



Playworks

WILL BROOKS

In a way, every writer is an emerging writer

What is it like to be an emerging writer? What are the fears and challenges?

I suppose that my thoughts on the topic are that we've all been there... something tells you that you have to write, that you have something to say. There is a great fire that burns in someone who has just taken their first stab at creating a piece of theatre from the ground up. The excitement that something wonderful could happen, there is a blank canvas and your brush might paint something that will have an effect. The emerging writer has this excitement and fire to lean on as they begin to find a home for their work. They also have, if they live in this province, the SPC to lean on. The SPC is a place where an emerging playwright can go, attempt the impossible task of creating something out of nothing, and be encouraged for it. They have the SPC, because it is an organization where writers

become involved and give back, to the place that was there when they first put an idea on paper.

In a way, every writer is an emerging writer. Every new piece, no matter how many pieces have come before it, is a new task, a new journey into a new world. I don't think anyone who is committed to the craft ever really knows when they choose that first word, where they may end up at the end of the process. There is an inherent fear of being on the ground level of the creative process, whether as an emerging or as a veteran writer. The thoughts in this newsletter centre around the question of emerging. I suppose the thought I have to add is that the SPC invests in all playwrights in the province, as their stories emerge from nothing, through their fear and excitement, into a reality. I encourage all of you to invest in the SPC. Get involved, sit on a committee, be active.

In This Issue

The Emerging Writer

Heather Inglis	page 2
Julianna Dunn.....	page 3
Arden Angley.....	page 4
SPC AGM.....	page 5
24 Hr Playwriting Competition....	page 6
SPC Membership Dues.....	page 6
Spring Festival of New Plays.....	page 7
Saskatoon Fringe Festival.....	page 7

My term as president is coming to a close at the coming AGM, and if there is a thought that I would like to leave with our members, it is that the SPC's successes over the years have all stemmed from the fact that the members give back. That must never end. We have a duty, no matter what level we are at, to get involved and to help the SPC continue to remain healthy long into the future. We don't know what or who is going to emerge from this province tomorrow, but we do know that we have a responsibility to make sure that the SPC is there to help them along.

See you at the AGM.

**Will Brooks
SPC President**

HEATHER INGLIS

We all want to be the one who knows

"In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, in the expert's there are few." Shunryu Suzuki.

Holy smokes, it has been a year since I began as SPC's dramaturg. A year since I wrote my first article for the SPC newsletter last September with shaking fingers, having no idea what I should write and wondering if I had anything at all to say. The year has gone quickly. There has been much to learn. It has been a year of meeting new people, learning new things and just plain getting to know this organization, this community, and how I fit into it.

I have been a beginner. I think we often view "beginning" as sort of a mixed blessing. It can be fun to learn new things and meet new people, all of which hold undiscovered possibilities. But being a beginner often requires humility, which is not a virtue that is especially lauded in mainstream culture. Magazines, newspapers and the electronic media most often celebrate people who have accomplished great things. It is rare to devote time and energy to the beginner, to those who are just starting out. So welcome to our issue devoted to newcomers to playwriting, newcomers to the SPC and beginners of all ages.

There is much to learn about the craft of theatre, in fact many lifetimes worth of knowledge. This means that the amount any one of us knows is very small indeed compared to the sea of theatrical wisdom in which we swim. No matter how much we know there will always be a great deal to learn. And the best way to learn is to allow ourselves to view both our work, and our world, like a beginner does.

Ever notice how a small child will pick up an object - let's say it is a spoon - look at it, fool with it, bang it on the table without having any idea what it is? For them it is just an interesting thing and it is a delight to see what it can do. A small child might try all sorts of things that you or I would never try with a spoon.

Those of us who are older and more experienced with resumes of adult experience see it as "a spoon" which

sits there and is used to stir coffee or to eat soup. That is all. It is limited and uninteresting.

But what if we were able to see the spoon the way the child does, with unlimited possible uses? Isn't it our role as artists to reveal hidden possibilities to the world, to unlock unexpected perspectives long forgotten or unexplored?

We all want to be the one who knows. But if we decide we "know" something, we are not open to other possibilities anymore. And that's a shame. We lose something very vital in our lives and our art when it's more important to us to be "one who knows" than it is to be awake to what's happening and what is possible. We get easily disappointed because we expect one thing, and it doesn't happen quite like that. Or we think something ought to be like this, and it turns out different. Instead of saying, "Oh, isn't that interesting," we say, "Yuck, not what I thought it would be."

The beginner on the other hand does not know what to expect and is interested, delighted, and engaged with whatever happens. They are open to seeing in a way that "those who know" are not.

There is a great deal to be gained by cultivating the mind of the beginner, no matter how many plays you have written, no matter how much theatre you have done.

So here is to those at the beginning of their journey into the playwriting. This issue is for you.

At the SPC we welcome playwrights at all stages of development. Our script service is open to all members, whether you are a beginner writing your first play, or a beginner writing your thirtieth.

Heather Inglis
SPC Dramaturg

JULIANNA DUNN

She helped me to realize the spark in my story

I was five when I brought home my own book of show-and-tell stories. Stories about things that I wanted: like a dog named Pepper, a big house with a pool in the back yard, and a relative who always gave me money to buy candy. All of these things were pretend. I have seven siblings, and the day I brought these stories home is a day I have never forgotten. My older brothers and sisters all wanted to see what the kindergarten was learning at school. Naïvely, I allowed them to read my book. I felt proud, until they started to laugh, then I felt ashamed. I had dishonored the family. Ok, a little dramatic, but isn't that what this is all about?

My mother, who was raised in a very traditional Cree family, sat at the table and read my book. One of my eldest brothers scoffed and said, "Mom, none of those stories are true!" My mom swung her arm at him, missing him of course, and yelled, "Ahh go on, you! Julie's our storyteller." I wouldn't understand the meaning of "storyteller" until much later in life.

I went from wanting to be a dancer (Janet Jackson made it look cool), to an actress (until I got stage fright at the altar at my own wedding). Then I wanted to move to New York and be a model (but "Ford Modeling" wouldn't have known what to do with a size 14 that had more in the front than in the back). I journaled on a daily basis, about how I wished I was Lucy, whose family could afford to give her piano lessons three times a week. I would write about how I wished I was Kendra, who drove to town to go to McDonalds every Friday with her family. I would tuck myself into my bedroom and listen to AM radio and write myself into happiness.

I wrote on walls, sidewalks, garage doors and bathroom stalls (which ultimately lead to toilet paper). I felt pretty serious about writing at age nine when I wrote a radio play (sound effects included) for my school. It was a Halloween themed play which they played over the school intercom. I wrote my first stage play in grade seven for an open house night at my elementary school. As a teenager, I wrote romantic stories for my

friends, starring them and the boys they liked, and I also wrote songs and poetry. My greatest accomplishment to date is writing a play for my high school acting class called, "Christmas with the Mafia." A comedy.

Education is what led me to every opportunity I ever had, so I aspired to be a teacher. I went to university to fulfill that dream. I managed to squeak in a playwriting class for First Nations students, just for fun. Mansel Robinson, my instructor, guided my playwriting dreams through my murkiest ideas. He gave me clarity and direction; he gave me hope. He is a voice in my writing history that I will never forget. He told me not to give up on the idea I had been working on.

By the end of my internship I knew that teaching was not what my heart longed to do. I wrote a paper for one of my education classes titled, "The Secret Diaries of an Indian Intern." I told a very real tale of what the system does to an aboriginal teacher. My professor said that it was a great paper because it was a real story with drama and heartache. Why would someone's sadness make for great writing?

As I turned my back on six years of education, receiving my diploma was anticlimatic. What did I have to look forward to now?

Thanks to the Saskatoon Fall Leisure Guide, I spotted my next opportunity to advance in my goals—a playwright lab at the SNTC. I was fortunate enough to work with Mark Dieter, a few other playwrights, and a screen writer, in a workshop that helped us develop our projects in progress. I participated in an acting workshop with Kenneth Charlotte as well. I was exploring the world I wanted to be in.

Truthfully, my greatest challenge was discovering that playwriting is the long lost relative knocking on my "proverbial door." With so many stories that needed a voice, each churning inside of me, I was feeling overwhelmed, so much needed to be told. I didn't know what form to put it all into. Then my husband insisted that I submit a play, written at the SPC 24 Hour

Playwriting Competition, to the Sage Hill playwriting lab. It was there I met Governor General award-winning playwright, Colleen Murphy. She helped me to realize the spark in my story. I learned there is no need to fear pain and hurt from the past because it's already been written. It's over. Colleen encouraged me to let the story speak for itself. More than a doting mother of my work, she has become a mentor and friend. My experience at Sage Hill was more than magical; it was an assurance from some power greater than me of where I needed to be at that time.

As far as a playwright's hopes and fears go, being produced and not being produced would sum it up nicely.

So with that I will share some important cultural principals: honor those who teach you, those who support you, and those who believe in you. When I organize time to write, away from my daily life as a full time, very busy mom, I recall the words that my teachers, mentors, and ancestors whisper in my ear, "persevere." As I kiss the kids goodbye and run out to my local coffee shop, it's seemingly not as powerful as a baseball field and the whispered words of, "build it, and they will come," (enter the ghost of Joe DiMaggio), but perhaps, one day it will come.

Julianna Dunn
24 hr participant 2008

ARDEN ANGLE

They read "Playwriting" and "24 hr" and some nothing at all

It was the best of road trips. It was the worst of road trips. They were experienced. We clearly were not. Our travel coordinator and tour guide was decorated creative writer "Dan" Macdonald. (As students of his we knew his first name only as Mister.) He warned us with pieces of advice as he drove, "Keep in mind, girls, that this is a great experience," Mister wagged his finger, "I don't want you to invest yourselves too seriously into the competition." (Real encouraging, "Dan", if that is your real name.) "Most importantly, I want you to have a lot of fun. Don't be afraid... but don't get your hopes up."

At least he was honest. We were not expecting much.

There were five girls in total. We dropped lazily out of the van one by one, dragging our assorted sleeping bags and pillows to the front doors of the University of Saskatchewan. The brick walls were dressed with pages of printed arrows. They read "Playwriting" and "24 hr" and some nothing at all. So there we were, scuttling like little mice amidst a maze, trying to find the cheese.

And find the cheese we did. In a small brown room about fifteen people stood lining the perimeter. (Stepping inside meant direct attention, and it was obvious that of the 15 of us, half were uncomfortably

introverted and preferred their attention to be indirect, if not silent and unnoticeable.) This room would become a tease to our senses, as it was outfitted with food. It was a cruel torture. Attendance in the room ensured tiny talk. Talk so small that conversation actually failed to exist: "Where are you from?" "Ever written a play before?" "How old are you?" Regina. Yes. Seventeen.

The thing about one-worded answers is that nothing is revealed. It didn't open anything. And with questions like that, you can't exactly reciprocate. It would have been rude to say, "I'm seventeen, and you?" Sheesh, very inappropriate. So I left the brown room just as empty as when I arrived. Especially empty, since Mr. Tiny Talk blocked me before I ever reached the muffin table. I turned away and out the door to avoid the next bout of mingling. In the hours to follow I did have an extensive talk with my tummy. He did most of the grumbling.

Pulling out of the narrative for a moment, I must say that the main idea of the 24 Hour Playwriting Competition is, well, writing. The most time is allotted for this purpose, and I found it to be the least intensive—despite Mister Macdonald's description of the experience being like a dog turning rabid. (I saw writers hunched over with runny noses. They nervously

flicked their eyes, which were bloodshot and leaking water.) It was, in fact, the opposite of my preconceived notions. There was not one rabid writer, however many of us were hunched over in front of our computer screens with tired eyes. Despite this, the writing part was quite bearable, and in a sense, effortless. Anyway, breakfast the next day was ridiculous, if not incredulous.

A few actors, including Mister "Dan" Macdonald, went to a Starbucks to rehearse one scene from each of the winning plays. ("Dan" as it was, is a decorated actor as well. I forgot this in his introduction.) Being it was a Sunday morning, the coffee shop was bustling. We couldn't find an open table. So, as honest participants, the five girls left the Starbucks (IN FEBRUARY) and went for a forty-five minute walk (again, I stress, IN FEBRUARY) to avoid an unfair advantage. Once rehearsal was finished Mister (our resident soccer mom complete with a minivan) shuttled us off to breakfast with some serious secrets in tow.

We ate quiche, we ate hash browns, we ate like kings! As breakfast wound down and our bellies filled up (a different kind of ache), the results from the previous day were announced. In the student category, "Dan's" previous students pulled away with a handsome Third place prize. Clap. Clap. Clap. At best, at the very best, I could only see Third place as a weak possibility. After all, I wasn't supposed to get my hopes up too much. Preparations for Second prize went underway. With half my attention on whether or not dessert would be served, and the other half on if dessert is served how I shouldn't partake on behalf of my bellyache, I almost missed the announcement. My friend, also seventeen, wrote a play about a cursing Santa and a drunk of an Easter bunny caught up in the murder of a little girl. She snatched Second place! As our table gathered our jaws and collectively shoved them back into our faces, we felt either one of two extremes: if Katherine could

win, then I can win too! Or, more pessimistically, if Katherine won, there is no chance for me! (Both exclamations—actually, most things spoken after this point were all exclamations.) (!).

Anyway, the actors were sorting out parts for the final prize, the coveted First Place. I didn't realize what was being acted in front of me. At some point my ears clued in. I recognized some dialogue I'd written, I looked at my co-writer and friend, we burst out laughing. Burst. Like a blister or balloon—loud and ugly. (I apologize now for being so inconsiderate.) We received disapproving glances. I wondered if people thought I was scoffing at the "person who had won."

"The nerve of that young woman! Ungracious young lady! Young! Young! Young!"

I was merely aghast with the decision. I was truly astonished watching the actors read our play. The play was nine pages long (I say nine pages short, personally) and if that wasn't enough, our play and Katherine's play had a common character: Santa.

I am still pleased with winning First place. It was deemed so far from my reach, and my partner and I, somehow, caught up to it. What fails to make sense to me, to this day, are the coincidences that wove through the weekend. All three winners were students of Mister Macdonald and two of them included the same inappropriate Santa. I see three possible answers: reverse psychology really does work, we all ate the same Cheerios, or Mister Dan Macdonald is a real man with a real first name and knows his stuff.

Arden Angley
24 hr participant 2008

SASKATCHEWAN
Playwrights
CENTRE

2008 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Please attend the SPC's
2008 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Sunday, November 23rd, 2008, 1:00pm
Riddell Centre, Room 286, University of Regina
RSVP the SPC at sk.playwrights@sasktel.net



The Saskatchewan Playwrights Centre
presents the 12th annual
24 Hour Playwriting Competition

Join us as 30 playwrights from across the province gather in Saskatoon, at the University of Regina, May 2009. Starting with no more than one page of notes each, competitors will have just 24 hours in which to write a play (the SPC will provide the computers, printer, paper, caffeine and lots of food). The competition will have two categories: Student (university and high school) and Open (everybody else). Whether you are a first timer or a seasoned professional, you're welcome to join the fun. Admission is on a first come, first serve basis, and the registration fee is \$30.00—the entry fee will also include a one-year membership with the Saskatchewan Playwrights Centre.

Once the writing frenzy has run its 24-hour course, a distinguished panel of judges will read the plays. The winning plays will have a book-in-hand reading by professional actors at an Awards Brunch. This event is open to the public.

The first prize in both categories is \$500.00. There will also be 2nd and 3rd prizes. The event is co-produced by the Saskatchewan Playwrights Centre, the City of Regina, Saskatchewan Lotteries, the University of Regina, Saskatchewan Arts Board and the Canada Council for the Arts, with support from many local businesses.

Rules and Regulations

- 1) Open to all professional and non-professional playwrights.
- 2) Scripts must be written on the premises. New material only.
- 3) Only one page of notes is permitted on the premises at the start of the competition.
- 4) Entrants are accepted on a first come/first serve basis.
- 5) An entry fee of \$30.00 must accompany each application. Entry fees are non-refundable
- 6) Registration forms are available from:

Saskatchewan Playwrights Centre, Rm 700, Bessborough Hotel, Box 3092, Saskatoon, SK S7K 3S9
(306) 665-7707 or email: sk.playwrights@sasktel.net. Or online at www.saskplaywrights.ca

SPC MEMBERSHIP FEES ARE NOW DUE

SPC Membership for August 1, 2008 through July 31, 2009 is now due.

Playwright Membership: \$25

Associate Membership: \$15

Playwright memberships for those who participated in the 2008 24hr Playwriting Competition in Saskatoon are paid through to July 31, 2009.

Please forward your cheque with your current email/ mailing address to the SPC
Box 3092
Saskatoon, SK S7K 3S9

SPRING FESTIVAL OF NEW PLAYS 2009

October 31, 2008 deadline for submissions

Since 1983, the Saskatchewan Playwrights' Centre has held an annual Spring Festival of New Plays either in Regina or Saskatoon. Spring Festival is the highlight of our year. We bring in directors and dramaturgs from across the country to work with our playwrights and actors in workshops that range from 2-6 days and culminate in a staged public reading.

The scripts are chosen, in a **BLIND** competition, by the Festival Dramaturg.
The competition is open to all SPC Playwright members.

Plays chosen for Spring Festival are offered a one-day pre-festival workshop, one-on-one dramaturgical support, and are workshopped for 2-6 days during Festival week with a director/dramaturg and a group of actors and then given a public reading.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

- * Plays must be written by playwright members of the SPC in good standing.
 - * This is a **BLIND** competition - so no identifying markings should appear on the script itself. The playwright's name and contact information should appear on a separate cover page for office use only (see sample Spring Festival Format on the SPC website www.saskplaywrights.ca).
 - * Plays **MUST BE IN STANDARD PLAY FORMAT** - see sample Spring Festival Format
 - * Playwrights may also submit notes discussing aspects of the script they are currently working to improve, but these notes must not contain any identifying markings.
 - * Email submissions are not currently accepted.
 - * Translations are not considered new plays and are therefore not eligible
- Mail scripts to the SPC
Box 3092
Saskatoon, SK S7K 3S9

The Saskatoon Fringe Theatre Festival

Attention Saskatchewan Theatre Artists

www.25thStreetTheatre.org

The Saskatoon Fringe Theatre Festival has opened their application process for Fringe 2009. They are dedicated to the development of opportunities for Saskatchewan theatre artists and have allocated 1/3 of their performance spaces for provincial theatre companies. The Saskatoon Fringe has fantastic audiences and is consistently in the top four destinations chosen by touring artists in the Canadian Association of Fringe Festivals Touring Lottery.

Join the "Best Little Fringe" in Canada. Call (306) 664-2239

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williamallenbrooks@yahoo.ca
(306) 341-4089

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(306) 522-5098

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trenakeatster@gmail.com
(306) 539-4032

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Members At Large

Cheryl Jack: cheryljack@sasktel.net
(306) 668-8039

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(306) 341-4089

Terry Jordan: lmnop@sasktel.net
(306) 931-3437

Rob van Meenen: getnthevanmeenen@sasktel.net
(306) 652-2859

The Saskatchewan Playwrights Centre

PO Box 3092
Saskatoon, SK S7K 3S9

Office address:
7th Floor, Delta Bessborough Hotel
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Phone: (306) 665-7707
Fax: (306) 244-0255
E-mail: sk.playwrights@sasktel.net
Website: www.saskplaywrights.ca

Staff

Dramaturg: Heather Inglis
hdi1@telus.net

Administrator: Sheila Angelstad
sk.playwrights@sasktel.net

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