, all are eligible to win the aforementioned prizes. The only stipulation for you, the author, is that it must be able to be performed or read in one minute. This year's festival will also feature a new category of entry, Excuses, which will include letters of excuse why you can't enter a play. Like the other entry formats this will boil down to creativity and execution and will be judged on letterhead, composition and originality. This means that the subject matter and manner of the play or excuse itself is entirely open to personal interpretation.

All entries to be performed must be submitted by the night of July 29th, 2005. Entries may be submitted via videotape, audiotape, e-mail, or in person but must be available on the night of July 29th in Wells, BC. Silent entries and excuses should be submitted by July 22nd, though some exceptions might apply, all entries will be judged upon the performance night. Winners will be contacted by telephone or e-mail by August 5th, 2005. There is a \$5.00 fee per entry.

All entrants shall receive a copy of the eventual publication for their own records, and the play's performance rights shall remain privy to that of the author. Anyone interested in submitting an entry in a form other than that of print are encouraged to do so. Those submissions shall be kept in the archives of the International One-Minute Play Festival to be drawn upon for inclusion in a future documentary based upon this continuing festival.

Entries and the \$5.00 entry fee may be submitted by mail to:

International One-Minute Play Festival  
P.O. Box 114  
Wells, BC V0K 2R0  
Canada

Or by e-mail to: [oneminuteplay@hotmail.com](mailto:oneminuteplay@hotmail.com)

Questions and inquires can be forwarded to the above addresses. Thank you for your time and consideration, please forward this document along to any parties that feel may be interested in participating in this event. For info on past plays go to: <http://geocities.com/oneminuteplay/>.

Yours truly,

Paul Crawford and Charles Ross  
The International One Minute Play Festival

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**SHORT & SWEET MELBOURNE 2005  
AND SHORT & SWEET SYDNEY 2006**

*Entries now open for Short & Sweet Melbourne 2005 and Short & Sweet Sydney 2006.*

Short & Sweet, the largest Short play Festival in the world, is now accepting entries for its Melbourne Festival in November-December 2005 at the Arts Centre, Melbourne and Sydney Festival in February-March 2006 at the Seymour Centre and Newtown Theatre.

We are looking for 60 plays for Melbourne 30 of which will receive full productions and 30 more which will be given public readings or one off performances as part of Best of the Rest.

For Sydney we are looking for 120 plays, 80 of which will receive full productions and 40 more which will be given public readings or one off performances as part of Best of the Rest.

Entries received by Friday August 12th will be considered for both Melbourne and Sydney Festivals. Entries received by Friday October 14th will be considered for the Sydney Festival only. No further entries will be accepted after that date.

There are two ways to enter: Playwrights may enter a script (as many as you like) or Independent Theatre Companies may enter a script or idea accompanied by a production team of director and cast.\*

For more information on how to enter online or download entry forms to enter by post visit our new website at [www.shortandsweet.org](http://www.shortandsweet.org)

(\*Conditions apply for Independent Theatre Company entries. Please check out website for more details.)

### **THE PATSYLU MUSIC FUND**

*If you are planning a music project there is a fund operated by Open Meadows*

The PatsyLu Music Fund will consider women in music projects from women who are composers, music educators, musicologists, performers (or in performing groups). The mission of the Fund is to seek out women's music projects from women of ethnic, cultural, and racial diversity and especially the work of lesbians.

For more info see: <http://www.openmeadows.org/special.htm>.

Please note that emails sent to Open Meadows send an automated spam-blocker reply. You need to fill in an online form saying who you are and why you are contacting them.

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### **THE JIM HENSON FOUNDATION**

Since 1982, the Jim Henson Foundation has made over 350 grants to 179 different artists for the development of new works of contemporary American puppet theater. Each year the number of applicants and the scope of their artistic vision continue to grow. We are proud to support the extraordinary work of so many fine artists. If you are interested in learning more about our granting program, visit our Grant Guidelines section.

International collaborations are considered.

To read more go to <http://www.hensonfoundation.org>

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## THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA

*Subject: Science and Technology Playwrighting Competition*

University of California launches International Competition for plays about Science and Technology with \$10,000 Prize. The Professional Artists Lab and the California NanoSystems Institute at the University of California, Santa Barbara announce a collaborative effort, the first International STAGE Script Competition, open to plays about science and technology. The winning script in the Scientists, Technologists and Artists Generating Exploration (STAGE) competition will receive \$10,000 USD; a staged reading with a cast of professional actors and simultaneous participation in an awards event with distinguished professionals from the worlds of theatre, film, science and technology; and the opportunity to go through the Professional Artists Lab's development process, which includes access to advice and guidance from professional theatre and film artists as well as experts in the fields of science, engineering and technology. Scripts will be judged by an esteemed panel of jurors from both the arts and sciences. Thus far, the judges include two Nobel Laureates: Dr. David Gross (Physics, 2004) and Dr. Alan Heeger (Chemistry, 2000). Additional judges to be announced shortly. Submitted plays must explore scientific and/or technological stories, themes, issues or events. (The competition is not open to plays written in the genre of science fiction.) Entries must be postmarked by Dec. 15. The winning play will be announced on June 15, 2006. For details about the competition and submission guidelines, visit <http://www.cnsi.ucsb.edu/stage>

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### MA-YI THEATER COMPANY

Ma-Yi Theater Company is committed to developing new work, and providing a focused and supportive environment that allows writers to explore new ideas and take creative leaps. Selected works are given 2 to 3 week rehearsals in New York City with full cast, director, and dramaturge. During this time, the writer is actively engaged in refining his or her work through the processes of discovery and collaboration. The workshop culminates in a staged reading that may or may not be open to the public. Ma-Yi Theater will support the writer's continued journey with additional workshops and readings until the work is deemed ready for production.

<http://www.ma-yitheatre.org/playwrights.html>

At the core of our mission is a commitment to new writers. We look for original, unproduced plays by U.S.-based writers of Asian descent.

Please send a letter of inquiry only that includes the following information:

1. A brief synopsis of the play
2. Number of characters
3. Past Workshop/Reading history
4. Any encumbrances on the work, rights of first offers, accreditation, third party royalties, etc.
5. Playwright brief biography and/or resume
6. Playwright contact information

Please send all materials to:

Play Development  
Ma-Yi Theater Company  
520 Eighth Avenue, Suite 309  
New York, NY 10018

## NEW (AND RECENTLY RETURNING) MEMBERS OF ICWP

Lisa Soland	CALIFORNIA	USA
Jodi Schiller	CALIFORNIA	USA
Heather Cloud	CALIFORNIA	USA
Terri Febuary	CALIFORNIA	USA
Joanna Piucci	NEW YORK	USA
Jon Oak	NEW JERSEY	USA
Jacquelyn Singleton	VIRGINIA	USA
Judith Hancock	NEW YORK	USA
Maureen Brady Johnson	OHIO	USA
Heather Van Doren	OHIO	USA
Hortense F. Gerardo	MASSACHUSETTS	USA
Elena Naskova	WASHINGTON	USA
Marlene Shelton	CALIFORNIA	USA
Marie-Jeanne Pense	ARIZONA	USA
Kim Merrill	NEW YORK	USA
Kathleen M. Buckstaff	ARIZONA	USA
Judy Carlson Hulbert	WASHINGTON	USA
Diane Swanson	GEORGIA	USA
Scarlett Ridgway Savage	NEW HAMPSHIRE	USA
Linda Thomas	RHODE ISLAND	USA
Marilyn B. Montgomery	MARYLAND	USA
Michael Wright	OKLAHOMA	USA

Please join us in warmly welcoming all these writers.

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

To support women playwrights around the world by:

- bringing international attention to their achievements
- encouraging production of their plays, translation, publication, and international distributions of their works
- providing means for communication and contact among the sister community of the world's women dramatists assisting them in developing the tools of their craft, in determining their own artistic forms, and in setting their own critical standards encouraging scholarly and critical examination and study of the history and the contemporary work and concerns of women playwrights
- supporting their efforts to gain professional equality, and to express their own personal, artistic, social, and political vision without censorship, harassment, or personal danger

More information about ICWP at:  
[www.internationalwomenplaywrights.org](http://www.internationalwomenplaywrights.org)