

# P T I N T E R P L A Y T P T

newsletter of the international playback theatre network • po box 1173 new paltz ny 12561 • march 1993 • vol IV, 1

## PLAYBACK STORIES

### Millbrook Morning

*From the archives: this story, one of the first ever "Playback stories," was written by Jo Salas, of New Paltz, NY, about a performance of the Original Company over ten years ago:*

On that Saturday, one of the best of the spring, only half of the company came for the performance. Crises and commitments kept the others away: but in spite of ourselves, we felt a little forlorn. It was to be a community performance, held at a theatre in the country, arranged and produced by the local arts council. At literally the eleventh hour, word came that the communications had not worked and in fact that theatre was not available. The theatre managers gave us their smooth theatrical apologies and found us a room at a nearby children's home. So we climbed back into our cars, drove away from the theatre with the immaculate golf course beside it, and the rows of cars parked in the sun. There were ten of us. Susan had brought her friend Tom and her 8 year old daughter Star, dressed with her usual panache in a diaphanous white nightgown and black vinyl cowboy boots. Jonathan, the director, and Jo, the musician, were there with their daughter Hannah, the same age as Star. Michael was there, and Vince, and Danielle, whose private distress was touching us all. And there was another Tom, someone who had seen Playback in New York City and had come to see more.

The children's home was a large, beautiful house surrounded by lawns and trees and flowers. We walked in, apparently unnoticed in spite of our conspicuous parade of people, props and instruments. At the door, a nun appeared, Sister Emily, with the warm, worn out and hurried air of a mother of many. She knew nothing about us, had never heard of us before; she had been asked for the use of her playroom one hour before. It was a cozy and comfortable playroom, but small for our needs. We would need to be strong to create our own atmosphere in this atmosphere of ordered and contained children's activities. We rearranged little tables, tiny chairs, put toys to the side, opened a window, drew the curtains, set up our boxes and props. We told Sister Emily, who flitted in and out like a conscientious but worried bird, that she and the children were very welcome to be part of the audience. But she said that the older children were not there, and the five-year olds were too unruly.

We came together and warmed up with our familiar exercises, trying to feel ourselves in this strange turn of circum-

stances. One of the Toms attached a poster to a tree outside, for the people we hoped would be re-directed from the theatre.

But no one came. At last, determined to create something from this apparent fiasco, Jonathan again invited Sister Emily to bring the children. And they came, six small children without families. They were all neat, all sweet and friendly. One was badly malformed and could not talk, but it was other, less visible misfortunes which had deprived the rest of the children of their mothers and fathers.

So we began, the six Playback people, and the small audience, the children, our children, Sister Emily and her helper, and our two guests called Tom. The first one to get up to be a Teller was a bright eyed little boy called Lance. They had already told us he was a pest. He sat in the big Teller's chair, and shouted with glee when Jonathan honked his honker, hidden in his pocket. Jonathan asked him if he had a story. With no hesitation, Lance said: "Jesus died. And came to life again." We were taken aback. We are seldom given a story so fundamental and so succinct. But Michael became Jesus, and with music and without words we enacted his scene.

The next Teller was a little girl with short blonde hair and faraway eyes. She wanted to hear a certain kind of music. Jo played the recorder and she said it sounded like birds. She was pleased, but she didn't smile.

Then we did a scene told by Tom, Susan's friend. It was about Tom at 15, reluctantly taking part in a pheasant hunt. But he missed on purpose and the bird flew away unharmed.

The children were attracted to our prop tree, with its draped display of many-colored and textured fabrics. We decided to let them dress up. Each child was helped by an actor to dress up the way he or she wanted. The little girl, Martha, who had heard bird music, chose Danielle who had played the pheasant. Martha wanted to be the Sound of Music. A little boy called Michael seemed to be bewildered by finding a namesake. Jose with the malformed head and hands couldn't talk, but Sister Emily knew he wanted to be Batman.

When they were ready we had a parade. One by one, they walked slowly toward the audience, announced by Jonathan and accompanied by music, different for each child. They were very proud, very beautiful. Watching, our hearts were deeply touched by their intense and poignant creativity.

The performance came to an end. The children gave us merry good-byes as we collected our equipment, and again when we passed them playing outside near our cars. We took down the poster. It had not been needed.

# My Year in Playback Theatre

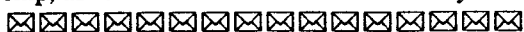
From Donna Cole of Walnut Creek, California, a member of Living Arts Theatre Lab:

Our Playback Group rehearsed every Thursday evening. From June 1991 through June 1992, we performed once a month in space rented from a local church. The audience consisted of neighbors, families, and friends. The audience was as large as 60 and as small as 12. In July 1991, we performed at the Institute for Integral Studies in San Francisco with Jonathan Fox as conductor (our second public performance).

We also gave two performances at local elementary schools to extremely enthusiastic audiences of children and parents. We performed at a local church as part of a worship service and at an outdoor festival, the theme of which was art and nature. In several of our performances, we were joined by a member of the Perth, Australia, Playback group who was studying at a local college. We also experimented with themes. On Valentine's Day we tried the theme of "love and friendship." At our April performance the theme was "transitions and beginnings." One of our school performances has "school memories" as its theme.

Perhaps our greatest adventure and success was participating in a Holocaust memorial ritual conducted by our director, Armand Volkas. For some time, Armand has been leading workshops that bring together Germans and Jews of the post-World War II generation (the children of the victims and the children of the persecutors). A series of these workshops culminated in the Acts of Reconciliation memorial ritual on May 2, 1992. As part of the ritual, Playback Theatre was used to tell the stories of the workshop participants. The Playback Theatre actors observed and participated in several of the workshops preceding the ritual. During these workshops, each participant was asked to tell a personal story about his or her encounter with the shared German and Jewish past. We performed these stories at the workshop, and again at the ritual before an audience of about 150. The actors found performing these stories particularly rewarding because of their emotional depth and universal meaning, particularly in the wake of the Los Angeles riots.

Problems faced during the year include finding in our busy schedules adequate time to rehearse, to process, and to deal with business and marketing issues; making our pairs and fluid sculptures work (Arquam, our Australian visitor was very helpful with this); making smooth scene transitions; and keeping the stories from becoming too talky, long, and literal (we've been experimenting with sound and movement transformations and transformations in general to move the scenes along and have had quite a bit of success). The biggest problem we face at the moment is finding new members for the company and achieving stability in the membership, as four of our members have recently left.

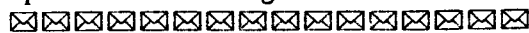


From Peter Hall, of Sydney, Australia:

My own story is inextricably linked to that of the Sydney Playback Company. Last year was my third year as a Director of the Company. I performed as an actor and conductor and was heavily involved in training. At the end of the year I stood down as a Director. This was primarily due to an expectation of increased workload elsewhere, but has also been a relief. I am cut loose now, and refractory.

I taught a small amount of Playback at the Drama Action Centre, and as part of my storytelling classes.

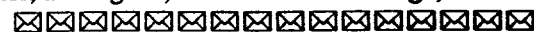
Running like a thin, but ever-burgeoning, filament through the year was membership of the committee organizing the Playback Conference of January. This was a labour of love, and had all the joy and bloody, bruising pain of this emotion. By all accounts the conference was a great success. I learned much about the personal cost of taking on such a venture.



From Rebecca Rucker, of Houston, Texas:

This year I was able to use Playback Theatre successfully as one of the interventions in my therapeutic work. I am contracted to perform psychodrama services for a psychiatric hospital in Houston. I work with many patients suffering from PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). Many of these patients are hesitant to enact their stories because they become so overwhelmed with feelings when remembering the trauma. However, even the most reticent survivor is able to tell, sometimes briefly, a story of what happened to them. Other patients will enact these stories using their own experience to portray roles. The most gratifying moments of these sessions are when the storyteller will exclaim, "That's it. That's what happened. They (the actors) knew how I felt." These moments really connect these "surviving spirits" together and the group becomes stronger and more bonded.

The most moving story I witnessed this year involved the participation of the whole group of approximately 14 patients. The storyteller described an event which had happened at his job site. Just after lunch on a warm Houston day, he and his buddies returned to their work stations at a chemical plant. This man had just watched his friends climb ladders to the top of the oil storage tanks where they turned to wave to them. In the next moment he saw the storage tank explode. As the man tearfully concluded his story he finished by saying "I just wanted to tell them good-bye." The patients enacted the lunch scenes and the explosion. In a moment of silence following the chaos of the explosion, the storyteller's actor spontaneously went to each of the friends, took each one of them in his arms and tearfully told them good-bye. For several minutes there was a quiet reverence in the room. The storyteller turned to me the conductor, and sighed, "Now I can let them go," he said.



From Elizabeth Hetzel, of Maylands, South Australia:

I'm trying to work out when the year began, or ended for that matter. The past few years in Adelaide, Playback wise, have been ongoing - no breaks - with the conferences in the "holidays".

My main Playback activity has continued to be with the

My Year in Playback Theatre

Adelaide Company in my role as Director, and as attender to the administration details. I won't put "administrator" as it's not official or very extensive as yet - but it will be and it's possible I'll do it for some extra cash!

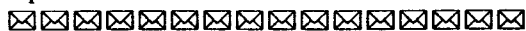
My Director role is ever changing. Each day I write this would be a different story. Today it seems like I'm forever building, building, building with the group. It seems quite a slow process to me, building our stability as a group, building the foundations of Playback form, knowledge, experience, skills, building our reputation in the community. We've just had another Playback public performance, and I think, yes, we've come a long way, and, yes, we have a long way to go.

And my skills are developing as a director. And my conducting is developing - and in the roles I have come a long way, and have a long way to go.

But there's no question of renewal of my IPTN membership! It's such an enormously rich part of my life, Playback. Being part of a Playback group, developing the skills and roles in myself and relating to the community I live in through Playback is a great way to live.

I can remember my beginnings with Playback, but I can't recognize there ever being an end to my involvement.

One thing I realize is that I have felt more able to build on the links I made at the conferences. Through letters, I have got a lot of inspiration and support, which has been great. I realize the IPTN has been significant in bringing the world-wide links out - making visible the Playback network. I feel I can use it now, act upon it!!



From Timothy Van Ness, of Concord, Massachusetts:

Since the year's beginning we have lost several members. Laine moved to Arizona to be with her friend Rob and enjoy what changes her life brings her there, Ryk took a leave of absence and has not returned, Roger decided to leave the group because his needs were not being met. We held some open rehearsals from which Ken joined our group and Polly as well. We performed less than we had in the past few years, primarily for Shortstop in Sommerville, as I have mentioned. Those performances have been very encouraging and uplifting giving us the feeling that we are still doing something for the Community and reaching young people, helping them to experience and express their feelings.

From Sandra Collins, of Alderley, Queensland, Australia:

The highlight for us was when we invited new people to join in November '91. We had an open day (mistakenly called an audition). Perhaps a better word would have been an open workshop? About ten people came along, and eight have made a commitment to be in the training troupe for the year. We decided on a self-selection process, and this has worked well. Dates were established and guidelines offered and agreed upon for ongoing training for one year before a paid performance (excludes public performance). The public performance, in October, has offered trainees a focus and goal for their hard work throughout the year.

Inviting new people to join came about as a natural evolu-

tion of our group. It was time for our group to expand so we could have more people available to perform and have more resources available and an opportunity for our group to grow. This expansion offered existing group members a time to re-evaluate roles; clarify how we were going to manage the training programme; and welcome new members (which Francis does very well). This was the next stage of solidifying our group and becoming more professional - including having our name registered. So far we have enjoyed a Dance and Mime workshop, 3 Playback workshops, all led by Francis Batten, and 3 administration meetings. What we have down the track is numerous Playback workshops; Clown and Spontaneity workshop; Neutral Mask workshop all conducted by Francis. Plus the public performance for friends and family in October.

On our last training day two newcomers, Ann and Peter, bought along a variety of musical instruments to explore, and they tuned in well to the actors and the teller. We're all excited about this and look forward to hearing lots more music in our performances. Peter has made his debut as a musician at a recent S.I.D.S. (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) performance and did well.

For me, (perhaps the whole group...) there was an element of concern about the change in our group because we'd all been together since the conception 2 years ago. However I've learnt a lot about welcoming newcomers and the work that needs to be done before and during the next step of expanding...and I'm really enjoying our larger group. Welcome new Playbackers! A pleasant discovery for me is our Playback group can grow and live more fully, and I can survive to enjoy it!!



From Marc Weiss, of Boulder, Colorado:

My involvement with Playback over 1991 has been as a member of Playback Theatre West (PTW), a teacher in Boulder, Colorado, and as a Board member of IPTN. I taught a course in Playback in Boulder in the spring of '91. A number of people had asked me to do this and there seemed to be an interest in a new group. The course, however, seemed to fill people's hunger for more Playback, and while I had two Playback "parties," there was not enough energy to form a new group. In particular, I was very busy.

PTW has gone through a lot of changes since January '91. At that time we had a single person as leader of the group, with a total of 8 members. In the spring of 1991, one member moved away, another left the company, and two others became members. Throughout this period, we were doing a lot of processing: looking at our sociometry, exploring possible group structures, and considering leadership questions.

(Cont. on page 6)

# Patti Does Playback

From Patti Gassaway, of Boulder, Colorado, a former member of the original Colorado Playback group, who was attending a workshop after a long lapse. Patti described her experience in a mock newsletter-letter, which had wonderful graphics as well as her personal account. The following has been selected from this "newsletter." (She changed all the names in this piece except Jonathan and Jo's). Patti's initial Playback involvement was under the direction of Marc Weiss, now of Playback Theatre West—see his current report on page 3.



## JUST GETTING THERE

Nickie told me that her friends, Jonathan Fox (founder of Playback Theatre) and Jo Salas (his wife and a music therapist), would be presenting a summer workshop in Colorado. She wanted me to meet them because she felt strongly they could help further my goal of becoming a performer, doing my own stories on stage.

For weeks, I planned on going, waiting to hear back from Robyn, the organizer of the workshop, about a partial scholarship. Then Steve told me that he was experiencing a lot of pain and anxiety. My past involvement with Playback Theatre synchronized with the lowest point in his life, and he didn't want to be reminded of it. He didn't want to chance any further involvement. I backed off, and told Robyn I couldn't make it, after all.

That's when I got in touch with my anger and resentment. I talked again to Steve, trying to fully grasp his point of view, spoke with friends, meditated, wrote to clarify my feelings, and finally decided to go, no matter what the consequences. To me, this workshop represented riches beyond compare, bought at a ridiculously low price in terms of money and my time. I couldn't let this opportunity pass. "When," I asked myself, "will another chance come when I can have three days' training in the art of telling stories from my own life, only a couple hours from my home, at a scholarship fee? When in the next five years, ten years? And this is two weeks away! No, I can't let it go."

Informing Steve I had changed my mind was hard. He had said, "This [workshop] is a cup of poison, and it's just a question of who will drink it, you or me." I waited until Saturday, and as I stood in the kitchen, creaming butter in a bowl for cookies, I told myself, "I'll go tell him before I put the flour in." I cracked two eggs and stirred. As soon as I added a teaspoon of vanilla, I turned and ran down the stairs to his den. Steve looked up from his computer. I put my hand on the back of his neck. "I just need to tell you," I said, "that I decided to go ahead and take the workshop. I also want you to know that I'm going to work very hard not to let this be a problem for you or our relationship. I love you very much." I kissed the back of his neck and retreated immediately to the kitchen. I could breathe again!

The next day, I received word that I would be paid \$283 for my time spent testifying in court for a former employer, some months back. This amount would cover my workshop fees! I was on my way.



## ACT ONE

### Scene One — This First Day: Arrival

*Setting:* Stage is empty as the curtains open, with a backdrop of gorgeous, rolling mountains and a narrow, gray road winding through.

*Voice Over:* The ride down was wonderful in the rental car, a small white Ford with less than 10,000 miles on it. Its powerful little engine helped me pass slower-moving vehicles, many of them military, on the back roads that led to the ranch where I was headed. I listened to Jo Salas's tape for the first 45 minutes, and marveled at her technical ability to compose and sing songs whose rhythms were uncommon and melodic line arresting. The last 9 miles were on an unpaved road through a narrow valley, a tiny creek running alongside. The valley gradually widened out and I became anxious, wondering if I would ever see the sign, "Shilling-Hobby Ranch." Just as the odometer changed to 8.9 miles, the sign became visible on my right over a gate behind which horses grazed. A large, rambling farmhouse stood far back from the drive, and a thin woman dressed in a colorful blouse and blue jeans wandered in the meadow below the house. I let myself through the gate, closed it, and drove slowly up the narrow path. The woman turned and waited for me to reach her.

Janice: Hi! Are you Patti?

Patti: Yes.

Janice: Well, you're in the right place. I'm Janice.

Patti: Should I just drive up to the house?

Janice: Yes, just park where you see the other vehicles.

And, welcome!

*Voice over:* I drove up to the bend in the drive where a bright orange gate barred my way through the fence that looped the house. I opened the gate, pulled through, and parked beside a pickup truck. Another woman, red-headed and sun-glassed, came from the porch and closed the gate for me. I approached her slowly, wondering if this was Jo Salas, herself.

Patti: Hi. I'm Patti. Sorry to be so late.

Jo [slight British accent]: Hello. I'm Jo. We've been watching for you.

Patti: Jo, I'm so pleased to meet you. I was listening to your tape on the way up. I really like and admire your music.

Jo: Thank you. Well, we didn't get started until about 10:15, so you haven't missed much. Right now, everyone is out, searching for found objects, and then we're going to do an installation, a kind of arrangement of what's been found, so you could do that, or you could just rest for awhile. How are you feeling?

Patti: I'm pretty tired. I think I would like to lie down, maybe in the grass. This is so gorgeous.

Jo: All right. I'm to ring a bell, or strike a gong, when it's time for everyone to come back, and that's in about ten minutes. If you can join us, that's fine, and if not, just come when you can. As I say, this is just the first exercise.

Patti: Thanks a lot. I'm really glad to be here, Jo.

*Voice over:* Jo smiled and turned back to the house. I pivoted in a circle, scanning the possibilities. I didn't want to go south down the drive, although there were horses in that direction. To the west was a high hill where a few people were

moving, and to the east was an even higher, steeper hill with a grove of aspen breaking through the grass on either side of a wire fence. I chose to go north, where old wooden buildings stood, their color softened red by weather. On the way, I watched the ground and picked up a large piece of metal with squares like a graph paper, twisted and warped and rusted. I selected a few wildflowers that caught my eye, and went around the shed, drawn by boards stacked against its side. The boards were dry and warm from the sun. I lay down on my back and closed my eyes against the light. The wood smelled sweet. I heard a sound like a motor running and opened my eyes to see a hummingbird treading air near the shed's corner. It zoomed off and then I could hear the bee buzzing near my left ear. Sighing, I closed my eyes again and let my body loosen into the comfort of being outside, having arrived, with nothing to do but relax.

[*Sound of a gong*] I rose, brushed off my pants and headed for that first encounter with my fellow players.



### INSTALLATION PIECES

When I looked around the porch that swept the farmhouse three-fourths of the way around, I saw that the railings met at the southwest corner overlooking a mountain range turned blue by the distance. No one had chosen this, the most powerful spot on the porch. I immediately set my wirework up there, turning it until the wire rose and fell in peaks ("Like my emotions, getting here," I thought). There was a perfect little pocket in the wire where I dropped a full clump of yellowed grass, its dirt base snuggling down; the blades shot upward. I wove wildflowers stems through the back of the frame and set quartz and pebbles below. In moments we gathered to look at all the pieces.

"We don't have to analyze these, or comment critically," said Jo. "But if the person whose piece it is wants to say something about it, that would be fine."

We stopped in front of a lovely piece by the backdoor to the kitchen--a single strand of barbed wire curved upward like a song, pebbles in a circle at the base, and a sheaf of hand-picked wheat lying like an offering to the side. "You can tell I'm an artist," said the woman who had done it, Dawn, and it wasn't until she laughed that I realized she was joking. "Looks like art to me," I said, as the others stepped around me to move on.

One woman said that her piece was in honor of her grandmother, who had loved to pick wildflowers. Jonathan's was mostly wood and rocks forming a square, and incorporated the bottom as well as the top of the rail. "Variations on the letter 'A'" he explained.

Indoors we looked at a delicately balanced wood-and-flowers piece on the windowsill by the front door. "I have these all over my house at home," said Rachel, "so it was easy to do." Reed showed us his, set up by the fireplace. It looked like, and was, elk droppings and a cow pie, separated by a piece of bone. "I've been thinking about what's really down-to-earth," said Reed in a soft Texan drawl. "And this is about as earthy as you can get."

When everyone crowded around to see mine, I said, "The

most important part of my piece is, of course, the setting." Many heads nodded. "The colors in the wire are great--that orange rust," someone murmured. I felt as though I had passed the first test.



### PERFORMANCE PIECES

Dawn, Susan, Rachel and Malcolm raced around the porch in a spoof of life before the workshop, then settled down with a strumming guitar, at peace now that they were here.

Robyn, Janice and Jonathan in unrequited love scene spanning the meadow, then as horses horsing around, finishing with conversation "rounds."

Reed, Jo and Patti in a skit of Lilah Hobby turning over the ranch to Robyn's family, with Reed playing the characters, Jo on her violin, and Patti vocalizing with movement as the land itself.



### TELLING THE FIRST STORY

The warm-up games were over and Jonathan rose, stretched, walked over to the couch. He sat down and gave us all a gentle smile. "Who would like to tell the first story?" His question was followed by a deep silence.

When I was certain that no one else was eager to tell, I sang out, "I'll tell the first story." Jonathan looked a little surprised, but patted the couch beside him and invited me to come up.

I sat next to him; he put a warm hand on my knee and said, "Now where does this story take place?"

"In our house, in my bedroom and the living room upstairs."

"OK, in the bedroom and the living room," repeated Jonathan. "And when did this story happen?"

"Oh, just a few weeks ago. Maybe a month ago. Fairly recently."

"OK. Are you in this story?" asked Jonathan. I nodded. "Pick someone to be you." I chose Dawn, a woman of spirit and strength with some hidden anger. Dawn rose from her seat and stood in front of the fireplace. "All right. Now, who else is in the story?"

"My oldest son, Gabe, and my husband, Steve."

"OK, pick someone to be Gabe. How old is Gabe?"

"He's fifteen. Reed can be Gabe," I said,

"and...mmmmmm...Jan can be Steve." Reed and Jan rose and took their places on the hearth next to Dawn.

"OK, what's a word for Gabe?" asked Jonathan.

"Rebellious."

"And for Steve?"

I cocked my head and thought. "Holding down the fort," I said.

"And you? What's a word for you in this story?"

I looked at Dawn. Her large brown eyes reminded me of my mother and distracted me for a moment. "Desolate," I murmured. "I'm desolate."

Jonathan patted my knee and looked at our audience and then back to me. "OK. So, what happens in this story?" he asked.

I explained how I was asleep in my bedroom and woke to angry voices in the living room down the hall. I couldn't make out most of the words, but I heard curses exchanged between father and son, and then Steve came in the room and got in bed. A few minutes later, he got up again, pulled on his blue jeans and left. When he returned, he was carrying the standing lamp that Gabe usually read by in the living room. He got back in bed, and I lay there, trying to sleep. Finally, I got up and went to the living room. Gabe was there, reading by a lamp he had brought up from downstairs. I sat across from him and wrote in my journal.

Jonathan nodded as I finished telling. He looked at the audience briefly and then smiled over at the actors, standing at loose attention. "Watch," he said, turning back to me.

Jo immediately began playing some quiet music while the actors set up the scene. Cloth was set in place on the floor for the bedclothes, and Reed set up a chair and a small lamp beside it. There came a moment when all was in pause...I could sense that the actors were ready, and the music ended momentarily, only to begin again with a sense of purpose behind it. Dawn lay on the floor, her arm pillowing her head. Janice walked over to the chair and told Reed it was time for bed. He ignored her (just like Gabe!), and Janice yelled at him (just like Steve!). The two of them shouted for a while, culminating in the exchanged curse. "Steve" strode a pace into the "bedroom" and lay down beside "me" for a moment. "What's going on?" "I" asked. "Oh, that kid, he just makes me so mad!" cried "Steve." He leaped up again and went out to where "Gabe" was reading. "Steve" grabbed the lamp up and the two of them faced each other, close to blows before he returned to the bedroom. "I" again tried to talk with "Steve" but there was no communication. After a while "I" got up from bed and went to the living room where "Gabe" had already replaced the lamp with another. "I" sat beside him and wrote for a while. After a moment, Dawn as she reached across and touched "Gabe's" bare foot, said "hey" and smiled as he glanced up at her. Then all the actors turned and looked at me and the music stopped.

**W**hat can I say? I had tears in my eyes when the play ended. It felt like ants were under my skin while I was watching, reliving the anguish of that night. But until it was acted out in front of me, I had not realized my pain came from conflicting loyalties, that I was torn between husband and son. In Dawn's final gesture, I recognized the solidarity that I had shown Gabe by getting up and reading with him.

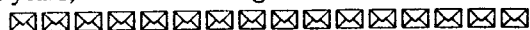
"Is that what it was like?" asked a gentle voice.

When I could trust myself to speak, I turned to Jonathan and said, "Maybe that was more than it was really like. I mean, Steve and I didn't speak to each other the way Dawn and Janice did, and the fight wasn't about Gabe going to bed, but it doesn't matter. Those details don't matter. The truth of everything that happened was there. I understand it better now. Thank you." I looked at all the players. "Thank you," I said again, and heaved a sigh. This is what Playback is all about, I thought.



## BOTTOM LINE

For me, the greatest benefit of taking this workshop was that it affirmed my abilities as a performer in all the aspects I identify every Wednesday that I attend A.R.T.S. Anonymous. I am an actor, a singer, a story-teller and a musician. My talents shone in this setting, and I earned the admiration of an audience of strangers. It was concrete evidence that I am, indeed, on the right path. I found, also, that over the past five years I have been developing my skills informally: I have progressed, although I quit Boulder's Playback Theatre in 1987. Discovering that these abilities had not atrophied, but grown over the years, was exhilarating.



## My Year in Playback

(cont. from page 3)

There was a lot of conflict in the group. I found the situation stifling. I was frustrated in trying to connect and find the heart of the company. In dealing with this, we first tried to get everything "on the table." In our processing, we created an environment where we felt safe saying our personal truth to each other. So we could say that we believed and felt about each other, whether positive or negative. I found that having clear information immediately lightened the situation. I knew where we stood.

**I**n this process, the leader of that time moved out of that role. We spent time processing this, looking for a new leader or leadership structure. Eventually that former leader left the group. Different members reacted differently. Some felt loss; others relief. I missed our former leader, but I was relieved to be free of her style of leadership and post-leadership membership. She took up a lot of space. That is, I feel she wanted to shine at the expense of everyone else. She did shine. But she could not tolerate anyone else growing.

Over the summer and into the Fall five members of PTW became the core, and two others had less commitment. The five of us became more and more comfortable with group leadership. We found we could work well together, hearing and respecting each others' ideas and decisions. In May of this year, the other two members left the company, leaving the core five to move into the process of solidifying and simultaneously looking for new members.

I have loved being involved with the IPTN, though I've been very disappointed not to be able to be more available. It's a real pleasure to hear from folks doing Playback around the world. It's also very stimulating and supportive to hear of others' ideas and struggles. I want our connections to continue growing. I want to feel our community more and more, even though it's far away.

# South America

*From Christina Hagelthorn, of Göteborg, Sweden:*

...The next morning is Friday, and my workshop begins. I am going to do Playback Theatre in Buenos Aires! In the morning I will work with one group for four hours and in the afternoon with another, and on the Saturday the groups will return for another four hours each. This means that I have each group for eight hours altogether, and how on earth will I have time to convey the form of Playback Theatre, not to mention its content, in such a time? And preferably, too, in such a way that the groups can go on working on their own?

The course begins at nine o'clock, and by nine-thirty the participants have arrived, which is quite in order by the Argentinian comprehension of time. Nineteen participants in the morning and fourteen in the afternoon. The days are intense. Psychodramatists in Buenos Aires are lively and talkative, and it comes to the point of giving instructions at a furious speed to meet the energy level of the group. If there is any resistance, it is not passive and delayed. Instead the group sometimes does something else than what I have suggested, and there are exciting surprises. On Saturday we have already done so much that I don't really understand how it happened, and we can even begin to use the Playback Theatre for our own stories, which become very emotional. On Sunday I am, of course, totally exhausted. Dalmiro returns from Chile at noon, tired and happy too, and we spend the day, that has suddenly turned humid and hot, indoors with quiet small talk, wishing that we had had the energy to make a boat trip.

On Monday night I fly to Córdoba to do another workshop there. In Córdoba there are many psychodramatists, and one of the leading ones is Maria Elena Garavelli. She has just built a new house for her work, and this will be the first workshop in her new studio. The beautiful, small, red, brick building is in an alley, not far from the river, that flows in a thin sludge through the centre of town.

**O**n Tuesday morning fourteen psychodramatists come to my workshop, and here I notice that the soil has been prepared. We have another intense morning, and at five in the afternoon fifty more people will come to participate in the next workshop. When we have lunch, someone says that he feels it is going to be interesting to see how I will handle such a large group, and I answer that so do I and laugh to keep the anxiety in check.

After the usual half hour of slow arriving, Maria Elena's house is full of people. I do some simple warm-ups and then I begin to take risks. While everybody is talking in a more complicated exercise, together with most of the participants from the morning I prepare the room for a performance, and with only four hours of training behind us, we get going. And it succeeds! Eventually I invite the audience to come and take part as actors, and the Playback Theatre shows its strength and capacity for a life of its own. We get many sensitive and beautiful stories, and the evening ends in a feeling that a miracle has happened.

Afterwards I am told that the participants have decided to form a company, and the first rehearsal will be the 13th of November! So the first Argentinian Playback company has been born.

Wednesday morning I get a very short tour of Córdoba. It is a pleasant city with only two million inhabitants, compared with the twelve of Buenos Aires. Then it is time for me to fly back to Buenos Aires. It is a clear day, and from the plane I can see the big El Tigre delta distinctly, where the two rivers Rio de la Plata and Paraná flow together into the sea. Four years ago I made a boat trip here and even swam in the brown, muddy river of Paraná, or rather floated in the strong current between two landing-stages.

I continued to São Paulo in Brazil, where I will do two more workshops. The flight takes two and a half hours in a big plane, and that gives me an idea about how long the distance really is. On arrival I am met by Dalmiro's Brazilian secretary, Norival, who drives away with me in the evening darkness in a little, red car, and soon the cluster of tall buildings appear. I am now in the fourth biggest city in the world with twenty million inhabitants.

**D**almiro's house, to which I have only sent letters before, turns out to be an older, 2 1/2 story row-house in an area with expanding high buildings, not too far from downtown. In the ground floor is the psychodrama theatre with a terrace leading out into the long and narrow, wild garden.

The rainy period of spring has just begun, and it is quite chilly. During my five days in São Paulo, the sun only appears a few hours one morning. That I was going to experience Brazil without sunshine, I had never been able to imagine.

Friday morning my course begins again. Now I have fourteen participants in the morning group and twelve in the afternoon. They are all experienced psychodramatists, and the energy is high and the working pace intense. We act and experiment, discuss and play, and we laugh a lot and cry sometimes. Finally the white plate paneling on the walls of the theatre gets a dent, and the brown wall-to-wall carpet comes loose in one corner. Several of the participants work or have worked for the poor, for the orphans and for the street children, and during the second day, the pain of living in a cruel and wounded world also comes forth.

On Monday morning I fly back to Buenos Aires. On the plane I sit thinking of all the stories I have heard during these days. Many have been about ancestors, who arrived to the new country from Europe and the Middle East in poverty and sufferings. Here they met, and here they continued their generations. Often these stories have released tears, and at the same time the dance, the joy, and gratitude for the gift of life are there.

Again the sky is without clouds, and under me a large plain extends with light green fields and meandering rivers. Where the ground is dug out and naked, the earth shines red as blood.

The flight over the Atlantic takes thirteen hours to London, where the autumn rain is falling and the pound has dropped. For several days after my return home to Sweden, I don't know where I am when I wake up. Meanwhile the winter darkness deepens and the shops are decorated for Christmas.

# A Conductor's Story

From Martin Sutcliffe of Auckland, New Zealand

There weren't as many men as we'd expected. Maybe 25 in all to the second men's Playback performance in Auckland. They sat scattered around the room in twos, threes, a row here and there. But when they spoke their experiences for fluid sculptures, flashes of emotion accompanied their words framed in the silent room. Intense feelings were wanting recognition overtaking the desire to be evasive or frivolous.

A man spoke of feeling lost, recently separated from his wife and children. What would his life hold for him now?

We were making the transition to enacting stories. I was sampling the possible stories, eliciting a few words to tell what some of our stores were about. A man who I had noticed sitting right in the middle of the room, leaning forward, eyes wide eager and involved in the performance offered "When I was eighteen, a friend of mine, a man a bit older than me, tried to get me into bed..." The computer in my mind went "This sounds pretty intense. Too early for such a story. Besides it'll alienate the gay men." In a split second, I had moved onto the next offering.

We did our first story about a boyhood prank. I might then have gone back to the seduction story, but I didn't. Instead, the evening went down a well-worn, well-lit safe track. I arrived at the end of the performance feeling unfulfilled and frustrated.

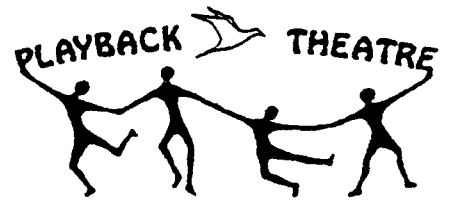
When I reflected later on all that had happened, I got it. The man with the seduction story had handed me a key, a story a lot of men wouldn't want to tell. I'd made a judgment that the audience couldn't handle it. Probably I couldn't in that moment. And then I'd promptly erased it from my mind. Effectively my response had told the audience that this sort of story was taboo here.

Having run men's groups in the past I know how most men, myself included, struggle with intimacy; how many men want a closeness with other men they maybe didn't get from their fathers, but then get scared off by the possible sexual connotations. I had played it safe and missed the moment: the performance had veered off from its mark.

That man's story would have undoubtedly had an impact. We would all have had to face something -- our homosexuality, ourselves as sexual aggressors, our innocence, our homophobia, our need for loving. Whatever happened, the track would have been darker, unknown but I feel sure we would have reached a new destination together.

I still feel that flush of embarrassment and irritation with myself when I think of this performance. But I have this distant memory of something that struck me when I read "Conference of the Birds," an account of an international theatre company's tour across West Africa under the direction of Peter Brook in search of the universal language of theatre. The company were experiencing a sense of repeated failure of not connecting with their audiences of village tribespeople.

Afterwards though, Brook would get very excited having discovered how *not* to do it, and he would rush around creating a whole new idea to try at their next performance.



**INTERPLAY is the newsletter of the International Playback Theatre Network, an association of Playback performers and teachers.**

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## IPTN Messages

**Requests for renewals are in the mail -- please let us hear from you soon!!**

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Sincere apologies to any member who was inadvertently left out of the Directory, or whose entry was incorrect -- we tried to be very careful but some mistakes did happen. We'll let you know when it's time to send in corrections and updates for the 1993 edition.

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**We will be electing several new IPTN Board members at the meeting in June. Please think about people you would like to see on the Board -- perhaps yourself. We need active people with vision, experience, commitment, and the ability to travel to Board meetings, which are held in different countries every year and a half. Please send names and reasons for nominations to the IPTN address.**

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It's not too late! Make your bookings and send in your registration now for the Midnight Sun Conference, 10-13 June, with post-conference workshop right up to Midsummer's Eve. For info call Paivi Jalkanen at 358-79-531010. Fax: 358-79-531313.

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***This issue of INTERPLAY is the once-a-year "stories" issue, so that we can publish a "news" issue in July following the Playback conference in Finland.***