

PANTOMIME AND COMMUNITY SPIRIT: A "CINDERELLA" STORY

by

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ABSTRACT

For the past 26 years, in one way or another, I have been connected to a unique private school located on the small island of Barbados. My connection to the school may be dated much earlier if one considers that my grandmother was one of the first students to attend the school and later became an active member of the committee of management. Every so often life at this school becomes a little more exciting, as attention is focused on the next St. Winifred's School Pantomime.

Pantomimes were introduced to the school in 1969 and were produced bi-annually until 1977. After a break of 12 years, they were reintroduced in 1989 and have continued to flourish ever since. As successful as each St. Winifred's pantomime proves to be, its future is hardly secure and every year the question arises, "Should we do another pantomime?" This study is an effort to answer that question and in answering it, provide justification for us and other schools to embark on similar theatre projects.

Throughout the process of producing the 1996 pantomime "Cinderella", I recorded the journey of myself, cast and crew members in an attempt to understand, why we do this. Research was necessary to narrate the history of the past pantomimes at the school. Newspaper articles and letters from members of the audience and cast help to document the impact of these shows. Interviews were also held with the cast and crew of "Cinderella" about four weeks after the show had closed.

It was an unforgettable journey through the year. One made more special by the heightened awareness of the significance of the St. Winifred's pantomimes. Apart from the obvious financial rewards, the major community benefits included positive public relations for the school, confidence and poise among cast members and the development of pride and responsibility among parents and friends of the school. There is little doubt left in my mind that the pantomimes "give and keep giving," and theatre in the school has a remarkable effect on the school and its wider community.

***COMMUNITY WORK IS LIKE THERAPY. WE MUST
STRIVE TO EMPOWER PEOPLE. PROMOTING
INVOLVEMENT IN ANY ACTIVITY IS NOT ABOUT
GIVING PEOPLE THINGS TO DO, IT IS ABOUT MAKING
PEOPLE BELIEVE THEY HAVE A CONTRIBUTION TO
MAKE.***

Sharon Carmichael, Barbadian Psychotherapist.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract		ii
Table of Contents		iv
	Reflections	1
Chapter One	A Journey of a Thousand Miles...	2
	Where to Start	3
	What's in a Name	4
	Home of the Green Girls	8
	Whatever you can Imagine	10
Chapter Two	...Starts with a Single Step	12
	The First Bunny	13
	1000 Yards of Material	14
Chapter Three	Help Wanted. No Experience Necessary	16
	A Tradition Born	17
	Look Ma, I'm Dancing	18
	The Foundations are Laid	21
Chapter Four	In the Tunnel. No Turning Back	22
	A Harvest of Rewards	23
	All Good Things Must Come to an End	26
Chapter Five	Growing the Spirit	28
	The More Things Change the More they Stay the Same	28
	New Faces	30
	Old Friends	34
	Getting to Know You	35
	Bring on the Boys	36
	A Taste of Success	38
Chapter Six	In the Swing of Rehearsals	40
	Making it Their Own	40
	The Baton Changes Hands	44
	The Team Grows Stronger	45
	Halfway There	47
	Becoming a Family	49
Chapter Seven	Finishing Touches	52
	Lights	52
	Costumes	54
	Just Having Fun with my Friends	55
	Action	56
	Camelot Revisited	60

Chapter Eight	The Performance Takes Off	62
	Flowers and Fears	63
	There go my Babies	68
	Maintaining Focus and Energy	70
	Success and Confidence Turning into Fun	74
	Keeping Discipline	77
	Laughter and Tears	78
Chapter Nine	Journey's End	81
	A Junior Jaunt Down Memory Lane	81
	The Seniors Plan Ahead	84
Chapter Ten	From a Distance	87
	Looking Back	87
	Looking Forward	95
	A Final Note	97
Bibliography		100

Reflections

Lipstick and green eye shadow.

Silver glitter that gets in my eyes.

*I'm tired of sticking UV paper on costumes,
the glue is always on my fingers*

Miss Adamira is calling someone a Nincompoop.

Blue costumes are my favorite, I hate green or orange.

*I hope the big girls write something nice in my program.
I sign my name a hundred times over.*

*There is a bomb scare and we all have to stand out on the field. My
mother is searching for my little brother, then she sees him. The
'Obeah man' is running across the lawn with him on her shoulder.
He cannot walk because he is wearing his octopus costume.*

*We do another show for the audience and the shark spits the bomb
on stage.*

*I tell Miss Adamira that one of the lines does not make sense
and she corrects it.*

*One of the backstage boys nearly fell through the roof!
The audience thought it was part of the show.*

The big girls are so beautiful, we are all pretty.

I am allergic to the cane arrows on stage.

What's the audience like tonight?

Don't scratch yourself on stage.

Smile, keep smiling.

*I am a firework,
My sister is an icicle,
My little brother is the octopus,
My big brother lowers him down from the catwalk.
My mother is doing the fast changes,
My father is bartending.
We are all here.*

1. A JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND MILES...

The year was 1977. I was 11 years old and presented with the first big decision of my life. Would I rather be a mermaid or a speaking wind fairy? We were rehearsing for our Christmas pantomime, "The Fire Princess", and Anna Adamira, our director, in an uncharacteristic display of democracy, allowed me the choice. The decision was huge; a small speaking part was a step up towards becoming a principal, but being a mermaid meant an additional costume and a chance to perform with the senior chorus in the spectacular underwater scene. I chose to be a mermaid.

The "Fire Princess" was to be the last pantomime in which I performed as a child. Two years later when we should have been preparing for the next big show, Anna Adamira retired from teaching. Although my "career" as a performer only lasted until the age of 11, the pantomimes had a tremendous impact on me. The second half of my school life at St. Winifred's School, even becoming head girl, seemed to pale in comparison to the excitement of preparing and performing in shows.

The managing director of Standard Distributors is a guy called Danatis. His wife was a young girl at St. Winifred's School, whom I had chosen to be the Genie of the Ring but her mother would not let her. She passed the Eleven Plus, came back to the pantomime, and sat and cried through the whole pantomime. Now I did not know this. I am decorating Standard for Christmas and go to meet this gentleman. He says, 'I know you very well...my wife knows you well and for 17 years I've heard about how she wanted to be Genie of the Ring.' She told the husband, 'I want to go back to Barbados...take the job, because I want my children to go to St. Winifred's to be in these pantomimes.' (Anna Adamira)

Where to Start

April 16, 1996

An overwhelming sense of panic threatens to engulf me as I contemplate the volume of work that lies ahead in the next six months. Pantomimes, as elaborate and spectacular as they are as a final product, are many times more elaborate in preparation. To take the reins for one such production is an experience of a lifetime, a challenge that must be met. To accept responsibility a second time is nothing short of sheer lunacy! The fact that both Anna Adamira and my mother, Hazel McConney, have survived seven pantomimes, is a testament to either their courageous hearts and boundless energy or their threshold for punishment.

My immediate task is to decide which pantomime we will produce. Even before my return to Barbados the word on the street was that we would be doing "Cinderella". As likely a choice as any, I am happy to oblige with an appropriate script, except for a few nagging worries.

1. Cinderella is remarkably similar in nature to our pantomime "Sleeping Beauty" that we produced seven years ago. "Sleeping Beauty" was followed by "Robinson Crusoe" and "Aladdin", in an attempt to explore the exotic side of pantomime. Now on the occasion of the school's seventy-fifth anniversary, is it desirable to return to a classical fairy tale?

2. Old sets and costumes from "Sleeping Beauty" could be used appropriately in "Cinderella". Can we alter their look sufficiently, so that they are not as easily recognized, or will "die hard" audience members be disappointed in the recycled goods? Initially, I rejected the idea of any compromise and insisted that we had to make everything fresh. Now, I am beginning to think I would be insane not to make use of existing costumes and sets. This is our chance to improve and embellish on a previous look. One woodland scene may even be considered a tribute to past pantomimes, if we incorporate all our flora and fauna costumes.

3. Principal roles in "Cinderella" are mainly comic and cry out for experienced actors. The students at St. Winifred's have little drama experience. I am greatly tempted to insert a few adults into these roles. This leaves only a few speaking parts for students.

Food for thought!

What's in a Name

A pantomime is something that...you have fun first thing, and you dance, you talk, and it's a lot of fun. (Emma-Age 7)

A play based on a fairy tale and usually performed at Christmas time. (The Collins English Dictionary)

Christmas pantomime has been a popular form of entertainment in England for over three hundred years. Present day pantomime is comedy, magic, song and dance, built around favorite fairy tales and nursery rhymes.

Years ago a writer laid down the rules that should be observed in constructing an ideal pantomime. He said: 'There must be songs, there must be a ballet; there should be some sufficient reproduction of a fairy tale to be recognized by the children; there should be scope for the impossible, the absurd and the grotesque and there should be a full stage and plenty of spectacle.' (Wilson, 1948:134).

The origins of pantomime are different from the traditions we recognize now. Yet in the three hundred years of change it has remained the same at heart. The first pantomimes were not staged at Christmas and were not targeted towards children. Its form, content, characters and stories, are not familiar to us. Pantomime has changed over the years to suit the trends and demands of each

new generation, and will continue to change to reflect the manners of future generations.

From the very beginning Pantomime was acutely aware of the world around it and eager to exploit the comic or emotional possibilities of whatever was topical (Frow, 1985:136).

The word "pantomime" is Greek in origin and means "an imitator of things". "Pantomime", therefore, originally referred to the performer and not the show in which he appeared. He spoke no words and told his story through movement and gestures, often accompanied by music. This form of entertainment was known among several early cultures, but was identified as being especially popular in the Roman empire. The pantomime seemed to decline in popularity in Rome but was revived in a similar form in the fifteenth century in Italy, where it was known as *Commedia dell'arte*. It was here, in Italy, that the original comic characters were introduced to pantomime. Among these new characters were the predecessors of the Harlequin and the Clown.

When pantomime was introduced into England, Harlequin was the early favorite, and developed into the principal character in the show, amazing the audience with his magical tricks. Words were still not used in these shows and a common story generally dictated every performance. Harlequin is thwarted by Pantaloon in his attempts to marry his beautiful daughter, Columbine. Harlequin runs off with the girl and employs the Clown to help prevent Pantaloon from catching them.

These characters were the main enjoyment of any evening at the theatre, and followed an "opening" that was based on a fairy tale.

The opening lasted a few short scenes, while the Harlequinade consisted of up to twenty scenes. As time went on, the fairy tale portion of the pantomime developed and improved in quality. The Clown and Harlequin were no longer solely responsible for the evening's entertainment.

Old fashioned pantomimes were very simple in appeal - just a little fairy story or nursery tale unfolded with dialogue in verse, some pretty songs and music and a good deal of magic, all of which was followed by the more boisterous fun of the Harlequinade, which many grown ups tolerated only for the sake of the children, who certainly enjoyed it (Wilson, 1948:82).

Over the years the Clown had increasingly stolen the spotlight from the Harlequin, until he became the hero of the show. But somewhere between 1860 and 1870, both these characters found their roles in jeopardy. Music Hall entertainers began to be introduced to the fairy tale portion of the pantomime, and these funny men began to rob the Clown of much of his "comic business". Gradually, Harlequin and Clown were given less and less to do, until finally they ceased to exist in the pantomimes that we know today.

Today's tradition of pantomime incorporates new characters into its fairy tales, the most famous of whom is the dame. The dame is the main comic force in the show and is usually played by a man, costumed in outrageous outfits to increase comic value. The principal boy is played by a woman, and along with his principal girl does most of the singing and "love-making". There is always a fairy queen, who knows her place and always enters stage right, and inevitably an evil force, who dominates stage left. Virtue and

goodness always win out in a pantomime, and evil is consistently punished.

The spectacular transformation scenes, that were used to herald the beginning of the Harlequinade, are still reflected in modern pantomimes by the overall elaborate sets, costumes and large cast numbers. The rhyming couplets used in the original fairy tale pantomimes have been dropped and only the fairies now speak in verse. In general, the basic story remains the same today as it was when the pantomime was only the opening for the Harlequinade.

This 'opening' consisted of some fairy tale or nursery story in which generally the characters included the village boy and girl who were sweethearts, a mother or some woman described as 'dame' and a wicked baron or equally wicked village squire who persecuted the virtuous characters and was properly punished in the end. It was considered right that pantomime should inculcate a good moral lesson (Wilson, 1948:39).

The pantomime is a living, growing art form. It has survived by taking and expanding from the new ideas that each age has given.

The pantomimes before were very...they were fabulous but they were very pantomime. With 'Aladdin', you had just come back and it was your fresh ideas. It was like all the new stuff, like technology and stuff, effects and stuff. (Naomi-Age 16)

April 25

"Cinderella" it is! My worries remain unresolved but the comic potential for "Cinderella" is too tempting to resist. As fast as the word goes out, speculation "runs rampant" among the students. Who will play Cinderella? One little beauty in the prep department informs her brother that she will claim the lead. He knowingly corrects her stating, "You're too little to be Cinderella, one of the green girls has to do it!" (The prep department students wear a checked uniform, while the seniors wear green.)

Home of the Green Girls

St. Winifred's School is located on the South coast of the small island of Barbados. Barbados can easily be found on a map of the Caribbean, as it sticks out, on its own, to the East of the chain of islands. Many of the islands that are part of the chain are a result of volcanic activity and therefore sport black sand beaches. Barbados in comparison, has white coral beaches, which any Barbadian will tell you are magnificent.

Barbados was settled in 1629 by the English, but quickly became a melting pot of different cultures as various nationalities arrived either voluntarily or as slaves. The resulting natives are a mixture of English, African, Scottish, Irish, and various other nationalities. Barbados became independent in 1966, but many of the English institutions still remain. The schools and legal system are British. The parliament, the oldest democratic system in the western hemisphere, follows the Westminster model. The Governor General is appointed by the Queen of England, and indeed some people still refer to Barbados as "Little England". Is it any wonder, then, that

Barbadians enjoy British humor? In this world, the tradition of British pantomime was equally welcome, as it found its home at St. Winifred's School.

St. Winifred's School is a privately owned school that was founded in 1921 by Miss Charlotte Seale. Miss Seale was incensed at the kind of education offered to girls in Barbados, and rejected the notion that education was wasted on women who were supposed to be kept at home "barefoot and pregnant". Miss Seale had been well educated in England and from the beginning set a high standard, so that in a few years St. Winifred's girls were sitting the Oxford and Cambridge examinations that were taken by boys in other public schools. Miss Seale started her school with eighteen girls and by the end of the first year had to expand her school to accommodate the many additional girls that were requesting her education. In five years the school had grown to ninety girls.

Today the school comprises a role of six hundred students. The primary and junior sections of the school are Co-Ed, but the senior school remains restricted to girls. The students of St. Winifred's reflect a cross section of the Barbados population. Although some scholarships are now offered on academic merit, the school still charges fees, and therefore continues to attract middle and upper income families.

The school has changed location once since it was founded and presently sits on a six acre lot in a quiet neighborhood, backing onto the residence of the Barbadian Governor General. The school is a tidy, attractive collection of two story buildings, tennis courts and grassy playing fields. The central focus for the school is a large coral

stone building with an impressive pillared entrance. This is the school's auditorium, or as we like to refer to it, The Hall.

The Hall was constructed in 1955, when little thought was given to the importance it would play in the school's continuing history. Perhaps our neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Clifton Wright, who donated the funds to build the theatre, were visionaries. They donated the funds because they were very impressed with the school and wanted to see the school "grow and prosper". The Hall has survived through the years with surprisingly little maintenance or alterations and the space has proved to be appropriate for the British pantomimes we produce.

Whatever You Can Imagine

May 1

I am censoring myself before I even get my ideas down on paper! Now I understand why writers and directors should never have to worry about budgets or technical problems. Every grand set, costume or effect I envision is accompanied by the realization that I, or my mother, will personally have to make it happen.

Strange how clearly one can see from a distance. I used to criticize Anna for having so little concern about the expenses and labor required to make her visions a reality. I thought she was taking unfair advantage of her volunteers, saddling them with work that she never even witnessed. I felt angry about how hard my mother worked and wanted to protect her from Anna's selfish and constant demands. I never realized how much more elaborate and

creative her ideas could be without the burden of logistical worries. However, my mother understood and they worked as a team in a way that I never recognized.

Anna related how she wished to have 'Crusoe's' ship 'break up' on an offstage cue. The idea of introducing such realism on stage was considered over ambitious, if not impossible. Pantomime Coordinator, Hazel McConney, did not share that view. What she might have whispered in the ears of fathers, uncles and friends is not known, but 'Crusoe's' nightly shipwreck became the dramatic highlight that closed Act One (Blackman, 1996:41).

*Louise and Andrew love the script!
Breathe a sigh of relief.*

*Sandra is going away.
I can't design the sets too!*

*Fairy tale, fairy tale,
it has to look like a fairy tale.*

*I need more music-
I must find that closing number.*

*What would you find in a wood?
Not trees - trees aren't pretty and they can't dance.*

*The house is black as the music awakens.
Softly, slowly we hear a voice "Once upon a time..."
A glowing light and the story book opens.
From the stillness of the page climbs a tiny fairy.
She yawns and stretches and the magic begins.*

2 ...STARTS WITH A SINGLE STEP

If you have something in your head it can work. Just find a way to make it work. (Natasha-Age 13)

May 24

Meet with Anna to go over costumes before heading to Miami to shop for material. Anna is supportive, as she was in the last pantomime. As I run through my ideas, she comments on costumes, magical effects, etc. You can always tell when she does not like an idea because she sits quietly and listens. When she likes it, she joins in excitedly and adds emphasis. She really hates the fact that I refuse to open my pantomimes with a little fairy spouting prose. Also, she does not like the fairy queen to be a comic character. She must have her beautiful ballerina queen. Wigs are another must! I agree that it would be nice to have our ballroom dancers in wigs, but the expense is a little more than we can handle. She is adamant that we should make use of existing costumes. "Use them all - the squirrels, bunnies, butterflies, birds, flowers. Think how exciting it would be for mothers to see their old bunny costume on the stage again."

I'm surprised that St. Winifred's girls can even write. Hopping around with your paws tucked under your chin is not conducive to neat penmanship. (Andrea-past student)

The First Bunny

Traditional British Pantomimes have had a place in St. Winifred's School, Barbados, since 1969. They were introduced by the one and only drama teacher the school has ever had, Anna Adamira. At the age of 14, Anna had moved to England to further her studies, and it was in that country that she gained her first real exposure to drama, and especially British pantomime.

Being a foreign student I did not come home for Christmas. So while everyone else was at home, I was at the school working with Miss Jack. I was mixing the pearly glue and what not. Not because they taught that as a course, but because I happened to stay in the school. I learnt how to fly the sets and roll the sets. So you see how life puts you on the path you are supposed to follow. (Anna Adamira)

After she had completed a degree in speech and drama at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts, Anna Adamira taught for a few years in Jamaica, then returned to Barbados and applied for a job at St. Winifred's School. Daphne St. John, the headmistress who hired Miss Adamira, acknowledges the importance of Anna's arrival and the effect her pantomimes had on the school.

The school at the time was in disrepair and in debt. Old girls were beginning to send their children to competing schools because the school looked so run down. They were in the process of cutting and selling the mahogany trees to raise money for the teachers' salaries. Jeanne Bancroft, the secretary treasurer, and self-appointed historian of the school, lists the arrival of Anna and the pantomimes as one of four milestones in the school's history.

I think the school needed a push. It had gotten, in my opinion, a little sleepy, a little lazy, a little too not involved.
(Daphne St. John, Past Head Mistress)

I said 'Mrs. St. John, for God sake do not cut the trees, I will be able to bring you enough money to pay the teachers.' But I think she thought I was a young kid, because I was only 22, talking off the top of my hat, but I knew what I was doing in Jamaica and I knew I could do it. (Anna Adamira)

So Anna guaranteed that, if she could put on a pantomime, it would be enough to pay her salary and give us something for the building fund. Mrs. St. John asked, 'Jeanne, you think we could risk it?' I said 'yes.' If Mrs. St. John wanted it, she told you afterwards that there was nothing she ever wanted that I did not try to give her.
(Jeanne Bancroft, Past Secretary Treasurer)

1000 Yards of Material

May 28

Final preparations for our Miami adventure. We search Bridgetown to check what material is available in Barbados. Moon glow, crystal charm and satin are easy to find but the brocade and glittery material is too scarce and expensive.

The fogger needs to go back up for repair. Measurements must be taken for the wings, traps, backdrops and traverse. This year I want to have more three dimensional props on the stage, as opposed to painted flats. I want curtains draped from the wings and a carpet to cover the trap door through which the mice will change into horses. My biggest wish is for a scrim to hang across the proscenium but this may be a little extravagant.

There are three "Diamond" stores in Miami.

*We compare material all over the city,
then buy the first bolt we saw.*

Jackpot!

*A tiny store filled with flashy stage material.
The aisles are so narrow that you have to walk through sideways.*

*It is impossible to see the material clearly
so I take my sketches to the owner.*

"I need an emerald green brocade for this costume."

He pulls down a bolt of material.

Perfect !

When can we have lunch?

A hot-dog with ketchup and a honey glazed donut.

June 14

Dear Pat,

Here in Barbados, we are poised on the brink of pantomime madness. I wrote the script as soon as I returned to Barbados, then designed the costumes and sets. We tripped off to Miami last week for our marathon material shopping expedition and now that we're back, I am continuing to source the music we need.

This weekend marks the real start of activity. On Friday the prop builders meet, Saturday the painters begin, and Sunday we hold auditions. Rehearsals then begin three weeks later.

The kids are extremely keen and excited, and I have been fielding calls from past students who wish to return to the stage. I even have a former backstage boy who is determined to be onstage instead of backstage this year.....

AnneMarie

3. HELP WANTED. NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY

June 21

Prop meeting. Peter is enthusiastic but some of his ideas for the props are a little too sophisticated for our needs. He wants to design a waterfall with real water but I am very reluctant to have water on the stage. The next suggestion is to shift one of the wings to make room for the carriage entrance. It is difficult to convince him that it is not a good idea to be moving a part of the stage on a nightly basis. Patrick jokes and wants to make fun but Peter will have none of it. He is serious and has a job to do.

June 22

The designs for the sets have been converted into transparencies that we can project onto the backdrops but first we must paint over a few old scenes to make way for the new. This is always a heartbreaking exercise and should be done quickly without too much deliberation. It is impossible to keep making new backdrops each pantomime. Not only are they difficult and expensive to make but we have limited storage space and backdrops do not store well.

This year we decide to paint over the old kitchen scene from "Sleeping Beauty". "Aladdin's" castle interior will also be partly repainted to look like the interior of Prince Charming's castle. I am thrilled to find that our old wood scene can be moved from bottom stage to the top stage, with the bottom rolled up to fit properly.

Nicolas brings his mother along to help. She says he was determined to help in some way with the show. He is only six years old but grabs a brush and starts to paint out the old scene. This is always the way, the kids pulling in their parents to become involved.

What usually happens is that I get involved, then one of the other parents involved drags Mum into it. After a little while she would just get right into it. (Isaac-Age 14)

A Tradition Born

Miss Adamira was convinced that she could make pantomimes as popular in Barbados as they were in England. She could see the potential for scripts to be adapted to local situations, and knew the humor would delight the Barbadian public. Barbadians are quite musical and love to laugh. At the time, television in Barbados was very limited, and theatre was almost nonexistent. An extravagant Christmas event would be a welcome treat in this small community.

No one had a clear understanding of what Miss Adamira was attempting to achieve when she began her first show, but she was so dynamic, that she managed to corral volunteers from the parents of the school. Those who could sew a straight line were put to work sewing the costumes. Anyone with a shred of artistic talent became backdrop painters, and those who could not confess to any particular talent found themselves with a tube of UHU glue and a bag of sequins in their hands. My own mother, a veritable workhorse who was quickly targeted for any community activity, was one who was pulled into this den of creativity. Never having sewed a stitch in her life, she was convinced by Miss Adamira (a woman who thought staples were comparable to stitches) that it was simple. My mother, Hazel McConney, began at that point a career in sewing and designing costumes for the pantomimes.

So it was a tremendous achievement because she came into a school that had no tradition of drama like that. The staff in a way were not fully cooperative because nobody wanted to run a box office, nobody wanted to be a stage manager. People weren't keen on a million things. I mean, how could we teach and do all these things. (Daphne St. John)

I used to get all the fabrics given. I used to go out with all these rich fellows and make them give bolts and yards. I begged everything. Every single thing. One fellow was a Swiss jeweler, he wanted to take me out and I made him paint all the sets one year. (Anna Adamira)

Then all these old girls and parents helped tremendously in all aspects, selling programs, making costumes, helping to get ads, looking after parking, all these things, the refreshments and so forth. (Daphne St. John)

Mrs. St. John, to tell you the difference in headmistresses, had her machine in the office, and all the spare time, she was sewing. (Jeanne Bancroft)

Look Ma, I'm Dancing

June 23

Auditions! The mums are busy organising themselves in the breezeway ready to register all who wish to audition. Harold is setting up his video camera so we can record the whole process. Louise and I chat as Peter comes in to check a detail for one of the props. I introduce him to Louise as Emma's father and she explodes with compliments for Emma, "That child is sent from heaven!" Peter goes about his business gruffly, pretending that he is unaffected by the comments but the glow of pride in his eyes betrays him.

The Junior Chorus is a delight to watch at auditions. Their faces light up and glow with a joy that is rare to see. They will be a wonderful chorus and thankfully I will be able to place most of them. Many more arrive for the senior chorus audition. Our past seniors strut their stuff, the younger ones try hard to keep up, and the older first timers try to act cool despite the difficulties they are having with the steps. Many of these will have to be turned away. This is a job I detest.

The principals are a fun group who will work well together. The challenge will be casting them correctly. My intended arrangement is not ideal. Cinderella is too tall for her Prince, the Prince is too feminine and the boys are not confident enough to play in the roles of the stepsisters. Reshuffles are in order.

Don't forget, Cinderella should have long hair, but not too long or she will look like Rapunzel. (Krista-Age 4)

Finding actors among the students in the school was the next challenge faced by Miss Adamira. These girls had never had a drama lesson and never performed on stage. Undeterred, Miss Adamira steamed her way through the difficulties and started to shape a young but excited cast.

All these girls... and they were bad, when I tell you bad, I mean bad. I would take a whole form and put them as first chorus. A whole form as second chorus. Whether you were spastic or ugly or whatever, you were in that group. You were no dancer, but you danced and that was the whole thing. And when you are up there in a pretty costume and you're doing simple movements... it's not the technique, it's the visual that I worked on. It was visual. (Anna Adamira)

June 24

One of the students whom I intended to audition for the role of Cinderella did not turn up for the audition. I phone her at home and she says she forgot but would still like to try. I arrange to give her a private audition during break time. Jonelle shows up with her long dark hair straightened and neatly styled, quite the contrast to the hurriedly piled bun she usually sports. She has the perfect look for the character and reads reasonably well. She promises that she will be committed and dedicated to the rehearsal process and asks if she can still be in a chorus if she does not get chosen as Cinderella. I promise to include her in a chorus if necessary but I know she is my Cinderella.

I do not remember ever auditioning for one of Anna's pantomimes. It seemed as if everyone who was interested would just show up and then be separated into different chorus groups. Anna never worried about the number of cast members. She would just create more costumes and dance numbers. She also never felt limited as to the number of children she could put on stage at the same time. The woodland scene in "Robin Hood" boasted at least 75 little creatures running around in patterns of color and movement.

Anna's work was all about the visual impact. Talent was welcomed but never expected. Anna would occasionally choose principals based on their acting ability but more often than not a character was cast strictly because they looked the part. Maid Marion was a shy, quiet girl, an unlikely choice for the role but for her thick, brown hair that flowed almost to her knees. Another adorable youngster captured starring roles in two sequential pantomimes but had to survive every rehearsal with Anna screaming "I can't hear you!"

July 1

Louise and I discuss the dance numbers and make the rehearsal schedule for the summer. The cast will have the first and last week of summer vacation off, rehearse the middle six weeks, then return for weekend rehearsals during the school term. Unable to accept cast members who will be away for too long, four mothers have agreed to rearrange their holidays so their children can be in the show.

The Foundations are Laid

The result of Anna's first instinctive, yet determined effort, was a performance of "Mother Goose" that older Barbadians still remember and can recall vividly. Miss Adamira, with limited resources and talent had managed to produce a show that challenged the very best amateur theatre groups anywhere in the world. A new tradition was born to St. Winifred's School.

Funnily enough, the same prayer that was said when I was a young girl 14 years at school in England, that is the same prayer I used at my pantomime. (Anna Adamira)

We had the first night and it went off with a bang and suddenly the public realized, here is something. When Jeanne Bancroft saw what could be done, as financial administrator, she put her full weight into pantomimes. Having proven not only that could you produce but you could make money, she was very enthusiastic. (Daphne St. John)

When she sat and saw the droves of people coming in, the dollar bills, like Donald Duck, drew up in her eyes. When she sees me now she sees little dollar signs. (Anna Adamira)

June 29

The guys meet at Peter's house rather than transport all the tools down to the school. They will build some of the big props there, then work on the smaller stuff at the school. Some of the painters and I work on the backdrops at the school and I miss having the guys there as well. I make them a cake and Peter gives me strict instructions not to bring it down until the afternoon. He does not want the work interrupted too early.

4. IN THE TUNNEL. NO TURNING BACK

July 2

Aloha Sue,

Auditions went well on Sunday last, and Louise is thrilled with her choruses. The Principals have gone through so many metamorphoses that I hardly remember what my original plan was. I was bombarded with requests from old girls who wanted to perform but I did not allow them to audition because I wanted to see what I had from the younger students.

I tried to get the boys to read for the stepsisters, but neither one wanted to touch the part with a ten foot pole (still too young)! Andrea and Rachel took over from them and were hilarious so I decided to go with the girls as the stepsisters. I was really happy with my group and felt they would work well together because they are all friends anyway. Then Bucket and Andrea pulled out.

Bucket's tall, lanky look was perfect for the Major Domo and it was disappointing to lose him. Likewise, it is hard to imagine anyone more suitable than Andrea to play one of the stepsisters. Her natural talent for comedy will be missed. The whole situation is frustrating because I had what I thought was the perfect cast and lost it, in less than a week. The enthusiasm of the young kids, who attended the auditions, makes me keen to stick with an all student cast. I hope I will be able to find the needed actors without resorting to the more experienced adults.

AnneMarie

July 2

Petty bickering before rehearsals even begin! Why did this person get that part? Do we have to share a dressing room with the younger kids in our chorus? AHHH!! Remind me why I am doing this again?

A Harvest of Rewards

Two years ago a young blond whirlwind named Anna Adamira blew all the cobwebs off the staid St. Winifred's traditions and swept the incredulous pupils into their first real show, an enormously successful 'Mother Goose'. She has done it again this year - this time supported by the confidence of the girls themselves, confidence gained from their earlier triumph (Prescot, 1971:1,8).

Over the years that followed, the pantomimes became increasingly sophisticated and professional. As the girls in the school were now attending drama classes, their skills on the stage improved dramatically. Great attention was given to the script, and musical dance and songs were carefully choreographed. Teachers in the school were also beginning to recognize the positive effects that drama was having on their students.

Yes, all of that learning scripts, and being at rehearsal on time, doing what they were told to do. All that discipline helped in the classroom. You could see them blossoming with confidence in the classroom. It was very good for the shy ones. They were transformed on the stage. (Daphne St. John)

She was a mess, but I put her front row, pantomime, because she was so gorgeous onstage, but she was very introverted and shy. I put her up front row and she held her own beautifully onstage, beautifully onstage. (Anna Adamira)

The pantomimes continued to follow the rules and traditions of the British versions, and Barbadian audiences soon learned to recognize and expect a certain product. Foremost were the beautiful sets and costumes that took the audience's breath away. The large cast numbers were taken for granted, and the good and bad fairies were quickly identified on their appropriate sides of the stage. Most

popular of all was the dame. The audience enjoyed her local dialect and humor, and never missed that she should have been played by a man. In a girls' school this was a difficult tradition to follow.

'To see my folk and all my friends again,
Around the family Christmas tree...
That's what Christmas means to me!'

The eye-misting words of the big finale from the St. Winifred's School Pantomime - 'Aladdin'. And for many people 'Aladdin' is just that...a Barbadian family Christmas Tree, where, over the next several weekends, folk and friends will gather to share the mysterious excitement and heart of Christmas...the heart of Christmas that is so definitely the innocence and joy of The Child.

Here, the child dancing and singing and acting its heart out, not expertly perhaps, but giving fully of itself - and in this giving, restoring and rejuvenating adults weary of a confusing and sometimes bitter world (Prescot, 1971:1,8).

From the opening number in Peking (which miraculously turns into Bridgetown) to the closing nostalgic Christmas song, you'll be transported into wonderland.

This, of course, is partly due to the pleasing sets and fabulous costumes, but more especially to the enthusiasm of the young artists who share their pleasure with the audience, making us forget all the hard work, they and their producer, Anna Adamira, must have put in during the past few months (Harrison, 1971:2).

The pantomimes became the main fundraising effort in the school, and proceeds managed to build the majority of buildings now found on the property. Apart from the obvious financial benefits, the shows were benefiting the school in other unexpected ways. As a public relations project it was hard to beat: the school was associated with a favorite Christmas activity, and was always thought of in positive terms by the public. More important, the school was developing the most willing and enthusiastic body of parents to be

found in any school in Barbados. Even when not working on the shows, parents started to look for many other ways to help and improve the school.

'The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood and Babes in the Wood', currently being staged at St. Winifred's, support the absolute and definitive argument in favour of private schools.

It is a production, in the first place, arising out of sheer necessity. There is no inexhaustible Treasury from which the school building fund can be generously supplied. The parents and pupils have to find the money themselves. And find it they will, if the thousands who attend the pantomime, paying tribute to their initiative, is any indication.

It is a production, in the second place, the scope and attainment of which is beyond the reach of any Government institution, confined as they are by rules, regulations and budgets, which boggle the imagination and inhibit the action.

In fact, for so truly 'professional' an elaborate performance to be produced at all, requires concentration of decision making within the hands of a single genius. You may call him - or, in this case, her - a dictator if you like, but surely a kindly and paternal dictator, using a free hand for the benefit of the whole band of collaborators, and giving the people what they need (if not always what they want).

The particular 'dictator' in question is Anna Adamira... Equally to be congratulated, are the governors of the school, its headmistress, the players and the backstage crew. The governors, possible with some trepidation, must have given permission for the use of money to raise money; the headmistress must be a tolerant and forward looking person to tolerate - and indeed co-operate - an effort disruptive, however mildly, to academic pursuits: the players were simply marvelous, and the backstage backed them nobly up.

Naturally, those most directly responsible for my delight were the players. It is truly eye-opening to ponder that one relatively small school could produce such a wealth of talent. The acting, the expressions, the vocal delivery, the obvious enjoyment of their roles, the precision achieved in the dance numbers, even by the tinniest Pink Rabbit, spoke volumes, not only for Mrs. Adamira's directing genius, but for the spirit of St. Winifred's - and the nurture of that spirit by its teaching staff (Cummings, 1973:5).

St. Winifred's School had definitely found its niche. From its earliest origins as a modest "drawing room" school, it had finally made a name for itself as a leading authority in the field of drama.

The pantomimes were important in creating a positive perception of the school. People recognized that St. Winifred's put on these marvelous shows and commented on how lively and energetic the school seemed. People began to send their children to St. Winifred's. Especially parents who had children who were not academically gifted. They thought their child could get something out of being at St. Winifred's. All this dancing and physical activity was good for their deportment, and they gained self confidence and learned discipline. This was transferred over to the classroom. (Daphne St. John)

One thing the pantomimes did was put St. Winifred's on the map of the island of Barbados. Everybody knew there was drama in St. Winifred's school and it gave the school a different public image. (Jeanne Bancroft)

July 2

First night of real painting and I had a momentary panic attack. Without Sandra here I am left to direct the artists. I have others who are more skilled at painting than I, but they do not seem willing to make any decisions about how the scene should look. As we set forth on the first scene I felt frustrated at what seemed to be fumbling efforts, but by the end of the night I can see it taking shape. Everything will be OK.

All Good Things Must Come to an End

In 1979 after the success of "The Fire Princess", Miss Adamira retired from teaching to enter the world of business. There was no drama teacher to take her place, and so the production of pantomimes came to a temporary end. The pantomimes had been

the main fund raisers since 1969 and had enabled the school to undertake its extension program and to make a number of needed improvements. St. Winifred's School was now considered one of the leading schools on the island and the Committee of Management felt confident that they could take a break from demanding fund raising activities.

For me, as a student in the school, I was crushed. For years I had performed in the junior choruses. I had treasured every moment, been proud to be part of the process, and had felt so very special. Not only did I not want these moments to end, I also wanted my chance to progress to a principal role.

I think that we achieved what we set out to do. I remember, as a student, how much I used to look forward to the shows and what I gained from the school that I attended. I learned many lessons in practical social integration through the coming together of pupils, staff, past students, parents and persons from the wider community when a pantomime was staged annually at Christmas time. I wanted to re-create for St. Winifred's the coming together of parents and children. The results have been of particular benefit to the children, in that it has helped many of those, who were not considered to be academic, develop a high degree of self assurance...at the luncheon table with the other teachers, when certain pupils have been discussed, I have spoken favorably about their ability and interest in our drama classes. Other teachers have differed with me in that they found the same pupils inattentive and unable to sit quietly and concentrate...It has also freed many of the students from problems such as shyness and poor self image...shyness that had even affected ability to read aloud in class. (Anna Adamira)

5. GROWING THE SPIRIT

July 31

Rachel has agreed to design the cover and center page for the pantomime program. Rachel is a past St. Winifred's student and has worked with Sandra in the past. Her style is compatible with Sandra's past work on the programs and will flow nicely.

The More Things Change the More they Stay the Same

In 1980, I graduated from St. Winifred's School and went on to gain my Bachelor's in Education from McGill University. I returned to Barbados and began teaching at my old school. As a class teacher for eight year old children, I was responsible for teaching all the basic subjects and preparing my students for the Eleven-Plus exam, which they were required to take at the age of ten. This exam determines entrance into secondary schools and is therefore of great significance to the parents of the children. St. Winifred's prides itself on teaching a variety of subjects to the junior students, and refuses to focus only on the Math and English required for the Eleven-Plus exam. There is, however, an accepted agreement that subjects such as drama and music must take a low priority among the core subjects. In this atmosphere I tried to incorporate as much drama as possible into the curriculum, usually as a way to teach a social studies or language arts lesson.

Although I enjoyed the teaching, I yearned for some focus other than work. I was not alone in my desire for stimulation, and my ally was closer than I would ever have imagined. I cannot

remember how, or when, but somehow, my mother, Hazel McConney, managed to instigate an alliance with my old drama teacher. Miss Adamira was eager to resurrect the pantomime tradition, and without much further consideration the three of us decided to make a comeback.

Proposing the idea of the pantomime, twelve years after the tradition had died, seemed almost as difficult as the first time the idea had been introduced. The new head mistress having not experienced previous pantomimes could not immediately appreciate the potential advantages of the venture. Other new teachers also considered that rehearsals might detract from school work. Luckily, the same secretary treasurer was in place, and the committee of management now consisted of some ladies, (including Hazel McConney) who had been very involved in the past pantomimes.

We were given the OK, but we faced additional problems. The students in the school, once again, had no drama training, and now, little school spirit either. They were not accustomed to getting involved in extra curricular activities, and could not see any reason to give up their time. Parents, as well, were increasingly busy and could not possibly imagine getting involved in any additional projects. Our Pantomimes relied on vast numbers of volunteers. Without that work force the show would not be feasible.

Interest began to trickle in from a likely source, namely the old girls who had performed in the past pantomimes. These new mothers, remembering their experiences were keen to allow their children the same opportunity. They were not quite as keen to volunteer their services in the preparation for the show, but that

over time would slowly change. We felt confident that we had the initial interest that was needed to produce a show.

The girls who were in pantomime are going to want their kids to be in pantomime. I'll never forget Bridget's mother, Loren, saying to her 'You have to be in the pantomime. It's good for you.' Poor Bridget didn't know what she was getting into.
(Anna Adamira)

My Mum was in a lot of pantomimes and she told us that it would be great fun. There's a lot of music and dance, and you'll have a great time. (Rebecca-Age 7)

New Faces

Aug 8

Mum has agreed to take a short trip to Puerto Rico with Dad who is going on business. We encourage her to spend the time just relaxing but we all know that she is only going so she can shop for additional pantomime supplies. She is determined to find a pair of glass slippers for Cinderella and traces Jonelle's feet to take with her.

While she is away I take the opportunity to speak to Valerie. I want her to accept more responsibility for the construction of the costumes. Valerie is already helping with the costumes but I want her to take more of the burden from Mum's shoulders. She agrees to help as much as possible and in the back of my mind I hear Anna's voice, "You must find someone to learn from Hazel."

Dear Sue,

...I was trying and measuring costumes including Cinderella's "glass" shoes which I bought in Puerto Rico, thank heavens they fit perfectly. ...AMarie is still struggling with the Principals but I think she is starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel now, and it will be a good Panto.

Love Mum

Unlike previous shows that had needed little explanation or encouragement, this new beginning needed all the publicity it could get. We began a campaign to rally the support we needed to produce the show. Newsletters were sent out with a brief explanation of what we were trying to achieve and requesting help in various areas.

Costumes: I can sew a straight line and am a pro with the UHU glue.

Building Sets: I need to get out of the house on a Saturday morning and express myself in a way I'm not allowed to do in front of the children.

Painting Backdrops: I want to catch up on the gossip I've been missing lately.

Selling Tickets: I've always wanted to sit behind a desk and deal with money.

Ushering & Selling Programmes: I'm great at telling people where to go

Bartending: Ever since I saw Tom Cruise in "Cocktail" I've wanted to be a bartender.

Selling Food: I consider it a challenge to stuff 500 hot-dogs in 15 minutes.

Directing Traffic: I look quite good in florescent colors.

As always, the most difficult area to find help was the sewing circle. Perhaps it was not that seamstresses were any harder to find, but just that we needed many more in this area than any other. (This may explain why Miss. Adamira had so brazenly recruited Hazel back in the 1960's.) Other disciplines, that were more social, did not necessarily require such large numbers of volunteers. The initial response was timid but undeterred. We tracked down old work forces, and with little persuasion, recruited them into our ranks.

Aug 3

Liz shows up to help with the sets and props. Her presence is like a breath of fresh air as she jokes and makes fun with the guys. Liz claims she has no special skills but her greatest contribution is her positive nature and her willingness to accept any task or job. Nick's mum, Nancy, has continued to come every Saturday to help with any painting. Although Nick now finds it more interesting to play outside with Peter's children, Nancy efficiently paints flat work and primes new props. Nick's Dad has also helped a great deal by supplying paint and building material for free. He insists that I ask him again if I need any other supplies.

On Saturdays, the carpenters began to build the sets and props that were needed. In this area I believe we started out with all of seven men. One of these volunteers, Patrick Bethell, was to become indispensable, in this and future shows and in general, to the school. Patrick was a Barbadian farmer whose young son was attending St. Winifred's. Through his involvement with the pantomime Patrick developed a broader and deeper interest in the school, leading him to become a hard working member of the Parent Teachers Association and eventually its president. He was later elected as a member of the Committee of Management. To this day, although his son no longer attends St. Winifred's, he continues to make invaluable contributions to the school.

A new set designer was discovered from the ranks of past pupils of the school. Sandra Weekes, a young graphic designer, found the time in her busy life to dedicate to the show. Painting the sets was no casual commitment. From April to November, almost every night from 7-10 pm, someone was needed to supervise the artists at

work. Sandra, not content to stand aside once the sets were finished, took on the task of becoming the backstage manager. Sandra was recognized for her talents, and her exposure through her work in the show served to promote her business. In addition she, like Patrick, continued to be involved in other school activities. She was invited to present awards at sports days, certificates at speech days, and was even asked by the senior girls to give the speech at their graduation.

Dear Sandra,

Haven't you retreated long enough yet? Translate that into, WE MISS YOU, WE MISS YOU! ... Every night Midge says, "I'm just filling this in, a better artist will have to come along and touch up later." We have realized now, that we are the better artist!

On the positive side, now that I have gotten over my initial weeks of sheer panic, I have become more confident in making decisions (regarding the painting), and I am now boldly blocking in the entire set of forest wings. I had been resisting this job because, as Linda had said, "Don't bother, trees just happen." Maybe they happen for her, but my other artists would not touch a blank wing.

The set builders are also working really well. Patrick is doing the organization and Peter is the main builder, both doing a great job. They have built a giant book, and a fireplace for the two side stages. There is a huge door for the main entrance into Stoneybroke mansion, a lovely bridge for the village and they are working on a curved railing for the gold palace steps. Still to come is the waterfall for the village. They are determined to make it with real water, and have plans for a pump and all. Peter seems to think that building the set gives him license to comment on the painting, so he has been giving me liberal advice. He told me I could not use the old columns, that I had to paint fresh ones!

Yours in rainbow colors, AnneMarie

Old Friends

Once the initial preparations were under way, it was time to cast the show, "Sleeping Beauty". The greatest interest among the children tended to be in the younger classes and this was to be expected, as these were the children of past pantomime performers. We would have ample choice for the selection of the choruses, but what about the principals? There did not seem to be much enthusiasm among the older girls. There was, however, great enthusiasm from another source. By now the old pantomimes performers were not only volunteering their children and their services behind the scenes, some of them were eager to get back on to the stage. "Sleeping Beauty" became the first St. Winifred's pantomime to consist of student and adult performers.

*12 years have passed.
We almost resume right where we left off.*

*The old girls have returned to teach the new.
We will show them what pantomime is all about,
then it will be their turn.*

*I long to be back on stage too,
but now I am helping to write the script and produce.
Anna says I can not do everything.*

*We read the script over and over.
She likes my Cockney accent,
I can take the small role of Bessie.*

*At auditions she cannot find the witch,
now I must be the Witch.*

*We are rehearsing my sister as the Dame.
Anna wants me to demonstrate,
now I am the Dame and my sister is the Witch.*

*I am a principal !
I am the Dame?*

Rehearsals began in full swing in the summer holidays. In order to accommodate the concerns of the head mistress we wanted to get the bulk of work out of the way before school began again in September. Once classes began we could rehearse the children only on the weekends. Two new choreographers, both Barbadians returning from dance training in England, were chosen to design the musical numbers. In the past, dances had been choreographed by Miss Adamira. Now Louise and Liz brought new life and originality to the numbers. Both Liz and Louise now have their own schools of dance and continue to benefit from the influx of new students that rush to enroll in dance classes after every pantomime.

Getting to Know You

July 22

The principals are self-conscious and uncomfortable with the warm up exercises. Many have no drama training and therefore view any voice or body warm-ups as being "flaky". They want to just start spouting the lines and practicing on stage. To suggest that they work on their character is ludicrous. They need time to adjust and feel comfortable during rehearsals.

*I meet with Sleeping Beauty.
She is a beautiful girl but can barely speak.
Anna has less patience and more volume than she
ever had in the past and this quivering girl is her target.
We work the scene over and over...
Finally I ask her if she can dance.
Maybe she would like to be in the chorus with her friends?
She says "Yes, that might be better."*

July 24

The junior chorus Mums have comfortably established themselves as a weekly audience for the rehearsals. Louise does not really mind but Karen does not know the kids and is somewhat intimidated by an audience. The Mums enjoy watching the kids and are delighted to do any odd jobs we give them. They work so efficiently it is sometimes difficult to keep finding them tasks but as time goes on they will get busier decorating costumes. Andrew especially, is a gem, always welcome at rehearsal. He must be on holiday and enjoys coming down to watch. He is the first up to run and move props, play music and open and close tabs. He never has to be asked.

One mum informs me that her daughter was upset because the other kids told her she was not a good enough dancer to be a bird. The mums must have overheard Louise and me separating the chorus into birds, squirrels, bunnies and butterflies. To a certain extent the chorus was separated depending on size and ability, but Natasha has nothing to worry about. She is just as good as any of the other birds.

Bring on the BoysAug 21

Peter wants to know who will run my backstage crew. I suggest that he should take charge since he has built the props and his daughter is in the show anyway. He fusses and objects that he will not have the time for that. I know he is interested and will take charge. He just has to get in the appropriate amount of quarreling first. Liz has already agreed to switch over from the dressing room to backstage and Denise will also work backstage this year. Andrew is a "faithful" who I know will help if he can get the time off work. With those four I will have little to worry about in that area.

By the time September rolled around "Sleeping Beauty" was progressing beautifully, and we were ready for the backstage crew. The backstage crew had always been an integral part of the pantomime package. Traditionally consisting of teenage boys from other schools, not only did they efficiently change the many scenes required in the show, but they provided endless entertainment for the girls in the show. In an all girls senior school, the opportunity to socialize with members of the opposite sex was an advantage not to be overlooked. Many a romance was found to have blossomed on the backstage steps. Of course, with "Sleeping Beauty", the boys did not initially flock to volunteer themselves as they did not yet understand the potential advantages of their involvement. We began with a modest group of parents. Slowly and steadily the most enterprising of the teenage boys began to sneak in.

With pantomime you come not only for the stage, you come for all your friends and the gossip and everything else - and backstage. (Zoe-Age 16)

It felt like a team. There was no difference between the backstage and the performers. Everyone seemed to have just as much fun. (Georgina-Age 14)

Organizing the vast numbers of parents and friends required to work the actual shows, was surprisingly easy. Once the shows were running, everyone was keen to get into the act, and we often had many more volunteers than we needed. Parents of the performers worked in the dressing rooms, applying make-up, changing costumes, and supervising the children. Other parents found themselves ushering, selling tickets, bartending, controlling traffic and stuffing hot dog buns. Adults seemed to be having just as

much fun as the children, and occasionally had to be reminded to control their "enthusiasm" for fear of disrupting the show.

In the beginning my dad was like, 'Man, I'm never working pantomime again.' But he always does that with anything that involves more work than he is used to. Once he gets there he loves talking with all the chorus girls and everything, not to make him seem like a flirt, but he loves it and he's always teasing everybody. Near the end it wasn't so much of an effort to get him to go. Like he would actually come home and bathe, dress everything, 'I'm ready, you guys are keeping me back,' and he's waiting at the door. (Rachel-Age 15)

A Taste of Success

Opening night for "Sleeping Beauty" was a frenzy of emotion. Would the audience appreciate all our efforts? It was gratifying to see the school come together again and work for a common goal. However, we would be hard pressed to convince the Committee of Management that the shows were worth doing just for the experience. The product had to stand on its own and support its creation. We had given little thought to marketing the pantomime, relying on our loyal audiences of the past. As we looked at the sales for the twenty performances scheduled, needless to say, we were concerned. The first weekend's performances would be crucial in order to sell tickets by word of mouth.

A standing ovation was our first reward for our efforts. Tickets sold quickly and by the end of the run, our ever thinking secretary treasurer, Jeanne Bancroft, was squeezing chairs into the auditorium as tightly as was humanly possible. (It was acknowledged that

St. Winifred's pantomimes forced even the audience to become more sociable.) The thrill of success was even sweeter to see on the faces of our young performers. So accustomed did they become to the standing ovations that one of the youngest performers expressed real concern on a night when the entire audience failed to stand.

The satisfaction of recognition spread to all involved in the show, and in the school. The head mistress shared in this satisfaction and was to become one of our most avid supporters. Future pantomimes would see her actively marketing the show and dragging non-believers by their ears to view our creations. Many of the teachers, as well, began to see some of the effect of the shows. Rather than the expected fall off in performance in the classroom, many of the children involved in the show improved in their school work. The demanding rehearsals on the weekends had forced them to become more organized in their time management, and their success in the show gave them the confidence they needed to succeed in the classroom.

It was easier for me to plan my day, because I knew that at a certain time I had to be at rehearsal. From then on, you know, after pantomime anything goes. I am usually a terrible person at time management but I actually managed to get things organized. (Kaya-Age 17)

What I also find that happens to some people, is that because they're in pantomime their parents are looking out for their work to go down. They do that much more, put that much more effort, to prove that they can do their work as well as do pantomime. So in fact it sometimes improves. Look at Kevin, when he was doing 'Aladdin' he aced all of his exams. Reissa says her work improved both pantomimes as well. (Naomi-Age 16)

6. IN THE SWING OF REHEARSALS

Dear Eric,

The show is progressing nicely now. The script, I am told, is great (I can't comment anymore after working on it for so long.) This is the first week that I have actually begun to enjoy the work. I was so stressed about finding music and getting it altered to suit the dances, that I was ready to pack it in. Finally last weekend things fell into place, and now my other problems seem like a vacation in comparison.

The kids have had their compulsory "dressing down" about arriving to rehearsals on time, the uncommitted have been weeded out and replaced, and we can now measure them up for costumes. They are having a ball and will really hit the excitement peak when we start putting the show together.

Yours in relief, AnneMarie

Making it Their Own

The success of "Sleeping Beauty" made it easier to continue the tradition with "Robinson Crusoe". We had a willing team of volunteers and an eager body of students, who now knew what the pantomimes were about and wanted a piece of the action. We could, once again, return to an all student production. Auditions, this time around, were over subscribed and we struggled valiantly to include as many students as we could.

It was easier to find help during the early part of the preparation for the show, and this time we had some new blood to help recruit. Patrick Bethell undertook the challenge of organizing

the set builders and, in the organization of the costumes, a new mother, Valerie Ward, became a right hand to Hazel.

Others became so involved that they designed t-shirts to identify the crew members. The backstage crew had their own distinguishing purple and black shirts, the dressing room ladies had their red shirts, and the bartenders, not to be outdone, had black and red striped shirts and pirate hats. We were thrilled that the parents were initiating activities on their own.

...Earlier on I acknowledged everyone who has had a part in making St. Winifred's School such a wonderful place. There is one aspect of the School's activity that I failed to mention but which I feel has made such an immense contribution to our community and whose focus is on creation rather than consumption. This is the St. Winifred's School pantomime. It is important that this annual activity be recognized and honored for what it truly is. This incredible undertaking creates a tremendous opportunity for young people to develop their talents and abilities and to perform before a live audience. It fosters discipline, and allows students to be entertained from within themselves. The pantomime also allows parents to be actively involved in the school's program, while generating tremendous goodwill throughout the community. Many would say that it is too large an undertaking and too much work. Yet, year after year the show goes on. (Sharon Carmichael, 1995)

July 26

Try pastel ball dresses on senior chorus. How is it possible that the adults who wore these dresses in "Sleeping Beauty" were smaller than these young girls? It takes forever to fit the correct dress on each girl. Not only do we have to consider the size but the color and length must also be right. Louise also has the chorus already paired off so this also adds a further dimension. The girls are so keen to be in costume, they will suffer

any discomfort to avoid telling us the costume is too tight. We have to remind them how many times they have to dance in these outfits.

Mrs. Lloyd has been helpful in taking rehearsals for the singing. She is new to the school and, as the singing teacher, has her hands full this term, preparing the school's choir for the seventy-fifth reunion church services. Her willingness to also act as a singing coach for the pantomime places her high on my list of favorite teachers at the school. Mrs. Lloyd valiantly tries to train the girls to sing the songs correctly. She favors the higher keys and the principals try their best but all sound like very bad sopranos. The villagers have also been tutored to sing high or low depending on whether they are playing boys or girls. I know these kids are not singers and I do not expect the songs to be perfect. I am happy for the girls to sing in a lower, more comfortable key as long as they are loud!

Cinderella is especially having a hard time with her duet. She is overly conscious of her voice and is convinced she cannot sing her song. This is a mental block I am not sure we will overcome, so I must start to think of a back up plan.

Aug 12

At the tender age of five, the two little pages are a real handful. I sent home the script for them to learn and clearly they were taught the effective art of shouting their lines. Placing them on stage is like juggling mercury. Jonathan is not too bad but Rhett does not stop moving. I cannot get them to open their bodies to the audience so finally I tell Rhett he must always be one step in front of Jonathan so we can see him. Rhett is determined to stick next to Jonathan's side and Jonathan keeps stepping back until he is practically out the wing. After every scene Rhett asks if it is time for a break. Just don't give them any sweets or red frutee, please!

I think that you are so brave to actually try to work with those two little boys. I was so impressed, I was amazed that you would actually think of doing something like that, and it paid off. (Sandy-Age 17)

Aug 19

I worry most because I am sleeping well and have some time to relax. This is most strange during a pantomime production. Last time I would have weeks where I could not sleep because I was thinking and planning for the show. Does this mean that I am less interested or just less scared of failure? I am dreading the start of full cast weekend rehearsals. I do not have full confidence in the direction I have given my principals. What was once a strong script and an extraordinary show, now seems like just another pantomime. With the exception of Buttons, every original character has been compromised to suit the personality and looks of the actor playing the part. Vastly comic characters have now become less interesting because these young actors have moderate experience or comic ability.

Sue reminds me that I worried the same way about my principals for "Aladdin". "Remember how they came to life once they were in front of an audience?" I hope she is right.

Anna was unparalleled in her ability to draw out the best from her performers. Children learnt, sometimes through tears, how to speak, act and dance. Our parents never questioned her methods and thanked her for the discipline. We adored her and accepted being referred to as "You with the two left feet and arms like a bunch of bananas!"

*Anna is giving notes on the day's rehearsal.
The juniors are crowded around her.
She takes a step back and they take a step forward.
They want to be as close to her as possible.
I smile. Nothing has changed.*

...A teacher at St. Winifred's School, Miss Adamira, is responsible for producing the pantomime shows, which, since they were first staged in 1969, have made a name for that school as being, perhaps, the leading one in the field of drama. ...She particularly likes teaching children although she admits that, when rehearsing for the pantomimes, she finds herself becoming very stern with them in the effort of getting them to work as a team (Burrowes,1976:14).

The Baton Changes Hands

"Robinson Crusoe" proved to be as successful as "Sleeping Beauty". The tradition was reestablished, but history was to repeat itself with the departure of Miss Adamira. No longer able to dedicate the time needed to produce these extravaganzas, Miss Adamira again bowed out.

...Many students, who are now parents, wish pantomime to be continued. I am thrilled that AnneMarie McConney has the ability and the personality to pursue it. It is satisfying to see one's students carry on what was one's own work...I will never miss a St. Winifred's pantomime. (Anna Adamira)

Suddenly I understood what it meant to take Anna's place. It was not so much about having ideas, or blocking scenes, or designing costumes. All of those disciplines I had experienced as Anna's assistant. The new part, the scary part, was accepting the responsibility for the show. Would the audience still come to see a pantomime produced by someone other than Anna Adamira?

The pantomime for Christmas 1995 will be "Aladdin". Hang on didn't we already.....??? Yes, we did. The last "Aladdin" was 23 years ago and since the writer of this "Aladdin" was only four years old at the time, this one will be different.

The Team Grows Stronger

Aug 10

Naomi and Reissa come to help with the flower bushes for the wood scene. This was a project I had handed over to Liz and she subsequently enlisted Naomi and Reissa's help. I am always hesitant to ask cast members to give up additional time to help with props or costumes but they seem keen and will appreciate the whole process a lot more. Anna used to have us all decorating costumes and painting sets and we certainly never complained. On the contrary, we used to love being pulled out of lessons to cut out UV leaves and stick sequins.

Kevin also shows up to lend support. He is on summer vacation and although he is excelling at the U.S. Naval Academy, he misses being involved in the pantomime. Although Kevin's busy social schedule hardly allows him the energy to accomplish any work on this early Saturday morning, his mere presence is a cheer and encouragement to all present. Kevin quizzes me on my special effects and especially wants to know how I will change Cinderella into her ball gown. I explain that Teisha will double for Cinderella in the dance and then switch places again to reveal Cinderella in her gown. The same switch will occur later as midnight strikes and Cinderella runs from the Ball in her rags. Kevin thinks the audience will notice the difference between the two girls and challenges me to pull off the switch. "Hey, if I can make a carpet fly..."

*I can see DeVere trying not to laugh.
Rob is explaining how we can get Aladdin's carpet to fly.
He will drill a hole in the wall,
then a cable may be run through pulleys
and attached to the back of his pick up truck
which will be parked outside.
Given the cue, he will then drive his truck across the lawn,
thereby raising the carpet.
We just have to make sure that parking spot is left empty.
I don't think so.*

Aug 27

We paint throughout the days in an attempt to finish off the backdrops and set pieces before all cast rehearsals begin. Diana brings her daughter and friend, who are on holiday, to help paint. They are a welcome addition as they can paint with little supervision. Diana is meticulous in her detail and reminds her daughter, at home, to correct some of the vines she has painted - "I think AnneMarie said to highlight them in yellow not white, Debby. You'll have to change that tomorrow."

The columns and staircase in the palace scene are impossible to get straight. Never mind no one will notice from a distance.

Aug 25

First all cast rehearsal. We run through Act One on Saturday and Act Two on Sunday. The cast are enjoying watching each other perform and cheer supportively at all the dances. Both principals and chorus get a boost with this new audience and perform at a high level. Everyone pitches in to help change set pieces and props. The show flows and it is a relief to see all the scenes working together. The cast will have the next week off and then start back school. We will not see them for two weeks. Louise and I hope they will remember all the dances and blocking.

During the summer, at first you have these dances and everything is new and exciting. Then by the end of summer when you've done as much as you can towards the individual dances with the choruses, before the all cast rehearsals start, then you get tired. It's like what now? (Naomi-Age 16)

Halfway There

Sept 8

Rehearsals resume again during the weekends only. The cast returns in full force with enthusiasm brimming. On the Friday night we rehearse the dances and polish any mistakes that have crept into the choreography. On the Saturday and Sunday we run through the entire show so everyone remembers the routine. They are amazingly accurate and we can now move ahead to tighten and clean the whole show.

When you come back into term again, after the break, it is exciting because all the cast are together and there is a whole new set of things to work on...Then all cast rehearsals start to drag on again, and it starts to get monotonous, then you get dress rehearsals to break it up. (Naomi-Age 16)

*We are halfway through the rehearsal process.
The excitement is gone.
Most of the big creative decisions have been made.
The dances are choreographed and the scenes are blocked.
Now I must polish the work and I do not know how.*

Sept 15

We have borrowed microphones for this weekend's rehearsal so that the principals can learn some microphone technique. They are nervous about singing with microphones in front of the entire cast, especially Cinderella. I send the others outside for lunch while I work with her and Prince Charming. A stepsister stays to lend encouragement. I try a couple of other ways to do the song and finally decide to let the two principals speak their solo lines and then sing with the villagers for the chorus bits. The last two lines of the song are slow and without much musical accompaniment. We all cringe to hear them sing. Then I discover that Prince Charming's mate, Dandidi, has a lovely voice. She sings the end of the song and the chorus just joins in for the final note. Not brilliant but it has many

"hammy" dance moves during the song. It will work as the comedy piece I had intended it to be.

Anna attends one of my rehearsals.

*The children are so excited they can hardly perform.
Even the youngest children know who she is.*

*She tells them how much they look like their parents,
and shares stories of their pantomime days.*

*Anna watches and I can see the longing in her face.
She wants to instruct the children.*

"No, this is my rehearsal, Anna. Tell me, not the children."

*Anna tells me I must replace my Dame.
She is not funny enough.*

*"Comic timing cannot be learnt," she says,
"You either have it or you don't."
We also cannot hear what she is saying,
her diction and projection are terrible."*

*I look up at the stage and see a frightened young girl.
She can barely remember her lines
because she knows Anna is talking about her.*

*I know there is truth in what Anna says,
but I cannot abandon this child.
She says I must, but I know I will not.*

Sept 22

The set builders return before rehearsal on the Saturday to erect the backstage props' shelter. We debated whether we needed the shelter this year and decided with the carriage and larger props it would be useful to have them right offstage protected from the rain. Peter is back and grumbling about the fact that he will soon have to attend rehearsals and "there goes all of his time." He wants to know who are his crew and if they are responsible. "They are teenage boys, Peter. You have to teach them."

Louise takes some time to work on the finale walk down. It is not easy with seventy kids all on the stage at once. We are obviously being unreasonable in thinking that it is possible for them to restrain themselves from talking. Rhett still wants to know when he can take his break.

One rehearsal I remember vividly. It was hysterical. Jonelle and me learning the walk down with Louise. Both of us were standing up against the wings like this. We were so exhausted and so miserable. Then from the time we heard our piece, smiles on and down the steps, and once the music stops you clap, and you crawl back into the wings and do the whole thing over again. We must have done that 15 or 20 times.
(Zoe-Age 16)

Becoming a Family

Sept 22

On Sunday we take pictures for the program. The cast has been warned and they all arrive looking their best. The principals fix each other's hair, suggest different poses and are teased unmercifully by the chorus members. Teisha is sick but insists on staying just for the picture. The girls hug her protectively and we manage to take one shot before she has to run off to the bathroom. The eight senior dancers pose themselves and pull Lana into the shot. Lana has just returned from a summer dancing with "The Harlem Dance Company" and will now become the understudy for the seniors as well as the village chorus.

*A big cake in the shape of Aladdin.
The birthday girl cuts the cake with her best friend,
then blows out the candles.
We all sing happy birthday.
Even the bigger kids are anxiously reaching for cake.
They are all laughing and sitting close together,
the little ones on the laps of the principals.*

Sept 29

Reissa brings me an e-mail message she received from Kevin, at the Navel Academy. It is addressed to the entire cast and, as I read it aloud to them, I am touched by the strength of this young man's feelings towards the pantomimes.

Dear Cast,

I know each and every one of you is becoming unbelievably excited as opening night draws closer. You should each be proud of all of your achievements thus far. You are representing yourselves, your schools and St. Winifred's splendidly, through the use of your talents, to bring joy and enlightenment to so many in the Christmas season. You are all a part of a large pantomime family that will never abandon you. The hours you spend rehearsing and performing will definitely be among your fondest memories. The friends you are making here will in one way or another be some of your closest friends in the years to come.

I am just one of the many few who would give almost anything to be involved in the pantomime right now and I know I can sincerely speak for them when I wish you the best of luck and the happiest of nights in the long road ahead. To the small ones, the junior chorus; you are the luckiest ones. You have years of pantomime fun ahead of you. To the other choruses, especially the seniors, you are the life and the blood of the production. Enjoy yourselves and never let the energy fall. To the principals, a piece of your character will remain with you forever so make each moment on stage the best it can be. To the hard working backstage crew, lights and sound crew, costume producers, dressing room ladies and assistants, hearty congratulations. The show would never be without each and every one of you. And finally, to you AnneMarie, whose persistence and vision over the past two years have brought us all to this wonderful point. You deserve every accolade and compliment for what I know will without a doubt be an outstanding show.

So to the entire "Cinderella" family, as you embark upon this blessed journey, as we say in the Navy, fair winds and following seas!

Kevin Simmons
a.k.a "Captain Crossbones"
& "The Genie of the Lamp"

Oct 5

The backstage arrive. The cast is thrilled that backstage has joined us. Not only will they be relieved of their duties moving props and set pieces but they also now have male entertainment during their breaks. Peter has paperwork ready for all the boys, detailing the changes and pieces for each scene. What a relief it is to see the organization and effort, quite the contrast to my last manager who insisted that , "Things will just work themselves out."

I am clashing with my backstage manager.

*He runs his crew as a separate entity
and thinks I am a young whipper snapper.*

I am intimidated.

*He is influencing the rest of his crew
and making things difficult for me .
If I ask him to leave he will take others with him.
Do we have time to train a new crew?*

*I cannot live with it, so I call him and discuss the situation.
I tell him that regardless of his personal opinion of me,
he must respect my position as director, or he must leave.
He decides to leave.*

*The next weekend he is back.
Now he is my biggest supporter.*

Even if they are people that you don't really like you have to work with them. There's no point having animosity because it makes it a lot harder. (Kaya-Age 17)

Oct 12

Louise has agreed to take the rehearsal for Saturday night. The cast teases me about skipping a rehearsal but this is one night I must miss. My family would probably disown me if I missed my cousin's wedding and I am aware of the significance of this event for Uncle David. Everyone feels this will be his last big farewell bang and my priorities must live with family for this night.

7. FINISHING TOUCHES

Oct 13

Patrick has managed to persuade Peter to let him have the carriage to finish. No matter how busy, Peter refuses to delegate prop work to other parents. I can relate to this need to do it all yourself because my mother and I suffer from the same problem. I go over and help wind Christmas lights around all the struts. Patrick has gotten someone to instruct us how to join the light strands together so they can operate all together off a battery at the back of the carriage. We have finally decided on the appearance of the carriage. We will distract the audience with an air burst and black out while simultaneously opening the traverse curtain and illuminating the carriage.

Lights...

Oct 14

We set up two levels of scaffolding to hang one new lamp. The stage left side stage is too dim and cannot be covered by the spotlight. There is an extra cable running through the roof, but where it ends is anyone's guess. I locate one end of the cable, by the dimmer pack, then trace the cable through the roof to find the other end that will plug into the lamp. We make the connections and try our luck. Of course, it is the wrong cable but by chance the next cable I plug in operates the new lamp.

Oct 17

As we paint into the night we suddenly hear a loud bang in the direction of the lighting room. The batons overhead go dark and as I race upstairs I pray that it is not the dimmer pack. There is a faint smell of smoke in the air but no damage is visible to the eye. The pack will not power back up. Not a good sign.

Help!
We don't need this now!

A connection within the dimmer pack has blown.
Can anyone in Barbados fix it?

Make your decision fast.
OK! Send it to Strand in Toronto to be repaired.

Unbolt the 90 pound pack from the wall,
box it and get it on the 5pm flight.
Clear it through customs and find someone to take it.
I see a distant relative!
They are next in line, talk fast.
It's over the weight limit - Please, it's for a school!

Who will receive it on the other end?
Richard lives in Toronto, he will help!

To the Cast and Crew of Aladdin,

We think of St. Winifred's often with fond memories, not only of the time spent working on props and backstage, etc., but of the fantastic group of people who rally together for the cause of improving the school. We are sorry that we are unable to participate in this year's production but we are thinking of you nonetheless.

With warm regards, Richard and Cathie

Dear Jim,

...Needless to say our rehearsals are suffering without the proper lighting, and as our dress rehearsal looms closer this coming weekend, we all wait with baited breath for the return of our pack.

As I explained to you this dimmer pack was a significant purchase for a small school and one that was greatly deliberated. We decided to go with the Strand CD80 because we were told it was very dependable. We went to further lengths, flying down a technician from a theatre in Canada in order to properly install it. To have to deal with this problem only two years after purchase is very distressing. St. Winifred's School would be more than grateful for any consideration you can give to our situation.

Yours sincerely, AnneMarie McConney

Costumes...

Oct 25

First Dress rehearsal. Kids are excited to be in costume. Focus goes out the window but energy and spirits are high. The 1st half costumes are spectacular. The 2nd half costumes are not quite as stunning, only because some of the costumes are repeated from the 1st half. The Finale Ball costumes are definitely dull and something must be done to improve them.

To be able to watch it, like when we had the dress rehearsal, it was real interesting, because it was like, 'Wow, this is what I'm a part of!' (Kaya-Age 17)

Oct 26

Now try to get the costumes dressed on the kids correctly. Some major pieces are still missing and many are needed to practice the fast changes.

*First time on stage with the costumes.
Everyone is excited.*

*"It's harder to kick our legs up now."
We'll run the dance in costume.
"Keep going, You look fantastic!"
Penny's genie pants fall down.
Everyone collapses into laughter.
It is 5 minutes before we can restore order.*

*"This is the best 'walk down' we have ever had.
If I play the Christmas song after,
it will pull the energy right back down!
It will destroy the final moment."
I explain over and over again.
"You must have the Christmas song. It is tradition."*

*They sit on the verandah, partially clad in costumes.
They gossip and tell jokes
and the junior chorus try to join in.*

Just Having Fun with my Friends

Oct 27

What is the point of trying to rehearse anymore? Give them a costume and all they want to do is run the show. I promise the next Sunday off if they concentrate and clean up the scenes and dances today. They would rather play volleyball outside in between calls. To them this is a big social event and canceling a rehearsal is a threat not a reward.

After pantomime people who were our total enemies at school are now like your really good friend. (Natasha-Age 7)

It is not just that you get to make new friends but you know your old friends better. (Kira Lee-Age 14)

I know a person who, all she has to do is see somebody and immediately - 'Man, I don't like her blah, blah, blah.' When you are made to work in a situation with them... she has made so many friends, I mean lasting friendships. With the same people that she used to talk bad about. (Rachel-Age 15)

I remember after 'Aladdin', Rachel looked at me and said, 'You know Kaya, I had never met you, I had never spoken to you before, but I absolutely hated you. I am so glad that I got to know you.' And like we are really, really close, ever since then. I'd rather you dislike me for knowing me, than not know me and still dislike me. (Kaya-Age 17)

Oct 31

Julia suggests trimming the Finale ball dresses with pink frills and flowers. This may be just what they need but a little more than we expected to be doing at this point. Mum works like a dog, never resting. Liz joins me to help make mushroom headdresses, then we take the costumes down to the school to continue decorating. We sit on the floor and the senior girls float in and out during their free lessons to help glue sequins.

Action

Nov 3

Dear Sue,

We had an interesting dress rehearsal weekend. On Friday night Buttons was sick so his understudy went on and did her own part as well. She's a 13 year old girl who is the most naturally talented actor of the bunch, but was too small for any big parts. She plays a small role as one of the debt collectors: Kash and Karry. She was swamped in Button's costume but performed both parts commendably well. (Mum was worried she'd have a nervous breakdown from all the fast changes back and forth.) I didn't want her understudy to replace her because I didn't think she was strong and I wanted a good rehearsal. I needn't have worried because the entire cast was very weak. Their energy was low and dances looked scrappy. I was incredibly depressed because I had given them a big pep talk and promised Sunday off if the dress runs were good.

*Encourage them, don't be too hard.
At what point do you stop encouraging
and lay it on the line.
This has to be the point.*

Saturday night I didn't think could get worse but it threatened to prove me wrong. Instead of one principal sick, I had two down plus a few out of the choruses. Never have I done a show with so many cast members sick! Natasha had to replace Buttons again and I could not ask her again to do two parts, so I had to put in her understudy as well, that meant three principals replaced.

To add to the confusion both Natasha and the other understudy had been involved in an accident the Friday night after they left rehearsal. The two kids and the mum all came

to the Saturday rehearsal because they thought it best to continue as usual. The mum was the most shaken of course. The kids told me they were OK, so they went on. Meanwhile one of my stepsisters had an aunt die the night before, so she was also feeling upset. I felt as if we were being dumped on from all over.

*The show goes on.
The understudies do a fabulous job
and the choruses pull together in support.
Even the fill in dancers are great.
Is this what it takes for them to pull together.
You are brilliant!
SUNDAY WE CAN HAVE A DAY OFF.*

There comes a point when you have to sit back and say that's enough, there's no more that we can do. The only thing that can come now will be the audience. (Naomi-Age 16)

Nov 8 - Speech Night

I don't think Lana expected to be filling in quite so early in the run of the show. Since the Speech Night performance is only a preview consisting of Scene One, she has just one dance to learn. I am glad that the situation has presented itself sooner than later because she is now forced to take her role seriously. The other understudies are also reminded to look over their script and practice dance routines.

Our opening was not quite as spectacular as I know it can be. The music was a bit too "bassy" and not clear. Chorus and backstage alike were over anxious at the beginning. As a result the fog was early and the fairies, with their candles, walked through the audience so fast, they had to pause before getting onstage. The dance settled as it progressed and the opening scene was received with thunderous applause.

The school kids went wild as each principal made their entrance, but it was more in response to the recognition of the actor as one of their friends. Nevertheless, the laughter and applause did a world of good for the principals.

Their overall performance was outstanding. Every character projected clearly and paused like professionals for their laughs. I was so incredibly proud of them. The entire cast got a great boost from that short performance in front of the audience.

It just gave you that energy. Even those that weren't involved in Speech Night, like Zoe. For me to go back and say, 'Zoe this show is going to be fantastic, the audience is going to love it,' gave Zoe that extra little bit of...you know, 'OK, now I have to perform, I have to see for myself what it's going to be like.' (Naomi-Age 16)

I never expected it to feel like that the first time that I was on. The people all there, the reactions and everything it was like 'Wow!' (Tina-Age 13)

I must compliment my cast members who received prizes, before the entertainment, on Speech Night. I was very aware of how many prize winners were also in the show.

Nov 9 - Charity Show

The senior chorus arrive early to teach Lana the ballroom dances. The cast is in an overall state of high energy, boosted by the Speech Night preview and eager to test the entire show on this first public audience. I have warned them again that the reactions at this Charity Show may be slightly unusual.

The performance started twenty minutes late as we were forced to wait for buses to arrive from the child care homes. Audience talked throughout the performance as expected but seemed to enjoy it immensely. Laughed at most of the jokes, sometimes so much so that the flow of the scene was disrupted.

The principals perform beyond my expectations. Characters come to life as if by magic and even the most inexperienced of the principals perform like seasoned

professionals. The Choruses as well, look clean and sharp in their dances. They all radiate energy and enjoyment and I cannot be any prouder.

During intermission the children in the audience gather around to meet Cinderella and the Fairy Godmother. Kaya shows them her wand and thanks them for shouting so loudly and helping to make her spells work. She asks them if they would like to touch the wand and they reach out in awe to stroke it gently.

You are performing on stage and you are making other people happy. Just to watch the brightness come upon the people, like the charity show, that gave you energy. (Georgina-Age 14)

The St. Winifred's School Pantomime 'Cinderella' promises to be a smash hit! Invited guests from various 'child care' and retirement homes were treated last Saturday night to a special sneak preview of this year's Christmas extravaganza.

... All the performers are obviously enjoying themselves on stage and this is reflected in the positive response of the audience. The dance routines are excellent and there is some very innovative use of props...check out the village girls' trays.

Part of the production's success must be attributed to the stage design. The sets and costumes are incredible, with shapes and colours that create one spectacle after another... The backstage crew must also be commended, for a wonderful job getting the many sets and costume changes achieved quickly and quietly.

The long months of rehearsals and the tremendous support of parents and helpers have paid off. Cinderella is great entertainment for the whole family. For the performers, it was clear that the laughter and applause made it all worthwhile (Allen, 1996:7).

Camelot Revisited

Dear Sue,

I am not sure if Mom is just working hard or having a good time. Every time she tells me how hard she is working I remind her that she is having a good time. She has encouraged many of the past students to contact as many others as they can think of and this has created a lot of excitement. She expects some 400 past students to attend the Reunion Pantomime Gala on November 15. They are coming from far and wide even from as far away as UK, New Zealand and Australia. Quite a few from the US and Canada as well.

Love, Dad

Nov 13 - Reunion Harbour Master Cruise

All the events planned for the 75th reunion have been a huge success and this evening cruise is predictably well attended. Even Anna has shown up for the occasion. It is inevitable that all the old pantomime girls would eventually get together and begin to rehash all the old Pantomime stories. Remember when...

- I had to fill in for Christine. Anna stood behind the traverse and fed me all the lines.
- And then Anna had to strap her chest down to wear Desiree's costume.
- Christine performed all the other shows with a cast and on crutches.
- Anna made me leave my own brother's wedding early.
- Andrew had all the birds held up in the dressing room tent, holding up the zipper.
- Who was it that kicked that shoe into the audience? Anna told us it made it to row H.
- I never cried so many tears as back then.
- When you cried you made it good because you knew you had to be back on in 20 minutes.
- Bev dropped her petticoat, stepped out of it and continued dancing without missing a beat.
- Remember Hazel stitching up the zipper as the actor stood with her back to the wing.
- And Anna yelling at the backstage "I asked for snow not a blizzard!"
- The night the rainbow fell over those juniors didn't even blink.
- Peta had to physically carry Gina offstage because she was so sick.
- And those young Babes made up new lines on the spot, to suit the situation.
- Lauren fainting constantly and us using smelling salts not knowing that she was a diabetic.

The stories continue as I listen silently. I am younger than these girls and I was in the junior chorus when they were principals. I know the stories but I cannot share in all of them. It is fun at first but then becomes depressing. Is it because I feel left out? Will I ever experience my performers reminiscing like this years from now? Have I made an impact in their lives as Anna did in ours? Also there is something there under the surface - a challenge - that my shows can never be like hers, never as good, never as strong, never as memorable. Is it my imagination?

8. THE PERFORMANCE TAKES OFF

It is the Gala Opening.

The house is full.

*The children gather for our pre-show notes and prayer.
For the first time I repeat the prayer that Anna has said
at every previous St. Winifred's School pantomime.*

I have asked her if I may use it.

*I stand on the steps with my mother beside me,
in the same place she stood for Anna.*

A standing ovation!

I shout into the headset to be heard above the audience.

I am telling them to open the curtain again.

Five curtain calls and I can't stop smiling.

I am so proud of the children I could burst.

I am so relieved.

Anna sits with the Governor General as an honored guest.

She joins us afterwards and she is so gracious.

*She tells me she can hardly recognize the Dame,
she has come so far.*

I thank her.

Five curtain calls and a thunderous standing ovation from an enraptured audience crowned Saturday's opening Gala performance of 'Aladdin' at St. Winifred's School.

'Aladdin' is produced and directed by AnneMarie McConney who also wrote the script and together with Hazel McConney designed the breath-takingly beautiful costumes. This multi-talented former St. Winifred's student and teacher has succeeded in extracting from her young theatrical charges focused excellence while at the same time giving them full rein to have fun on stage.

There was a moving moment just before the curtain went up Saturday night when the young cast, as nervous as they were excited, gathered just outside the hall to say a prayer before going on stage. 'This is what you've been working for all these months,' McConney told her cast. 'Stay focused and have fun.' Then there was a soft prayer, and good luck wishes as the children scampered to take their places (Dear, 1994:16).

Flowers and Fears

I was really excited the whole day at school. I was just dilly dallying around. (Natasha-Age 7)

Nov 15

Dear Sue,

Many thanks for the flowers you sent for our Reunion Gala last night. One of the little fairies presented them to me after the prayer. That moment turned out to be the highlight of the night for me, because I was not that pleased with the show itself.

We started off well, because our opening is very strong, but throughout the first half the audience seemed particularly quiet. They were laughing at the jokes but nothing like what we had experienced at Speech Night or the Charity show. They would not respond to any of the audience participation bits. Some of the principals forgot a few lines, more than normal, but they covered and in general did a good job. The Choruses were trying really hard and performing well, especially the little juniors but somehow it seemed as if they were in an empty room.

The worse moment of the night came in the change before the last scene of Act One. Kash and Karry were doing their bit in front of the tabs while backstage were doing their fastest and hardest change of the night. Over the headset came "AnneMarie we have a serious problem with the backdrop." I felt as if I was in Apollo 13! I told Janine to hold the music and rushed down backstage. One of the pulleys on the backdrop had broken and it is practically impossible to get a backdrop of that weight up on only two ropes. I must say the backstage crew did a commendable job. Nix somehow got it up with Danny on Andrew's shoulders pushing the loose end up. Peter rushed up into the ceiling, smashing his head on the roof in the process, and grabbed the backdrop from above, pulling it up the rest of the way and hooking the hook back on. Meanwhile we had black for about two minutes, seemed like an eternity to me. Janine started the music the second it was up and

the curtains opened to a crooked backdrop. One of the little pages that come on to deliver the invitation to Cinderella was so interested in what was going on in the ceiling that he had to be practically thrown on stage by one of the backstage boys!

As you can imagine my spirits were not what you would call high at intermission. I was so embarrassed I didn't want to see anyone in the audience, but I still had to go and encourage the cast.

Hi Anne Marie,

I figure all of your worries are the normal 'it's so bad' when we all know it will be fantastic as always. So once again I have attributed your comments to your over critical nature rather than to the quality of the show !!!

Sue

PS. Ask Mum if she remembered to send flowers to Uncle David and Aunt Roz for me.

The second half was better, probably because the audience drank and ate everything at the bar, so they were more receptive. Still those little pages managed to mess up their lines so much in one scene, the other principals didn't know what to do. They only got away with it because they are so little and cute the audience love to see them mess up.

The whole show had the overall feel of a second show. For some reason this year, the Charity show was very much our opening, and second shows are notoriously bad. I didn't really want to see anyone at the reception after but those who did see me were very complimentary. Needless to say I was not in the right frame of mind to believe them. With "Aladdin" I felt sure it was good; with this one I don't feel confident at all. The Charity show felt fine but this opening I felt bombed. The worst part is I can't figure out what went wrong or how to correct it. I know the script is strong and the jokes are good, so I'm wondering if our visual impact in the dances is not as spectacular as last time.

...Last Sunday we took the grands to the St. Winifred's School presentation of Aladdin. The student pantomime was nothing short of delectable.

Past student Anne-Marie McConney, producer of the show of singing, dancing and a kaleidoscope of colours, can be

faulted for very little. You cannot say the pantomime is too goody-goody; it is functionally tasteful and titillating. And, unlike what is too often the case with childrens' stage productions, one could not accuse Anne-Marie of a too rigidly rehearsed thing...It should be pointed out here that this is the first time a past student of the school itself would have produced the pantomime in its 25 years or so of presentations.

There has been some small talk though about Aladdin and similar offerings having no relevance beyond the children and the school themselves - primarily from those critics who have not taken the trouble to go and see these highly enjoyable student productions, particularly the current one.

Too often I am being forced to ask why is it that mostly old, good, clean fun is subjected to these offensive criteria, when the more 'mature work' of older stagehands is judged highly 'on its merits' - for all its tiredness and vulgarity.

All the reason why our very talented youth, fresh and unspoiled, must be spared the unnecessary dissecting. Instead, being only critically supportive, we must help put the skills of our young to good use.

Aladdin is but one example of the great talent that lies with our Barbadian youth, just waiting for the opportunity to present itself. I salute Anne-Marie, Annalise and the rest of the cast of Aladdin (Seale, 1994:11).

Nov 19

Dear Sue,

Audrey came and worked with the kids to polish a few of their songs. I think she finally realizes what we were up against. Before, she all but guaranteed me that she could fix them in one rehearsal, but after she admitted that she wasn't sure if they were any better. I think she did help a bit. Her energy is great and she works quite well with the kids. She complimented them all the time and made her corrections in between the compliments (I told her I was worried about shaking their confidence.)

She called me after to check that she hadn't overstepped her bounds. I told her I was grateful for the help and wished I could have involved her earlier. She then wanted to know if we could have another full rehearsal! I told her I did not think so. She also said

she was sorry she had not jumped in three months ago. It's interesting because she sees where we are now and knows how much farther it could go. I also know how much better we could be, but remember where we came from too. I told her I had to be satisfied with how much the kids have progressed and trust that notes and experience will improve them along the way. I cannot ask them to give more time now, especially with three shows a week. I was quite clear about her not giving notes to the cast and she understood, so we'll just have to hope that she can resist the impulse to jump into everything.

Needless to say I'm trying to think of a way now to light a bomb under the cast, to get their energy up for the second Gala performance.

Bye for now, AnneMarie

Dear Mrs. Binks,

The evening on Saturday was most enjoyable. "Aladdin" was very professionally produced and acted. My sincere 'thank yous' to all of those involved. The programme which I spent some time reading shows what a large number it takes to achieve the excellency which we saw. I would like them all to know that they have my gratitude and admiration as well as sincere thanks for the production. Not the least of these are the young actors and actresses. Barbados certainly has a talented group whom you are preparing for the future of the arts. Yours sincerely,

Dame Nita Barrow, Governor General

Nov 22 - Gala Opening

Cookies and candies in the dressing rooms to hype up the kids again for this second Opening Gala. I was worried that this audience, with the Governor General present, would be a bit stiff, but surprisingly enough they were very receptive. They applauded the opening when the little fairy climbed out of the book, and continued to show their appreciation as each new scene was revealed.

The little pages forgot their lines again but that only prompted more laughter from the audience. The Chariots of Fire race had them almost rolling in the aisles. As the curtains closed on the final number the audience stomped on the platforms and demanded three curtain calls.

Afterwards, compliments flowed like wine and the only negative comment was that they missed the singing of the Christmas song. The Governor General wanted to know how we managed to change Cinderella into her ball dress so quickly. Mrs. Binks surprised and amused me by stating that she thought the change was getting faster. After watching so many rehearsals I thought she would have discovered the switch by now.

It was difficult to tell who enjoyed the St. Winifred's Pantomime 'Cinderella' more - the adults or the children - as scene after scene was met with thunderous applause and joyful laughter by everyone in attendance.

At the Gala showing last Friday evening which was also attended by Governor General, Sir Clifford Husbands and Lady Husbands, an energized cast gave sterling performances much to the delight of the audience.

The AnneMarie McConney- production was filled with surprise after surprise as she not only employed clever writing, but top notch stunt skills as well.

For example, the transformation of the pumpkin into a coach is a vital element of the fairy tale. Other than to draw the curtain or hypnotize the audience, how does one pull it off without missing a beat? With perfect timing and ingenuity, that's how!

Another thoughtful trick was Cinderella's own transformation out of her rags and into a magnificent ball gown... (Smith, 1996:32).

There Go My Babies

Nov 23

Reminded the villagers that they must warm up their voices as well as their bodies before every show. The volume and energy of their opening song set the tone for the first scene. These girls are inexperienced performers and are also at a very self-conscious age. They find it difficult to believe that getting it right is less important than making it big.

The cast take a vote at the pre-show prayer and decide almost unanimously to sing the Christmas Song at the end of each show. We sang the song at the Reunion Gala because I thought the old girls would be appreciative. I was hoping to then wait until mid-December before starting to sing it again but these performers have decided otherwise.

What is it about this Christmas Song? We have sung this song at the end of every St. Winifred's pantomime and continue to do so even though the words are inappropriate for our Barbados climate and culture - "To hear the Sleigh bells ringing soft and clear"? During the production of "Sleeping Beauty" when a recorded version of the Christmas Song could no longer be found, Anna suggested we sing a different carol. We old girls practically mutinied. So committed were we to staying true to tradition that we arranged to do a new recording of the song ourselves. We spent an entire night locked in a studio with one of our old musicians until we were satisfied that our new version was true to the old.

Now these younger performers demand also that the tradition continues. I who fought against Anna to continue the song, now fight against my performers to let it go. And I have to bow to their

demands. Regardless of how inappropriate, badly sung, or energy draining it is, it is tradition.

Nov 24

A quiet audience but a strong performance by the cast. Sunday matinees are filled with very young children who do not necessarily respond with laughter and applause but rather with open mouthed amazement. Cinderella and the Fairy Godmother decide they would like to meet the kids during intermission at every Sunday Matinee. Given a chance the entire cast would like to be out there mingling with the audience but I have to draw the line somewhere.

You know what was amazing? These little children who actually believe that Cinderella is in Barbados, at this school. It's just like absolutely amazing and lovely to see their faces.
(Kira Lee-Age 14)

By the time you are like 17, 18, you've seen all the tricks. You are like, 'Right, the pumkin is going to be pulled up.' But little children still believe in magic. It gives you a nice feeling inside to know that somebody still believes in all this. (Naomi-Age 16)

When I came out at intermission it was like, 'How did you do that?' I'd be like, 'Well, you all helped me. Once you believe in magic, that's how it happens.' Hopefully if they remember anything about the pantomime they will remember magic. Even later on when they don't believe in magic anymore.
(Kaya-Age 17)

Nov 29

The dances are looking clean and it is evident that the cast is gaining more confidence with each show. Rehearsed the pages before the show and they got their lines right this time.

*Cinderella races across the yard to find her ball dress.
 It is not backstage where it should be.
 All hands on deck as costumes fly.
 She races back across the yard,
 the ladies run behind with her tiara and shoes.
 She makes the switch and no one is the wiser.
 Cinderella's smile is even wider tonight.*

*Nieltje's skirt falls off.
 Thank goodness for matching panties.
 How many times have they been told to use safety pins!*

*We use a thinner nylon string for the pumpkin.
 The other one was too visible.
 Don't forget to test it before the show.
 Five minutes before the pumpkin has to fly
 backstage discovers they can't lift it.
 Get Nix and his hard hands,
 Nix flies that baby.*

*One of the little mice has noticed.
 The audience was starting to stand for an ovation
 then the Christmas Song started to play so they sat back down.
 AH HA ! There is method to my madness!*

Maintaining Focus and Energy

Nov 30

A smallish audience but very appreciative. The cast were doing their best show until I complimented them all at intermission and seemed to jinx them. Rachel started with the wrong chorus in her song and could not rescue it back. Loss of focus or what? She was very upset afterwards and cried. The Stepmother cheered her up before the next scene by showering her with rude jokes. At least her crude humour is good for something.

All of us on stage were killing ourselves with laughter, and the two of them half laughing, half crying still trying to think up words. Mariama was trying to think up a line, trying to focus, and I don't know if she saw people on the side of the stage laughing or what but she could not get the line out and her focus was gone again. (Naomi-Age 16)

It was amazing how that affected the entire scene, it really did because after that we were so off. (Penny-Age 14)

Dec 1

Sold out house, including eleven extra seats put in. Lots of children so the audience noise was significant. Quite a clean show but lacking a bit of energy. Pages did a clean run but surprisingly enough Dandini dried up in the middle of a scene. This is unusual because Sandy is generally the most focused of the whole bunch.

You're focusing on what they are saying but suddenly you'll catch something like a bead of sweat on their forehead and you'll get so involved in this bead of sweat...and all of a sudden it's like your turn to speak. (Sandy-Age 17)

Dec 4

Many cast members feeling sick. Morgan had to fill in for Ghislaine again and I wonder if her nausea is a result of stress rather than stomach flu. Ghislaine never reacted to the recent loss of her mother and this may be a delayed response. Her chorus members have been asked to be as supportive as possible.

Kaya is also struggling with a combination of tonsillitis and gastroenteritis. Between pantomime, school, karate and her busy social life, she has been going non stop since we began rehearsals. She really needs to take some time to rest and recover but she refuses to curtail any of her activities. Decided to ease her up a bit by performing as the godmother in disguise. Managed to get through the scene even though I had to ad lib a few lines. Cinderella was quite amused but I don't think the audience noticed. Kaya managed to make it through the rest of the performance but you could hear she was struggling with her voice.

Besides battling various illnesses, there is an overall feeling of the cast fooling around, possibly over confidence mixed with the celebration of the last week of school. Peter commented that backstage is also getting sloppy and tonight I could hear many of the

changes. Now is the time when they must learn to perform consistently well, even after the initial excitement of opening has died down.

Dec 6

Had to start the music for Janine who was working late so Penny had to fill in for Kaya as the disguised godmother. Penny was so nervous that she was physically shaking. I know how she feels and must give her even more credit for performing in spite of her fears. I am always impressed by the understudies, jumping at the opportunity to take on a relatively unrehearsed role.

Sometimes in the wings you think, 'I can't remember what I am doing!' but as soon as you hear the music and you get on stage, it's routine. (Kira Lee - Age 14)

But the funny thing is that some nights you're doing fine, no nerves, well obviously just that little bit, but all of a sudden one night, in the middle of a performance you just start freaking out, and you're really, really nervous, and you've never been that nervous before. (Naomi - Age 16)

The Stepmother was also sick with some stomach flu but managed to make it through the night by running back and forth to the bathroom. Morgan filled in for Ghislaine again. Complimented the pantomime girls for racking in the prizes at the end of term. Teisha came third in class and her mother says it is because of the pantomime, that all she had time for was studying and rehearsals.

Dec 7

Ghislaine returned to perform, much to Morgan's dismay because her Gran was in the audience. Kaya also said she did not need any fill ins but I could still hear she was having trouble with her voice. The pages did a good job. They missed some lines but only because the other principals, who now expect them to forget, jumped the gun and spoke over them.

I just got to a point where you knew they were going to say one of three things so you made up responses for each of those things. But when they said it right you would be like, 'Oh my god what's the real line?' After a while they got it perfect anyway so we didn't really have to worry. (Zoe-Age 16)

Louise watched the show and although the audience was very responsive, she did not seem too enthusiastic and mentioned that the energy of the choruses was lacking. This is always the biggest problem in the run of a pantomime, maintaining the energy and keeping the scenes looking fresh. I feel I cannot expect much more from the villagers but the senior chorus should know better than to just go through the motions on stage. Louise suggested talking to Naomi and Ayesha and getting them to pick up the energy. The others may follow their lead.

If you're in a dressing room and you're down and everyone else starts getting down as well, then when you come on stage it so hard to bring it up. But other times like if you're down and everybody else around you is bubbly and stuff you can't really be miserable round everybody else then that just starts to bring it up a little bit. (Naomi-Age 16)

Success and Confidence Turning into Fun

Dec 8

Good audience and a good show. Rachel, as the stepsister, has taken her performance up a notch again and continues to amaze me. Is this the same Dame from "Aladdin" that Anna insisted I replace? Originally I worried that Mariama, with her natural flair for comedy, would be the dominant stepsister and overshadow Rachel. This has certainly not been the case. Rachel continues to improve and together they compliment each other and perform at a consistently high level. The Major Domo is also doing well. Never having performed on stage before, he astonishes me with subtle changes to his character each night. Cinderella continues to exude the energy and confidence she discovered from the first night she stood in front of an audience. Buttons is working his audience with the natural comic talent that has made him a favorite through four pantomimes. Renee, as the Stepmother longs to share in the laughter and tries her best to drag some comedy into her evil character. Fortunately, for the show, her physical size and presence do not allow her to be anything but appropriately intimidating. In the end it is still those little pages that rack in most of the applause and it is incredible to realize that they steal the show from the stepsisters.

I think that the four week run was a good length of time. If you compare how we were when we first started performing and how we ended up...it's such a big difference. Even people who went to the Gala then went to the last night, liked it towards the ending. It's a huge improvement. You can't really improve that much in any shorter period of time. (Kaya-Age17)

Dec 11

After three days spent visiting the hospital and the final passing of Uncle David, it is difficult to present a cheerful front. The cast and crew are supportive and it is comforting to be around this group.

Backstage are doing well. I don't have to worry about them this year. The dressing rooms also are being kept tidy and neat, everyone doing their part.

I would have a horrible, horrible week but the minute I came on stage it just changes, it totally changes, you know it just really made you feel good. I don't know why that happened but that happened to me quite a few times. (Penny-Age 14)

Dec 13

Found out after the show that fast change dressers were scarce tonight. I could have easily helped but I think they looked at it as a challenge.

Sara Jane slipped in the Finale number and fell flat on her face. She had a hard time keeping that smile on her face throughout the walk down but managed to save her tears until she got offstage. The chorus flocked around her to lend comfort and support, telling stories of their own mishaps to ease her embarrassment.

*The Stepsisters enter radiantly
in their overbearing ball gowns.
Rachel gives Rhett a little nudge
to move him out of the way.
OOPS...he nearly fell down the stairs.*

*Where's the Major Domo?
He has to introduce Prince Charming to Cinderella.
The Prince pauses for a second,
then introduces himself.*

*Cinderella is dancing elegantly with her Prince...
until she breaks a heel .*

*She starts to tumble down the stairs,
One of the chorus catches her at the bottom.*

*Seven mushrooms dance instead of eight.
The missing mushroom is reading in the dressing room,
she didn't hear the call.*

*One of the little pages is in tears.
The other will just have to do his lines as well.
What's wrong?
He did not get his ham cutter at intermission.*

Please, no hands near noses onstage.

Dec 14

Excellent show! Good energy probably prompted by a great audience. The junior chorus especially impresses me with their unwavering enthusiasm. I meet them in the breezeway before one of their dances and am nearly knocked over with hugs. They insist that I check their hair, headdresses and zippers. Emma announces proudly that I am her real cousin. She has only recently discovered this. The others want to know if this is true, and Emma adds that she is going to grow up just like me.

Keeping DisciplineDec 15

High spirits but a bit sloppy onstage. Lots of stuff dropped onstage. Mugs from the village dance, laundry from the mice dance, hats dropping, etc.

The Stepmother is entertaining herself by standing in the wings and mooning the stepsisters who are performing onstage. Her sense of humour is not appreciated by the backstage crew and I have to remind her to set an example for the younger cast members. I will have to watch her on the last night.

Dec 18

Liz greets me at intermission with bottle in hand and boasts that she has had three beers. I believe her performance especially with the rest of backstage playing supporting characters. I make my way over to her side during the second half. She has to cue the little pages and I am worried that she will mess up. After the show I am informed that the bottle was filled with water and I have been had. Who would have thought that Liz could act so well!

Dec 21

A lovely night filled with good times. Anne brought little baskets of soap for the principals in her dressing room. Other rooms were also having their own parties. The juniors exchanged gifts and the villagers received a carnation from their dressers.

The hall is packed beyond capacity and I beg Maureen not to squeeze in any more chairs. The cast is high on excitement during this last weekend.

Dear Mrs. Binks,

We were privileged to attend the second last 1996 presentation of 'Cinderella' by your St. Winifred's School. We were amazed and thoroughly delighted with the high quality of the show. The choreography, costume design, lighting, special effects were produced at a professional level.

We were particularly impressed by the enthusiasm, talent, expression and dedication to excellence displayed by the students. It was one of the most enjoyable Pantomimes that my wife and I have ever attended. Congratulations.

Joan & Bill Deyell, Canada

Laughter and Tears

Dec 22 - Closing Night

Flowers are in the senior and villagers' dressing rooms. The juniors will get a "piñata" afterwards and the principals will receive flowers on stage. The energy is terrific and I must watch that they do not get carried away with tricks. Before the prayer I remind them to clean up the dressing rooms before they go on to the party. My mother and I receive gifts, a Cinderella figurine and a glass slipper. I present the Academy Awards and lead the prayer for the last time.

*The villagers enter and sing at twice their normal volume.
I watch them from the Hall door
and I wonder if they can see me smiling.*

*It rains for the first time during our run, not tonight, please!
The principals shout to be heard
as the ushers move in to close windows.*

*The rain subsides.
We will not have to relay the cast with umbrellas .*

*The tricks are tame so far, I'd better go check.
Backstage is packed with cast members, something is brewing.
A gorilla in the wood is not that funny.*

*Second half is more inspired.
Chippendales and party crashers at the Ball,
Kevin and Bucket are fabulous
in their guest appearances from "Aladdin".*

*Backstage crew and dressers
join us onstage for the Christmas Song.*

*The audience sings along.
Four curtain calls and the seniors are in tears.
Back in the dressing rooms
the juniors are sobbing their hearts out.
I hug them all.*

The sad thing about the pantomime ending is because I get closer to a lot of people and then when pantomime is done I think that I may never see them again. (Zoe-Age 16)

You do become like a family. I mean you see each other every single day and you can't help getting closer to them. And then all of a sudden pantomime is done. You see them once a week if that, once every month, and its just kind of sad.
(Kaya-Age 17)

*The show has closed and I have invited some of the
cast and crew over to my house for a barbecue.*

*I can hardly recognize these young performers.
They do not stop talking and they are full of confidence.*

*My niece is watching a video of "Cinderella",
and the teenagers wander into the room.*

*They laugh at the characters
and begin to suggest variations on the story.*

Soon they are picking out the character they would like to play.

They are planning the next pantomime.

8. JOURNEY'S END

For me the greatest satisfaction of producing a pantomime comes after the show has closed. Opening night brings its thrills and chills and each subsequent performance brings its own reward including flowing praise from audience members. The praise, however gracious it may be, leaves little lasting impression. There is nothing that can equal the memory of watching the performers from the hall door and feeling so incredibly proud of them.

Once the show has closed, the most important reviews begin to float in, those from the parents and the performers. The parents say how much they miss the show, how they are lost now on weekends. They tell of the tears their children shed every morning when they go to school and remember there is no more pantomime to look forward to. They say how self-confident their children have become, how they have been brought out of their shell. The performers themselves most often relay one message - they are ready for the next pantomime.

A Junior Jaunt Down Memory Lane

In an attempt to fully understand the impact that performing in a pantomime had on these young students, I brought them together in two separate groups to discuss their experiences from the show.

Out of a chorus of twenty four juniors, fifteen attended the meeting on the Monday. Most of the absent chorus members had

previous extra curricular activities, such as ballet lessons and many of their parents phoned to apologize because they could not attend.

I was greeted on my arrival with warm hugs that did not want to end. The juniors were excited, energetic and curious as to the purpose of our meeting. I got the distinct impression that they were more than a little disappointed that I was not there to organize a new pantomime.

Settled in the classroom that would serve as our meeting place, they asked permission to discard their shoes. They eagerly grabbed some cookies I had brought for them and then fought for positions to sit in the circle on the floor around me. The tape recorder placed in the centre of the circle was of great interest and after demonstrating its ability, it was ignored and generally sat upon.

Although I had prepared questions intended to focus the discussion and keep it flowing, it became increasingly clear that the juniors had their own agenda for discussion. In the end it was easier and vastly more enjoyable to be an audience for their enthusiasm.

-When my Mum told me that there was going to be a pantomime called "Aladdin", I'm like, what's a pantomime, and she explained it all to me and I'm like, 'Hey, let's get in.'

-My brother wants to be in it next time because he saw how good it looked. He saw how Rhett and others got good parts so he said 'I can do it.'

-We made friends with the big girls.

-I never played with Alisia and now about three times a day I'm friends with Alisia and Giselle, and Nicola. I was never with Nicola.

-Everyone who wants to be a principal, say yes.

-(Everyone shouts) YES!

-You were a principal.

-I was not!

-Tid bits.

-That's not a principal. A principal has words to say.

-Yeah, but you were on the stage by yourself.

-The last night I went on stage with my normal panties not my fairy panties, and I didn't even know.

-The worse thing that happened to me was when we were running around in a circle with our candles. I never knew that a candle broke and then all of a sudden I look on the floor and there's my foot on a piece of glass, I had to keep on running.

-My mum took my costume home to wash, and she brought back all the others but she forgot mine so I never even got to go on.

-I got better marks after the pantomime.

-Even Mrs. Binks thought I was chatting so much, and now my Mum says I am improving very well.

-I got a red badge too.

-I came first in my class.

-I didn't even want to do ballet but I wanted to be in pantomime. Mummy says that I probably will only be in pantomime if I do ballet. I'm meant to start back ballet, but then I would have to quit gymnastics, and I'm not really good at ballet but I am good at gymnastics, so do you have to do ballet to get into pantomime or not really?

-Now we're so bored on Saturday, Sunday.

-My mother even admitted she was bored. First she was like, 'I can't wait till this thing is over,' then after she is like, 'maybe I'm bored because there's no more pantomime.'

-Why can't we have a pantomime every year?

-Next time we're old enough to have lines.

-The mice should have sung 'Cinderella, Cinderella, night and day it's Cinderella...'

After the discussion Natasha stayed to let me know that she and her sister had missed the pantomime so much that her mother arranged for them to have their own show at home. They invited over some of their pantomime buddies, taped out the floor of the living room, practiced for a few hours and then performed their own version of "Cinderella".

Emma and Alicia met me downstairs and confided in me their one disappointment over this year's pantomime. Last pantomime, Emma, Alicia and Giselle were the youngest performers in the show and the only cast members from their class. This year, they complained, there were so many other juniors that they no longer felt special anymore. Never mind, next time they are sure they will be principals!

The Seniors Plan Ahead

As rewarding was the visit with the juniors, my meeting with the principals and senior chorus was even more inspiring. I was impressed by the large attendance and even individuals who had apologized for their absence beforehand because of another commitment showed up. They were glad to see each other and were just as excited as the juniors at being reunited.

The older girls dominated the discussion, as expected, but the others listened keenly and supported in smaller ways. Like the juniors they were eager to reminisce and laugh over the mishaps that occurred throughout the run of the show, but they also listened to my questions and responded sincerely and enthusiastically. Their

comments were positive and other than the length of the rehearsal period they had little criticism.

I personally don't find much fault. If you want to get an A you have to study, if you want to give an A plus performance you have to rehearse and you have to work hard. It is going to get monotonous as with any sport, or anything. Once you are training to achieve a certain goal you have to do it over and over again, and it will get boring, but it's up to the individual to find certain things that thrill you about each time. Little things to make your performances go by a little easier. It's just an individual effort that has to be made. I mean whether people find the rehearsals too long or whatever, we still had faults when we went up on stage. And there were still things that needed to be cleaned up. (Kaya-Age 17)

They spoke of friendships formed and the sense of a family united. They credited the pantomime with improving their performance in the classroom and teased the principals for retaining their character nuances offstage. Throughout the discussion it was evident how proud and loyal they were towards the show.

I saw pantomimes before and they were all very, very good. I wanted to be part of that. I wanted to be part of something that was so good. (Sandy-Age 17)

People always say, you cannot beat a St. Winifred's pantomime. People who don't even go to pantomime know. It's just the standard because the standard has not dropped. I know big men, they work and all this, no kids or anything, but they will always come and see the children in pantomime because they love it, and they love to see people coming together and working and pulling off a good show. People that you would never expect to see at pantomime and they come because they love it. (Kaya - Age 17)

It was obvious how much the pantomime meant to them. Even at this age and so close after the event they were appreciative of the opportunity they had to perform. What became even more clear was how important it was to them that the pantomimes continue. They talked of clubs and workshops, things to keep the spirit alive and the cast close together. A way to be more prepared for the next show but, what is more important, a way to bridge the gap.

After "Sleeping Beauty", Anna had a drama class, a club, and I went. I really enjoyed it because a lot of people that had been in pantomime were there. It was great because you got to see your friends and you also got to fool around and do other things. We could experiment a little more and get rid of these inhibitions that we have. Then when you get up on stage it will be a little easier to find that little bit of courage, to do things that maybe you would not normally do. (Naomi-Age 16)

10. FROM A DISTANCE

This study has described a year of exploration and discovery springing from my need to "justify" the continuing tradition of pantomime at St. Winifred's School. The 1996 production of "Cinderella" had an expense budget of eighty thousand dollars and made a surplus of one hundred and seventy thousand dollars, an amount that would immediately seem to justify any theatre endeavor in any location. But this would not have been possible without the many volunteer hours that went into the production. If these had to be paid for, one could certainly wonder if it was all worth it. The full intention of the journey was to explore the depth and significance of the pantomimes beyond that of providing financial support for the school. The material collected, in the form of a personal journal, reflective writing, narrative, letters, newspaper articles and interviews, were studied. Without question, the St. Winifred's pantomimes have a great impact on the development of the school and its wider community.

Looking Back

This study supports a number of impressions about the pantomimes and their effect on the school and the individuals involved. It is abundantly clear that the performance functioned, like ancient theatre, as a community-building exercise.

The Barbadian public eagerly anticipated and filled the Hall throughout all twenty performances of "Cinderella", an audience loyal to the school since the first "Mother Goose" was presented in 1969. In addition to supporting the performance, parents and friends discovered skills in choreography, music, set design and costume construction. Peter Chapman progressed from being a helper with the props on "Aladdin" to designing, supervising and building most of the props for "Cinderella". He then found time to manage the backstage crew for all rehearsals and performances.

Adults who professed no particular skill, donated time and energy. They willingly transported children back and forth to rehearsals, sold tickets, food, drinks and programs, directed traffic, ushered, dressed the performers and worked backstage. Many of these people who started by just helping a little, later became invaluable to the production process, as they become more interested, involved and proud of the community achievement.

One future parent of the school asked me after the pantomime if I ever experienced any feeling of resentment from the volunteers who were consistently being asked to contribute their time to the school. On the contrary, experience has shown parents to become more dedicated to the school as a result of their involvement with the pantomimes. Indeed, the challenge is to keep volunteers fully involved to avoid feelings of being "left out". During the production of "Cinderella" the school was also preparing for the 75th anniversary celebration. Parents, many of whom were also busy making costumes and sets for the show, donated their time to paint bathroom walls and in general beautify the school. It was not the

first, nor will it be the last time, this would happen. Every summer, for the past three years, a willing team of painters has helped to "touch up" the school so that the students begin the new year in a spotless environment.

Many other volunteer programs are also in place at St. Winifred's. All of them have been initiated during the reign of the pantomimes. Each class has two parent representatives who remain in contact with the teacher and help organize any activity, thereby freeing the administrative staff for other things. Parents help with form trips, providing transport as well as food for a picnic. Parents also assist professionals who visit the school to provide eye tests, vaccinations and tips on dental hygiene. In the Junior school a reading program has been developed whereby several parents arrive to act as teacher's aids and teach reading on a "one to one" basis. This has now been broadened to include help with arts and craft classes which parents and children enjoy very much.

New suggestions have already started to flow from parents who were involved in the last pantomime. They see areas that need to be improved and realize how much their help is welcomed and appreciated. One parent who recently spotted a broken guard wall came in on a Saturday, fixed the wall and repainted it, to the delight of the headmistress. As one parent said, "Those who are not fully involved (in the pantomime) just don't get it. It's not just about money. This is your child's school, be involved, see where they play, see what needs to be fixed, what needs to be done."

Besides getting to know the school, parents also begin to know the children. Another pantomime helper expressed similar thoughts,

"I think they (those who do not get involved) do not know what they are missing. At the end of the whole thing you feel like family to all the kids. Now when I see them in the car park at school they come running up 'Auntie Marcia, Auntie Marcia!' I never knew these kids before."

The children who participated in the pantomime, as cast or crew, also learnt about community spirit and developed their own "sense of ensemble". A group of over seventy students, all under the age of eighteen, spent six months together, focused towards the same specific goal. Skills of personal discipline were challenged as children learned how to cooperate, collaborate and respect each other. As they worked and played together, they also grew in poise and self confidence.

Rehearsals began with a reading of the script so that the entire cast could get a sense of the final goal. The children then divided into different groups to learn their respective lines and dances and as they did so, began to realize the importance of each part to the whole production.

From the first "Mother Goose" to the latest "Cinderella", all the St. Winifred's productions have relied on the collaboration of adults and children. No pantomime has ever been completely based on a pre-written script rather the script evolves around and with the student cast. Adjustments have always been made to accommodate the needs of a group, or individual, while maintaining artistic quality. In the 1994 pantomime, "Aladdin", the role of the Genie of the Lamp was expanded to include some improvisational scenes developed by the actor. The Genie's initiative and natural talent for comedy won

him a meatier role. Alternatively, individual characters have been divided into multiple characters to include more actors. The little village boy in "Aladdin" became three and the older page boy in "Cinderella" transformed into two primary school tots.

Knowing the children and writing the script meant that the director, first Anna and then myself, could tailor the roles to fit the children. The Godmother in "Cinderella" was originally scripted as a typically fat, comical and heavily accented Barbadian washer woman type. When the actor chosen to play the part had to be replaced, the new Godmother became a fashionably sexy, over dramatic, valley girl star.

The numerous dance numbers that are a part of any pantomime give the youngest children the opportunity to experience performance within the safety of a group. As with the principal roles, certain parts are developed to incorporate children's individual skills. Those with strong point work in ballet, have been given solo roles and children with gymnastic ability have often been featured effectively in dance sequences. The cast seems to recognize that spotlighting one child's talent may improve the overall show, which is every one's ultimate goal. As with any good team, the members give and take encouraging each child to excel at his or her special gift.

During the initial staging, or blocking of the scenes, principals are free to explore their character and their movement within the scene. Whenever possible the children's ideas are used and if they are not used, they are told why. In "Cinderella", the Stepmother and Major Domo were forever planning new tricks and jokes for each

scene and many of their ideas made it into the final script. In one rehearsal our physically imposing Stepmother prevented the Major Domo from leaving with the glass slipper by lifting him off the floor. This tiny character with his feet peddling desperately through the air was a sight that delighted the other cast members and the later audiences.

The junior "mice" chorus in "Cinderella" was another classic example of a performance developing through improvisation. In one particular dance the mice were choreographed to help Cinderella clean up the mansion. Although the kernels of the dance remained, by the end of the run each mouse had created its own character and incorporated new actions and stories into the dance. Daphne St. John, a past headmistress of the school, commented that one of the nicest things about the pantomime was that the children were not "over produced".

As the "all cast" rehearsals began, the entire cast and crew came together to encourage and support each other. Initial all cast rehearsals captured every one's attention as completed scenes and dances were viewed by many for the first time. Following rehearsals found cast members involved in individual activities but still maintaining a presence. The Hall was filled with children drawing or doing school work while waiting for their scenes. Parents gathered in a connecting room, fitting and sewing costumes, and some of the senior cast members would be just outside the hall door chatting softly with backstage crew. While attention was not focused exclusively on the production, the children remained interested in the whole process. A natural movement between the fantasy of the

play and the reality of one's own activity was established.

Rehearsing in this manner was practically a necessity when rehearsals stretched for three to four hours on a Saturday or Sunday. Focusing intently for ten minutes, far less three hours, was an impossibility for some of the juniors and this way the repetitiveness of rehearsal was not quite so demanding. Yet, the sense of team work was maintained. The children were continually aware of the full scope of the play. By performance time, many knew the lines and movements of all the characters.

Whether they were onstage rehearsing, or offstage waiting their turn, the children learnt that their behavior counted and had an impact on the group goal. Negative behavior was replaced by positive behavior such as watching, listening and encouraging other performers, teaching dance numbers to understudies, running lines and, in general, waiting patiently. They all knew that "the production is bigger than any one of us."

Anne Marie, as a mother whose child is at St. Winifred's you made me proud to see St. Winifred's put on a pantomime of such a high standard - your dedication and determination to take this production to this high level was evident throughout the entire show.

Lalita has learnt so much in her contribution to "Aladdin". It's not just the rehearsal and the hard work but the art of working together as a team. The feeling of 'we' and not 'I' was always in the air; everyone making sure that the other does well - it was very touching to see this happen when the society we live in is so different.

Maduri Vaswani

Besides the promotion of self-confidence and community spirit, cast members also learnt some of the basic tools of drama, song and dance. Through the experience of production, they learned to project their voices, not to block each other on stage, to stay in character, not to turn their backs to the audience and to know their lines. The principals also learned some of the more difficult skills such as, "cueing up" after the last character had spoken, timing the pauses for laughs, and listening and responding to each other - making it seem as if it was happening for the first time. Dancers in the choruses learned specific steps and choreography. What is more important, they learned how to shine on stage.

One of the most important skills that the children learned was how to focus their minds on the character and the performance. This ability to concentrate was what brought the play to life. Some of the parents and teachers often remarked at this improvement in concentration. The same child who could not focus for more than five minutes in the classroom, was able to learn five different dances and perform them consistently well every night.

As rehearsals moved closer to the performance date it became more of a challenge to keep the cast focused through the repetition. New elements of the production were introduced one at a time to help the children sustain their concentration. Sound was an early addition to the production and it was joined by lighting, scenery and costumes. These new additions to the productions kept everyone interested and excited.

After months of rehearsals the cast was ready for their first audience. Every detail had been polished and the cast and crew

worked together like a well-oiled team. Months of disciplined effort now faced the "moment of truth" before an audience that placed more emphasis on the final product than the process. There is nothing more inspiring than watching the moment when performers encounter their first real, living audience and the play comes to life. As entertained and transformed as the audience is by the performance, the cast is equally affected. The actors and dancers feel the support of the audience and derive new energy that is channeled into their performance. Each additional show grows and finds new life as cast members become more and more self confident and improve performances beyond their own expectations. The community spirit extends to include the audience, as together, cast, crew and spectator experience the magic of shared imagination. If there is a single moment that can justify the initiation of any theatre project it is the moment when collectively the community realizes what they have achieved together. Our pantomime process has involved hundreds of cast members and many more crew members, through cooperative journeys towards specific goals. It has stimulated and challenged them. Best of all, it has created life long memories, warm friendships and vibrant community spirit.

Looking Forward

The implications of this study have consequences for the Board of management, teachers, parents, students and friends of St. Winifred's school as well as other schools who may be interested in embarking on similar theatre projects. The inevitable question is:

"If this is such a worthwhile endeavor why aren't we all initiating theatre productions?"

There are several reasons for hesitation. First, a high standard of quality and professionalism must be achieved for the group to feel proud of its achievement. This requires a certain amount of expertise in the field of theatre. The show cannot be created from recipe cards and scripts that are inflexible. Cast members are more interested and willing to work towards a project that encourages their participation.

Once individuals who are knowledgeable about theatre have been located, they must be willing to accept the demanding work load and take responsibility for the final product. Countless other volunteers must provide the labor required to make sets, costumes and work the shows during performances. The whole process requires a great deal of coordination, time and energy.

The school must be willing to finance the show and trust that they will receive a return for their investment. The teachers must also be willing to accommodate to the needs of the performances. St. Winifred's School began their Christmas term a week early so that classes would not run too far into the performance dates of the pantomime. Towards the end of the term, the final lesson each Friday was disrupted so that students could bring their chairs down to the auditorium. A few teachers, whose classrooms were located at the back of the hall, had to teach in restricted areas as their classrooms were transformed into additional audience space or rooms for lighting and sound boards.

There is no course available that can teach all the details of large scale community productions and guarantee success. Each school or community must embark on its own adventure and trust that the benefits of the theatre will grow with each additional production. For St. Winifred's School the journey has been well worth the effort.

A Final Thought

Anne Marie - 'Cinderella' was, without doubt THE BEST! You can be truly proud of your production - may there be many more in the future. You have clearly found your 'role in life.' I'm just so proud that St. Winifred's was on the receiving end!

Nance Binks - Head Mistress

This year's journey and exploration into the history, progression and effects of the St. Winifred's pantomimes have presented me with new discoveries and questions about my own future. My personal involvement in past pantomimes had been, to a certain extent, self-serving. Theatre has been a passion and performing in, or producing a show always satisfied my own interests. What I have discovered throughout the journey of this production was a new feeling of loyalty and responsibility to these young performers who are desperate to continue this tradition of pantomime at St. Winifred's School. I feel tied to their needs and question whether I have the right to decide if I feel like doing another pantomime.

Every cast member was in tears on the last night and parents reported later on the loss their children felt after the show was over. Children write to thank me for "making their dreams come true". They plan the next show and campaign for their chance to perform as a principal. There is no hesitation to their dedication and commitment to future pantomimes and the older performers mourn the end of their reign.

Dear Miss Mucony,

I like my dances and I like you. I thank you for letting me be in the pantomime. You mite of not got me in but I still thank you.

Love, Laura

Dear AnneMarie,

I doubt I will ever be able to find the right words to thank you efficiently for giving me this opportunity.

AnneMarie, in all sincerity, thank you for making one of my dreams a reality! I know that this experience will stay with me for the rest of my life!

I could not possibly have asked for a better person to guide me through this. Thank you so much for teaching me how to act; for never giving up on me even when I was miserable! For always understanding and listening and having faith! Thanks, Thanks, Thanks! I could never have done this without you!!!

With lots of love , Annalise

What is my responsibility to these children? More and more I feel I owe them some continuity. I feel I have to respond to their needs. I understand so clearly now why Anna handed over the reins to me so willingly, so graciously. She too must have been aware that she was the keeper of a tradition that should not, could not die. Can I walk away now when I have had enough without finding my replacement? Can I plan my future without a single consideration of where the pantomime will fit in?

Eight years ago Anna, my mother and I rekindled a tradition that had been dead for 12 years at St. Winifred's School. I had no idea of the responsibility that would come with the rebirth of the pantomimes. Did Anna? What was her intention starting it all up again? Was it just for fun, to satisfy her need for creativity, for theatre, or was she grooming her successor.

***YOU GIVE LITTLE WHEN YOU GIVE OF YOUR
POSSESSIONS, IT IS WHEN YOU GIVE OF YOURSELF
THAT YOU TRULY GIVE.***

Kahlil Gibran

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