

# Seasons

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## T-SHIRT DRAMA: CLOTHES, COLLABORATION, AND A SLOGAN MAKE THE PLAY

by Maureen Brady Johnson

During the months before Christmas, like everyone else, I get a lot of catalogs in the mail. The catalogs have titles like Mindspring, What on Earth, and Lillian Vernon. They have everything imaginable for sale. One of my favorite items in the catalogs is the T-shirts with clever, humorous phrases printed on them.

They say things like:

"Your body language is foreign to me."

"I hear what you don't think you mean."

"I just got lost in thought. It wasn't familiar territory."

These kinds of phrases always make me laugh. Last year, I began thinking that some of the phrases could be spoken by a performer in a play or perhaps used as a theme for a short performance. The notion was simple: Give my young performers a set of T-shirts with the same phrase on them, ask them to use it as the theme for a short script they would write, and then have them wear the T-shirts during the performance. The idea for T-shirt drama was born.



### Editors Note

*On behalf of the International Women Playwrights, and in celebration of the ICWP-sponsored readings to mark International Women's Day (March 8, 2007), which have been held throughout this month in Boston, MA; Columbus, OH; Mesa, AZ, New York, NY; Kitchener, Ontario, Canada; and Bucharest, Romania... we hope you enjoy this truly international issue of SEASONS.*

– Rachel Rubin Ladutke

*Thanks, as always, are due to all the contributors, and to Laura Henry for her marvelous work laying out both the print and the online issue.*

#### *T-shirts as costumes*

The idea to use the T-shirts as costumes was a practical as well as an economic decision—a cast wearing T-shirts and jeans would be comfortable, and it wouldn't cost a lot. What's more, the identical shirts could pique the audience's interest at the outset of the show. And, of course, as the show progressed, they would begin to realize that the phrase was the central theme of the show.

Initially, I considered ordering shirts with a pre-printed slogan from one of the catalogs at a cost of ten to twenty dollars. If you have the budget, this is the way to go. The shirts will match nicely and feature clearly printed text that's easy to read. You can get different sizes to fit your cast or you could get one size fits all and use them year after year. Sometimes T-shirts go on sale and you can costume the entire show for very little. (Though in sale situations, usually there are limitations in the choice of color and sometimes sizes.)

I chose an alternative option that was cheaper and gave an additional hands-on opportunity for my students: we made our own T-shirts. Well, not quite completely. I purchased packages of white crew neck extra-large shirts at the dollar store. The price of a package of three t-shirts was six dollars. I also purchased colored fabric markers (nine dollars for a package of four).

#### *Choosing the phrases*

I searched through the catalogs to find phrases I thought would be good creative sparks for short plays. I also looked on the web for quotes and phrases. I tried to imagine the kinds of short plays that could be written with these phrases as their themes. I stayed away from any phrases or quotes that I felt would be inappropriate. Many of the phrases had double meanings, so I used my husband and college-aged children as a sounding board when I wasn't quite sure whether or not a phrase would work or was appropriate. I compiled a long list of short, usable phrases and quotes, with the idea of giving my students different options from which to choose.

I shared the list with my high school students. They picked the following:

"Maybe the hokey pokey is what it's all about."

"I make up my own dance moves."

"Duct tape is like the force. It has a light side and a dark side and it holds the universe together."

"Captain of the fashion police."

### *Making the T-Shirts*

Once the phases were chosen I had my students stretch the T-shirts on a piece of cardboard so they could print the phrases on them neatly. Some printed out the phrases on paper beforehand and then copied the phrase onto the t-shirt. Others improvised. Out of all the T-shirts, we only had one that was not usable because of a mistake. I would urge you to have the students write out the phrase on paper beforehand, though, just to be safe.

The phrases were all done cleverly, using different types of fonts and colors. Some groups added illustrations on their shirts. Others personalized the shirts by adding the names of the performers on the back. The one thing that is absolutely critical is that the phrase on the front of the T-shirt must be readable by the audience. In some cases, during this first time through the project, the writing was not as readable as I had hoped it would be.

Some groups adapted their phrases. For example, for “Captain of the Fashion Police” the students asked if they could have one t-shirt with “captain” on it and the other t-shirts with “fashion police.” Their script was based on something they called Fashion Boot Camp. I told them that they could make the adaptation. I didn’t allow many other changes with the phrases, though, because the point of the exercise was the uniformity of the phrases on the front of the shirts.

### *A collaborative effort*

I thought this project had potential for both older and younger students, so I paired my high school Theatre Two students (9th and 10th grade) with a class of fifth graders. Our campus is K–12 so we were able to do this with relative ease. The older theatre students took on a major share of the responsibility, but we also made sure that younger students had plenty of input into the script, the blocking, and the final performance. This was a challenge because we were under a time constraint and had limited opportunities to meet with the fifth graders. I streamlined the project into 4 weeks, 2 days a week, for a total of 8 class periods (of forty minutes each), but you can stretch it out to give the students more time to develop their plays. The collaborative process was a wonderful experience, providing numerous opportunities for both sets of students to learn from one another.

The older students were divided up into 4 groups of five to pair up with the fifth graders who had also been divided into the same sized groups by their homeroom teacher. The names of the fifth graders were given to each group of older students who would be responsible for writing the basic script—essentially a rough first draft—with a part for every student.

### *Writing the script*

Before the high school students met with their younger partners, I had them spend one class period brainstorming in their groups for ideas based around their chosen phrase. There are always disagreements at this time, so I circulated around the room listening and finding areas of compromise. I also added my two cents when a group seemed to have stalled out. I required each group to provide me with a summary of the plot and a list of characters by the end of the class. In the next class period, I returned their summary and character lists and asked them to flesh out a script. Generally, each group needed one more class period to finish their first draft.

We began the first meeting between the younger and older students by dividing everyone into their pre-set groups and having them introduce themselves. The high school students took the lead and explained what the project was all about. The fifth grade homeroom teacher had also offered some explanation earlier to her students, but it still seemed worthwhile to discuss the basics of the project at the outset so everyone would be comfortable with what they were about to begin.

Copies of the scripts were handed out and a first read through took place in the individual groups. Then the older student initiated a talk back session in which the fifth graders were allowed to say what they thought about the script and whether or not they wanted to change anything. As you might expect, most of the younger students were reluctant to speak up at first. So a few of the older students, along with input from myself and the homeroom teacher, prompted the younger students with some questions. For example, “Do you think this part is funny? What could we add to make it work?” or “Do you think your character would say that? What do you think he’d say instead?” This question-answer session helps ease the tension between the older and the younger students. After awhile, the younger students were taking ownership of the script and adding their own bits to the script.

The first read through and rewriting took us two class periods. Copies were made of the rewrites and then we were ready to rehearse.

This script writing approach saved a lot of time and each group had teachable moments during the process. The older students, who had a stronger idea of what makes a script work well, got the opportunity to teach the younger students about playwriting. They would ask the younger students questions like,

“What is the major conflict of the story?” or

“Do you have a beginning, a middle and an end?”

“What does the main character really want?”

At the same time, the older students learned how to listen and be flexible in adapting the script to facilitate the changes that the younger students thought were necessary. The process needs both teachers to hover and listen to help the students create the script and create an atmosphere of sensitivity and co-operation. For example, one of the plays had a scene in which a fight broke out. The teachers intervened and told the group that they had to find another way to solve the conflict without using violence.

### *Rehearsal*

The first rehearsal was done in one class period. Because the plays were very short (3–5 minutes) we were able to run through the plays several times. Improvisation was encouraged and many things were changed and added to the scripts. For example, in “Captain of the Fashion Police,” the fashion police decided that they needed some wild hats, scarves and gloves to wear to show that they had no fashion sense. The captain of the fashion police had the miserably dressed, misguided cadets line up and told them, in no uncertain terms, that they needed to “get with the program.” Then the captain leaves the stage and the cadets take off the fashion-less articles, revealing the T-shirts and jeans underneath. The captain returns to review the troops and is very happy with what she finds. Now they all look just like her!

The collaboration between the high school students and the fifth graders was successful because the young and the older students worked cooperatively to refine the script. Both teachers moved from group to group to help facilitate this spirit of partnership. After all the improvisations were added, the groups came up with a final script. The scripts were revised a bit more, copied, and memorized during one additional class period.

### *Putting it together*

All the groups had rehearsed independently of each other, but they all used the same simple set piece—black blocks of varying sizes. When we began to put all of the plays together, each group was responsible for setting up their own set pieces. I chose some high energy instrumental music to cover the changes and to play at the beginning and the end of the entire performance.

We did a dress rehearsal in which everyone took part during one class period. We were able to run through the show twice. In retrospect, I would have liked more time for rehearsing but it was exhilarating to be involved in such an upbeat, quickly rehearsed performance.

Our public performance was a lot of fun. The audience was small and appreciative: several parents (who could come to a daytime show) two fourth-grade classes, and an assortment of high school students who came during their free period.

The hokey pokey script was brilliant. The play began with a group of students giving each other secret handshakes. Another student walks by and asks, "What's that all about?" Immediately, the group breaks into "You put your right hand in, you put your left hand in..." doing the hokey pokey. The sketch continues with feet, head and whole self... and so on. The audience loved it.

"I Make up My Own Dance Moves" was about a kid who danced all the time. Other kids wanted to dance as good as he could so dance fairies come in, tap them on the head with magic wands and they become great dancers.

"Duct Tape is like the Force" was an infomercial about the many uses of duct tape led by a super hero named Duct Tape Man who stepped into crisis after crisis to repair them with duct tape. Darth Vader did an endorsement at the end that tied into the phrase on their T-shirts.

"Captain of the Fashion Police" was set in a boot camp for fashion do's and don'ts characters.

The entire production took twenty-five minutes to perform and the audience was very appreciative. And, of course, all the performers wanted to keep their T-shirts.

#### *If I had it to do over again*

There are certainly some things I will do differently when I do this project again with students. To begin with, I would take more time to write, rewrite, and rehearse. I'd also focus more on preparing the younger students for the playwriting process by reviewing what the essential elements of a script are and how they are included in a short play. I think having the younger students do short playwriting exercises before we began the writing of the script would be helpful too.

Actually I have done the T-shirt exercise again—with teachers at the Javits Institute for the Teachers of the Gifted and Talented in Louisiana this past summer. They had a great time with it. One teacher told me she is going to adapt the idea and do collages on the shirts with her students. I'm also planning a three-week T-shirt drama unit this year with my theatre one students. Whether you do the project exactly as I've explained here or decide to tinker with it to adapt to your own needs, just remember this is one of those exercises that should be flexible and fun. The idea is to give the students ownership of the process. You're going to get more creativity, commitment, and focus any time you let students take charge of the work. If you can fashion a partnership between two distinct age groups, even better. And don't be afraid to come up with phrases and quotes from different sources. You never know, that fishing gear sales flyer could be just as inspiring as the Lillian Vernon catalogue. Good luck and don't forget to write.

*This article was originally published in the Educational Theatre Association's Teaching Theatre magazine. Maureen Brady Johnson is the author of the recently published collection of exercises Shoes on the Highway, Using Visual and Audio Cues to Inspire Student Playwrights (Heinemann, 2005). She can be reached at MaureenBJohnson@aol.com.*

## Playwright Profiles

by Debbie L. Feldman

### *Jamie Pachino*

Jamie Pachino is an award winning playwright and screenwriter. Her work has been produced in four countries, commissioned, published, and honored. She has been named the winner of the Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays production grant, as well as Chicago's Joseph Jefferson ("Jeff") Award for Best New Work, among others. Her plays have been nominated for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize and the Illinois Governor's Award, and named Runner-up for the Osborn Award (American Theater Critics Association) and the Jane Chambers Award. Her work has appeared in new play festivals with Hartford Stage, American Conservatory Theatre, Geva Theatre, A Contemporary Theatre, and the Women's Playwright Conference in Athens.



Jamie Pachino

#### **How long have you been writing plays?**

My first play, which I started writing in 1991, was produced in 1993.

#### **Do you write one acts, full-lengths, monologues, or ten-minute plays?**

Primarily full-length (eight of them), although I have had a handful of monologues published and produced in short play festivals.

#### **Do you write primarily female characters?**

Not primarily, but the majority of my plays have female leads for a number of reasons:

I want to see more actresses employed in chewy complicated roles. I started as an actress, and know what actresses are likely looking for and (I think) how to write for them. I find women's problems full of depth and texture and drama. I want to see more plays about women in the theatre in general.

#### **Did you formally study playwriting?**

No. I studied to be an actress, and did so, for many years.

#### **Did a certain playwright or playwrights or school of thought influence you?**

I love the work of so many different writers, but have also been very influenced by the dance I studied growing up (rhythm, pace, drive, build), music (similar) and musical theatre (showmanship and sentiment, schmaltz and comedy).

As for writing influences, I like the muscular, issue-driven work of Miller, the poetry and yearning in Kushner, the sheer brilliance and intellectual discipline of Stoppard, the flights of fancy of Paula Vogel, the honesty of Eve Ensler, the trust of the audience in Pinter, and beauty and daffiness of Charles Mee.

#### **Why did you become a playwright?**

I wrote my first play on a bet. I was always a writer growing up—working on the lit. magazine in high school, writing journals, bad poetry, and the like—but I was a dedicated actress for a considerable



amount of time, really moonlighting as a writer. Over time, it turned out my voice was better suited to writing, and it fulfilled me on a much deeper level than acting, though I still miss being on stage from time to time.

**What attracts you to playwriting?**

Given my acting training, my ear was really trained for dialogue. I love the process of figuring out how people use words to achieve things, make an impact, represent (or hide) behavior, and make sense of the world.

**Do you have a particular writing ritual?**

I write headlong till it's done, usually without looking up (a break is a bad idea for me. A body in motion, and all that. . .). I also tend to write way more than I ever need, around the idea, or the characters, creating snippets, lines, scene ideas, then cobbling them together into a first draft and figuring out what I have. On the other hand, at least two of my plays have come fresh from an idea for the first scene, and written themselves linearly, in a very quick amount of time. I've also been fortunate to develop many of my later plays with theatres who are attached to producing them.

**Are your plays are character- or plot-driven?**

Character.

**Do you use improvisation when you write scenes?**

I tend to refer to playwriting as "extended improv on paper" where I get to play all the characters. But, I rarely use improv with actors to get at the heart of something. Either I hear it, or I don't. I need to write it out to get it.

**Do you write for a particular audience?**

Ones who want to chew on something. And laugh.

**What is the most difficult thing for you in writing?**

The scene just before the climax. I don't know what it is, but in nearly all my plays, the scene BEFORE the "big" scene is always a huge struggle for me. I think it's because I've spent a whole play lining up several dozen threads, and they have to be ALL wiped out of the way to clear the path for the big moment of clarity. Very frustrating. Always.

**What are you working on now?**

I've got a new play percolating in my head, but no clear time mapped out to work it out, unfortunately. I've been working in TV features lately, which has been great, but robs me of my playwriting time. Currently, I'm writing an animated feature for Disney (*Rapunzel*), and a new movie for Lifetime (*Stranger With My Face*—they produced two others of mine, one already aired, one to air this year), as well as an animated for the folks who produced *Shrek* (*Rabbit*), and my play *Splitting Infinity* (already produced in several places) will go up this year in a few productions.

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*Naranjargal Hashhuu*

Naranjargal Hashhuu lives in Mongolia. She can be contacted at [haran@globeinter.org.mn](mailto:haran@globeinter.org.mn)

**How long have you been writing plays?**

I've been writing plays for 12 years. My first television drama was aired in 1988 by Mongol TV, which was the only national television channel. My first stage play was staged in 2001 at the Mongolian Academic Drama Theatre.

**Do you write one-acts, full-lengths, monologues, or ten-minute plays?**

I write one-acts and full-lengths.

**Do you write primarily female characters?**

Not primarily, but I do write about many female characters. I think that the feelings and problems of female characters are closer to me.



Naranjargal Hashhuu

**Did you formally study playwriting?**

I completed a short correspondent course from the Russian Cinematography Institute (VGIK) in screenplay writing in 1991, in Ulaanbaater, the capital of Mongolia.

**Did a certain playwright or school of thought influence you?**

Yes. The famous Mongolian playwright Vangan influenced me to start writing plays. I also love Shakespeare and Chekhov. I have read a lot of plays by Ibsen and Russian playwrights such as Ostrovskii, Gogol, Arbutov, and others. Their works have influenced my writing.

**How would you describe the type of plays you write?**

All of my plays tell stories of modern Mongolians. My stories are melodramas or romantic dramas.

**What are conditions like for women's theater and women playwrights where you live?**

We do not have any women's theaters in Mongolia. There are two theaters based in Ulaanbaater: the Mongolian Academic Drama Theatre and the Mongolian Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet. There are several theater troops that use the stages of these theaters, as well as the concert halls of the City Cultural Palace, and the Palace of Mongolian Trade Union. There are around 20 provincial theaters, but most of them do not function efficiently because of financial difficulties and lack of professional theater management and marketing.

There are not many women playwrights in Mongolia. Our main problems are the lack of good training, especially in the Western way of playwriting, and the lack of stages on which to perform. Also, there is a lack of knowledge of foreign languages that could bring playwrights good experiences and expose them to the best practices and encourage cooperation with colleagues.

My problem is that I am full of ideas, but I can't earn sufficient income from writing, so I have to work. I work for an NGO, which requires a lot of time and commitment. Actually, this is not only my problem, but it is the same for other Mongolian playwrights.

**Why did you become a playwright and what attracted you to playwriting?**

It is my way and an efficient tool for sharing my thoughts and feelings with other people. I am attracted to creation and inspiration.

**Do you have a background in acting or other writing genres?**

I do not have any experience in acting. I am a former television journalist, so I have written more than 200 scripts for TV programs. I have translated more than 30 documentaries and feature films from Russian and English. Last year, I published a book called *Television Journalism: Basic Concepts and Practical Tips*. I have written a lot of handbooks for journalists on democratic journalism and free press issues.

**What do you try to say through your plays?**

Life has a strong flow. Some people conquer it and some lose. In any case, there is a bridge that connects people. It is the bridge of mutual understanding, love, respect, and tolerance.

**Do you have a particular writing ritual?**

Not really. I write when I am inspired and my thoughts are organized, and I'm ready to sit down and write.

**Do you use improvisation in any way when you write?**

In general, I plan my plot and characters, but they often change when I start writing. Sometimes new story lines come to mind while I'm writing, so I could say that I use improvisation.

**Do you write for a particular audience?**

I write for a general audience, although my first play was for teenagers.

**What are you working on now?**

I am developing two stories in my mind. I do not know which one I should start first. The first is about a female student from the province, who has no money and no choices on how to find it. The second is a story about an aged man and a young woman who meet each other in a dark forest and have no idea that they are father and daughter. My play, *Empty Fridge, Carrots and Tomatoes* will be performed.

**Mrinalini Kamath**

Mrinalini Kamath lives in Princeton, New Jersey, and received an MFA in playwriting from the Actors Studio Drama School of the New School University in New York City. Her plays have been produced in the U.S., U.K., and Australia. She won first place in the 2005 East West Players "Got Laughs?" Asian-American Comedy Play Contest, with her play *Celestial Motions*. She was a Tennessee Williams Scholar at the 2003 Sewanee writers' Conference in Sewanee, Tennessee, and a finalist for the 2004 Jerome Fellowship at the Playwrights' Center in Minneapolis. Her short plays have been published in the Smith and Kraus anthologies, *Best Stage Scenes of 1999*, *Best Stage Scenes of 2000*, and *Plays for 3 or More Actors*. She is a member of the South Asian League of Artists in America (SALAAM) and the Dramatists Guild of America, Inc. For more information, see her Website at [www.mkwriter.com](http://www.mkwriter.com)



Mrinalini Kamath

**How long have you been writing plays?**

Professionally, since 1996–97, so about ten years now. But I used to write short plays and skits in middle and high school.

**When did you write your first play?**

I co-wrote my first short play with a friend in the tenth grade. It was about a fortune teller who rips people off. The first play I wrote that was staged was my fifteen-minute play "Views," which was part of the Turnip Theatre Festival in Manhattan in 1997, I believe.

**Do you write one acts, full-lengths, monologues, or ten-minute plays?**

All but monologues, which isn't to say that I haven't taken a character's dialogue and made it into a monologue for the sake of having it in a monologue compilation. But I never look to write monologues or one person shows. There are some good ones, but in general, I'm not a fan of monologue plays. Lately, my plays seem to be at the extremes—either ten-minute or full-length.

**Do you write primarily female characters?**

I'd say no. Sometimes the main character is male, sometimes female.

**Did you formally study playwriting?**

Yes, at the Actors Studio Drama School when it was affiliated with The New School, in New York City. Since I graduated, the two have since parted ways, and I'm officially considered an alum of The New School for Drama.

**Did a certain playwright or school of thought influence you?**

Hard to say. I know whose writing I admire, but I don't know how much the influence shows. When I first started writing plays, I loved Ives and Durang and really admired Hwang's *M. Butterfly*. Since then, I've been blown away by Theatre de Complicite's show *Mnemonic* and Mary Zimmerman's *Metamorphoses*. But again, I don't know how much the influence shows. Probably the most influential person in my writing life was my playwriting professor the first year of graduate school—Laura Maria Censabella. She made me realize that I had a talent for comic writing and that I seemed to enjoy the writing process most when I made magical things happen on stage.

**How would you describe the type of plays you write?**

Before graduate school, heavily naturalistic. Right after graduate school, more magical. And, now, somewhere in between. Some plays are very grounded in realism, some are more magical, some are a mix. I pick the style that best suits the story. The most important thing to me is that the play not be boring.

**What are the conditions like for women's theater and women playwrights where you live?**

Pretty tough, though I think that's for playwrights in general. I'm in New Jersey, and most of the playwriting opportunities I've had have been in New York City. Getting my full-length plays done is the hardest, as lately I've been writing a lot about Indian and Indian-American characters. It's easier to get development support for them, but much harder to get people to actually commit to a production.

**Why did you become a playwright?**

Because I enjoyed writing dialogue. I was originally a fiction writer, and my stories would have pages and pages of dialogue. One of my professors said that I had a gift for dialogue and should look into playwriting. I did, and I loved it.

**Do you have a background in acting or other genres of writing?**

The graduate program I attended required both writers and directors, as well as actors, to take acting classes in the first and second year. As painful as this was (I hate being on stage), it was highly useful knowing how actors approach scripts. Before playwriting, I wrote fiction, mostly short stories. I've recently started to learn television writing as well as screenwriting.

**What attracts you to playwriting?**

The theatricality—the sense that the story could only be told on the stage. The dialogue, the characters, the way that characters sometimes seem to take over the play, through either words or actions.

**What do you try to say through your plays?**

I generally don't go into a play with a preconceived notion about what I'm going to say. It usually emerges in the first draft and becomes clearer and clearer with every draft.

**Do you have a particular writing ritual?**

I've gone through a few. For a while, I joined a writer's room, and my ritual was to write from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. every day. Lately, as I've set up a writing corner at home, I tend to write better there. I like to listen to a book on tape that I've heard at least a few hundred times before. I don't know why that is—maybe I just like to hear "dialogue" while I write! I taped up a little Sanskrit chant to the Goddess Saraswati (goddess of knowledge) that students generally say before they start their studies, but I don't necessarily chant it myself.

**Would you say that your plays are character-driven or plot-driven?**

More plot-driven, though that's been changing a bit, of late.

**Do you use improvisation in any way when you write scenes?**

I've found that it generally doesn't work well for me, except for one play, where I was getting constant feedback from the director. We tried improvising one scene, and it really helped.

**Do you write for a particular audience?**

Adults, most of the time, rather than children.

**What is the most difficult thing for you in writing plays?**

Writing without hearing pages out loud or getting any kind of feedback. So much of playwriting is about how something PLAYS. I'm grateful to belong to a writers' group that encourages us to bring in pages for every meeting. That was the difficulty for a while, the first few months I was out of graduate school.

**What are you working on now?**

A full-length commission for a theatre company. It's an adaptation of the Greek myth of the Quest for the Golden Fleece, only it's told from the point of view of two of the more famous Argonauts, Theseus and Orpheus. It also has to do with their own personal stories, and of course, Medea manages to get in there.

I'm also re-writing a ten-minute piece for Second Generation (2G)'s upcoming tenth anniversary celebration and will be writing another ten-minute piece in February for a showcase that my writers' lab will be doing in collaboration with another writers' lab.

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## THE MIRACULOUS PLAY: A History Lesson for Our Time

by Mary Steelsmith

It started out as a typical Tuesday morning, here in Los Angeles. I woke up at 7:00 a.m. our time (10:00 a.m. Eastern time) and flipped on our local station, KTLA Channel 5, for a daily dose of their super cheery Morning News



*Mary, with students from Jacksonville University.*

Show. Immediately, I realized my mistake. Somehow I'd gotten a cheesy TV movie with some building being blown up. The special effects were almost laughable, sounding like someone was shaking a sheet of aluminum. No way would I sit and watch this stupid show. So I switched channels. And switched. And switched. The same idiotic "movie" was on each and every channel. Obviously this was not a show.

My response was a practical one. I got into my little car, drove down to the local gas station and filled up the tank, just in case we'd have to evacuate the city. Then I treated my Ford Escort to an automatic car wash. Sitting inside that cocoon of soap, wax and swirling soft brushes, it hit me. Today, September 11, 2001, was completely out of my control, except for one trivial thing. No matter what was to happen, if the terrorists attacked us next, at least I would face it in a clean car.

As a member of WORDSMITHS, the great late playwriting workshop that met in a converted bank vault at the bottom of the Los Angeles Theatre Center, I looked forward to our Tuesday night meetings. But

with our space being maintained by the City of Los Angeles, the building was closed that day out of security concerns. None of us would have wanted to be anywhere but home that night.

Silas Jones, the facilitator of WORDSMITHS, once told us that as playwrights we are the historians of our time. Instead of looking back at an event in the distant past, the audience in a theatre gets to experience what is happening to the characters in the moment. With his words in mind, I called each member of our group and suggested we come in the next week with a short play about 9/11. We couldn't control what happened, but could be the historians of our own time.

Being the queen of procrastination, I waited until the last moment the next Tuesday to write my little play, starting it 45 minutes before the workshop began. I had no idea what the play was to be about. What did I, a woman in Los Angeles, have in common with anyone who was in New York City, Washington, D.C. or near a remote field in Pennsylvania? What qualified me to write about an experience that wasn't mine? After all, I wasn't there when it happened.

It was nearing sunset. My boss had just left the office and the building was silent except for my little radio under the desk, the dial firmly set on a local classical radio station. The song, "The Bells of St. Genevieve" by Mann Marais, started to play. This piece, relentless in its strident rhythm and straightforwardness, carried me to thoughts of the Twin Towers collapsing in on themselves.

Then I heard them, the voices only a playwright can hear. A man next to me complained, "I screwed up. I was late to work. I'm never late. My Brownstone held me hostage." A young woman chimed in, "I screwed up. Greg wouldn't get off me. Though I kept saying I had to get up to go to work, he knew I didn't mean it. And pretty soon, I didn't mean it too. I decided what the hell, it won't kill them this one time." She was interrupted by an agonized male voice with a thick, unfamiliar accent, saying, "It was a conspiracy. Why didn't they get me? I was on the corner like they said. Like He said, 'Be on the corner and don't be late.' Only I was late." And finally, an angry businesswoman elbowed her way in, "My assistant wrote down the wrong time for the flight. They left without me. Don't they know who I am? So should I fire Teddy or give him a bonus? I don't like to reward bad behavior."

The characters speaking to me were distinct, yet all had something in common; he or she was late that day, resulting in the miracle of surviving the attacks. In their own way, each expressed relief, guilt, anger and resolve for the future. Two steered their lives into new directions. One remained basically unchanged, angry at the prospect of being known as "That woman who missed the plane." The last character seemed doomed to wander the earth forever, with no place to rest. It was one of those rare, mystical moments, trying to keep up with these distinct characters, taking dictation from them as each became a different musical instrument in the quartet being played on the radio.

A few moments and seven pages later, it was over. I rushed downtown, barely making it in time to present "The Miraculous Day Quartet" to the workshop. The pages were still warm from the printer when I put them in the hands of my fellow WORDSMITHEE'S.

Since then, "The Miraculous Day Quartet" has seen productions in Los Angeles, Chicago and New York. Each production has had its own individual spin, sparking discussions. I've learned so much from each comment.

Last year, as part of winning the Helford Prize for my play, *Isaac, I am*, I was flown to the University of Jacksonville to attend rehearsals and speak to the students. It was kind of a culture shock for somebody who sits, typing in a little room each day.

The idea of speaking to several classes about being a playwright seemed daunting. What could I say or do that would connect with these students, especially those taking Theatre Appreciation courses simply to fulfill an arts' requirement?



Well, of course, I reasoned. We'll show a DVD of a performance of "The Miraculous Day Quartet," and I'll simply say, "Any questions?" Great. I was certain this ploy would take up at least half of the 50 minutes I was required to fill. We could play charades for the rest of the time.

When the day arrived, however, the DVD player refused to function and no others were to be found. I needed a miracle to get me through the next 50 minutes. This may sound corny but it is true. I actually heard Silas Jones's voice reminding me about playwrights being the historians of our own time. After a deep breath, I looked at the students. Some were catching eyes with me. Others were poking the person next to them. At least one young woman was text messaging notes over the ethers to some distant, invisible friend.

"How many of you are here for the class credit?" All of the hands shot up. "All right," I said, "How many of you are interested in the theater?" A few hands came down. "Okay. How many of you are playwrights?" Maybe two hands stayed up. "And my final question—how many of you are historians?" No hands. Just blank stares.

"Tell me the most significant thing that has happened in the world in the past five years."

"Nine-eleven," someone murmured from the back.

Quickly, I selected random students, including the girl who had been text messaging her friend, to come up front. They were handed scripts of "The Miraculous Day Quartet," and without telling them what the play was about, I cast them in roles and had them read it aloud to the class, cold.

I'm certain some members of the cast considered me cruel. At first they endured word stumbles and giggles when one person accidentally read another's lines. Then it happened. The miracle. My impromptu cast fell into the rhythm of the words I'd heard that night, five years before. As they finished reading the play, one of the students made the most beautiful sound of all. She said, "Ohhhhhh. I get it." The applause was thunderous.

I went to the young woman who had made that wonderful sound. "What were you doing that day?" I asked. She replied, "Waiting to see if my dad would come home."

Hands flew up around the room. Students were straining forward in their desks to be recognized, wanting the chance to tell me their part of the story. They were bursting to talk.

Many of these young people had grown up in New York and New Jersey. Almost all would have been in their early to mid-teens at the time of the attacks. The stories were extraordinary. While I was clear across the country, critiquing the "cheesy movie's special effects," one student witnessed the unreal sight of a plane folding itself into the Pentagon. A young woman's mother would have been in the South Tower later that morning and couldn't reach her family by cell for hours. Another could smell the jet fuel outside his school. They saw smoke. They knew people who knew people who weren't coming home that day, or ever. The stories didn't stop when class was over. Throughout my stay, students sought me out on campus with the need to share their experiences.

I felt honored and full of gratitude to witness these bright, young people start to think like playwrights. Did they learn anything from me? I don't know. They taught me so much that day, reinforcing my belief that everybody's story is important.

To write in the moment, as we do for the stage, is to connect our audience with their own experiences. I asked each one of my new friends to write it all down, not to let their stories slip away. Now, I can hardly wait to see what plays will come from these historians of their own time.

## Viva South African Theatre, Viva!

by Karen Jeynes

This article is late. I have never been late on a deadline. I have minor excuses—I was attacked and locked up by a psychotic woman and had to be rescued by the Angolan Navy, my car's entire exhaust fell off on the highway—but the big reason is that I am so worried about what to say. I want to properly represent South Africa and what it is like to make theatre here.

**"Let me be very clear: Theatre in South Africa is alive and well. We've got back on our feet and we're starting to take a stand."**

Let me start by stating clearly who I am and how I fit in to South Africa. By the time you read this, I will be 26. I was born in Durban and moved to Cape Town when I was two. My mother is English and my father is Afrikaans, and ndifunda isiXhosa (I am learning Xhosa). South Africa has nine provinces and eleven official languages, in the Western Cape, where I live, these are the three official languages. The Western Cape is complicated. The only traditional inhabitants of this area are the Khoisan. The Dutch, French and British variously arrived by sea at Cape Town, and the Xhosa nation moved down from the North at roughly the same time. For some perspective, my father's family moved to South Africa in 1730. We've been here a while!

Right. Now theatre. Until the end of apartheid, we had a state theatre system. Each of the provinces—then there were four—had a large state funded theatre, and a permanent company of actors, directors, writers, etc. In 1994 these were disbanded and all the money was put into a few funding bodies: The National Arts Council (NAC); the Arts and Culture Trust of the President (ACT); and provincial bodies like the Western Cape Cultural Commission (WCCC). Recently, the National Lottery Distribution Fund (NLDTF) joined the fray. Then there are bodies like Prohelvetia, the Royal Netherlands Embassy and the British Council.

On the other hand, most of our theatre practitioners had been working in protest theatre. Now that apartheid was over, artists were looking for a cause. For a few years, theatre flourished. Everyone said, as people love to do every now and again, that theatre was dead.

Let me be very clear: Theatre in South Africa is alive and well. We've got back on our feet and we're starting to take a stand. A few years ago the Performing Arts Network of South Africa was formed, and goes from strength to strength. Just this Saturday I was at the inaugural meeting of the South African Scriptwriters Union (SASWU) where I was elected to represent the plight of the playwright.

There are many issues facing us in South African theatre. Top of everyone's list, always, is funding. But moaning about funding is boring so I will gloss over it, just to say that there is a serious need for a sensible approach to theatre funding in this country, that encompasses administrative and development costs.

The other issues that come up time and again are audiences, touring, and subject matter. The three are intrinsically linked, and the underlying question is: Who do we make theatre for and why? Yes, the majority of theatre audiences nationwide are upper and middle class white, although in Cape Town there is a huge coloured and Muslim audience base [Quick digression: when we say "coloured" in South Africa we are, to be crass, referring to those people descended

from the Malay slaves—as opposed to black or mixed-race]. Does that mean we make theatre that appeals and speaks to only them? Or do we make theatre for the poor black audiences? If so what language do we make it in and where do we perform? And when we do take theatre to the people, will they actually come and see it?

For me there is a simple answer to this question, and it goes back to one of the first things I was ever taught about theatre. Theatre happens when someone does something in a space, and someone else is watching. Yes, it's fantastic when we can put on a show in a big theatre with lights, costumes, props and tinkly music in the foyer with full colour programmes showing our best side...but the traditional storyteller who lives in Khayelitsha does theatre too, and when the group of girls I work with sing and dance at the taxi rank at six am on Monday morning and get the crowd cheering along, that is theatre too.

Times are hard in South Africa, with crime, and a leadership crisis in politics. People often dismiss art as being nice but unnecessary. I believe art is central to life, it reflects, critiques, celebrates. Music in this country is only on the rise—my friend Zolani's band, Freshlyground, recently took home an MTV award, and Seether is, I believe, quite popular in the USA. But it is the simpler songs, on the ground, that rock the nation in a different way. At the moment there are two controversial songs: Bok van Blerk's "De la Rey", about a general in the Anglo-Boer war and with the refrain "Kan jy die Boere kom lei" ("Can you come and lead the people?") has taken the country by storm, seen by some as a leftover mentality from Apartheid days, and by others as a cry from a youth who feel unwanted and powerless in their own country; on the other end of the scale "Awet' umtshini wam" ("Hand me my machine gun"), a struggle song, has been taken up again by supporters of Jacob Zuma.

My friend Brett Goldin wrote and performed a play, *Bad Apple*, about violence amongst teenagers, which ended with the lead protagonist getting killed. A year later, Brett himself was cruelly murdered. Now we are busy planning a huge tour, taking the play into schools and enskilling the teenagers there to tell their own stories about crime and violence. Because of Brett's play, people are moving on.

I have a production company, Blameless Productions, in partnership with Nkuli Sibeko (my best friend and sister from another mother!). The most exciting project we are undertaking this year, in my mind, is running arts business management courses with community leaders in the North West Province.

And apart from that I am directing a musical, dramaturging a puppetry performance, adapting a novel for the stage, writing a radio drama series, and helping put together a performance for a breast cancer fundraiser. Oh, and my play is on at the Baxter, I am taking one show to the Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees and three to the National Arts Festival. Oh, and putting together a music festival, Mpfree...oh yes...

Yes, theatre is alive, it will always be alive because it lives in us. Viva South African Theatre, Viva!

## Bringing *Heads* to NYU's HotInk International Festival of New Plays

by EM Lewis

From the official NYU 6th Annual hotINK International Festival of New Plays Press Release...

Now in its sixth year, hotINK brings distinguished playwrights, directors and actors from the professional theatre community together with the talented students and alumni of the Tisch School of the Arts to bring new plays from all over the world to New York audiences.

Thursday, January 18, 2007

The trip from Los Angeles to New York was eerily easy. I had an entire row of seats to myself (when does that ever happen anymore?), and had a lovely little nap as I flew across the country. Then I caught the AirTrain to Jamaica Station and the A-Train to 23rd Street in the Chelsea District of Manhattan. The place I was staying—the Leo House—is only half a block from the subway stop. It felt lovely to drag my suitcase up those stairs and into the wintry cityscape.

The Leo House is a hostel run by German Catholic nuns, who live up on the 8th floor. They offer simple rooms in a neat old building that's a little cheaper than your usual hotel. It's not fancy, and you have to share the shower facilities in the hall, but it was plenty good for me. There's a radiator in the bathroom! I definitely was not in LA anymore.

After checking in, getting settled, and calling my folks to let them know I'd arrived all right, I headed to dinner at a little French restaurant with Laura Savia. Laura works at the Atlantic and was going to be directing the reading of my play for the hotINK Festival.

I used to underestimate the value of the "getting to know you" part of the theater process. It would make me antsy in first rehearsals when an hour was spent on introductions and discussions when we could be "working." But it seems to me now that getting to know each other—feeling out how another person thinks and works and what their perspective is on the world—is tremendously important. How can we speak with each other, understand each other, and work together until we find a common language? I guess that's what Laura and I were doing. We talked about where we were from and where we went to school and all that good stuff. Who we are, what we want from this life, and who our heroes are. And in amongst all that, we talked about my play.

I wonder if playwrights ever get jaded about this? I am always so delighted. Someone wants to talk about my "baby"—not just in general terms, but specifically, and with purpose, and at length!

Laura had clearly read the play carefully, and asked good questions, many about background, as the play is set against the war in Iraq. She also had questions about each of the characters and their motivations and struggles, which we discussed—a conversation made even more interesting since she had just finished casting all four roles, and had been thinking a lot about what makes these four people tick.

Later, on my way back to Leo House, I saw Gay Talese standing on the sidewalk, talking with friends. What a city, that Gay Talese and (presumably) Edward Albee and all manner of other fabulous, literary folks are just wandering about! In LA, we just have TV stars...



*Friday, January 19, 2007*

Friday ended up being a free day for me, as our four actors would not be available for rehearsal until Saturday—the day of the reading. Time for a New York adventure!

I had breakfast at Leo House. They had a nice buffet set out down in their dining room, and I sat there listening (as playwrights are wont to do) to other people's conversations. There was an Aussie chap who was bending the ear of one of the nuns about his daughter. Much drama there. One elderly nun had a little white poodle-ish dog who followed her all around. They both looked very distrustful of the riff-raff assembled in their breakfast room.

Next, it was time to scout out NYU—to make sure I could find my rehearsal and reading the next day. I consulted my subway map but ended up getting off at 14th, rather than 4th—which made for a longer walk than was truly necessary. But it was lovely and crisp outside, and Chelsea is an interesting area of town to wander through.

Finally, with a little kindness of strangers who pointed me in the right direction, I found NYU. And the Tisch building! Unfortunately, it was the wrong Tisch building. After poring over his directory for a while, the nice security guard and I figured out that I needed the Tisch School of the Arts, and he sent me off again.

I found it at last, signed in with the security guard for that building, and went up the elevator. A nice teacher led me through the absolute maze of the building until we found Catherine Coray, the curator of the hotINK Festival.

Catherine was tremendously generous with her time, especially considering I just dropped into her office without warning. But she'd read my play—read all the plays in the festival, it seemed like—and liked it a lot. We discussed plays about the war in Iraq, which she said she's seeing more and more of now that it's been going for so long. We talked about the festival, and about some of the other entries, and how she had worked to pair the sponsoring theater companies with plays that would fit their sensibilities. She seems like a really nice woman! I didn't stay too long, but it was great to put a face to the name on the e-mail that had invited me there.

Next, I decided to find the Dramatists Guild, because...it's there, and I was there, and I'm a proud member of the organization. What a location! Right in the middle of all the Broadway theaters. I was glad to see what it looked like. I asked if Gary Garrison was in, but he wasn't. I have to start learning to call first! I met Gary at the Last Frontier Theater Conference in Alaska, where he led several outstanding writing workshops, and think he's a fabulous teacher. He teaches at NYU, but also works at the Dramatists Guild now.

The rest of the afternoon involved a trip to the Natural History Museum, which I'd never been to before. The subway conveniently stops right there. It's amazing to walk right out of the train car and into the museum! A person could spend days and weeks looking around. As I just had an afternoon, I moved right along. I particularly enjoyed a big hall that had Native American masks and totem poles and other cool stuff in it. Another highlight was the Hall of Biodiversity. The new full-length that I'm trying to finish is called *Song of Extinction*—and all the exhibits on biodiversity, extinction of species and evolution were fabulous background. I also learned more about Teddy Roosevelt than I'd known before...

My feet gave out before I ran out of museum to explore, but I knew it was time to quit. I'd promised Laura that I'd get her a new draft of the play via e-mail by the end of the day. I'd made some small (but important) changes during the rehearsal process for a staged reading I'd had in Los Angeles at the Blank Theater earlier that week. Back

at the Leo House, I took off my shoes and input my edits. I felt good about them—this draft of the play, which I'd been working so hard on for a year and a half—was feeling pretty tight and strong.

I had Chinese food and snow for dinner! It was getting very cold. Very, very cold. Cold enough that I wished for more layers of long underwear and a thicker coat—but what's prettier than snow coming down? Amazingly enough, the bicycle delivery boys were braving all elements to do their thing, coming in with blue fingers that they immediately wrapped around mugs of steaming hot tea. People better tip them well.

I hurried to finish eating so I could find the Atlantic Theater, which was only a few blocks away from Leo House. Laura had kindly arranged for me to have a ticket to that night's performance of *The Voyage Inheritance*, adapted by David Mamet from an older play. I enjoyed it! It felt quite modern most of the way through, in its analysis of a family's financial misdeeds, and how the sins of the father are passed down to the son. The women's roles (or lack thereof) and the right-with-the-world ending made it feel its era to me, but I was still very glad I went.

Luckily, New York is the city that never sleeps, because I'd input my edits but hadn't e-mailed them to Laura yet. I found an internet café half a block down from Leo House (which served hot tea and coffee, and lovely little crème-filled pastries!). A perfect end to a good day.

*Saturday, January 20, 2007*

Reading day! This was what I'd come for, and I was both nervous and excited.

I tried to give myself plenty of time to find the elusive NYU again, in time for my noon rehearsal. Good thing I did—the streets were icy, and I was sure I was going to fall. Yellow taxis slip-slid at every stop sign, and it took a lot of hot coffee to warm me up.

Laura was in the lobby when I arrived at the Tisch building, so we went up to the Goldberg Theater on the 7th floor together—the place where we would rehearse, then have the reading. She brought water for everyone, along with nuts and nibbles. It was going to be a full day, and we needed protein.

Because of some of the actors' schedules, we didn't have everybody for the whole rehearsal period. But the structure of my play makes it easy to work with two actors at a time. We had Melinda Wade (who played Caroline Conway, British Embassy worker) and Michael Cullen (who played Harold Wolfe, American engineer) from noon to 2:30 p.m. The two of them have worked together before and had an immediate rapport with one another. I liked them! Great stage presence. I could tell that just sitting at the table with them.

Freddy Arsenault and Damon Boggess were with us from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. What great guys! Freddy is an NYU acting student, very gifted and professional. He played my network journalist, Michael Apres. Damon had been working with Laura in a play she was acting in, and he was a great choice to play the impatient photojournalist, Jack Velazquez.

From 4:30–7:00 p.m., Laura (and I) worked with the whole cast, bringing everything together. Everyone had questions, and was very engaged, which was great. We got to hear the rhythm of the scenes and how the piece was flowing.

We took a brief break, girded our loins, and went on at 7:30 p.m.

One challenging aspect of the festival was that multiple readings were always scheduled for the same time, in different venues in the same building. I wished I could have gone to see more of the others! But despite competition from simultaneous pieces, we had twenty or thirty people in our small theater. Not a huge crowd, but respectable.

Among the people who came were NY actress Sara Wagner, girlfriend of one of my playwright mates in Los Angeles, and two fellow playwrights from the ICWP—Lia and Robin, along with Robin's husband Joe. Writer types flock together, so we found each other in record time. A huge thank you to all of them for coming.

The reading went well. The actors were all on, listening to each other and in the moment. They really nailed the relationships between the characters and allowed themselves to be vulnerable with each other. There were lots of laughs, which might be surprising considering the subject matter, but I always think the more dire the subject the more necessary it is to laugh. Laughter is one of our most potent defense mechanisms against the powers of darkness. I don't think anyone left at intermission...

Afterwards, I nervously went back to find Sara and Robin and Joe and Lia. Luckily, everyone seemed to enjoy the play. It was very gratifying! Laura was pleased; the actors were excited. I love the theater!

Next, we went down to the lobby for the communal reception for all the plays. I had two glasses of wine in quick succession, with no food in my stomach since breakfast, and between that and having the reading done with, I was happy, happy, happy. I talked with Robin and Lia and Sara and with other folks who had seen the reading, gabbed with my actors, and let the whole happy evening wash over me.

Afterwards, Damon and Laura and I took the subways back to our respective garrets. It was a great day.

**“For two weeks after finishing the last scene, my head was so amazingly quiet I couldn't believe it. They'd been talking and talking and talking—and suddenly, the story was done, and they were quiet, and I was alone in my head again. Until the next play...”**

Sunday, January 21, 2007

Down day.

Robin had invited me to go to a play with her and her husband at Rhode Island Rep—but as soon as I woke up, I knew I'd have to call and beg off. A head cold had hit me with a vengeance. Thank goodness it waited until my reading was over with! But sometimes the body insists that we rest. I stayed in my room most of the day, only venturing out for food and cold medicine, which were all (luckily) within a city block. I used up a box and a half of the Leo House's kleenex during the rest of my stay.

So. I felt terrible, but was still very happy about the reading, and on a bit of a high from that. I thought about the reading, and how glad I was to have come to New York for it. I felt good about this draft of the play after the reading, and still do—I'm still tweaking tiny things here or there, but I think whatever other rewrites are going to be done now need to be when it's going into production. I thought about making the play one part of a trilogy. We'll see...

Slept some more. Drank tea and ate take-out. Didn't go to the second night of plays. Slept.

Laura had asked me to write an introduction to *Heads* to include in the program. It didn't make it in...but here's what I wrote.

What is my impetus for writing a play about four western civilians held captive during the war in Iraq? There is no one big thing, but there are several small things that led to this play.

First, I write a lot in my plays about dealing with death and trying to figure out how to (and why to) survive. About four years ago, I

lost a number of people who were very close to me in a very short amount of time, and I guess I'm still trying to figure out the universe in the wake of all that.

Second, long before the war in Iraq, I'd been reading and researching the Vietnam War (not for any particular purpose, just because it interested me). I have two shelves of books on the topic, mainly memoirs, nonfiction and interviews of people who were there, in whatever capacity. Part of why the Vietnam War interests me, I think, is that the people fighting and reporting and nursing the wounded there were all in a place of violence, conflicting loyalties, and moral complication. I find many parallels between that war and this one.

Third, I write to figure out what I think about things, and how I feel. The more unfathomable I find something, the more I feel the need to write about it, in order to force it into making sense to me. When the first reports began coming in, of the beheadings of western hostages in Iraq, I found myself trying to figure out how this act could possibly be within the ability of one human being to perpetrate on another. Then I asked myself what it would be like to be in a small, dark room, with a violent, ugly death on the other side of it? Sitting there, waiting for it. How do you do this? What would my survival techniques be—and how would they be inadequate for this task?

I cried while writing every scene of the second act of this play, because I loved all four of my characters so much. They had talked and talked and argued and battled in my head for months and months and months—and now I knew what was going to happen to them. For two weeks after finishing the last scene, my head was so amazingly quiet I couldn't believe it. They'd been talking and talking and talking—and suddenly, the story was done, and they were quiet, and I was alone in my head again. Until the next play...

Monday, January 22, 2007

On Monday, I slept in and felt better than the day before by a long ways. Still snuffling, but vertical!

I grabbed soup and a sandwich on the corner, then went to my little pastry shop for a big cup of coffee and to check my e-mail. I found that both Lia and Robin had kindly and generously commented on my play on the ICWP list. So glad they liked it! Very nice of them to say so “out loud,” on the list.

I caught up on e-correspondence, wrote a little on *Song of Extinction*, and researched some possible New York relatives for my Mom, though hunting them down will have to wait for another trip. Or letters. My mom's parents were from New York, and it's fun to walk down the streets imagining Grandma and Grandpa young and walking down those same streets.

Evening was upon me already, so I bundled up, filled my pockets with kleenex, and headed toward NYU. I always like to eat near where I'm headed so I won't be late to what I'm trying to get to, so I ate near the university, at a place called Cozy Burger. It should have been called Busy Burger! It was good, though. I had my burger with heaps of blue cheese on it, and fries, and some sort of cherry soda which was fabulous. Then hot tea to go.

I was back at the festival for another festival reading, also sponsored by the Atlantic, called *Stoning Mary*, written by British playwright Debbie Tucker Green. The play is about a wife and husband who are forced to choose which of them should receive treatment for AIDS; a mother and father sinking into despair at the life and death of their son, who had become a machete-wielding child soldier; and a young woman, waiting to be stoned to death for murder, who is

visited, reluctantly, by her sister. Bold subjects for a play indeed—but the boldest choice is actually in the casting, as the playwright stipulates that the play must be set in the country in which it is being performed, and the actors playing the parts must all be white.

I strongly believe that playwriting is about empathy. I am you. You are me. What happens up here on this stage could be your life and your life could be up on this stage. We are talking about real, true things up here—or we should be. With that in mind, I think Green's choice is a good one. It forces the audience to put something they perceive as far away and separate into their own faces and voices.

I thought the characters were strong and the situations absolutely dramatic. The one problem I had with it was in the dialogue, which used some techniques from language playwriting which, to me, detracted from the real and terrible situations that the characters were in and ended up feeling a bit stylized and repetitive. Still—I thought it was a play worth seeing and talking about afterwards.

There was another reception after these readings (giving me the impression that NYU is all about the party!). This one was up on the 7th floor, which soon became packed with people. I had a nice chat with one of the adjunct professors on the stairs, and then found Laura wandering about. We decided we needed some more time to talk, so we ventured out into the snow (which was falling again) to a nice dark German bar that was within walking distance, with some of Laura's theater friends in tow.

I had an Irish coffee, despite it being a German bar, because it was warm, and I could wrap my hands around it. Brr! I've become such a lightweight about the weather, living in southern California for the last ten years.

Laura and I had both had a chance to think and reflect about the play and the reading, so it was great to have the chance to talk with her about it again. She didn't have too many quibbles with the script. One thing that came up as a possibility, as we talked (including her other friends in the conversation), was to generalize the time and setting of the play. I thought about this, but subsequently decided against. I prefer specific to general whenever possible. But it was good to consider. We also talked about places to send the play... and then more general topics. Like what did we want to do with our lives, and how were we trying to get there. Excellent subjects to end my visit to New York on, over a drink, on a snowy winter evening. We didn't make any momentous decisions, but we certainly bonded with each other and recommitted to our theatrical paths. Then we shared a cab, dropping me at Leo House, then sending her on toward home. (Thank you, Laura! You were awesome to work with!)

I had to get to the airport at an ungodly hour, so I packed up immediately, caught a couple hours of sleep (literally), then checked out and grabbed a cab. The airplane took me home. It was a great trip.

I'd like to thank the International Centre for Women Playwrights, who helped me with my travelling expenses with a \$200 grant. I appreciate your help! Thanks also to Laura, my actors, and Catherine Coray for inviting me to attend this festival. Being at hotINK made me feel like I've taken another small step forward in my journey to become a playwright.

## Warring Feminism In Tess Onwueme's Dramatic Landscape

by Carolyn Nur Wistrand

Tess Akaeke Onwueme weaves a multilayered dramatic landscape that is threaded with a warring feminism to reshape/rethink tradition in Igbo society. In *The Reign of Wazobia* she places HE/SHE (Wazobia the female King) as a cross-gender character to imagine male/female as equal fashioners in the political, social, and economic well being of community. Forging West African ceremony of Igboland (Eastern Nigeria) with Western postmodern deconstructionist themes, the play is crafted as a stylized mythopoeic ritual that centers around Wazobia, a dancing girl that has been chosen to reign as regent King for three years. Structured in Six Movements (long scenes) and a prologue (no epilogue) in a nonlinear plot, the playwright rearranges the world to unmask the injustices in male hegemonic rule and brings the voice of female leadership to the head of the table/center of the dialogue.

The central conflict in the text is the tradition which requires Wazobia to step down as King at the end of three years. Refusing to relinquish control, the prologue opens with a war chant led by Wazobia at the end of the third year. Here, Onwueme paints the portrait of the SHE/KING calling the women of Igboland to battle against the tradition, the stage directions read "*the women strip themselves almost naked as a sign of revolt.*" (Onwueme:127)

Within the first movement of this piece, Igbo traditions of male leadership, upholding time honored customs, and female nudity to please the eyes of men have been discarded.

Onwueme takes on many of the traditional roles of Igbo women that Chinua Achebe discusses in *Things Fall Apart*. The four wives of Wazobia (widows of the deceased king) mirror Okonkwo's (*Things Fall Apart*) three wives, who take turns preparing meals in separate huts for their Master/Husband. Breaking another tradition, Wazobia demands that her wives eat and sit with her from one table. While Okonkwo beats his 2nd wife mercilessly for not having his noon day meal prepared, a man who has beaten his wife for the same offense finds himself brought before the throne of Wazobia. The She/King pronounces:

I know when men are united. When they have a common enemy. That is *woman*. The king will not allow himself to be dragged into the mud of your prejudices. *He*, the king, *She* is beyond man or woman. The king has therefore gathered you, to make this pronouncement. That whatever you call yourself, You are, every one of you, first and foremost, *human beings* with potentials waiting to be actualized for the benefit of this kingdom! (Onwueme: 149)

The Sixth Movement of the text returns to the prologue as the women, having received education/empowerment in the three years of Wazobia's reign, form a moon shaped arc behind the throne of their She/King in full nakedness. Their nude bodies have become the strength/soul of the kingdom which hypnotize and dismantle the minds of the male chiefs who would have their She/King step down. "Long reign Wazobia!" (Onwueme:175) is the rallying cry of the dancing women as the drums beat a new tradition across the stage as the lights fade.

### Work Cited

Onwueme, Tess, Akaeke. *Three Plays: The Broken Calabash, Parables for a Season, The Reign of Wazobia*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993.

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## REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

### NONFICTION

*Granuaile: Ireland's Pirate Queen c 1530–1603*, by Anne Chambers. Anne Chambers is considered the expert on Grace O'Malley.

*The Captains: Heroines and Hellions of the Sea*, by Joan Druett

*Booty: Girl Pirates on the High Seas*, by Sara Lorimer

*The Pirate Queen: In Search of Grace O'Malley and Other Legendary Women of the Sea*, by Barbara Sjöholm

*Women Pirates: Eight Stories of Adventure*, by Myra Weatherly

*Female Tars: Women Aboard Ship in the Age of Sail*, by Suzanne J. Stark

*Seafaring Women*, by Linda Grant DePauw

### FICTION

*Grania*, historical novel by Morgan Llywelyn

*The White Seahorse: A Novel about Granuaile, Legendary Sea-Queen*, by Eleanor Fairburn

*The Ghost of Grania O'Malley*, by Michael Morpurgo

*The Gift of the Pirate Queen*, by Patricia Reilly Giff

*The Pirate Queen*, by David Ross

### PLAY SCRIPTS

*Pirate Queen*, by Zane Rodriguez. A play about Grace O'Malley, focusing on the meeting between Grace and Queen Elizabeth. [http://www.omalley-clan.org/uow/omalley\\_web/granuaile.htm](http://www.omalley-clan.org/uow/omalley_web/granuaile.htm)

*A Most Notorious Woman*, by Molly Lyons. This began as a monologue assignment in an acting class and grew to a full one-woman performance. [http://www.omalley-clan.org/uow/omalley\\_web/granuaile.htm](http://www.omalley-clan.org/uow/omalley_web/granuaile.htm)

### MUSIC

*Granuaile*, by Shaun Davey. One of the most moving pieces about Grace O'Malley out of all the music, books, and articles. His music and lyrics tell her story beautifully. I played this CD while my fourth graders made their pirate boats.

"Grace O'Malley" from Cathie Ryan's *Somewhere Along the Road* CD

*Notorious*, music by Martin Stillion for Molly Lyons' play, *A Most Notorious Woman*

### WEB SITES

<http://www.graceomalley-annechambers.com>  
Anne Chambers is the official historian and biographer of Grace O'Malley.

[http://www.rencentral.com/oct\\_nov\\_vol1/graceomalley.shtml](http://www.rencentral.com/oct_nov_vol1/graceomalley.shtml)

These are good pictures and descriptions of Grace's castles.

[http://www.omalley-clan.org/uow/omalley\\_web/granuaile.htm](http://www.omalley-clan.org/uow/omalley_web/granuaile.htm)

O'Malley site. The O'Malley clan is still very active and has a reunion every year on Clare Island, Grace O'Malley's birth place.



## Pirate Queen For a Day

by Diane M. Swanson

*Daybreak, 1564. The men wear their breath on their beards, the cold air clinging for warmth. After days of readiness, each man is still. All eyes are on the horizon, waiting. Two hundred warriors waiting...for one woman. The ship is hers, as are the thers in the fleet. The ropes are hers, the barrels, the sails, the galleys and the decks all belong to Grania O'Malley, daughter of Dubhdara, one of the last great chieftains. "...A most notorious woman in all the coasts of Ireland," as the English spoke of her in their official court papers of the 1500's. She was seventeen when these reports first appeared.*

*Now seventeen-year-old boys to fifty-year-old men line her decks, eyes fixed, waiting for her call. She appears above them and her voice rings out, a sharp eagle in the morning air. With a flip of her cape and a snap of the sails, they are off. And may God help those who come between her...and what will be hers.*

July, 2004. After months of my mother and I emailing each other research on Grace O'Malley for a play I was writing, we are stunned to find ourselves standing in the late, setting sun of Connemara. Exhausted from an all-night flight from the United States, early landing, driving on the other side of the road and finally finishing the 48-hour stint, we are here. Here, on the edge of a lake. And in the middle of the lake is a tiny island. And on the island is a castle: Hen's Castle.

Our first night in Ireland and we are staying at a bed and breakfast that overlooks Hen's Castle; we cannot believe our luck. And as it soon turns out, the owner of the bed and breakfast's maiden name is O'Gorman and my mother's maiden name is Gorman. They become instant cousins.

This is the west coast of Ireland, where Grace O'Malley lived, worked, and fought a life-long battle against the English. To the north of Connemara is Clew Bay, a port of many small islands, the biggest of which is Clare Island, Grace O'Malley's childhood home. Although she was born into a seafaring family of considerable wealth and power in 1560, the ancient Gaelic world into which she arrived would be on its last voyage, eventually to be torn asunder within her lifetime like a great galleon ship, crushed upon its own rocky shore and sunk, forever. But like any great sea captain, Grace O'Malley would stay with her ship to the end. The very bitter end.

Connemara is where Grace O'Malley went as a young, sixteen year old bride. This is north of Galway, which was an English city at the time and Irish were not allowed to enter or trade in the port. The English court papers begin reporting attacks from "a feminine sea captain" at this point, Grace being age seventeen. She gave birth to two sons and a daughter. When her husband was killed in battle by the Joyces, they honored his fearless fight by calling him Donal The Cock. Grace successfully led her husband's warriors into battle to revenge his death and won the warriors' loyalty. Soon after, the Joyces attacked the castle where Grace stayed, a castle which her husband had stolen from them. Grace and her men fought the Joyces off and they were so impressed that they called it Hen's Castle, a name it keeps to this day.

Grace's genius was in her maneuverability. Her ships were small and she knew every little channel to slip into with the fog after attacking a large Spanish or English ship. After her husband's death, she announced she would go back to Clare Island. The two hundred men asked to go with her. Grace took the two hundred warriors, put them on her father's ships, and sailed out...into history.

When I first started to write a play about Grace O'Malley, the venue was an historical script for our middle schoolers to perform. I soon discovered that a play about this woman who ran her own fleet of pirate ships for fifty years could never be anything less than an epic. Fortunately I have been saved from having to write that epic by two events:

One, somewhere in around the third scene I was visited with an idea for a one-act comedy that took over and pretty much wrote itself. *The Pirate Magnet School* has a large cast including pirate Cheerleaders, pirate Goody-Goodies, pirate Freaks, a pirate Nerd, and pirate Nobodies. Captain Bamboozle is the bumbling principal, Nurse Shark is the blood-thirsty nurse, Mrs. Vendetta is the revengeful guidance counselor, Mrs. Absconder is the flustered homeroom teacher, and Mr. McAargh is the English teacher with the corny jokes. The production of this play at my school was an incredible experience for the forty kids involved as well as myself.

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The second reason why I do not have to write this epic about Grace O'Malley is because a far more competent group is already doing it. Boubil and Schonberg, the creative team that wrote *Les Misérables* and *Miss Saigon* previewed their huge new musical, *The Pirate Queen*, in Chicago at Thanksgiving. They will be opening the show on Broadway this Spring. This event will bring the name of Grace O'Malley once again into the homes of people on many coasts. This time, however, four hundred years later, people won't be quite so scared.

And although Grace O'Malley sailed the seas for eighty years, the rest of us will have to be content with just being...Pirate Queen for a Day.

It is up to the artists now, however, to fill in where the historians leave off. The gaps and the mysteries beckon our interpretations. Historical figures become legends and we, the storytellers, keep them not just alive, but living.

More information about Grace O'Malley can be found online. For detailed information, Anne Chambers is considered the expert. Chambers has done an impressive amount of research in the English court papers and has done an unparalleled job of presenting what facts we know in her book, *Granuaile, Ireland's Pirate Queen c 1530-1603*.

Contact Diane Swanson at [diane.swanson@hies.org](mailto:diane.swanson@hies.org).

## Playwrights Need Not Apply

by Carolyn Gage

I see that the Maine Writers and Publishers Alliance is offering a contest to Maine writers of fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. Playwrights need not apply. I see prizes for children and young adult books, books with Maine themes, books that are self-published. I see prizes for cover design, for art, for illustration. What I don't see is prizes for plays.

Hmmp.

I want to protest this exclusion, and my beef is not just with MWPA. You are only following a practice that has been established by writers' programs and organizations, grant-funding foundations and government programs (including NEA, sadly), and so-called literary competitions all over the US. Sometime in the last two decades, during the period when the teaching of writing moved from private mentorships into professional degree programs, and when the nurturing of writers moved from individual patronage to an upscale industry, playwrights found ourselves out in the cold. We were told repeatedly, condescendingly, that we belonged (downstairs?) with the performing artists, not (upstairs?) with the literati. While we were busy fixing our second-act curtain, the powers-that-be decided that playwrights were no longer writers, and that our plays were no longer literature. Under these new definitions, earlier playwrights (Molière, Shakespeare, Aeschylus, Miller, and company) were apparently "grandfathered in" as literature.

You think I exaggerate? Google "creative writing programs" on the Internet and check out how many of them offer any playwriting in their curricula. Look up the roster of presenters at most writers' conferences. (A recent and notable exception is the Stonecoast Brief-Residency MFA program. Thank you, Annie Finch!) Browse the "Deadlines" section or the "Recent Winners" section of any copy of *Poets & Writers Magazine*. Fifty pages of competitions, and nary a one for playwrights. Grants? Here's a typical notice: "The literature fellowships are given every other year to creative nonfiction writers, and alternate with fellowships in poetry and fiction."

Okay, I go to writers' conferences and also theatre conferences. I feel far more at home at the writers' conferences, in spite of the exclusion of my kind from the rostrum. The theatre conferences are filled with workshops for movement for actors, roundtables on problems with theatre management, demonstrations by directors on methods for scene interpretation. Yes, tangentially related to playwriting, but, frankly, I find writers' workshops on style, on getting published, on storyline, and so on, far more applicable to my craft.

I am a writer. I swear I am. Really. My plays are not channeled to me in my sleep. My characters do not materialize and dictate their dialogue. I use pencils and paper and computers. I edit. I revise. I spell-check. I cut. I throw out. I rewrite. I research. I research massively. Proof: thirty bankers' boxes of notes, all sitting in the University of Oregon Special Collections. No, despite the economic trends driving playwrights to make plays as untheatrical as possible, I don't just write about arguments with my family. I have plays about athletes in the 1934 Olympics. I have plays about 16th century Italian nuns. I have plays about ancient Greece. I have plays about famous historical figures . . . Joan of Arc, Harriet Tubman, Eva Le Gallienne, Jane Addams, Anastasia Romanov. But I don't just research history. I study poetry, because I use it. I write book and lyrics for musicals. I construct monologues like prose arias. I write. I have gone through mountains of legal pads, miles of computer paper, four computers, a half-dozen word-processing programs. I write all the time. And I've got the rejection slips to prove it.

Which brings me to the subject of publishers. They have form letters for people like me: "We don't publish drama. We suggest that you contact the drama publishers." Well, the drama publishers are not really in the publishing business. They are in the business of licensing plays. They take a loss on the publishing end, which is why they only want to publish drama that has a Broadway or Off-Broadway track record, or is written for high school production. They publish plays in small, paperback, actors' editions. These are rarely, rarely sold on bookstore shelves, except for the handful of specialty drama bookstores. This is some serious discrimination, here. I submit that far more people have *read* and currently *read* Shakespeare, Molière, Aeschylus, Chekhov, Shaw, Miller, (note the gender... subject of another rant, not entirely unrelated to this one, at a later date), than have ever attended live performances, or even watched plays on film or TV.

**Plays are literary. They are meant to be read, as well as performed. And what a treat for the reader! In the absence of a live production, the reader becomes set designer, director, and actors. The reader provides the visuals. Reading a play is actually a highly collaborative, creative act. It's playwrighting by proxy.**

And it's not like this country doesn't need good plays. Come on. We all know the media is owned by one or two evil moguls whose souls belong to various corporate interests profoundly invested in the pyramid scheme we euphemistically call "free markets" since the rogue capitalism of the '80's and '90's. Uh-oh, I'm losing support here. I can feel it. See? This is why you need theatre—the very discomfort some of you are experiencing right now. That discomfort should feel familiar, invigorating. Live theatre, good live theatre, does that.

I'm wearing out my welcome here. But I have just a few more things to say before I pack myself off to the "performing arts," where I belong. I can construct plots with the best of you novelists and short story writers. How do I know? Because I have to do it in two hours (120 pages) on a platform, no special effects. My audiences can't get up and fix a sandwich when they get a little sleepy. They can't take the dog for walk if their legs get stiff. They can't even go to the bathroom if they have to, without considerable social censure. If I can't distract them with a compelling storyline, they will blame me, unfair as it is, for the discomfort they are experiencing. I have to be down with plot, suspense, character, momentum—and I am.

I also want to say, I can do character. Again, I have to. My plays are going to be in the hands of actors who say things like, "My character would never say this"—as if that's the playwright's problem. And, actually, it is.

I also want to say something about compression. Playwriting is the haiku of narrative forms. I can hold my own in this arena with any poet. The compression of playwriting is extreme. Fifteen characters, four subplots, profound engagement with the most explosive issues of the culture, and (drum roll) an *audience-assisted* paradigm shift achieved in real time at the end of just two hours! Ha! Let's see the author of the 400-page novel pull off something like that!

Okay, so I can write. Therefore I am a writer. But what about the literature aspect? Plays *are* literary. They are *meant* to be read, as well as performed. And what a treat for the reader! In the absence of a live production, the reader becomes set designer, director, and actors. The reader provides the visuals. Reading a play is actually a highly collaborative, creative act. It's playwrighting by proxy.

Well, it's time for the closing arguments. I've already made them. Put me and my kind on the guest list, on the speaker list, on the faculty as *writers*. Name our work in your categories for grants, for prizes, for subjects you publish. And, MWPA, I am renewing my membership (see enclosed check) as an act of faith. Next year I expect to submit a piece of LITERATURE to your competition for WRITERS, because I actually think I've got a shot at winning... provided, of course, I'm allowed to enter.

*Carolyn Gage is the author of five books and more than fifty plays. At the risk of losing her credentials as a writer, she also tours internationally in her own work and is the artistic director of Cauldron & Labrys, a women's production company in Portland. Her catalog is online at [www.carolyngage.com](http://www.carolyngage.com). Article ©2005.*

*POSTSCRIPT: The MWPA not only printed this letter, but also added a category for playwrights. In addition, this letter was successful in petitioning the Lambda Literary Foundation.*

## Ramping It Up

by Patti Dean

It's the '80's. 1982 to be exact. As I get ready to go on stage, I check my appearance. Not too risky. Pants, for sure, so I can move around and avoid any potential embarrassment and—don't forget—it makes me one of the guys. A sweater. And most important—wear a bra.

Last night the dreaded thing happened to my sister comic—"Your headlights are on." "What?" She stood ready to move from her prepared material to the proof of a Real Stand Up Comic—riffing with the audience. In particular, *mano y mano* with a heckler.

"Your headlights are on." What?"—We all knew and cringed—"Your nipples are showing." From that moment on—I watched my friend's material fall apart, as she turned her 15 minutes at the Improv into the longest night of her life.

We were in male territory. And in that decade—we were moving from the self-deprecating humor of Totie Fields and Phyllis Diller and the "Get mad—get everything" humor of Joan Rivers to the uncertain ground of "I've got something to say—because." We knew we had something to say—but we only said it in male terms. We hung out with the male comics, we more than likely slept with male comics, and we fought to hold our ground. It was exhilarating to be invited on to male turf—and you got to stay there—if you were good enough to do what they did. Be aggressive. Be confrontational. And follow one boffo laugh with another one and another one and another one.

You started out just like everyone else—doing your best work—night after night to drunken sailors shipping out in the morning. "Are we on? Are we on? Is anyone out there—who speaks English?" If you were smart—you had a comedy buddy. I'll stay for your turn if you'll stay for mine. And then you could talk about your act or your bit on the subway home.

This all worked well for me. I learned toughness. Nobody can get me—on stage/off stage. I learned to shift and move like a bantamweight. I learned thinking on my feet, which would serve me well when I later wrote plays and the director and actor looked at me and said—this isn't working. 1-2-3 always in threes—take your pick which line do you like?

Stand up is a great way to train for ready fire aim!

Then I got pregnant. And became a huge receptive hormone junky. I lost that aggression. For this mother, I wanted to protect and stay in the cave and be my baby and me. There was still smoking in clubs. I craved clean air. Riding subways at 3 a.m. suddenly seemed like—a dangerous idea. And I lost my desire to put an edge on my point of view. I stopped stand up.



During the next decade or two. Women changed. More feminine. Women could be sharp, funny, and pretty. Women could be sharp, funny, and themselves.

But I'd changed. I didn't want to have to immediately look for the ascending jokes. Set up joke. Resting joke to prepare for the—pow! Right in the eye. I wanted to say something that would make them laugh and then in the next second—question that laugh.

My next step, I wrote a children's musical. During production, my seasoned director/composer—taught me to move from talk talk talk—to can this be said by action? Take the stereotypes and shade them. Add something surprising. The big chase scene—the banana peel—not the first time, not the second time—now—that's the release. I learned to enjoy the poetry of slapstick—an audience of 4 year olds became my Comedy College.

Take a breather for 4 children. 4 children—three husbands. It can happen.

At the end of Marriage Door #3, I took a poetry class. Economy of phrase. Punch lines. Verbs that cry—verbs that mute. Poems that must obey strict structure—poems wild and free. I went to Poetry Slams and open mics of writer's reading their work. Unpredictable—boring/exhilarating. A burst of creativity unbridled. I'd introduce myself to 18 year olds. I got published in a magazine that a 23 year old put out in her spare time. Or rather when her printing job ended at 5 and everyone went home, except her. I performed my piece in a whole in the wall to the sound of hip hop music. The DJ forgot to turn off the music. I was double the age of anyone there. That same piece is being published in an anthology in England this February.

I cautiously started back into the performance scene. Next venue—cabaret. Coffee house entertainment for the evening. I bring in business. I get the free space and provide minimal lighting. This was a powerful campfire experience for me. I discover themes. I involve all sorts of people—this appeals to the Aquarian in me. The beginner. The seasoned pro. I ask everybody. One of my shows involved former prisoners. Another was devoted to women artists, singers, poets, and dancers. I loved the program art I devised for it—Women Creating—strong women pounding an anvil. Yes, doing a man's job—but doing it—beautifully.

I develop performance pieces. I have many stories that I want to say, to act, to sing. Rock Band Singer. Mormon. Southern Child Bride. Stand up Comic. Alcoholic. Grandmother. I've lived them all. One of those was chosen as Seattle's entry for the Shag Rug Show/Mobtown Players production, *Double X: The Bad Ass Lands* for production this April in Baltimore. Another will be a creative non-fiction story in an anthology about Wise Women over 50.

One thing I've learned—is to pay attention to the morphing. Pay attention to what seems to be nudging me next. I am inspired by my fire. I am humble that life has ramped up for me at age 52. Oh, and did I tell you—I bought a scooter this past summer...

*Patti Dean was a stand up comic at the Improv in New York City in the '80's. Wrote for other comics. Lead in "Club Ted" off off B'way production in NYC—directed by Suzy Schnieder. Performed in Angry Housewives in the '80's. Wrote a children's play for the Children's Festival in Seattle. Produced, wrote, and edited an award winning documentary on stand up comics. Produced and wrote various cabarets in Seattle in '04-'05. Is published in the anthology, Love and Sacrifice, as a companion piece to the international movie, London Voodoo, by Zenfilms. Solo piece, "PETE," to be performed by the Shag Rug Shows/Mobtown Players in Baltimore for Double X: The Bad Ass Lands in April 2007, as their Seattle entry. Contact pattideanwriter@gmail.com.*

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## IN HER OWN WRITE

### Theatre in Our Schools

**Within the next two months, a week of awareness and celebration will occur: Theatre in Our Schools Week. Drama Clubs, teachers, directors and students will post posters, proudly wear t-shirts from past performances and sell buttons with phrases on them like I (heart) Theatre. For one full week the kids who love plays and the teachers who've inspired their passion for all things theatrical will use every spare moment to tell their school that drama matters. Drama makes connections, builds community and inspires new ideas. But what is one of the first things to go when a school needs to make cuts? The plays, the musicals and the drama classes...the very place students learn to be the best possible human beings by pretending to be someone else. These students are the future for us, the playwrights. They are our future audiences, performers and directors.**

**As members of ICWP, we connect with each other, and we connect with playhouses and theatre companies. These relationships are the cornerstones of our careers. But to build a foundation, we also need to connect with the future—the students. When Linda Eisenstein took time out of her busy schedule to visit my classroom, she inspired future playwrights. When Robin Rice Lichtig answered e-mail questions from students as they directed and performed in her plays, she showed them the possibilities of a life in theatre. And when college students met with ICWP playwrights in Alan's classroom, connections were made that fueled future discussions, rewrites and understanding.**

**When drama students meet playwrights, many things can happen. They realize why there are royalties to be paid because the people behind the words are real and they earn a living with their plays. They meet people who are just as passionate about character, plot and storyline as they are. These kids will devote their best hours in the future supporting theatre in cities big and small, rural and urban.**

**So when you hear about a school celebrating Theatre in Our Schools Week, do a little celebrating yourself. What you're really celebrating is a life rich with possibilities in the future of theatre.**

—Maureen Brady Johnson

# Seasons

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## ICWP MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of ICWP is 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; and supporting their efforts to gain professional equality, and to express their own personal, artistic, social, and political vision without censorship, harassment, or personal danger.

ICWP welcomes all who support our goals and share our vision.

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