

**NZ-UK Link Foundation Discretionary Award 2011 – Lesley Shepherd**

## **A Midsummer's Tale**

**Chapter 1:** “We are such stuff as dreams are made on”

Once upon a time, there was a little girl called Lesley, whose mum read her a wondrous book, *Tales from Shakespeare* by Charles and Mary Lamb. She was transported to exotic places and met many marvellous people and creatures, but only in her imagination. Soon, Lesley grew up and became a teacher. She dreamt of visiting Shakespeare Land in London and finding out more about her favourite author. Then, hey ho, her feisty, fabulous Fairy Godmother, Dame Dawn Sanders at the SGCNZ, waved her magic wand in unison with the Prince of Shakespeare Land, Patrick Spottiswoode, and soon Lesley and 19 other teachers were flying in the belly of a great, winged steel beast across the oceans to visit and play in the famous Globe Theatre. Lesley's Fairy Godfathers, the NZ-UK Link Foundation, her school principal and her husband, also waved a magic money wand to help finance her globe-trotting, for which she was so very, very grateful.

**Chapter 2:** “All the world's a stage...”

After exciting adventures in Hong Kong to break their long journey, the weary travellers arrived in Shakespeare Land, where they were well-met by moonlight gleaming on the Thames River in the shadow of St Paul's Cathedral. The days that followed were filled with lively action and merriment, as



well as much learning, with many inspiring people to spur them on to their intent. Their stage adventures began with meeting-and-greeting, then their first foray into the hallowed wooden O. Ah, dear reader, this magical shape draws in the sky and light as the pinnacle lines up the midday sun. The pale timber belies an ornate stage, yet the shape is simplicity itself while the fretted canopy spills out its



heavenly stories. Shivers shot down from Lesley's head to heart to limbs as she and the other teachers heard all the newest news from the dignified and knowledgeable Fairy of Research, Amy Kenny, while they took in their precious surroundings. That night, by the light of th' inconstant moon, they revelled in the sight

of wondrous players who strutted and fretted their hours upon this glorious stage enthraling the audience with their merry tale of *Much Ado About Nothing*. These magical moments were repeated in the days to come as the group were drawn into the

depths of despair watching *Doctor Faustus* deal with the devil, and *Anne Boleyn's* sad but heroic life as a queen of England. Truly, *All's Well that Ends Well*,

as they discovered while watching the spirited players of this comedy. Oh, how blessed it was, dear reader, to have seen such marvellous plays and players.

From being groundlings watching the plays, the teachers also became explorers



of the Globe's heaven and hell , when they were escorted backstage, downstage, upstage, below-stage and above-stage by Stage- Master Bryan Paterson, he of gentle voice and infinite patience. They pinched each other to test if they were dreaming, as they touched and played with the weapons, clothes, armour and props that helped create the magical worlds on stage. In the depths of below-stage where only little people and fairies can stand, they popped their heads in and out of trapdoors to delight each other and themselves. When they finally took turns to step out onto the stage, a hush fell over them. The great oak pillars looked down on them kindly and the surrounding seats and space enclosed them lovingly. They knew they would soon

be playing on this very stage themselves...

### Chapter 3: "I must to the learned..."

These fortunate teachers found many more things than they had dreamt of in their philosophy as they undertook the search for the holy grail of learning about Shakespeare and his world, to take back and share with their lucky students. The Fairies of Teaching and Learning, Sarah Nunn and Yolanda Vazquez, guided them through many active sessions, offering powerful, practical strategies in the beautiful new Castle of Learning ,the Sadler Globe Education Centre. Lesley discovered so many wondrous ways to make the Shakespeare texts leap off the page onto the stage and felt so privileged to be in the hands of these two practitioners who were the most skilled and inspirational fairy teachers in all the land!



When she eventually returned to her own land, dear reader, she astonished her English students with her new learning

and they clapped their hands with joy and merriment.

**Chapter 4: 'What is it you read, my lord? Words, words, words.'**

The Great Wizard of Words, Giles Lock, unlocked the magic of Shakespeare's words as part of the teachers' learning, too, though sadly, he was seen only once. They learnt about the throbs and beats of the words, and the way they leap out as speech actions. How astounding this was for Lesley, who thought she knew so much about the words already, the silly girl! Now she appreciates so much more how prose is from the head, and verse is the sound of



sincerity, which is heart-felt.

Soon after this, the Great Acting Wizard, Phil Cumbus, alias Claudio in the play *Much Ado About Nothing*, delighted the teachers with his insights into using the words to play a character on the Great Globe Stage. He spoke of the importance of being honest to the text and the story, and of a sense of response and reciprocity between the player and the audience. Lesley felt drawn in by his openness and generosity as he shared his experiences with everyone. Hard on the heels of this came an opportunity to look at words turned into magical moving images on a big screen with the Grand Professor of Film at Warwick University, Tony Howard.

He offered so many stimulating ideas about Shakespeare in film that the teachers wished they could have had more time with him or a second visit. What an extraordinary adventure this was turning out to be, dear reader!

**Chapter 5 Part 1: 'The soul of this man is in his clothes'.**

Another wonderful personage, Grand Professor Jenny Tiramani, showed us how Shakespeare's actors would be dressed when they played on the stage. The clothes were glorious and so exquisitely fashioned in silks, brocades, wool and gold thread, dear reader! (Do forgive this multitude of exclamations, 'tis unavoidable!).



The teachers were even allowed to touch them and examine them. They began to understand more and more how these very clothes would display the status and characteristics of the actors wearing them on stage, enabling them to portray their characters more honestly.



**Chapter 5 Part 2: “The earth hath music for those who listen”**

A very merry Grand Wizard of Musical Instruments, James Bisgood, entertained the teachers with his tales of how different instruments of the time were developed to create sweet music- and very bawdy songs, too! Lesley was delighted by the names of some of the instruments, such as the Hurdy-Gurdy fiddle, the Fipple-Flute, the Sackbutt trombone and the Rommel Pot. This Grand Wizard could play every single instrument he showed them (and there were many) which was astounding and so much fun for everyone.



**Chapter 6: “The man who of all Modern, and perhaps Ancient Poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. He needed not the spectacles of Books to read Nature”.**

In the midst of all these many adventures, the teachers had one Grand Day in which to stroll, ride and gallop around London, finding images of the most important personage of all, Grand Master Shakespeare. The Prince of Shakespeare Land, Patrick Spottiswoode, sent them on their way with words of wit and wisdom. The excursion took Lesley and her companions many places. Her favourite-favourite was Southwark Cathedral where a fine marble statue of a reclining Shakespeare, with fresh rosemary for remembrance tucked in his hands, was lit by stained glass windows containing



images from his plays. The splendid British Library had a great imposing statue of Shakespeare which looked down on them, and there they found rare treasures like the First Folio. Then on they skipped to the Shakespeare Head pub in Carnaby Street, where his merry plaster face watched over passers-by while the teachers ate fish ‘n chips in the Macbeth room. Of course, dear reader, this merry troupe found time to stop and shop ‘til they dropped along the way, too!

**Chapter 7: “Nor do not saw the air too much...but use all gently”**

These voyages of discovery were intertwined with preparations for the teachers’ performances, assisted by gifts from three glorious practitioners. The Feisty Fairy of Movement, Glynn MacDonald (in form and moving, how express and admirable!) danced us gently but firmly through our bodies and souls. Peels of laughter rang out often, as men learnt to walk like women, and women like men, with instructions to push out or pull in various parts of their anatomy. Time and space took on new meaning as the teachers explored the relationship of body to place. Lesley experienced a welling-up of emotion and gratefulness to be in the hands of someone full of a profound understanding of human nature who spoke her mind only to make everyone deal honestly with themselves.

**Chapter 8: “The voice of all the gods...makes heaven drowsy with the harmony”**

The second great practitioner, Grand Wizard of Voice, Martin McKellan (his voice was ever soft, gentle and low) prepared the teachers to flood the Globe stage with their spoken words by taking control of their breath with total body resonance. They learnt that the thought is the breath and how to pull the audience in. Sounds of individual humming often filled the room making its own harmonious tune, as the teachers lay on the floor, finding their inner sounds. There were many sighs of pleasure as their bodies relaxed into their voices. Another precious gift.

**Chapter 9: ” Suit the word to the action, the action to the word.”**

Their third precious gift was given over and over in the many practice sessions with splendid practitioner number three, Grand Dynamo-Director, Bill Buckhurst. His was the most daunting challenge of all- to rehearse these madcap, excited , diverse teachers and mould them into a tight ensemble in a matter of days, ready to perform to an audience. This wonderful, talented and generous William edited the script of the Great William’s play, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and his consistently positive encouragement, mischievous banter and merry games, soon had the teachers strutting and fretting through their lines and actions. At the final rehearsal, he presented the fully-fledged cast with a yellow rose each, then escorted them to the stage for the BIG event- the culmination of two weeks of immersion in all things Shakespeare. Dear reader, it was a sight to behold! The glorious Globe stage with its bold pillars waited to invite these explorers from faraway New Zealand to step out and discover the joy of

performance in such a special space. Prince Patrick and Fairy Godmother Dawn waved their wands of welcome and out came twenty Teachers Go Global , transformed magically into players. They soon had the audience laughing and crying, pointing and sighing, and bowed to rapturous applause. Not to be outdone, the Young Shakespeare Company performed a powerful haka to open their astounding performance and the teachers’ hearts swelled with joy and pride to be part of this wondrous occasion.



**Chapter 10: “The purpose of playing is...as ‘twere,to hold a mirror up to nature.”**

And thus, dear reader, did Lesley finish her travels to the land of Shakespeare with her companions. There was much celebrating in the land and on the steel beast that carried everyone home safely. Lesley had learnt so much, and she had many plans to share it all with her students and colleagues. She hoped other teachers would in future have the same opportunity to explore and discover these wonders. Meanwhile, she would live happily ever after in her own recreation of all things Shakespeare, seeking always to understand humanity through his mirror.