



Quarterly Newsletter of the International Centre for Women Playwrights

July 2006

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Watch for the next issue of SEASONS later this fall, with more articles and columns...and submission opportunities as well!

Greetings from the Editor

From Where I Sit

Dear ICWP members and friends,

Here in the northeastern United States, the "dog days" of August are upon us. Unfortunately they started a bit early this year. Talk about a long, hot summer! I hope that wherever you may be, you're staying cool or warm and that this issue finds you in a good place with your work, whether it's writing, rewriting, or pre-writing.

I'm proud to be assuming Editorship of *Seasons*, as of this issue. There have been many Guest Editors doing wonderful jobs, and I'm delighted to have been entrusted with your newsletter.

The centerpiece of this issue is a wonderful journal contributed by Ellen Lewis about five days at the Great Plains Theatre Conference. While at GPTC she heard her play read, met several sister-listers and attended panel discussions with some of her heroes. Following her delightful account are notes from an Edward Albee master class she had the good fortune to attend during the conference.

Also in these pages you'll find an introduction to the new ICWP Board, a truly international lot with members from six countries (and counting!); a welcome from new president Paddy Gillard-Bentley; and Sandra Hosking's account of following her work all over the U.S.A. as she flies around attending performances of her plays. I would like to send out a big THANK YOU to all of the contributors!

We do realize that this is a compact issue. However, we've got a few exciting things "in the works" for the next issue. As always, we encourage you to propose ideas or just submit pieces for consideration going forward. Photos are always a welcome addition!

Editing this issue has been a wonderful experience and I'm sure you'll find something in it of interest. Please feel free to e-mail with any comments. Happy reading! And may we all enjoy much success in the coming SEASON.

Rachel Rubin Ladutke
Editor, *Seasons*
Weehawken, New Jersey

August, 2006

Message from the President

I am so lucky to have the opportunity, at this time, to be your President. This board is vibrant and exciting and chomping at the bit. This year, we have representation from USA, Canada, Scotland, Romania, Germany and Australia. The diversity can only prove to be beneficial. There are several projects already in the works. Some are brand new, scathingly brilliant ideas, while others are projects from the past, about to be raised from the ashes, as it were.

Marie-Jeanne Pense is working on re-establishing Her-Rah, with a different name, Jenni Munday, our secretary is exploring options for an online playwrights event, Margaret McSeveney, who has put so much into this organization, is always busy with new things. Mags, as our Communications Director, is working to integrate the new ICWP Membership Area into the ICWP website; publishing the ICWP Education Resource online securely and continued work on database development and maintenance. Jill Elaine Hughes, aside from being the Treasurer, is working on strategies to encourage theatre companies that support and develop work by women playwrights. As Literary Director, Jodi Schiller will concentrate on getting the monologue and short plays books published, and also, she is working on a playwright mentoring project. Mary A. Donahoe is on the Ohio Retreat Committee with myself and Alan Woods. Lucia Verona is planning, and seeking funding for, an incredible playwright's event in Romania. This is really going to be amazing! Rachel Rubin Ladutke is going to make sure that *Seasons* comes out filled with information and ideas.

And as if that weren't enough...in addition to all this going on, we have the services of several non-board people who continue to support ICWP in varied and creative ways. Laura Henry converts to HTML and publishes the Newsletter on the ICWP website. Allison Williams will continue working on 501(c)3 process with the lawyer. Joanne Conger has been wonderful in keeping up the contact list. I can't tell you how often I refer to those emails to find someone! Sarah Bewley has done a great job as the List Administrator. Thanks are also due to Alan Woods, for keeping the archives for future generations, and for creating and coordination the Ohio Retreat. As for Linda Eisenstein...for most of us, she is the first person you want to contact, when you need to know...well, almost anything.

To all of you, a huge thank you for your continued service, and dedication to ICWP.

And to all members...thank you from all of us on the Board of Trustees for your continued participation and support. Hang on, I think this is going to be a fabulous year.

Your President,
Paddy Gillard-Bentley

**A PLAYWRIGHT REPORTS BACK FROM THE FIRST ANNUAL
GREAT PLAINS THEATRE CONFERENCE
by Ellen Lewis**

Who am I?

Ellen Lewis. I'm from Oregon, now living in Santa Monica, California. Member of Moving Arts Theatre Company, the Alliance of Los Angeles Playwrights and the Dramatists Guild. I have always written, it seems like, but have been seriously pursuing playwriting, specifically, for the last three years. I have lots to learn.

Tuesday, May 30, 2006 – DAY ONE

Travel karma is good today.

I'm going to the First Annual Great Plains Theatre Conference (GPTC). I am a playwright.

The theatre conference goes for a week, but I'm catching four good days in the middle. The two events that I'm looking forward to most include my Play Lab, where Kokopelli Theatre Company will be reading the first 20 pages of my full-length play *Reading to Vegetables*; and a special playwrights workshop taught by Mr. Edward Albee. He is worth going half-way across the country to learn from for a few hours.

To distract myself, I am thinking about what I want from this journey. I guess I would have to say, my goal is to move myself forward in the art, craft and business of playwriting—and to have a great time hanging out with other people who love making plays. I'll be glad for a few inches forward in any of those areas; I don't need miles.

Playwriting is sometimes a lonely business. Even when you belong to a writing workshop, and e-mail discussion groups like the Playwrights Binge List and the International Centre for Women Playwrights (ICWP), the biggest part of playwriting is sitting alone in front of your computer. I belong to a theater company, which allows me to connect in wonderful ways with actors and directors, and the characters I create are good company, too, in a literarily schizophrenic way, but going to something like this lets me know that I'm part of a real community, too—a playwriting community—which is a very reassuring thing. It's always nice to know you're not alone.

I flew into Omaha at around 6pm. My two roomies, Amy Lynne, a playwright from Cleveland, and Cheryl, an actor from Los Angeles, weren't in the room, but had left me a key, so I dropped my bags and Dale Duko, an actor friend from L.A. who happens to be passing through town, picked me up so we could have dinner. Old town is quaint—cobblestone streets and horse-drawn carriages.

Dale was full of stories about Emily Mann, whose presentation he attended during the day. Years ago, he worked at the theatre that she is now artistic director of, and he is familiar with her work. He loved it! He met Mr. Albee, got a tote bag, and said that I

was going to love the Conference—everyone was friendly, and it's all much more intimate than filmic gatherings that he's attended.

Back at the hotel, my roomies still had not returned, so I gingerly went about changing the room around to fit my rollaway bed, trying not to move their things around too much. Met them an hour later, and they're so nice! They updated me on how things had gone so far, and said that Judith was going to give us a ride in the next morning.

Wednesday, May 31, 2006 – DAY TWO

I'm here, I found Omaha, and I'm having a wonderful time.

We continental breakfasted at the hotel, then I got to see Judith. If you're not on the ICWP yet, you should be. Such kind, warm-hearted people!

Omaha is lovely, from what I've seen so far. Lots of grass and trees and water (and how can you go wrong with that?). The campus is spacious, all red brick buildings and white painted trim. I'm sitting on the grass under a tree right now, writing this and checking my e-mail using their wireless.

I checked in, and received a lovely tote bag with all kinds of goodies in it, including a printed schedule and t-shirt. I bought Edward Albee's biography, *A Singular Life*, and am looking forward to having him sign it—and reading it. There are all kinds of wonderful plays in the world, but I've never met one I liked better than *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. I admire Mr. Albee's work very much.

The mornings consist of Play Labs—readings of selected plays by theater companies, then feedback from panelists and the audience. I attended *Razorback* by Forrest Attaway (from Texas) at 9 a.m., and liked it a lot. A one-act with both punch and real, complicated characters who talk like people talk—about (in my mind) a novelist grieving his own inability to move forward after an early success.

I was up next, at 10 a.m. Got to meet Kari Mote, Artistic Director of Kokopelli in Anchorage, who was directing the reading of the first 20 minutes of my full-length play, *Reading to Vegetables*. She's splendid, and we talked about a few things she wanted to cover with me—but I trust her judgment, and told her so. She and I have been e-mailing about the play for several months, and I feel like she really connects with the piece.

The reading went well. All the actors (including playwright Forrest Attaway, who played Tom Linkowski to a T) did a great job. It is a memory play as well as a mystery play (and an investigation of medical ethics and personal responsibility), and I felt like the actors brought the interweaving of past and present across very well. The panelists and audience seemed to like it too, which is very gratifying. Good response all around—and several people asked me if I'd e-mail the whole script to

them, so they could find out what happens! Always a good thing, even if you aren't writing a mystery. I know that I have some work to do on the second act of the play, especially the ending, but this was a great spur to action for me to sit down, when I get home, and do that work that's waiting for me.

Next...Bill Campbell's reading of *The Twenty Year Package*. Also talks about medical ethics—in the near future, a couple has to choose the genetic “package” that they want for the child they are about to give birth to. It is a 10-minute play, and I thought that it did everything that a 10-minute play “should” do—audience reaction was strong and vociferous, and it clearly got people thinking about the implications of the evolution of genetic “medicine” in a way that was entertaining to watch. Good job, Bill!

Ate lunch with Rox and her husband, and Judith and Amy. Rox is another ICWP gal. She came to my reading, gave me a welcome-to-Omaha gift bag, and over lunch talked about her experience directing Mr. Kopit's musical *Nine*, which went up on Saturday evening. She makes theater here in Omaha, and is very welcoming and great to talk with.

Afternoons consist of panels and presentations. First, a conversation with our honored playwright Arthur Kopit, who was friendly and informative about his writing process and experiences with writing both plays and musicals. I liked what he had to say about structure—framing a play (and he studied architecture, so he ought to know) by finding out what the character needs. I liked what he had to say about craft, and... he made me want to try to write a musical, which I've actually thought about before. Yipes. This business gets its hooks into a person, doesn't it? So many plays to write, so little time.

I didn't attend the Long Play Lab in the afternoon, but sat under a tree instead, decompressed, wrote, and called my folks.

Just got back from the evening's presentation—Patricia Neal. Award winning actress of stage and screen. She is quite a lady—been through a lot, but maintains a good sense of humor and a strong drive to keep doing what she loves. One thing she said that sticks with me: “I'll keep acting as long as I keep standing—and then I'll do it sitting and lying down.” That's the kind of drive that makes you a career. She's an inspiration.

Drinks and dessert after. Talked with Harold, who works at a college in Iowa, teaching theater. Talked with Forrest a bit, and we may exchange plays tomorrow. Got a picture with my Los Angeles actor friend, Kim Estes, who's one of the Play Lab panelists. Listened happily to the sax player play and mingled. It was all at the Jocelyn Museum, a lovely place. I have had two gin and tonics, and am ready for a nice sleep now. It's been a good day.

Thursday, June 01, 2006 – DAY THREE

What a full day it's been! Amy, Cheryl and I ate continental breakfast at the hotel this morning, then headed out to the Conference at 8:30 a.m. with Judith.

The first Play Lab I saw was *The Scandalmakers*, by Myla Lichtman-Fields. It was about Mary Shelley, and the inspiration for Frankenstein. Percy Shelley was a character, as was Lord Byron. Lots of sexy love triangle/lust triangle stuff!

For the second Play Lab, at 10 a.m., I went to *Between Dream*, by Laura Morrissey Foronda. I liked it! A teacher, who is dying, thinks back to what led him to the place he's in now. Monologues by him move into monologues by one of his students, her mother, and another teacher who works with him. I thought that breaking up the monologues with scenes of dialogue between these characters would strengthen the play, but it was quite compelling already.

At 11 a.m., Amy and I met up with Tim, Kim and Dawn and walked across the street to Mr. C's restaurant. We'd heard it's a place to see, and it ~was~ awfully funny. Kitsch, kitsch, kitsch! Everywhere! Crazy Christmas lights and cheesy decorations. Old style American food menu. I had a cheeseburger. Amy and Kim both had the deep fried ravioli. I'd never heard of deep frying ravioli! They also had "jello with whipped cream" on the menu. Regional differences are fun to note for a writer!

We made sure we were back in time to attend the Conversation with Mark Lamos at 12:30. He's a director who has worked with Mr. Albee quite a few times, including on the revival of *Seascape* in New York. He originally went to school to become a violinist, but then ended up acting, and then directing. He was Artistic Director of Hartford Playhouse for 17 years, doing lots of classical stuff, but now works freelance (is that what you call it?), working all over. He directs a lot of opera as well as plays. He is charming, a great talker and storyteller, and seems very much like the director he is—capable and... well, direct!

It was a fascinating hour. Two things I took with me particularly came up in the Q&A. I said that I was a playwright interested in directing, not because I want to be a director (I don't), but because I thought I would learn something from the experience—and what advice would he give to someone like that. He said he didn't think I needed to direct, and that as a writer, I'd probably just find it annoying. Judith asked him a great question about stage directions, and he talked about them being very important—a blueprint for a director. He said that these are the secrets a writer tells a director.

He told a wonderful story (which I shan't be able to relate nearly as well as he shared it) about sitting beside Mr. Albee during a read-through rehearsal of his play. He knew that Mr. Albee would have issues with some things, so he had his assistant stand by with his finger on the place in the script where they were all the way through. At one point, one of the actors bellowed a line, and Mr. Albee let out a great sigh. But Mr. Lamos immediately turned to his assistant and pointed out to Mr. Albee

his own direction in the script—which said, “with a voice like thunder.” Mr. Albee wrote on the script “the memory of thunder.”

Next was Edward Albee’s Master Class for playwrights. I took notes, and will attempt to write them up later, as coherently as I can, and share them. What I’ll say now is this. There are two times I have found myself thinking—yes, I am a playwright. The first was when the workshop production of my full-length play *Infinite Black Suitcase* opened at Moving Arts—looking at all those wonderful, talented people making my play, which had become our play, happen, and hearing the world I had created come to life. The second was sitting there today, learning from the man who wrote my favorite play. I was teary-eyed, which is silly. And humble, which is appropriate. And happy. This IS what I want to do with my life.

I’m tired now, and it’s late—so I’ll write up the rest of today tomorrow, if I can!

Friday, June 2, 2006 – DAY FOUR

Great waves of theater are crashing over me. It is a marvelously generative devastation.

What to say? I haven’t finished with yesterday yet, and today was so full I couldn’t breathe or call my mother.

I believe that the next thing yesterday afternoon, after Mr. Albee’s Master Class, was the Long Play Lab. David Krespe’s play *Men Dancing* was read. I liked the title already, before the play even started. I love to dance. It is a play about family grief, secrets and devastation, all of which I write about and am compelled to read about, so he had me there, too. It is not a perfect play, but I found the first twenty minutes absolutely fabulous, and much in the rest to like. The father of the main character suffered from aphasia, as a result of a stroke—and as someone who has lost three beloved grandparents to Alzheimers, his challenges, and those of his family members, resonated.

The panelists talked about streamlining the play, and about the difficulty of writing a play that is very tangled up in your own stuff. Mr. Albee said that the first play of many playwrights is a (too?) personal play which they must write, learn from, leave and move on from. (I am not looking at my notes now, so this is the broadest of interpretations of what he said.) I think *that Infinite Black Suitcase* is this play for me. It has all my garbage in it, every piece of my aching heart, and I think that it will never be a perfect thing. (I know, horrible word to use, “perfect.”) It’s my red guts on the white page, and that’s not really pretty to see. I don’t think I have the ability to get far enough from it to craft it into a finished, polished piece. That doesn’t make me any less proud of it—but I do think that it’s good that I’m letting it be its flawed self and have moved on to write more plays. Writing it saved me, and I learned from it, and now I can go on. The panel of judges for the long plays are: Edward Albee, Mac

Wellman, Arthur Kopit, Glynn O'Malley and Mark Lamos. The lucky playwrights who were selected for the Long Play Labs are also very brave.

We ate Persian food after and Kyle Bostian, an expert on Mr. Kopit who presented work about him at the Conference, joined us. He's very nice! We grilled him about Mr. Kopit's work and his own over our grilled Tandoori.

Between the Long Play Lab running long and none of us playwrights being able to conquer math and figure the bill at the restaurant in any reasonable amount of time, we were a few minutes late for the evening's presentation, held at Omaha's new Holland Center (outside of which two swans are lovingly nesting). They kindly seated us anyway, so we peered down from the gallery seats at a scene from *Seascape* by Edward Albee (Wonderful! I have a terrible writerly crush and hero worship for the man, which I suspect I've already given away to you all. But Emily Mann said she would get very friendly with Chekhov if she could, then blushed and fanned herself, so I'm not the only one.) Next was a scene from Mac Wellman's *Ambrose Bierce* play, which was not so much my cup of tea (but I quite liked tonight's play by him, done at the Blue Barn, so stay tuned). Then a monologue from Emily Mann's *Still Life* (nice – and I want to read the whole thing). Finally, a scene from Arthur Kopit's *Oh, Dad, Poor Dad, Momma's Locked You in the Closet and I'm Feeling So Sad* which was very, very funny. We must have found the hotel afterwards. We must have brushed our teeth and fallen into bed. Tomorrow afternoon, as late as I can push it before running to the airport, I go home. Good night!

Saturday, June 03, 2006 – DAY FIVE

3:30pm

I didn't think I was going to make it to the airport. Nervousness! Palpitations! I gave myself plenty of time, I thought, to call a cab, swing by the hotel to pick up my bags, and run to the airport this afternoon and catch my 4:15pm flight, but... I found that getting a cab in Omaha is more of a challenge than I has suspected—especially if one is out at Metropolitan Community College, North Campus, and 5,000 Women of Faith in pink blouses have descended on the city for the weekend. I am here now, though, at the airport at last, waiting to step into the air toward Minneapolis, then home.

So. Where was I? Talking about yesterday, I believe—which was the fullest possible day of theater one could imagine. It started with the morning Play Labs (well, biscuit and gravy before that, and coffee, and diet coke to fortify me for the day). One of the difficult things about the Play Labs being booked two and three at a time is you can never get to everything you'd like to see.

At 9 a.m., I saw Kendall Gray's *And to All a Good Night*, a radio show within a play that talked about hope, values and the meaning of Christmas. The readers did a wonderful job bringing the radio show to life, including singing commercials and sound effects. I talked with Kendall today, and found out that we are both part of the

Brown Couch Theatre Company's Mating Games 10-minute play festival, so that was lots of fun to talk about!

At 10 a.m., I saw Adrienne Earle Pender's play *Banana Split Lady*. It begins with a woman on stage with all of her different selves/personalities, and they argue with and support her and each other as she wakes up and prepares for the day ahead. There is a back story about the woman's sister, and the clock ticking as she has to leave for her first day at a new job. I enjoyed it! And it was very theatrical.

Staggering Girls was next, at 11 a.m., by ICWP sister-lister Deborah Greenhut, who I enjoyed getting to know more during the rest of the day yesterday and today. Judith and I sat together, both interested in the political and women's focus of the play, which deals with *Roe v. Wade* over a twenty year period in the lives of a woman who fights for a woman's right to choose—then finds herself pregnant, and having to. It is a full-length play, and we only read a 20-minute segment, so I should say that that was my take on it, from what we read, not her synopsis. I was engaged by this young woman's story, and look forward to seeing the whole thing some time soon!

I had lunch with Bill, Dawn and Amy. For \$5, you could buy lunch each day there at the cafeteria, and they were serving tacos yesterday. We had a good talk! I kind of wished that lunch each day was scheduled for an hour, so that more sitting and talking could have taken place, but we squeezed a lot of gabbing into the time we had.

Next, Mr. Albee talked about and signed his biography. He said much about himself, and what a writer should and shouldn't tell, and about the process of being biographed. Here are a few of the things I wrote down:

* "I am 78 years old."

*In answer to the question, "What do you want to do with your life that you haven't already done?" He answered "Write better plays."

* "If I lose my mind, I hope someone takes my pen away."

* "Most people write their memory play first. Eugene O'Neill wrote his last, with *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. If I have a memory play, I suppose it is *Three Tall Women*."

*"After I write a play, I can no longer access that experience. But I know my characters."

* "I didn't like my parents. But if I'd liked them, I would have turned out to be a bigot and a Republican." (talking about his adoptive parents)

* "I cared about finding my biological parents in my teens, but when I began to find out who I was, I no longer needed to find out who they were."

Next up, at 1:45pm, Joel Vig “interviewed” his old friend Patricia Neal, encouraging her (and it didn’t take much encouraging!) to tell us stories from the old days. She began acting when she was a girl. After a woman who did monologues came to her town, she knew immediately that that was what she wanted to do. She took a course and began reciting them to anyone who would listen. When she saw her first play, that was that. She acted on Broadway, and in Westport, Connecticut where lots of big New York folks retired for the summer. That’s where she met Richard Rodgers, Lillian Hellman and Eugene O’Neill. Some of the men she acted with include Ronald Reagan, Gary Cooper (who she loved), John Wayne, George Peppard (about whom she had a few choice things to say) and Andy Griffith. She remembers the men particularly well—and I’m sure they remember her. It was very nice, I thought, that Mr. Vig was with her for this talk, because anytime she couldn’t remember a name, he remembered for her—but never took any spotlight for himself. This was her day. They seem to be such great friends.

The Long Play Lab of the afternoon featured *White Horse* by Jakob Holder. I really like the format they have with this—short plays in the morning, then one long play each afternoon, that we all go to together and is discussed/judged by the luminaries who are attending. The playwright appears to be in his late twenties (28 specifically, Amy figured out, but I don’t recall how). The language and set-up of the play reminded a number of us of Sam Shepard’s work. It begins in a cabin in the snow, somewhere in Canada. After eight years, one brother has finally found the other, who fled after some sort of family crisis that we come to understand more clearly later on. Their sister has gone crazy, and the brother who has just come has touches.

There are wonderful beautiful things buried in all the words of this play, and I ended up scribbling tons of thoughts to the playwright on our little blue feedback sheets about structure. Amy looked over my shoulder when she saw me drawing little arrows and diagrams. I felt that if he could find the natural, organic structure that the play wanted to have, and could craft what he has to match, he could have an utterly amazing piece of work. I also thought up a new play while I was sitting there (the beginnings), which I wrote on a little this morning, longhand, between Omaha and Minneapolis. Men again. I really don’t know why most of the people in my head are men.

I had dinner with Bill Campbell of Omaha and the binge list, and we talked and talked and talked over some awesome Indian food. Saag paneer is really a wonderful thing to do to spinach. A lot of what we talked about was submissions, since we have both just finished a binge, on the binge yahoo group list, submitting 30 plays in 30 days. We also talked about how we work, what kinds of plays we write, and how to keep motivated. We discussed our record keeping methods, which were remarkably similar, except that he very sensibly uses an Excel spreadsheet while I’m using an ugly, unwieldy and impossible to print WORD table. Over the next couple weeks, I’m determined to figure out how to transfer over, and Bill said he thought I could figure Excel out without too much trouble. We’ll see about that... I’m going to e-mail you, Bill, if I fail utterly.

After dinner, Bill and I walked over to the Holland to see *Wings* by Arthur Kopit, which was brilliant. Kathleen Chalfont was featured, who played in *Wit* Off-Broadway and lots of other things. (I could totally imagine her in *Wit*). The play is about a woman trapped in her own head after a stroke, which doesn't seem at all theatrical until you see how he does it. I'm going to check it out of the library on Monday, at work (and how cool is that, that I have a giant library at my work?), so I can see how he put the play on the page—I sat by Tim, who said something about the dialogue being on one side of the page while the action is on the other... If you've ever known someone who was trapped in her or his own head, by a stroke or Alzheimers, or anything, it will resonate with you, too. I hope the published version mentions what the impetus for him writing the play was.

The evening wasn't finished yet! The ICWP bash was next, at Vivace's, organized by the fabulous Rox. Over two chocolate martinis, the group of us talked and connected—Kate (who isn't on the list, but is connected to it through someone), Judith, Rox and her husband, Deborah and her husband, Amy (who we adopted) and Kim Pritchard, who went back and forth. Several of the women teach or have taught theater at the college level, Rox and Kate direct, I loved it, and only wished we didn't live on all corners of the country, so we could do it every week. I guess that's what the list is for, though—so we can always be as close as our keyboards.

We were running on fumes at this point (all right, vodka fumes for me, but it's all right, as I wasn't driving anywhere). We walked over to see *Psychology* by Mac Wellman at the Blue Barn, starting at 11pm. I sat two seats down from Mr. Wellman, and in the front row. The young man who sat beside me (clearly a sign I'm getting old, that I'm calling him a young man) is in the theater tech program at a college there in (or near) Omaha. We had a great talk about his plans, and the Conference, and what we thought about everything so far. Everyone was in a reveling, festive mood—there's always something kind of festive about a late night show, I've noticed. The play was compelling to watch—splendidly put across by the actors. The characters were “girl,” “boy” and “green car.” I took a workshop recently at Son of Semele that focused on language playwriting techniques—and it was great to be able to see, in action, how they actually work. I could be entirely wrong, but I thought the play was about our isolation from each other, and anger at each other, and how our anger grows in our isolation, when we can't do anything about it. It used wonderful, creative language and crazy visuals and repeating themes—and I felt at every moment like it was a carefully and creatively crafted experience meant to take the audience on a specific journey. I think some people hide in their language techniques, but this was not hiding, it was storytelling.

Judith bee-lined for the car after, and Amy and Cheryl and I followed in her wake. Utterly exhausted, all, but... theater! Utterly drenched in theater.

Sunday, June 4, 2006 – EPILOGUE

I am back in Santa Monica, California. Slept in until four today. Yes, four in the afternoon. This has been an intense week! After a Diet Coke (elixir of life, without which life could not go on), I pattered in my garden, instead of doing anything useful, like my laundry. Putting my hands in the dirt makes me feel more... erm... grounded. Apparently I have a very literal brain.

Yesterday was my last day at the Conference. We were all late getting up, and sleepy, but still made it over to the college in time for the first Play Lab. Judith and I watched *When All the World Goes to White* by Doug Marr. A bickering couple come to terms with each other after getting stranded in a snowbank. Nice back and forth between the man and woman, whose natural antagonism made them seem very couple-like... I heard that *Termination Aberration* by Andrea Onstad, which occurred at the same time, was particularly good.

At 10, a.m. we walked over to ICWP lister Kim Pritchard's play, *Anabel's Plum*. It featured a young woman in a wheelchair and her elderly parents, neither of whom was well. The father was particularly well drawn, and I thought it was a great set-up for a story about family conflict, and fear about moving forward.

11 a.m. brought the Dawn or Ron dilemma. Several of our group went to see *Make Your Own Soup* by Dawn Wilson, who we'd been happily hanging out with all week. A couple of us went to *Consequences* by Ronald Rand, who some of you may be familiar with from his one man show about Harold Clurman. I wish I could have seen both! *Consequences* was a spy thriller of a 10-minute play. Agents, suspicion, bad blood, guns—the guys in the room seemed to like it particularly. There was shooting in the end, but an axe was used on stage earlier in the play—which led me to the thought “If you bring an axe on stage, someone ought to get chopped.” Luckily, I was sensible enough to keep my great wisdom to myself.

I sat with Deborah during lunch, and we had a good talk about the Play Labs we'd seen that morning, and the New York area ICWP lister community.

Then—my last event to attend at the Conference, a Q & A wrap-up with honored guests, who included Edward Albee, Arthur Kopit, Mac Wellman, Glynn O'Malley and Mark Lamos. People could ask anything, and did. More than their specific answers, though, I was left with a general impression—that these five men are tremendously generous, smart and talented without feeling the need to compete about it, and good teachers. I was very lucky to have been able to learn from them this week.

I missed Glyn O'Malley's play *A Heartbeat to Baghdad*, which I'm sorry about, especially since it is a play about the war; I have written a play (*HEADS*) about the war, and am trying to see everything I can that others are creating on the subject. I also missed Mac Wellman's Master Class, but Bill has promised to share his notes with me (and I'm going to hold you to that, Bill!). Finally, I missed the Closing

Gala—about which I am also sad. These sorts of things tend to be long, and serve rubber chicken, but... rituals are important. They help us transition from one part of life to another. My personal goodbyes and subsequent gardening are going to have to do for me this time, though.

I caught everyone I could, from our group, and hugged them. Promised to stay in touch. I think I hugged Judith three times, as she truly is a kindred spirit. I'll miss everyone!

So. To paraphrase Raymond Carver, “Did you get what you wanted from this Conference, even so?”

I did.

When I undertook this journey, I said I wanted to move myself forward in the art, craft and business of playwriting—and to have a great time hanging out with other people who love making plays. I think I have made some small strides in those directions. Art: I have started two new plays during and since the Conference, have new ideas about revising the end of *Reading to Vegetables*, and feel a great deal of creative energy rushing through me. I want to always be around people who are that excited about what they're doing!

Craft: Mr. Albee's class alone gave me a lot to think about here, not to mention all the other luminaries' wisdom! And seeing their work. And seeing (and analyzing) a whole boatload of other people's work. You learn so much about writing plays from seeing plays – and I've seen eighteen plays (or parts of plays) this week.

Business: At least twelve people asked for copies of *Reading to Vegetables*, because they wanted to know what happened next, after the 20-minute excerpt we read. None of them were Mr. Lamos—but all of them are in some way connected, in their communities, with making plays happen, as actors or teachers or writers or directors. Now I just need to fish their business cards out of my bag and fix the end of the play, so I can send it to them... Ron Rand gave me some wonderful marketing advice, for when I'm in New York at the end of the month, which I'm going to try to follow as best I can – he knows what he's talking about, as he's taken his one-man show all over the world. Also, I think meeting other Binge and ICWP playwrights is a wonderful thing. We ARE each other's community. We can help and support each other. Thank you so much to everyone I met in Omaha!

Hanging out with other people who love making plays: Yes. The entire Conference was this.

I'm very glad I went.

EM Lewis
Santa Monica, CA

June 4, 2006
emlewis@usc.edu

Notes from Mr. Albee's Master Class

(Please note that these are translated through my mind and pencil, but are as accurate as I could make them. Everything in parentheses is my notes, either to clarify his context or to myself.)

“My name is Edward Albee. I write plays.”

“If you're a playwright, you need to know as much about music as you can.” (also the visual arts)

“Plays exist on the page as literature. They do not exist only in production (which directors sometimes say). It is also nice to see them be done.”

“If you can't see it in your head, you don't know your characters well enough, your play well enough.”

“Every production of a play is an opinion – the director's, not necessarily the playwright's.”

“Most rules you are given about playwriting are wrong.”

“How long should a play be? As long as it needs to be.”

“In Japanese theater, if you are covered in black fishnet, you are invisible.” (about a type of stylized Japanese theater that he enjoys)

“If it is its proper length, it will not feel too long.”

“Any play that doesn't hurt, in some way, to write, you should throw away.”

“Don't get trapped into thinking what commerce wants is what you should do.”

“A play should be about anything that holds interest on the stage.”

Chekhov – “...the amazing sound of a man changing his mind.”

“Form and content dictate each other.” (I like this one – think about this.)

“Whatever you do, by the end of it, should seem inevitable.”

“All these people are in the room because you wrote a play – actors, directors, agents, producers.”

“Playwrights should know how to talk with all other theatre practitioners.”

“Don’t talk about the theme of the play to the actors—only the moment to moment reality of the play.” (yes, yes, yes! – so hard)

“For example, ‘You represent famine’ cannot be acted. ‘You are starving’ can be acted.”

“I learned most about directing from directing Beckett. He is most clear and pure in his intention.”

He likes to read plays before seeing them. “The first reading of a play is often great, because the actors are using their intuition.”

“A bad set can do terrible damage to a production.”

“The Dramatists Guild is your only protection against the forces of darkness.” (repeated often throughout by Mr. Albee and Mr. Kopit in particular—all of us should belong to the DG!)

“The author chooses the director, and helps choose the actors.”

“You will constantly be asked to abandon your control of your play. Be very, very careful. Some changes that happen during production help it—others make it more commercial, easier.” (about writing “Zoo Story” at 28, after years of writing poetry, short stories, novels)

“It was the first time I could write like me.” (I felt this way about playwriting—like it was the way I should have been writing from the beginning, like this was the car that could get me there.)

“I write the play to discover why I’m writing it. I don’t know the reason going in.”

“If you are a playwright, it is what you are, and it is what you do.”

“Questions not to answer... ‘What is your play about?’ Tell them, ‘About an hour and a half.’ If you can tell them in two to three sentences what it’s about, that’s how long the play should be.” (I remember Flannery O’Connor saying something similar in “Mystery and Manners.”)

“Being a writer is knowing where to put the parentheses in, in the story of your characters’ lives.

“It is your responsibility not to bore, or confuse without reason, your smart and sober audience.”

“Plays are usually about people who don’t get along well with each other. The Macbeths were not good neighbors.”

“Each play you write should be your first play. Invent the form. Invent the experience. Always do more than you think you are capable of.”

“Plays are in the present tense always. It is dangerous.”

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CHASING PLAYS...A MUSING by Sandra Hosking

Two weeks before Thanksgiving, I boarded a plane to Las Vegas. This was not a pleasure trip. It was business. I was headed to Sin City to watch the premiere of my short comedy, "The Fast Track." The play was to be included in a late-night showcase of shorts at Las Vegas Little Theatre, an amateur group.

I was wary. Prior to leaving, I had read a review of the plays in a Las Vegas newspaper. The critic had written that it was "50 minutes of you've-got-to-be-kidding awful." He had blamed the acting, directing and the writing.

Should I still go? I wondered. I had been disappointed by sub-par productions of my work before. Should I invest in a lost cause? The critic hadn't mentioned my show by name, so I held onto the hope that my show was only a little awful and booked a hotel.

If plays are like children, then like good parents we attend their screechy violin recitals and hold their hands while the doctor sets their broken legs. Some of us travel the country, following our plays from stage to stage. Like Mama Rose, we're convinced our Baby June is going to be a star.

In high school, I read Two Plays: *Dinny and the Witches* and *The Miracle Worker* by William Gibson, published in 1960. I recall thinking in my teenage mind that *Miracle Worker* was totally rad, but *Dinny* was the lamest play I'd ever read. It was an odd fantasy musical with dorky songs. What kind of name was Dinny anyway? In the book's preface, Gibson chronicled *Dinny's* journey to the stage. He originally wrote it in 1945 as a one-act play for his home theater in Topeka, Kansas. Five years later, he revised it. "It sprang almost faster than I could put it down," he wrote. "I regarded it as an eminently commercial piece of writing, and I was much astonished when no one produced it."

A few years later, he revised it again and a community theater produced it with a budget of \$75. "Though the writing process was now altogether external, I was no less fond of the piece and it made some friends," Gibson wrote. In the late 1950s, as *Miracle Worker* was emerging, Gibson received a request from an old acquaintance to produce *Dinny* off Broadway. "I was unwilling to have *Dinny* seen without a rewrite and unwilling to rewrite, but in the end I rewrote," he said. "I could not then any more than now deny Dinny his chance in public."

So, in 1959, *Miracle*, a hit, was produced on Broadway with a budget of \$125,000 and *Dinny*, a critical flop, was produced off Broadway for \$15,000. "In *The Miracle Worker* the audience was ours from the first minute on; but in *Dinny* I could not blink the fact that the connection was mine to establish or nobody's," Gibson wrote. "Accordingly we dug into the work — restaged, cut, rewrote — and with our fourth performance the audience unfroze, joined us, wept a little, laughed a lot, and de-iced our hearts with curtain-call applause; the show was alive."

Watching your characters onstage is like watching your child's first dance recital. Your daughter may miss her cue, cry onstage, her tutu may come undone she may even fall and break a leg. Whatever the outcome, you are there in the audience with video camera in hand. Many years ago, a friend of mine took her son to see a production of the musical *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown* at a California theater where Charles Schultz lived. The cartoonist sat behind her.

The first time I chased a play, I learned the lesson: Have no expectations and you won't be disappointed. The decision to travel to Hollywood to watch the show was easy. My mother and I decided to turn it into a fun girls' weekend with a trip to the beach, a restaurant where the prices weren't listed in the menu, a museum and Disneyland.

I booked a chain hotel in Korea Town where in the middle of the night I was awakened by a man outside pleading with his girlfriend not to call the police on him. "Aw, Baby, I just got out of jail," he cried.

Even though the trip itself was exciting, I was wary of the production itself. The play was a one-act drama to be included in a director's showcase. My director had requested I rewrite and cut the show, which I did.

The theater was housed in a tiny auditorium on La Brea Avenue that formerly was a television studio. The audience was equally tiny but enthusiastic. I distinctly remember a dark-haired girl wearing a red satin Chinese tunic, bright red lipstick and chopsticks in her hair. The show I saw was not exactly the one I had written. The director had used one of my changes but had cut out two-thirds of the play. The acting was average. Afterward, the director blew me off to meet with a TV producer. That's Hollywood.

In 2001, my husband and I (seven months pregnant) drove from Eastern Washington to Vancouver, British Columbia, to see a premiere of my new romantic comedy, *Fortune's Fool*. This time I was optimistic. I had discussed the play at length with the director and artistic director, Jay Hamburger. I reworked the ending several times and felt the play benefited from the effort. Theatre in the Raw, a community theater troupe, was including the play in a festival of one-acts to be performed in a restaurant.

I was introduced as the international portion of the international play festival since I was the only non-Canadian author. The place was full and the performances decent. Afterward, Hamburger, the cast, crew and other authors went to a club to share a pint and stories of our experiences in theater, film and all-night Vietnamese restaurants.

The next morning, Hamburger treated my husband and I to breakfast in a restaurant on Commerce Avenue, a street containing an eclectic mix of ethnic restaurants from Asian to Italian to Cuban. I ordered the special, which consisted of thick swirled toast with fresh tomatoes, scrambled eggs and feta cheese.

Last summer, I traveled to Valdez, Alaska, for the Last Frontier Theatre Festival where I ate good Mexican food and met several of you, then to Portland, Oregon, for Radiant Theatre's women's play festival, *Emergence*.

What did I gain from making such jaunts? I received no movie deals or offers to publish. I wasn't discovered or nominated for any awards. But, I met some interesting people, saw mountains and valleys I had never seen, tasted new food and shook many new hands.

I think of times when I declined to chase, stayed home and saved my pennies: St. Petersburg, Florida; Dubuque, Iowa; Santa Cruz, California; and, yes, New York City — twice. I relied on newspapers, associates, and directors to give me the low down on the productions. Maybe there's nothing extra-special about those other places, those other theaters, those other directors, actors and audiences that are so similar to those in my backyard. All I know is that each time I said, "next time," I felt something akin to gloom and maybe even guilt.

Ding! In November, Southwest Airlines was selling tickets to Vegas cheap, cheap, cheap. I couldn't resist. Thanks to Priceline, I stayed at a nice, quiet hotel off the Strip near where rapper Tupac was shot. The performance at Las Vegas Little Theatre pleasantly surprised me. My show was directed and performed exactly as I had intended. The small audience laughed in all the right places. The cast and director were amiable. On the way out to our cars, I congratulated the lead actor for doing such a good job. "Send us more stuff," he said. Music to my ears.

Sandra Hosking's plays have been produced in New York City, Los Angeles, Canada, and elsewhere. She is a member of the Dramatists Guild of America. For comments or story ideas, contact sandykayz@cs.com.

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