

# Shakespeare and Katrina:

## Observations from within the Tempest

Clare Moncrief, The Shakespeare Festival at Tulane

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### Abstract

"Shakespeare and Katrina: Observations from within the Tempest" was prepared as an oral and photographic presentation of the specific experiences of the staff and company of The Shakespeare Festival at Tulane following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Given the emotional nature of the described events and the company's dedication to performing Shakespeare's plays, pieces of Shakespearean text were used to punctuate the information presented. The writer/presenter Clare Moncrief, an experienced Shakespearean actress, finds Shakespeare's powerful words to be most effective in communicating human emotion, particularly relating to such a devastating event.

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Since the end of August 2005, when Hurricane Katrina devastated my city, I have often found myself saying "words cannot describe what it has been like." But as I prepared this essay and the talk on which it is based — focusing on the ways Katrina affected the Shakespeare Festival at Tulane, the only Festival of its kind located at "hurricane ground zero" — and as I therefore re-experienced the events, I did find words and phrases that helped me to convey what I felt, feelings that ranged from fear, shock, grief, and despair to comfort, laughter, and hope. They were words that had run through my head at odd moments throughout the past two years; they were Shakespeare's words.

Although I serve as Managing Director of the Festival, I am first and foremost an actor. I have been acting professionally for thirty years in the New Orleans area and have performed a number of Shakespeare's female roles, including Ophelia twice, Lady Macbeth twice, and Queen Gertrude three times. I have played Cleopatra, Queen Elizabeth in *Richard III*, Juliet's Nurse, and various wenches and wives. Whether onstage, or as an administrator, I have been closely involved with productions of twenty-four of the thirty-seven plays. When one is working on a production, particularly as an actor, over weeks of rehearsal and performance, the stories and language of the play become a permanent part of one's consciousness. And if I had not already been convinced,

the events of these last two years would have made me believe in Shakespeare's uncanny ability "*to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature.*"

The following is the Festival's tale of our very real tempest, using my own words and Shakespeare's. Please understand that I use his words in isolation from their complete texts, and that I am aware of the pitfalls of doing so. I use them simply as phrases that stand alone and address, with astounding clarity, what the experiences and emotions were like.<sup>1</sup>

To begin, I want to give you some perspective, to understand what the Festival is and what it does. Founded in 1993, The Shakespeare Festival at Tulane is a professional theater company in residence at Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana. The Festival's dual mission is to educate and to entertain, with a focus upon the works of William Shakespeare. We serve the New Orleans region through a summer season of plays, as well as through an arts-in-education program conducted throughout the year. The staff consists of an Artistic Director, a Managing Director, and an Operations Director. Company artists and technicians are employed on contract for each season's programming. Productions are fully professional, performed in conjunction with the Actors' Equity Association.

Though housed on Tulane's campus, the Festival is self-supporting through earned income and donations from individuals, foundations, the public, and corporations. Revenue from ticket sales is limited by the size and availability of our venues, and so, with an annual operating budget of some \$250K, the Festival must raise approximately \$170K "from scratch" each year. As is the case for any not-for-profit arts organization, fundraising is an ever-present reality and challenge. In its first fifteen seasons, the Festival has fulfilled its mission to entertain by reaching over 48,000 theatergoers with its two summer mainstage productions, as well as supplemental programming that focuses upon new works. Summer programming also includes a training program for high school students, which culminates in a full length Shakespeare production by the student company.

Of equal importance to the Festival is its mission to educate. *Shakespeare Alive!*, launched in 1997, offers three programs that have reached more than 75,000 middle and high school students from public, private, and parochial schools across fourteen parishes. First, the Festival frequently hosts the Institute on Teaching Shakespeare to train middle and high school teachers to bring Shakespeare to life in the classroom. Second, a team of actors visit schools with our program *Shakespeare on the Road*, featuring an "informance" titled *Shakespeare and the Language that Shaped a World*. This script contains excerpts from some dozen of the plays; it is exciting, romantic, physical, touching, and very funny. Students come away from the "informance" having overcome their misgivings about studying Shakespeare: they have a much improved understanding

of the language and have thoroughly identified with the stories and characters. The third part of *Shakespeare Alive!* is the *Annual Production for the Schools*, performed on Tulane's campus as a field trip for 4000-5000 middle and high school students. These performances culminate the outreach programming and often are the only opportunities these students have to see full-length, live professional theater. Perhaps because of the prior preparation offered by us and their teachers, the students quickly become engrossed in the story, often talking to the actors on the stage. When playing Queen Gertrude, I regularly heard shouts from the students in the final scene: "Don't drink it. It's poison!" Theory may disparage such identifications as thoroughly unsophisticated, but the student audiences are the most honest and responsive to which I have ever played.

"I could a tale unfold whose lightest word would harrow up thy soul."— *Hamlet*

Thanks to the stability and leadership of Tulane University, the Festival did weather the storm, and like the rest of the people and organizations in the region, we are still weathering it. Make no mistake: Katrina is by no means over. The scope — the depth and the length — of this crisis is unparalleled in modern American history. Never before have so many people been so deeply affected, whether mentally, physically, financially, or socially, for such an extended period of time. During the week prior to the two-year anniversary of the storm, the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* published an article addressing the complex effects of the storm on people's mental health, noting there is no yardstick available to measure it. We can compare recovery from a catastrophe like Katrina to recovery from grief — one goes through stages — but the comparison only goes so far, because catastrophe affects not just one person, or a handful, but thousands and thousands, each of whom passes through stages of recovery differently. As a result, the effect upon daily life can be disturbing on a number of levels.

"Chaos is come again." — *Othello*

At the two-year anniversary of the storm and with basic patterns of life generally re-established, our community found itself facing new challenges, such as shortages in affordable housing, inadequate medical and mental health services, continuing financial strain, and crime so rampant it sometimes suggests a state of lawlessness. But two years on, people have less energy and patience to respond to these new challenges. The adrenaline is gone. The resilience is thin. Not everyone copes well or successfully, even when the challenge is as small as a long line at the grocery store. Road rage is a daily experience. Drug and alcohol abuse has become a serious problem, and treatment options are desperately few. Suicides and even murder-suicides no longer cause the shock they once did. Just the week before I finished the talk on which this essay is based,

a well-known and apparently well-functioning family was lost when the husband killed his wife, two children, and then himself.

"Tut, man, one fire burns out another's burning, / One pain  
is lessened by another's anguish." — *Romeo and Juliet*

Survivor's guilt emerges everywhere, a problem and stress to which I can personally attest. After the storm, my home was still livable. I and my family were still employed, and my family members were relatively unscathed. Please understand that the back wall of my son's room was destroyed, the kitchen ceiling fell in, my brother-in-law, his wife, and their daughter lived in our parlor for five months, and in February a tornado hit the house; but compared to what happened to others, these were minor inconveniences.

"By the pricking of my thumbs something wicked this way comes." — *Macbeth*

Hurricane Katrina politely waited until we had closed the summer 2005 Festival season, which had included *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*. Sets, costumes, and all production equipment and materials had been dismantled and stored in the first week of August. My sons were two weeks into the school year, and I was enjoying a few uneventful days before I had to meet my acting classes. Truly, Katrina seemed to come out of nowhere. But on Saturday, 27 August 2005, as the strength and course of the storm began to threaten the city, President Scott Cowen had the foresight to close the Tulane campus. This was no easy decision, given that the campus was full of entering students and their families attending orientation. On Sunday, a mandatory evacuation was ordered, and most people began to pay attention — even my husband, who like many New Orleanians considered staying put and riding it out. Most of those who could began to leave. Having had a very dear, aged relative die shortly after losing her home and all her possessions in Hurricane Ivan the year before, I and my sons packed our irreplaceable possessions and forced my husband to evacuate.

"When sorrows come they come not single spies / But in battalions." — *Hamlet*

We rode out the storm in Covington, Louisiana, just north of Lake Pontchartrain. It was dramatic and a little frightening, but not out of the ordinary for a Category 3 hurricane. With no power for radio, water treatment, or air conditioning, we left on the morning of Tuesday August 30 to travel to Lafayette, Louisiana, where we would, we thought — having no idea of what was happening in the city — stay with relatives a few days until we were allowed to reenter New Orleans. Under normal conditions, this trip would only have taken two hours, but because

almost the entire population of the area was heading west, we traveled for six hours. We arrived in Lafayette at dusk, walked in, and found our relatives watching the first pictures of the flooding. I recall walking up the stairs to the bathroom and vomiting.

"Grief makes one hour ten." — *Richard II*

As the night passed, we began to hear about looting, fires, and civil unrest. My brother-in-law, with whose family we were staying, called us from New Orleans, where he was on duty as a police officer. I stood beside his mother, father, siblings, wife, and four-year-old daughter and listened to his first story. He and his commanding officer had been on the radio with an off-duty officer who was drowning in his own attic. The commander calmed the man down and told him to draw his weapon and fire repeatedly through the roof. The man did so and was able to punch a hole in the roof large enough to get his head out and above the water, so that eventually he was rescued. Things got worse from there. Sometime during the next twenty-four hours, he called to tell my husband that bulletproof vests and automatic weapons were being issued. Not wanting to tell his wife or mother, he thought someone in the family needed to know what he was facing. He spoke of his despair at his inability to help people who asked him how they could get out of the city. Time is insufficient for me to share with you the other stories that my brother-in-law told over the next days and weeks. I can only imagine, fearfully, the ones that he will never tell.

"My particular grief / Is of so flood-gate and o'erbearing nature / That  
it engluts and swallows other sorrows / And it is still itself." — *Othello*

On Wednesday morning, the scope of what was happening began to become clear. My husband and I realized that our exile was not going to be a one or two-week affair; we faced a period of months before we could return home — if we even had a home to which to return. Within hours, we registered our sons in a Lafayette school and rented what was probably the last available apartment in the city. A physical therapist, my husband was able to find employment almost immediately. I had no idea if Tulane University, or our Festival, or our city would survive. We could not reach anyone in the city or even other evacuees by cell phone. I sat and watched the television and wept. Those few days brought me closer than I have ever come to knowing the feeling of being tortured. Uncertainty can be viciously cruel, particularly when suffered in silence. But that silence was our only method of protecting our children from panic. Not a day passed, early on, that I did not encounter another evacuee, with whom I wept.

At first, we busied ourselves setting up our personal lives in exile. I bought clothes, groceries, and school supplies. Waiting in lines for insurance funds, food stamps, and other assistance

alongside doctors, lawyers, teachers, and others like me, for whom public assistance was a new experience, taught us all a lesson in humility. Having no idea whether we had lost all of our worldly possessions, we gratefully acknowledged and took advantage of every opportunity for help. I accepted loans of furniture, housewares, and linens from family and their friends, even people I did not know, people who so desperately wanted to offer help to real people, rather than send a check into the unknown. Even the local used bookstore refused to let me pay for the paperback mysteries I devoured each day to distract myself from the confusion and uncertainty. Such scenes were common in Lafayette and throughout the region. Almost none of the locals and very few of the evacuees were known to me before the storm, but when we met, they, like me, felt as if they were finding an old friend and took comfort.

"Beseech you, sir, be merry: you have cause / (So have we all) of  
joy; for our escape / Is much beyond our loss." — *The Tempest*

On Saturday, we received word from my brother-in-law that our house had not flooded and appeared not to have been invaded by looters. But still, we did not know the fate of our animals. We had left our three housecats at home with buckets of food and water, on the off chance that this might be the big one and we could be gone as long as one or two weeks; again, we had miscalculated. This was the most difficult time for our boys, but fortunately, one week later, my husband was allowed into the city for two hours to rescue the cats. It was a painful, surreal, but thankfully successful endeavor; and we and our two boys were joined by three very distraught cats in our three-room apartment. Apparently panicked by two weeks without human contact in a hot, humid, and utterly silent house, the cats had not felt very cooperative about aiding in their rescue. My husband's arms and torso were covered in lacerations, and he smelled strongly of cat urine, but he wore the biggest smile I had seen in weeks. It was one of the happiest moments of the evacuation and absolutely the funniest. Our fiercest male cat refused to exit the carrier for twenty-four hours. Finally, though, each cat emerged and made him or herself at home.

But what of the Festival? On Wednesday evening, I finally reached my Operations Director, Brad Robbert, by cell phone as he was driving with his 120-pound white German Shepherd to relatives in Maryland. At the Festival, before leaving we had left our ground floor offices securely locked and had piled sandbags against the door. We had not backed up the computers for months; after decades of dodging the bullet, complacency is inevitable. The offices contained all of our computers; our financial, donor, and box office records; our press files, including photos, tapes, and DVDs, as well as program and poster archives; and our equipment and even some costly costumes and props — in short, the history of the Festival. Our two precious donated minivans,

which sustained operations and touring, were parked in front of the office. Brad and I assumed at that point, after talking, that we would lose our desks and computers, but would salvage what had been stored over five feet from the floor. This was another miscalculation; even our rather active imaginations could not plumb the possibilities inherent in this disaster.

Finally, with no small bit of relief, we learned that Tulane would keep the Festival staff on payroll with benefits for our Festival work, but that our employment, as well as that of the entire university faculty and staff, would be decided on a month-to-month basis. In addition to worrying that our homes would be lost, we worried that at any moment the Festival could be eliminated as Tulane struggled against what often seemed overwhelming challenges.

"Tis true that we have seen better days." — *As You Like It*

At week three of the evacuation, we began to hear from our Festival company members via email. They were everywhere. And like us, they were terribly lonely. One actor had weathered the storm in the unscathed French Quarter, but then decided that he could not survive the lack of water, power, and civil order. He allowed himself to be evacuated by plane by the Red Cross. He ended up in Miami and was told to board the next flight to a destination the organization could not identify. At that point, with no money, he sought help from a couple of members of Alcoholics Anonymous who had identified themselves in the airport concourse. Ready to help a long-time member, the organization paid for a ticket allowing him to get to family in Boston. Our Artistic Director had left New Orleans with her husband and small son prior to the storm on an extended trip to the northeast. Spared the evacuation nightmare, she was not spared the loss. Situated in one of the lowest areas of the city, her home flooded to the roof line. She lost all of her possessions in her home.

One of our actresses lived with her mother in a condominium one-half block from the 17th Street Canal. They evacuated, but later discovered that the force of the flood had been so strong that their furniture downstairs was shoved completely up through the upstairs floor. Just one month before the second anniversary of the storm, they finally left their FEMA trailer to move home. Our Stage Manager, living in the same area, had not evacuated. She and her boyfriend were forced in a matter of a few minutes to climb into the attic with two of her three cats. The other had hidden in a mattress and was drowned. They escaped by hammering through the roof, but because they would not leave the two remaining cats, they had to wait twelve hours for rescue by canoe.

As is always the case, at least for me, healing began with action. I and other New Orleans actors who had evacuated to Lafayette staged a production of *Native Tongues*, a well-known theater piece made up of monologues written by and about New Orleanians. Spending those few evenings working with old friends allowed us to begin to process our grief. By late September, I

had stabilized our personal lives, and my husband and sons had adopted a day-to-day routine of work and school that allowed us a sort of skewed sense of normalcy. I had begun to make contact with our grant agencies. To my delight, I was browsing the National Endowment for the Arts website and found that we had, on our first application, been approved for a small grant. At that point, the award letter was somewhere in the Gulf of Mexico. More potentially complicated was our relationship with Arts Midwest which, in cooperation with NEA and under its *Shakespeare for a New Generation* initiative, had approved our second annual grant to underwrite partially our annual production for the schools, which was scheduled for October. Clearly, this event was not going to happen. I contacted them and asked what I needed to do. To my surprise, they told me just to wait and see when we would be returning and to keep them posted. They were relaxed and very sympathetic. This style would characterize their responses to us throughout the post-storm period.

This was not, unfortunately, the response of other organizations to the needs of the storm victims. I need not remind you of the debacle created as our government bumbled its way through an attempt to assist thousands of people left in the city in the days following the storm. But even for those of us who evacuated and initially took comfort in the fact that we had prepared by carrying insurance coverage, a nasty surprise was waiting. In an astonishing quest for profit, the major insurance companies mounted extraordinary obstructions against paying claims.

"This was the unkindest cut of all." — *Julius Caesar*

Our experience with State Farm Insurance Company is just one small example of the awakening experiences that Katrina provided. Having paid premiums for the maximum "cadillac" coverage for our homeowner's insurance since 1986, we assumed that temporary living expenses would be covered, as noted in our policies. After giving us \$2500, State Farm explained that they could not give us any more unless and until our home was declared unlivable. That we were prevented by a civil mandate from returning to our home in a city that had no power, potable water, or any other basic living services was not, in their reading, a fit interpretation of "unlivable." Other people have waited years to receive checks from the insurance companies, delaying in many cases the rebuilding of their homes and lives. These are powerful proofs that the comforting structures and systems upon which middle-class Americans depend for support and recovery are flimsy, at best. One look at New Orleans two years after the storm provided a strong example of the failure of every structure and system except one-to-one human compassion. The single greatest recovery success story is that of the volunteers who are still coming to New Orleans. In fact, the number of volunteers in the second year exceeded the number who came in the first year. Individual people, helping individual people, is still the one response upon which we can depend.



"The quality of mercy is not strain'd / It droppeth as the gentle rain  
from heaven / Upon the place beneath; it is twice blest / It blesseth  
him that gives and him that takes." — *The Merchant of Venice*

In early October, we began to get onsite reports from the campus. Our offices and vehicles were a total loss. We did not truly understand what that meant until we saw the site with our own eyes when we finally were able to return. So many times, it seemed that we might never get back. Tulane asked those employees who had housing to return in late November. In the Department of Theatre and Dance alone, three out of eighteen professors had lost everything they owned. Two were lucky enough to get FEMA trailers immediately. The other waited months. Having sent his family out of state to live with relatives, one professor slept in friends' living rooms for one entire semester. The toll on his mental and physical health was enormous. Having homes that were still habitable, my Operations Director, Brad, and I returned in December. Having lost her home and everything in it to flooding, our Artistic Director took a position teaching in Massachusetts and was understandably opposed to returning with her husband and young son to reestablish their lives in New Orleans. She visited briefly to facilitate the gutting of her house and spent the next year working long distance, struggling with the decision about what to do about her association with the Festival.

"What's gone and what's past help should be past grief." — *The Winter's Tale*

Brad and I toured the office and theater sites in early December, having been prevented from doing so earlier because of the toxicity of the flooded areas. So deadly was the mold contamination that biohazard suiting and equipment were common sights around campus and throughout the city. Cleaning teams were instructed to dispose of anything even minimally touched by flood waters. The campus was covered with giant cooling units and mammoth worm-like tubes to enhance drying and air purification. One of our theaters, basically a concrete and steel box, and its box office had to have all carpet and non-concrete surfaces replaced. The other, a 1000-seat proscenium theater, had to have the carpet and all the non-balcony seats replaced, as well as tons of plaster ceiling ripped out and then replaced. Our offices had to be completely gutted. All walls were gone. The floor was stripped to concrete. Before we could enter our offices and theaters, the cleaning team measured the content of mold in the air to determine whether, in fact, we could enter. When we did, we saw that nothing remained except a couple of piles of computer equipment sealed under plastic, which was opaque with water vapor and filled with actively growing mold. The teams had been told to keep, but seal, anything that might be personal property. Why they kept our computers,

but not obviously truly personal items, we will never know. Decorative items made of glass and metal, stage swords, metal lamps, picture frames, and other things that would have been impervious to the water had vanished. We asked if the plastic-wrapped things were dangerous to touch and were told that they were, but that the team needed our permission to dispose of them. We gave our permission and spent the next month working from our kitchens on personal laptops while we tried to recall everything that had been stored on the computers' hard drives. Finally, in February the department upstairs from our flooded space loaned us two offices, and we began to replace equipment. Having lost all paper and office computer records, we felt lucky to recover some year-old data from the main server. We begged friends, patrons, and board members to bring us any old programs, brochures, or posters that they might still have. Grateful for what we did still have, we focused and forged ahead with the adrenaline-fueled energy that follows tragedy.

"For there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." — *Hamlet*

The business of the Festival quickly and mercifully absorbed us. Those actors who had returned came by to tell their stories and catch up on the news of friends. Arts Midwest gave us permission to go ahead with our production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the schools that was to have taken place in October. We scheduled it for April 2006 and contacted the few schools that had reopened. I was very concerned that we might not have any students in attendance, but Arts Midwest clearly communicated that we were to at least try. We proceeded with rehearsals. Seventeen of our twenty-five company members were living in FEMA trailers or with relatives, in spare rooms. Many had to be shuttled to and from the theater, having lost their cars to the flooding.

"Lord, what fools these mortals be." — *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Our Titania was living with her mother in a seventeen-foot trailer parked on the street in front of another actor's home in what might be called an "iffy" area of the city. She was late for rehearsal one day because one of the regulars at the corner bar down the street, a "crack ho," came by to inquire congenially whether our Titania would do her the favor of urinating in a cup so she could pass the drug screen required of her probation. Titania, with enormous tact, said no. But the humor of that encounter was eclipsed just a couple of months ago. In her last days in the trailer before moving back to her home, the actress answered the door and found two ATF agents outside. They cuffed her and put her in the back of their car, explaining that she was being arrested for growing what apparently were marijuana plants in the back yard of her actor-host's home. Explaining that neither the plants nor the house was hers, she assured the agents that had she known the plants existed, she would have already harvested and smoked them, given the fact that

she had just endured easily the worst two years of her life. She then called the actor-home owner from her cell phone and handed it to the agents. They removed her cuffs and turned their attentions to the unfortunate man on the phone.

The final week of rehearsals arrived. On Monday morning, a day off for the company, we received a call that our Puck, Gavin Mahlie, had died in his sleep.

"One woe doth tread upon another's heels / So fast they follow." — *Hamlet*

To understand the effect of this on us, one must realize that Gavin was one of the most gifted actors many of us had ever known. He had been with the company for fourteen seasons and had played both Richard II and Richard III, Benedick, Shylock, Laertes, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Banquo, and Brutus, among many other roles. And those were just the roles he played with our company. He was a much sought after actor all over New Orleans. A graduate, with honors, of Loyola Law School, this charming and slightly dysfunctional man left the practice of law as soon as the school loans were repaid and settled comfortably into the role of poor working actor. He enjoyed being a big fish in the small pond of New Orleans theater and was never inspired to test the waters elsewhere.

Gavin was forty years old, and his death was utterly unexpected. He was our coworker and one of our dearest friends. After getting this news, I had to pick up my eleven-year-old son, Patrick, from school. He had known "Mr." Gavin all his life and was playing a fairy who served as Puck's sidekick. I had to tell Patrick what had happened. He leaned his head against the car window and wept. At that moment, my cell phone rang; it was the Arts Midwest representative checking in on how the project was proceeding. I was unable to summon the professional demeanor I normally use when talking with an agency. So I spoke through my tears about what had just happened to the project. With the wondrous ability to sympathize that is often found in artists, the representative explained that the NEA did not care how many students attended. She explained that she had just come from a meeting where NEA staff had expressed amazement that we were even *trying* to do the project. She insisted that we had their full support regardless of the outcome. It was that phone call that got me through the next week of funeral arrangements, re-casting, and devastating grief.

"Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, / Creeps in this petty pace  
from day to day / To the last syllable of recorded time." — *Macbeth*

Gavin's wake and funeral were easily the saddest events that I have ever attended. The sense of waste and despair was palpable, and the hopefulness of recovery, lost. Everyone was carrying so much pain from the experience of the storm, and the outpouring of grief at the loss of this friend

was overwhelming. Hundreds of people, mostly theater artists, attended the wake and funeral. This was a man with whom we had worked on a daily basis for many years. In an effort to achieve some sort of closure, the Festival set up a scholarship fund in Gavin's name for a summer internship. In this way, we keep his name and artistic legacy alive. I suppose that is some comfort, although the feeling of loss remains a daily occurrence in our lives.

"Thou knowest tis common; all that lives must  
die / Passing through nature to eternity." — *Hamlet*

Perhaps the most important lesson of Katrina's many lessons is that the most effective healing comes through work. We asked another company member to fill the role of Puck for his friend, which he did with respect and efficiency. We played the show for five performances and welcomed some 2500 students as audience. It was extraordinary. For one performance, we had a visit from Tony Cheveaux, the Deputy Director of the NEA. He wanted to speak directly to the students and the cast to express his and the NEA's compassion and appreciation. We drove him around the city to see the reality of the devastation. Admittedly stunned, he promised to take the news back to Washington. In June 2006, the Festival proceeded to present its first post-Katrina summer season of two plays: a remounting of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and a production of *Romeo and Juliet*. The season was limited to sixteen performances rather than the usual twenty-four, but audiences returned with very vocal and emotional appreciation that the Festival was back. Even so, change has become a way of life for our region and our organization. When the 2006 season closed, our Artistic Director separated from the Festival to remain living and working in Massachusetts. Tulane's new Dean of Liberal Arts, who was quite supportive, appointed Ron Gural, one of the three professors who had founded the Festival, to the role of Artistic Director. There were changes in corporate and private support and turnover within our Board of Directors. Outside support continued, even as the challenges of fundraising remain a constant in our lives. In March of 2007, having been a previous resident of New Orleans, David Loar of the American Shakespeare Center in Staunton, Virginia arranged for his company to travel to New Orleans to perform a benefit production of *Julius Caesar*. Other new donors have stepped forward and our 2007-2008 operating year has proven to be the most financially stable in Festival history. Our summer 2007 season of *Henry V* and *Coriolanus* was quite successful and was highlighted by a huge enrollment in our redesigned high school training program that culminated in a highly skilled production of *Macbeth*.

Our personal challenges continue: we are dealing with damaged homes; with traumatized children and pets; with a cityscape of which huge portions are still mud-colored moonscapes, with escalating crime; and with the annual five-month crap shoot that is hurricane season in the Gulf

of Mexico. But we are facing all of this with a sense of strength that we previously did not have. We have chosen to be where we are, and we must not ignore the opportunities that have arrived along with the pain and loss. After all,

"We are such stuff as dreams are made on." — *The Tempest*

### Notes

1. For the presentation, I included a running slideshow of photographs of festival productions, people, and places from my story. It was prepared from photographs taken by Brad Robbert, Festival Operations Director, and Martin Sachs, Chairman of the Department of Theatre and Dance at Tulane University. Brad tracked down these pictures from a number of private collections, since most of ours were destroyed. I presented them in no particular order, but as a sort of pre- and post-storm montage. For this special issue of *Borrowers and Lenders*, the images have been incorporated into the various essays as allusive illustrations.

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