

2007

From Rwanda to the stage: a production thesis in acting

Kesha S. Bullard

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

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**FROM RWANDA TO THE STAGE:
A PRODUCTION THESIS IN ACTING**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

in

The Department of Theatre

by
Kesha S. Bullard
B.A., Furman University, 1999
May 2007

To my daddy and mommy who taught me that with God, all things are possible.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT YOU, THEY ASK...WELL, THAT'S AN EASY QUESTION

People often seek role models to look up to and gain inspiration

Mom and Dad, you are my heroes, the source of my strength and my motivation

First and foremost, spiritually sound, a Man and Woman of God

You always remain optimistic and keep the faith that you have sought

Though you have been tried many times, and "life ain't been no crystal stair"

God has never put anything before you that you were not able to bare

You've taught me to dream big, both by what you say and by what you do

You've believed in me through my weakest points and showed me how to believe in myself too

You've taught me respect not only for others, but more importantly for myself

How to walk with my head held high but not look down on anyone else

You've stressed the importance of setting goals and persevering to prevail

You say, "Plan your work and work your plan" for "if you fail to plan, then you plan to fail"

You've taught me morals and values; you taught me how to stand alone

How to make the best of my circumstances instead of letting my circumstances take control

You've taught me the ability to be patient and understanding, the power to love and not hate

I have even inherited your corny sense of humor, the family gap, and other physical traits

You've instilled in me the power of prayer and taught me to think with my own mind

You have taught me humility so that I may learn from those who came before me and teach those who come behind

You are role models for others, not just for those who are close to you

Love and kindness fills your hearts; you have strength of character and intelligence too

You each have special and unique gifts that you give to our family

You've loved us selflessly & unconditionally, and made our needs the priority

People often commend me on all of the accomplishments and achievements I have made

But you are my backbone; it's your encouragement and support that got me through many rough days

It is impossible for me to express all of my admiration and my gratitude

You are a significant part of the every word that I speak and everything that I do

I am a live product and representation of your undying love and devotion

When I think of you, my heart gets filled with so much pride and so much emotion

I am rich in love for both of you; I love you with all my heart and everything that I am

I could not imagine trading places with anyone in the world and not having all that I have

What is it about you, they ask...I could name many things but one stands out above the rest

God blessed you with the gift of three children that truly love and admire you and embody the characteristics you possess

~ Kalesha S. Bullard ~

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank God for this amazing experience. With this opportunity, He has again reassured me that “Anything is possible for you who believes”.

I have always believed that when we cross paths with people, whether they are in our lives for a moment or a lifetime, they touch us in some way. There are a number of people who were strongholds for me throughout this process and I could not have endured this journey without them.

I want to say thank you to my Mom and Dad. You have always been my rock and my light and though you were unable to be here physically, your continued support and guidance were very much appreciated. I made it this far because of all that you sacrificed for me. I love you and I am honored to be your daughter. Daddy, may you rest in peace. Your legacy lives on through me.

I would also like to thank my sister Kalesha and my brother Leon, who have also made an unbelievable impact on me. Leon, thank you for being the best role model a little sister can have. You encouraged me never to settle for mediocrity in the journey to success. Kalesha, my “dookie-brain”, I love you immensely. You are always there when I need you. When I began this project, you told me you were proud of me. Those words inspired me to strive for excellence.

Angie and Michael, I want express my gratitude for your unconditional love and guidance. You go far beyond what is asked of you to make sure my needs are taken care of.

I also want to say a big thank you to the rest of the Barons and Bullards. Each of you has been an important part of my development and success throughout my life. I could not wish for a better family. I thank God for you.

Battling for the opportunity to produce this play was not easy. Christine and Nick, I thank you for taking on this project. Without a second thought, both of you stuck your necks out for me and I am beyond grateful. It was a joyful struggle. I thank you Christine for honoring the art of storytelling and sharing that love with me. You gave me the chance that no one else would. You cast me in a lead role. You had faith that I could play Juliette Niyirabeza and you were right! It was fulfilling and empowering.

Nick, I thank you for your daily advice. You always look out for me and I appreciate that. I am touched by your loyalty. Without you, there would be no Simon. You took on this play and everything that came along with it and we did it!

When we began organizing *I Have Before Me A Remarkable Document Given To Me By A Young Lady From Rwanda*, there were several people who supported us and helped to make this show possible.

Heather Gilbert, you are an awesome person. Thank you for believing in this play and for believing that it needed to be told. You have always had a way of walking into the room and making each person in that room feel special. You have a huge amount of faith in me. I will make sure that it is not in vain.

E.J. Cho, I thank you, thank you, thank you for believing in art. You gave us 100% all the time even though your schedule was hectic. Your work was beautiful. Thank you.

Thank you Lindsey Lanson, Adrienne Remy, Kathleen McMurray for being there everyday. Y'all are the best! Your hard work and commitment to this process was wonderful!

I have to say that my classmates were such an inspiration to me. You guys had my back and made sure I knew that I was not alone. We are an unbreakable ensemble. Reuben, Mark, Anna, Derek, Nikki, and Ron, I love you. You guys are my family.

Thank you Eric, Tara, Preston, and Michelle, for your phone calls and e-mails. It means a great deal to me.

J.D., Andrea Frankle, Leigh Clemmons, and all the PhDs, you shared words of wisdom with me. I thank you for reaching out to me and understanding why this needed to be done.

I have to acknowledge one more person, Leon Ingulsrud, for bestowing your knowledge on me daily. When you said, “Never let anyone keep you from doing your art”, I was listening.

There were so many e-mails and phone calls in support of us. To everyone, I want to say thank you. It was my pleasure to share this story with you. Stalin once said, “A single death is a tragedy; a million is a statistic”. *I hope this play has inspired you to open your eyes and see beyond that which is in front of you.*

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ABSTRACT

The role of Juliette Niyirabeza in *I Have Before Me A Remarkable Document Given To Me By A Young Lady From Rwanda* by Sonja Linden was selected and performed as a thesis project in the spring of 2006. This thesis, From Rwanda To The Stage, is a written record of the actor's process in developing the character in the form of a journal. It also includes an Introduction, Character Analysis, Research Notes, Reviews, and a Conclusion.

INTRODUCTION:

WHY...

This semester I made a case for the opportunity to experience something I have yet to experience during my graduate education, a culturally empowering lead role in a play. When I brought my request to Christine Menzies, my voice professor and mentor, she proposed a two-character play entitled, *I Have Before Me A Remarkable Document Given To Me By A Young Lady From Rwanda* inspired by a true account. In an effort to explore my options and present my case to the department, I obtained a copy of the play. I was excited to have an option on the table so quickly. Upon receipt, I did not read it immediately because I was told that it had to do with the genocide in Rwanda and, though I am embarrassed to admit it, I had absolutely no prior knowledge of this horrific event. I had recently bought *Hotel Rwanda*, mainly because I heard it was an amazing movie, but I had not yet looked at it and was unaware of the subject matter. So I wanted to ask questions and explore information about the topic before reading the script. I talked with a few of my classmates and friends about what they knew about the Rwandan genocide. I also looked up some facts on the internet and I got an overview. I became anxious to read the play, so I lay on my bed, began reading, and could not put it down. I was locked in from beginning to end.

This play touched my heart and soul in ways that no play ever has. All I could say was, “wow!” The story is beautiful, and the play is simple yet profound. We are taken on the journey of a young Tutsi woman named Juliette who survived the 1994 genocide of the Tutsi tribe by the Hutu tribe in Rwanda, while her entire family was slaughtered. She writes a factual book describing the events of the genocide and seeks help to get it published. She finds Simon, a struggling British novelist, and with his guidance, transforms her book into a personal account of

the tragedy, loss, intimate moments, and special memories in her life. Unknowingly, he leads her on a path to gain her freedom from her nightmares, her headaches, and the “pain” in “her heart”. Through the art of writing, she discovers healing.

After reading it, I wanted and needed to do this play, but I thought, “Oh my God, can I do justice to this young woman’s story?” I questioned if I was ready to take on the responsibility of a role of this magnitude. This play has the potential to change the lives of a countless number of people. It was important to make sure that I could fully invest all of my time and effort into giving Juliette’s story the attention it deserves. So I prayed about it, and God gave me assurance that “I can do all things through Him that strengthens me”. I sat down with Christine and Nick Erickson, my movement professor. We discussed the details and we all agreed to do it. Nick would be cast as Simon, I as Juliette, and Christine would direct. Heather Gilbert volunteered to be the lighting designer and E.J. Cho volunteered to design the sound. We now had a cast and design team. Next, we went through proper departmental channels, got approval and a budget, and began to work.

THE PLAYWRIGHT:

SONJA LINDEN...

In 1985, at age 40, Sonja Linden had a need “to do something... to fulfill” herself and started writing plays. These plays focused on international issues from the perspective of cultures other than her own, something she has always had a strong interest in. In 1997, she began working for the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture as a writing facilitator and playwright over the *Write to Life Project*, which completely changed the direction of her writing. Working closely with refugees from a number of different countries to help them write their personal accounts, she became “committed to these worlds”. She bonded with many of them and made every effort to pursue publication for their books. She wanted their stories to reach as many people as possible because she realized it gave them a sense of freedom to not only write, but to be heard. She recognized the fact that there was a language barrier and that was a hindrance for many of her clients.

As a playwright, this was her sign to write a play inspired by the lives of these people whom she encountered everyday. For Sonja, theatre is a perfect forum to impact as many people as possible. She began her new artistic path by writing a play called, *I Have Before Me A Remarkable Document Given To Me By A Young Lady From Rwanda*. The young lady on whom the play is largely based watched her entire family murdered and barely escaped death herself during the genocide in Rwanda. This young girl began to write while in a refugee camp and continued to write with Sonja’s assistance. Being the daughter of Holocaust survivors of Nazi Germany, Sonja took a personal interest in her story and restructured it into “a piece of theatre that would engage an audience”. Her adaptation uses fictional characters and events to create a comedic balance as the very real events of this young woman’s life unfold.

WHO IS

JULIETTE NIYIRABEZA...

The character, Juliette Niyirabeza is a young woman in her 20's inspired by the real life events of **Lea Chantal**, a Tutsi woman. She fled to England in 1994 at the age of 16, near the end of the genocide and spent the next few years writing a book about the execution of more than 800,000 people in her native country of Rwanda. She began writing while in a refugee camp to release herself from the burden of her severe grief. It was agonizing because she had to relive her tragedy every time she put her pen to a page. She was suffering from insomnia, depression, severe headaches, and a lack of appetite. She wanted to die. The following excerpt is from one of Lea's 1997 preliminary drafts:

“When the genocide started on the 6th April 1994, I was sixteen and therefore, old enough to see and record the atrocities committed. Even after my miraculous survival, I have psychological wounds that will never heal. I cannot remember a day that I do not have headache coupled with insomnia. While I thank God for my survival, I regret that I was conceived and subsequently born. I would probably have been better off dead in my mother's womb.

I regret that I lay on my mother's lap, sucked her breasts and grew up to experience what I went through. If I had perished together with my family, I would probably be in an eternal resting place and at peace with myself. Here I am God, without family, without friends. I am surrounded by people who are in the same predicament and I keep hearing voices telling me that I, too, should go. Please God, let me go where I think I will find peace.

I was in this state of mind when I decided to take an overdose of tablets. When I survived this I decided I owed my people a service. I had to write my book.” From *Return to the dark tunnel: the writing cure*

In Rwanda, the people have a strong belief in privacy. It is not common to reveal personal matters to a stranger, so sitting down to talk to a psychotherapist at the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, seemed invasive to Lea. During her appointments, she just sat there in a “puzzled, hostile silence”. After some months, the barrier

cracked and led to a release of everything she had bottled up inside. The therapy was a positive step on her journey to freedom because as a part of the healing process, she was referred to Sonja Linden, the Writer in Residence, to help her with her book. With her finished manuscript, she went to Sonja looking for feedback along with guidance to get it published. She sat down and talked to Sonja about the extensive trauma with which she had dealt. She shared her book and her pain. She told her that she wrote daily, beginning at 5 o'clock in the morning because she needed to release her thoughts onto paper. She said it was a way to "take the pain away from her heart". It relieved her of her headaches and nightmares and made her feel "clean". Sonja assisted in shaping her book by helping her to translate her thoughts into English and guiding her to a more personal and cohesive story.

When Sonja got the itch to write a play in relation to those she encountered at the Medical Foundation, Lea's story was the one she wanted to start with. She wrote the play, *I Have Before Me A Remarkable Document Given To Me By A Young Lady From Rwanda*. In the world of this play, there are two characters, Juliette Niyirabeza, who is strongly based on Lea Chantal, and Simon, a novelist in his mid-forties, who is loosely based on Sonja Linden. This story intertwines both fictional and actual events that help to establish and build a relationship between Juliette and Simon and also move the story along.

Juliette Niyirabeza is very much like Lea. She is a dainty, yet feisty young woman on a mission to get her book published. Written in her native language, Kinyarwanda, her book relates the story of her country's journey to devastation. She has an appointment to meet with a gentleman named Simon, the Writer in Residence at the Refugee Centre. Simon is a novelist who has not been inspired to write in years. He travels around England and recites his published poetry at different events. He is Sonja Linden's representation. She chose to create a male

character in order to allow more variation between the two characters. She said that this change, along with the cultural differences afforded her more opportunity to create humor.

After reading a number of articles describing Lea Chantal, I felt as if I had a thorough idea of who Juliette Niyirabeza is. It was now time to find out what added information the play gives. It was difficult to identify a specific starting point. However, that matter was settled when we started rehearsal. We combed through the script bit by bit and gathered every detail.

THE JOURNEY...

Entry #1

03/14/06

We met in the lounge on the second floor of Hatcher Hall and we read through the whole play aloud. It is amazing how different it sounds and how much more it affects you just by reading it aloud with the other actor. Then, we had a discussion regarding what we think the play is about and why we think the play was written. After rehearsal, Christine and I were talking in the hall about racial tension and sharing encounters we have had with discrimination and being called “colored”. During this intense conversation, which caused me to be emotional, I mentioned that during the read-through, I held back from emotionally expressing myself. I feared crying in front of Christine and Nick so I suppressed the tears. She stopped and gave me a “you know better” look, and then she scolded and reminded me that it is important not to hold back because I am training myself to do that in my acting. She suggested that I let go of some of the habits I have in my personal life when it comes to my acting. If I feel it, then share it. Then she shared a story with me about her experiences with the same habit while she was growing up. She described how she dealt with emotional release prior to grad school in her personal life. Then she learned something wonderful that allowed her to release it. She learned how to “loosen her jaw and relax her tongue”. I then told her that when she taught us that concept last semester, I was dumbfounded at how it allowed a freedom and a release of almost every tension in my body. During the run of *Arms and The Man* last semester, this technique was a Godsend. It encourages focus and awareness. When I loosen my jaw and relax my tongue, I am completely open emotionally. So, I looked at her with an “I know better than to hold back” look and we laughed.

For homework, Nick and I were both encouraged to watch *Hotel Rwanda* and *Sometimes in April*, two films that recreate different accounts of the genocide. Then, I went home and watched *Hotel Rwanda*. This movie was truly an eye-opener. It is interesting because several

people told me that watching this movie would be very depressing. I was even told by one person not to have plans to do anything afterward because it was so gruesome and disturbing. However, my response was more shock, disbelief, and disappointment in myself for not knowing that thousands upon thousands of people were being executed in the same world in which I live. Why was I oblivious to this?

Entry #2 **03/16/06**

We met in the conference room today. We began rehearsal with Christine handing out some information on the playwright, Sonja Linden. Also, there were a few handouts describing some of the previous productions of *I Have Before Me A Remarkable Document Given To Me By A Young Lady From Rwanda* (The Rwanda Play) including reviews and production notes. Then Christine spoke to us about some of the different ideas she is cognitively exploring. One of the ideas she threw at us was using as few props as possible with a relatively bare stage. Then we went on to notes from the previous rehearsal. Christine asked me to slow down during this read and let the text affect me word by word so as to allow images to form the words rather than me creating meaning for the text from a preconceived idea of what the text should sound like. We began our read. It went by very slowly, yet this was an invaluable experience for me. As we read through bit by bit, I found that each word I read had its own life and reason for being on the page. It was a new discovery. It felt great because it forced me to say each word and understand what I was saying, not speed through and know what I was going to say in the same way I said it in the previous rehearsal. I also was moved to tears, laughter, excitement and a plethora of other emotions throughout the read because I did not hold back. I gave myself permission to let the story affect me. How profound is that? Afterwards I expressed an interest in using The Rwanda Play as the topic for my thesis. Nick and Christine both thought it would be a great character to

write about and they gave me some insight on how to approach it. They said I would need to keep a journal and/or do a thorough analysis of each of my character's lines. For homework, we were to begin taking dialect notes because we needed to start reading the text in dialect. My notes would need to be from the two films, paying particular attention to the consonants.

Christine also mentioned that all the dialect notes I take and the documentation of how I worked on it would need to be included in my journal. On a different note, she suggested that I check out the "Non-traditional Casting Project" website: www.ntcp.org. This is an organization based in New York that addresses inclusion and diversity in the realms of theater, film, and television. Being that I am a professional actor of African decent cast in this play as well as other projects in the future, she thought it would be useful.

After rehearsal, I came home and started to brainstorm themes addressed in the play. During the Fall semester, I was in the play *Big Love* directed by Leon Ingulsrud and this was something we did that I found to be insightful. The purpose is to pinpoint as many themes as I can. I want to make sure that I am not overlooking what this play represents for me personally, as well as each and every audience member that comes on this journey with us. I tried not to leave any dark corners unexplored. The themes that impacted me were as follows:

Confusion	Survival	Will (live /die)	Strength
Love	Expression	War	Forgiveness
Lust	Release	Hope	Healing
Death	Family	Memories	Abandonment
Pain	Art	Commitment	Joy
Soul	Freedom	Suffering	Desperation
Loyalty	Friendship	Hatred	Failure

Despair	Independence	Shame	Intrusion
Rape	Murder	Betrayal	Blame
Justice	Acceptance	Fear	Exclusion
Courage	Empowerment	Redemption	Faith

Now that I have identified these themes, how can I make sure that I explore and embody every one of them?

Entry #3 03/18/06

We started breaking the play down scene-by-scene in reverse order, working from the last scene to the first. Our goal was to identify the needs of the characters and note new information and discoveries in each scene. We addressed these topics in the form of these questions: “What is the action/theme of the play?” “What are the new discoveries?” “What new information is given?” “What is revealed in each scene that was not known before?” and “What do I need to sit down and reflect on?”

➤ Scene 19

Pp 47-48

1. Action

They are presenting the book to the public.

(a) For Juliette, it is a relief of the burden.

(b) For Simon it is an enlightened way of connecting to Juliette. He is giving the world Juliette.

2. New information (NI)

Her headaches are gone and her nightmares have stopped.

3. **Important Reflections (IR)**

(1) What makes presenting the book to the public possible? She finishes the book.

(2) “I feel clean” and “I was dying a lot.” These two statements need to come from *sense memory*.

(3) There are 3 reasons for writing the book, “so the world should know what a terrible thing happened to us”, “to take the pain from my heart”, “to help all people in the world who feel hopeless, who want to give up, who think they have nothing to live.”

Pp 45-46

1. **Action**

Juliette is letting go.

2. **NI**

(1) She expresses she does not want to be a writer.

(2) She wants to practice medicine.

3. **IR**

What is getting in my way of saying goodbye? It needs to come off of Simon so it can be organic. I don't want to hurt him or see him hurt.

P 45

1. **Action**

Simon is introducing Juliette to the world.

2. **NI**

(1) She has known Simon for a year.

(2) Simon has written Juliette's speech.

(3) We learned that she and Simon rehearse the speech before the conference.

(4) We learned that she is very nervous.

(5) She has gone to Uganda.

(6) She finishes the book quickly upon her return.

(7) Simon and Juliette recognize and identify cultural differences.

3. **IR**

Think about Juliette's preparation for speaking to the audience about her book and the rehearsal process with Simon.

➤ Scene 18

P 44

1. **Action**

Simon is trying to get Juliette's family together –He's trying to reunite it permanently.

2. **NI**

(1) Maggie (Simon's wife) has read the poems.

(2) She thinks he's having an affair.

(3) These are Simon's first poems in five years.

(4) His wife has suggested that they pay for Juliette's trip.

(5) Maggie is putting down his novel and by doing so cutting down the idea of him being the breadwinner.

(6) Simon is discovering and letting it be known that he can never have anything with Juliette.

(7) Simon makes the discovery in this speech that Juliette is his muse.

(8) Juliette visits her brother in Uganda.

(9) This is the first time she says she wants to finish her book.

(10) Simon has facilitated the reunion with Claude and now her writer's block is gone.

(11) Simon is Juliette's muse also.

3. **IR**

Think about the first moment I see Claude, the time on the plane going to Uganda, the time before getting on the plane. What am I wearing, taking with me? Think of all of this in present tense. [*Meisner daydreaming: Refer to Appendix A*]

Entry #4

03/20/06

We started rehearsal looking at and discussing some images Christine found online. These were pictures drawn by children who survived the genocide. The pictures were disturbing. These children have seen and had to live through horrible things. Not one nation in the whole world stepped in to save these people from being raped, tortured, and viciously killed. After viewing these drawings, we talked about using some of the images as a visual effect for the play. Then we continued analyzing the play where we left off yesterday.

➤ Scene 17 Juliette's Room

Pp 40-43

1. **Action**

(1) They share the burden.

(2) Juliette opens up to Simon.

(3) Simon acknowledges what happened to her.

2. **NI**

(1) The Home Office denies Juliette's brother entrance into England.

(2) There is more information on the massacre of Juliette's family is revealed.

(3) Juliette has stopped going to see Simon and he comes to her room to find out what is going on.

(4) It is implied that many Rwandan women were raped during the genocide including Juliette.

3. **IR**

Think about the transitions in this scene. There are a lot and it would be easy to get caught in one mode.

➤ Scene 16 Simon's Office

P 39

1. **Action**

(1) They have to write a letter.

(2) Juliette appeals to the Home Office for Claude's entry.

2. **NI**

(1) Juliette's brother, Claude, is alive.

(2) Simon has written a letter.

3. **IR**

(1) This is the first time she seems to have something to live for. She's moving from death to life.

(2) What is my relationship with Claude? What are some of the memories I have of him? When was the last time I saw him?

➤ Scene15

Pp 36-38 Simon's Office

1. **Action**

They defend why neither of the two of them can finish their books.

2. **NI**

(1) Simon has not finished his book.

(2) Simon's book is in a drawer.

(3) Juliette's book is difficult for her to finish.

(4) Juliette lives in a hostel.

3. **IR**

(1) Make sure that I pay attention to Simon, listen to him. It is important that my reactions are inspired by what he is giving me, not what I expect he will give me.

(2) Remember to use chest resonance! This is a scene of strength for Juliette and my voice really needs to be grounded.

➤ Scene 14 Simon's Office at the Refugee Centre

Pp 34-35

1. **Action**

(1) Simon sparks Juliette's imagination.

(2) Simon gives her a light push to write more personal stories.

2. **NI**

(1) Juliette has a writing breakthrough.

(2) Juliette has written something personal and descriptive.

(3) Simon has done some research on Rwanda.

(4) The independence of Rwanda was in 1962.

3. **IR**

These are great memories to do some *daydreaming* about.

➤ Scene 13 Simon & Juliette both in their rooms

Pp 32-33

1. **Action**

Juliette honors and talks to her family, makes them come alive in her heart

2. **NI**

(1) Simon bought the jacket he gave Juliette. He did not get it from his daughter.

(2) Juliette threw her book out.

(3) She has chronic headaches.

(4) Juliette missed a week of writing lessons with Simon.

(5) April 6th is the anniversary of the day the genocide began.

(6) She lit 11 candles in memory of her family members killed.

3. **IR**

These descriptions of my family and memories need to be actual memories not just words. I need to do some *daydreaming* so that I can recount them when talking about them. NOTE TO SELF: Ask Reuben or Mark to drop-in with me over spring break.

➤ Scene 12 Regent's Park

Pp 28-31

1. **Action**

(1) Juliette highlights the depth of her depression.

(2) Simon shares some quality time and connects personally to Juliette.

2. **NI**

(1) Juliette doesn't eat.

(2) She thinks she is ugly.

(3) She was going to kill herself, but the manager of the place she was staying at stopped her.

(4) Simon gives her a jacket.

3. **IR**

(1) She is inspired to get beyond the literal descriptions of things.

(2) Homework – Christine brought in the movie *Sometimes In April* and gave it to Nick to watch. He is supposed to pass it to me when he is finished with it.

(3) I need to watch *Hotel Rwanda* again. I need a dialect refresher and I need to listen for some new sounds and revisit the rhythm of the dialect.

Entry #5

03/22/06

We began by discussing dialects and the film *Sometimes In April*. I need to watch this film listening closely to Carol's dialect. She is a Tutsi from Rwanda and a genocide survivor. Her accent is authentic, not coached like the other actors in this film and *Hotel Rwanda*. Christine encouraged me to score (breakdown the sounds, rhythm, and inflection of each word) everything Carol says in her interview. After talking about the interviews on the DVD, we continued with scene 12 where we left off yesterday.

➤ Scene 12 continued Regent's Park

Pp 28-31

IR

(4) The scene gets into metaphor. She is seeing beauty again and from this, she is able to enter joyful memories and continue writing her book.

➤ Scene 11

Pp 25-27

1. **Action**

(1) Juliette reveals how she came to England and the extent of her suffering in her transition from Rwanda to England.

(2) Simon brings to light the state of his marriage and his fantasies of Juliette.

2. **NI**

(1) Simon begins to write, discovers his infatuation with Juliette and is aroused only when thinking of her.

(2) He doesn't tell his wife about Juliette.

(3) He doesn't mention that Juliette accompanied him to the poetry reading either.

(4) Juliette describes coming to a safe place, her first days in England.

(5) She is lonely and thought about going back to Rwanda as opposed to dealing with her current suffering.

3. **IR**

(1) When I am quoting myself, find a deeper dialect because it would have been deeper when I first came to England and did not know very much English.

(2) These images have got to move and get more and more intense because they are building to the story of me nearly killing myself.

(3) These images also need to be strong and personal, so try *dropping-in* and *daydreaming* here as well.

➤ Scene 10 Outside Juliette's hostel after Simon has walked her home

Pp23-24

1. **Action**

Juliette acknowledges Simon's worth after experiencing his poetry.

2. **NI**

(1) Juliette likes England.

(2) This is the first moment they feel elation together.

(3) They are starting to relate on a friendly level.

(4) Simon is married.

(5) Juliette likes his poems.

3. **IR**

(1) I now have an English friend. How does that make me feel?

(2) I can infer that this is the first time he has been complimented on his poetry in a long time, or maybe complimented in that way.

➤ Scene 9 Simon's car

Pp20-22

1. **Action**

This scene consolidates Simon as a writer in Juliette's eyes.

2. **NI**

(1) Simon is not rich.

- (2) Simon reads his poems aloud. His poems are for the public, to share.
- (3) Juliette establishes how she feels about Simon's age, "older than my Papa".
- (4) Juliette is hearing and discovering Simon's writing for the first time.
- (5) She was wrong about Simon. She judged him prematurely.
- (6) Simon discovers a mixed crowd.
- (7) Simon has written a love poem for Maggie (his wife).

3. **IR**

- (1) How do I feel about being in that mixed environment with all those people?
- (2) What do I see in Simon's eyes when he reads his poems? I begin to see something other than the superficial artist.
- (3) When he says, "I wrote it for Maggie", what do I think? Who do I think she is?
- (4) Soften-up on the dialect a bit.

➤ Scene 8 Juliette's room

Pp 15-19

1. **Action**

- (1) Juliette protects her pride.
- (2) Juliette glazes-over her sparse survival conditions.

2. **NI**

- (1) This is Simon's first visit to Juliette's home.
- (2) A Boyzone poster is the only decoration in her room.
- (3) Juliette has no money.
- (4) She uses food vouchers.
- (5) We find out she is Tutsi.

- (6) She doesn't eat.
- (7) She writes under the window at her desk.
- (8) She respects Simon as a teacher.
- (9) She has a view from her window.
- (10) She doesn't sleep.

3. **IR**

- (1) Why don't I eat or sleep?
- (2) What is my struggle with Simon being in my home?

➤ Scene 7 Simon's hut

P 14

1. **Action**

He's preparing for a poetry reading.

2. **NI**

- (1) Juliette did not show up for the last meeting.
- (2) She has not returned his calls.
- (3) He does not want to give up on Juliette.
- (4) The poetry reading is in Barking.
- (5) Simon must have a public following if he was invited to speak at a reading.

➤ Scene 6 Simon's office

Pp 11-13

1. **Action**

Simon establishes what Juliette's book is lacking.

2. **NI**

- (1) Simon read Juliette's book.

(2) She didn't bring her homework with her to her meeting with Simon.

(3) This is Juliette's first personal revelation; first time she is revealing something.

(4) We find out her book does not include personal accounts.

(5) There is no evidence it was written by a survivor.

(6) Juliette has an appreciation for learning.

3. **IR**

How do I write about my personal story when it still hurts?

➤ Scene 5 Juliette is in her room, Simon in his 'writing hut'

P 10

1. **Action**

Juliette and Simon can't write.

2. **NI**

(1) We learn why Simon took the job in the first place.

(2) He is berating himself.

(3) His wife is supporting him.

(4) He has been writing his novel for a long time.

(5) Simon has writer's block.

(6) We find out about his writing process.

(7) She sees everything in her surroundings as grey.

(8) To look in the mirror reminds her of her family because her family is in her features.

(9) We find out about her physical environment and her neighbors.

(10) She is struggling to do her homework.

(11) She can do the assignment verbally, but can't write it down.

(12) The audience discovers her potential for writing.

3. **IR**

(1) Why am I hiding the truth of my pain from everyone?

(2) Why don't I see color?

➤ Scene 4 Simon's office

Pp8-9

1. **Action**

Juliette demands that Simon take her seriously.

2. **NI**

(1) Simon has only read a couple of pages of Juliette's book.

(2) She asks for a homework assignment.

(3) He gives Juliette her first lesson in writing.

(4) Simon finds out that Juliette lives in a room in a hostel.

➤ Scene 3

P 7

1. **Action**

Juliette makes her mind up about Simon.

2. **NI**

(1) Juliette does not have respect for Simon.

(2) Simon, on the other hand, thinks she has the utmost respect for him.

(3) Juliette thinks Simon does not have a wife because he has a stain on his trousers.

(4) The book is now translated.

- (5) Juliette has no English friends.
- (6) Juliette has a Hutu friend.
- (7) This friend translated the book for her.
- (8) There is only one person she can go to for feedback on her book: Simon.

3. **IR**

How do I feel about my friend being a Hutu?

➤ Scene 2 Simon's office at the Refugee Centre

Pp 3-6

1. **Action**

- (1) Juliette feels Simon out.
- (2) She quantifies his value.

2. **NI**

- (1) Juliette is Simon's first customer.
- (2) Juliette lives in Barking.
- (3) She has written a book.
- (4) She has been in the UK for five months.
- (5) She is alone in this country.
- (6) Simon has been backpacking in India.
- (7) He does not have a phone in his office.
- (8) The book Juliette has written is not in English.
- (9) Simon admits he did not know the exact date of the genocide.
- (10) The book is about the history, not a personal account.
- (11) She did research for the book.
- (12) Someone is translating her book for her.

(13) Simon's job at the Refugee Centre is to help people with their writing.

(14) Simon writes poetry.

(15) He types his own books.

(16) He can't type well.

(17) His poetry has been published and his novel is in his drawer.

(18) Simon schedules a second appointment for the next Thursday.

(19) He does not have a secretary.

3. IR

What did I expect and what did I get?

➤ Scene 1 Juliette waiting to meet Simon and Simon in his new office

P 2

1. Action

(1) Juliette is introducing herself.

(2) Juliette is building herself up.

2. NI

(1) First time Simon has been in his office.

(2) We learn about the physical environment of the office.

(3) Juliette is always early.

(4) She is scared of the train tunnels.

(5) Simon's first client is Juliette.

(6) Juliette is African.

(7) They are both in London.

3. IR

Where does Juliette get this image of Simon?

Entry #6**03/23/06**

We got up on our feet!

Scene 1: We talked about the disappointment in this scene, i.e. contrast between what I expected when I first met Simon and what I ended up getting.

I expected Simon to be classy and well-dressed, with a nice suit, tie, and polished shoes, well-educated, with lots of books on his shelves, wise, with a set of reading glasses, well-organized, with a secretary to handle all of his needs, well compensated, with a phone, a computer, and accomplished with a slue of published works, and a list of previous clients for me to reference.

I ended up getting an unknown writer, dressed casually, with no tie and a stain on his trousers, with an empty office void of books, furniture, and a phone! He seems inexperienced and does not even have a secretary! What self-respecting legitimate writer doesn't have a secretary or a phone? I cannot believe the nerve of some people.

Entry #7**03/26/06**

I AM STRUGGLING!!!!!!!!!! In every show and in my scene work, it seems like I always get to a place where the director expresses their ideas to me and they have to tell me how to execute them. They instruct me as to where they want me to go and what they want me to do. I don't like being in that place! Each show I am in, I am learning what it is to be a skilled actor. It is coming along, but much slower than I want it to. I need to be skillful NOW! Once I graduate, I want to work again and again and how can that happen if I have to be told everything?

In *Big Love* last semester, I did just about everything I was inspired to do and I thought, “Wow, it is finally here. I CAN do it without someone telling me to. I can ‘fill the space’”. I was a little too anxious.

My dad always says, “Practice makes *improvement*”. He’s right, but why, why, why, can’t it just snap into place? Okay...Calm down Kesha! Get it together girl. You are a Hot Mess. Okay...I just need to be patient and keep praying. It will get easier. I have to keep reminding myself that it isn’t intellectual, but instinctual. I don’t have to ask how to maneuver in my everyday life and as I get more experience, it will be the same on stage. Acting is my art. It is what I am called by God to do. He will continue to give me insight because “I don’t believe He brought me this far to leave me”. I just find myself getting impatient when I think I need to have answers.

Entry #8 **03/28/06**

I am in search of someone from Rwanda with whom I can have a conversation. I found out that Louisiana State University (LSU) is one of the most culturally diverse universities in the States. I never would have guessed it! That means the best place to look would be on campus. I called my friend, Nsikan in the LSU medical program. She is Nigerian and has a number of African friends. She said none of her friends are Rwandan and there are not any local African organizations that she knows of. She advised me to get in touch with the LSU International Studies Department to see if there are any Rwandan students on campus. I called the International Studies office and left a message with the assistant. She informed me that they would have to do a search that would take a few days and she would let me know something as soon as she can.

Also, Christine and I have been actively looking for a venue to perform in because the two theatres in the Theatre Department are booked for the semester. We have consulted with several theaters in the Baton Rouge area. Hopefully, one of their venues will be appropriate and available.

Entry #9 **03/31/06**

This past week, we did a skeleton blocking of the whole play with the exception of the last scene, scene 19. It was difficult to find comfort in blocking because I still have a tendency to tense up when I have to get on my feet. It is getting better but every time I start a new project and process, I revert to old habits. I tense my jaw and tongue and I don't breathe. If I don't breathe, then oxygen can't get to my brain! I can't be free and open to play if my intuitive awareness is blocked by tension.

Anyway, I am having a hard time deciphering which traits of Kesha (me) to emphasize in relation to playing Juliette. It is my belief that I am always Kesha taking on a new journey when I am acting, but I can't allow all of my natural tendencies to be evident on each journey because every character demands specificity. For example, Juliette is refined, centered, graceful, and still a teenager. I, on the other hand, am not a teenager, walk unnecessarily fast, use my hands relentlessly to supplement my speech, and speak faster than my brain can manage. My prominent habits are very different from Juliette's. It is a constant process to stand tall, to speak and walk more slowly, and yet have the energy, freshness, and naiveté of a teenager. I catch myself forcing it sometimes. My actions are not inspired, but contrived; planned. I am finding (via Christine) that my connection to my breath is vital for every thought to inspire every action. I need to have a sense of discovery.

Entry #10**04/02/06 - 04/04/07**

We have been examining Juliette's emotional tug-of-war, which creates the interest and curiosity for the audience. (Don't forget it.) For example, in scene 1, I am excited about the book and coming to the Refugee Centre. I am expecting the best, but at the same time, I don't know anything about it. I need to be open to the sensation of the fear of it. In scene 3, I have decided that Simon is pathetic and I feel sorry for him. I don't have confidence in him, but at the same time, he is my only option. I need to get my book published.

On another note, Christine has decided that the prologue will be spoken offstage. She is not sure yet if it will be recorded or live using a microphone. I think I like the mike idea, but we'll see.

Tonight I watched *Sometimes in April*. It is shocking and depressing, yet informative and does not leave much to the imagination. I would imagine it comes closer than any movie possibly can in illustrating the reality of this horrible massacre. My head is pounding, my heart is heavy, and my mind is cluttered and exhausted. As with *Hotel Rwanda*, this movie follows one family very closely, but it takes us outside of the confines of a hotel. It takes us through the streets and forces us to be witness to the ruthless savagery, insanity, fear, pain, destruction, loss, death, suffering, and mercilessness.

This movie does however bear witness to hope, love, sacrifice, brotherhood, empowerment, humility, kindness, and a release; freedom from the darkness; light. I know that the vivid images I now have in my mind will make a huge difference in how I approach the work.

After watching this representation of the genocide, I got on my knees and prayed because I feel like I have lost a part of my soul. I said a prayer for all the people who lost their lives, those who lost loved ones, those that witnessed this tragedy, and those that lost their sense of

compassion and mercy. Knowing what I know now has changed me. I hope and pray that God gives us the power through this play, to change others.

Entry #11 04/06/06

Okay, what is going on? I have now put up a wall. For some reason I think watching *Sometimes In April* has not helped but rather numbed me in my exploration of Juliette's experiences. I have this vivid picture in my mind from the movie, but maybe that isn't a good thing because I don't feel as if there is anywhere else to go. I can't remove the images. I am no longer living moment by moment. Lord, help me please. It has drained all that I have given to my character. I need to find my way back to awareness, responsiveness, and openness, with nothing pushed or imaginary, but in the moment, genuine, and organic... I will give it a few days to wear off.

Entry #12 Spring Break 04/07/06- 04/16/06

I am on my own this week because all three of us are in and out of town so my goal is to learn my lines. I have plenty of time to work on them while I am driving to and from Texas to see my sister. I will also have time to sit down and write them over and over. Christine encourages us to write out the play repeatedly. This is a technique she picked up along the way. It keeps us from learning the lines by rote. She also requires that I work from a handwritten script without punctuation or capitalized letters. She will no longer allow me to work from a printed script. I am glad. It has been very helpful in finding my own word emphasis and thought patterns when I am Juliette. It takes me out of a box and allows me to have freedom in my personal expression and interaction with Simon. Instead of causing me to get stuck or limiting

me to one way to say a phrase or word, I can explore in that moment. I can live in the present without having the obstacle of judgment of how it should be said.

I have never had this many lines to learn at one time in my life!!! I am scared that I won't learn them fast enough. Oh my God! My sister has to help me. Note to Kesha: I need to make sure I am learning the images that each word triggers and NOT just the words. Discipline my dear Kesha, DISCIPLINE! Are you breathing? ☺ No! Relax... You have to breathe dear... Breath is the vein of life onstage and off... BREATHE YOU!

My most efficient working time is in the morning (just like Juliette) so I am up and getting some work done. I am writing my lines and it has been going really well. La, la, la, I am learning my lines and that makes me happy. When I get back, I am going to do some *daydreaming*. Christine gave me a handout on *daydreaming*. It is a Sanford Meisner exercise. We have worked on it in class and with previous productions. I have not done much *daydreaming* so far, but once I learn my lines, I will do some *daydreaming*.

Nick is actually going to meet with me these last two days of the break to go through blocking and lines. That is awesome! I want to refresh what we have already done so that we don't have to do any backtracking when we start rehearsal again on Monday.

Rehearsal with Nick went really well. We went through the blocking and lines a few times. We had a discussion about what is expected of a professional actor while working on a show as in relation to the director, other actors, and daily preparation. It was a very insightful conversation. We also talked about my plans after graduation. He gave me some good advice and offered his help.

On another note, I got upset with myself for not remembering some of the lines I thought I knew. I need to stop being so hard on myself for not being completely off book. It isn't

productive. I am much further along than I was a week ago and that is wonderful! I have been working and I just need to keep working.

I called the International Studies Department again because I never got a return call. The woman I talked to said she would check and call me back. When she called back she said there are no Rwandan students on campus. That is disappointing for me. I am not sure how to find a Rwandan, but I will think of something. For now, though, I will have to depend on the stories we find online.

Entry # 13 **04/17/06**

I think things are really coming together and we may just have ourselves A Production! Rehearsal went well today. We all had long weeks, but we left those things outside of the door, came in, and got to work. I came a little early so I could warm-up and release the tension from the day. It felt really good to do that.

Entry #14 **04/19/06**

Today, we covered the first ten scenes. We were almost off-book so we were freer and more connected. The script was not as much of an obstruction as I usually allow it to be. Nick and I are really connecting more in the first half than we have been so far in rehearsals. Meeting this past weekend was helpful and proving successful in our interaction. Christine mentioned that there is more living in the moment and experiencing on my part. Great! I have been *daydreaming*! I have noticed that it has put some new images in my body. Maybe *Sometimes In April* didn't steal my soul. It just replaced my embodied images with intangible images. Now that I am renewing them, I am able to experience everything with a full presence of mind, heart, body, and spirit. I thought the lucid images I had due to watching *Sometimes In April* were more

significant than they actually were. They should have been my supplement, not my replacement. I realize that images have to be intimate. I can't conjure them from the outside. They have to be in my body. They must be sensual. I thank God for allowing me to make this discovery. I guess I am getting my missing soul back.

Christine and I met with Janie Oldfield over at the River Center's Manship Theater this past week. We took a look at the spaces available and want to use one of them if we are unable to get something on campus.

Entry #15 04/20/06

I had a breakthrough today. We started rehearsal with a bit of *daydreaming*: my first moments in London getting off the plane. When Christine asked me to do it, I went into anxiety-mode, but then I relaxed and began with breath as I was directed to do.

Nick and I both closed our eyes and began to connect with our breath. It took a little while to stop fixating on the fact that people were witnessing me struggle. I soon lost my awareness for those watching and started imagining my journey as Juliette coming to London. I had to focus on what my breath was doing and on myself. I started by identifying my location with the statement, "I am..." and from there created a memory. This memory was of getting off the plane and riding down the streets of this strange, cold, new city with a grey sky. I remembered the people I met and how they treated me. No one would look me in the eyes. They all acted as if I was not there. They looked so strange to me. I begged a gentleman to "help me please", and he did. He was tall and meek. He had dark eyes and a grey coat on. I was not sure if he would help me because he bypassed me but he turned around and came back. I was very thankful. There was nothing familiar around and I had nowhere to live, no money, clothes, food, friends, or family. He gave me a little money and offered me his coat.

We continued to develop our stories and after a little while, Christine asked us to stop and stay connected to the breath. We then dropped our heads forward and let the weight of our heads take us down to the floor, rolling down the spine slowly. We hung there with our arms free, then rolled back up with simple *touches of sound*.

It was nice to *daydream* and go immediately into Scene 11, which is proving to be my toughest scene. It put me into that place that I needed to be in. I have been resisting out of the fear to visit the place in my body that allows me to be vulnerable. I hate this scene!!! Okay, I don't hate it, but it is a huge challenge for me. Why? Well, because of a blasted notebook! The notebook I am holding in this scene is the notebook in which I do all my writing. The writing in this book has been my path to healing. I don't seem to know how to endow my notebook. It is my connection to my family. I experience anxiety every time I think about doing this scene. Having to start with *daydreaming* forced me to go to that special place of focus and stay there. I had to face my fear. The *daydreaming* exercise brought an array of emotions including anger, resentment, gladness, desperation, embarrassment, optimism, and depression. I could not stop crying and hurting; yet I had strength and passion. How great is that! It was still tough, but instead of thinking about the blocking and manipulating the words to sound as if I mean them, I had images that affected me. When I reached the section where I spoke of the Indian man who helped me, it was filled with a sense of intimacy. I knew the sound of his voice and what he looked like. I was there in England alone and cold with little hope. I had a full body experience. *Daydreaming* of this moment before exploring the scene set me free.

We have secured Hatcher Theatre for 4 days at 4:30 in the afternoon. The dates will be 05/03/2006 – 05/06/2006. We will be using the set built for *Outworks*, the studio production already scheduled in the space at 7:30 p.m. on those same dates. Also, we will have to perform

without charging admission and refer to the play as a workshop production because there is no money in the budget to pay the royalties.

Entry #16 **04/29/06**

Today is the first day of tech. We are working from two to six. I am starting to get nervous. We only have a few days left before we open and there are still discoveries to be made. I am still having trouble with scene five. It is still inconsistent. In this scene, my issue is yet another prop, a mirror. All I have to do is look in the mirror and see each of my family members in the reflection of myself. Why am I making it so hard? I think at this stage, it has a great deal to do with my images being stale. Well, I know how to solve that issue. You got it!

Daydreaming.

I just read a story of a young girl who wrote about the genocide. It is amazing what she experienced. When I began exploring Juliette's world, I had this idea that surviving was something beautiful. After reading Lea Chantal's story and the stories of other survivors, I have realized that though it is a blessing, it can also be a curse. These people have suffered great losses and continue to suffer due to grief and loneliness. I am having trouble relating the killing of Juliette's whole family to my own experiences. I need to write about my own family so I can get more in touch with Juliette.

Entry #17 **04/30/06**

What is it that makes me fear this piece? There are so many trivial hang-ups I have to fight against. I need to get past them so I can be free to exercise my art. I just spoke to my classmate Reuben. He says I should reassess why I am doing this play. I thought about it. Most times it is because I want enrich people's lives. I want to give them the gift of imagination and

play. However, sometimes I think that I have to prove to the Theatre Department that I am capable of effectively carrying the responsibility of a lead role. Then I come to my senses and remember that I am “honored and precious in God’s sight”. It does not matter what they think. I need to believe in myself. I can do this. I am worthy. I should not and will not fear people. That will hold me back and bring about anxiety. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” No one can be against me if Christ is for me. I do this because it is the passion of my heart and when I share it, it blesses others.

Tonight I looked at some photographs from Rwanda during the genocide and it just continues to blow my mind how people can be so cruel. Innocent people were murdered because of their tribal classification and no one helped them. I am about to look at *Hotel Rwanda* again because I need to reconnect and touchup my dialect.

Entry #18 05/01/06

We open on Wednesday. That is only two days away. We are tackling some more Technical aspects of the show today. I have been feeling so desensitized during rehearsal over the last week. I will do some *daydreaming* tonight.

Okay, I am in the living room of my apartment about to do some *daydreaming*. I think the best part to explore tonight is the quality time I spent with my family.

I had so many wonderful images. I saw myself playing with my little sister in the den of our house. We were playing with our dolls we got for Christmas. I saw my mom preparing dinner in the kitchen and at the same time, my dad got home from the hospital. He came over and gave my sister and I a big kiss and hug. The doorbell rang and my father went over to answer it. I could see our neighbor, Mr. Elliott outside and something seemed strange. My mother started walking toward the door. As I watched her approach my father, I could see the

guy standing behind Mr. Elliott in the skinny window alongside the door. He had a machete. I was confused until he began to yell and push his way into the house.

It seemed so real. I could see everything so clearly. It drained all of my energy. I am looking forward to bringing my newfound images to the stage. I just said a prayer before getting in the bed because I needed to talk to God about everything I have been experiencing. I got on my knees and I asked God for guidance and strength to embody Juliette. I asked Him to allow the spirit of every Tutsi to live in my body so I can tell my story through their souls. I asked Him to rid me of the spirits of doubt, frustration, pride, struggle, and impatience and to bless me with the spirits of faith, perseverance, confidence, and understanding. I know He is with me. I am ready. We have a dress rehearsal tomorrow! Goodnight.

Entry #19 **05/02/07**

When I woke up this morning, I got on my knees and prayed. God laid these thoughts on my heart: “My name is Juliette Niyirabeza. I am a beautiful Rwandan woman who has lost all the color in my life therefore everything is grey, my room, the sea. Everything I do is routine and lifeless, colorless. Every time I write, the color starts to come back. I breathe it in little by little.” This was very simple and at the same time, insightful and motivating. Wow! Thank you God.

I am nervous because this play is so different from everything I have ever done. It is extremely draining and requires an amazing amount of discipline. It has challenged me to find out who I am and where I fit into this art. I look at my life and the world differently now. I want to love more and share more of myself. This woman, Lea Chantal is an inspiration to me. Her strength and courage have reinforced my faith in God and myself. I am proud to tell her story.

Today was the first full-dress run. My free time was limited, so a couple hours before the run, I went to McDonald's and ordered a Filet-O-Fish Combo. I quickly destroyed it when I got to my office then headed downstairs to work on some lighting and sound cues. Afterwards, I went up to my office and warmed-up.

Before I start my sequence I lay down in the Semi-supine position on my back with my knees apart, pointing upward toward the ceiling, my feet on the floor spread the width of the hips, and my eyes open and soft. Then I begin by focusing on my breath. I take several simple, long deep breaths with my jaw relaxed open, then I release my breath using the fricative, "fff", and progress to a *touch of sound*. I move on to stretching using a position like a banana and then to making sound vibrations, stretching like a cat, and rolling up the spine while *touching on sound*. When I get back to a standing position, I bounce on my feet and shake my whole body as I release a couple sighs. Next I stretch my neck and massage my face and jaw. Once I am loose, I flutter my lips, roll my tongue, and move the sound through my body from the top of my head to my groin. After I complete that cycle, I do an exercise where I pick a spot of focus behind me, and then I begin to swing my arms from side to side, which causes my body to swing. Each time I swing my body, I also oscillate my head and catch the focus I picked with my eyes while projecting a series of sounds to my focus. Usually I start with breath, then move on to the fricative "fff", "ha", "hay", "ho", "hi" and from "hi" back through the sounds until I get back to breath. After that, I proceed to building power by panting in different positions. I then roll down my spine by dropping my head and allowing the weight of it to draw me toward the floor. Keeping my arms limp, I shake my shoulders rigorously. I roll up my spine *touching on sound*. This warm-up prepares me for the stage because it allows me to release all of my tension and clear my mind.

Again, I headed downstairs and got into my costume: a simple straight-cut grey and navy dress, my grey Puma sneakers, a grey sweater, and a navy scarf for my head. I put on my makeup, said a prayer, then Nick and I discussed a few missing props. Just before we went on, Nick shared a sentiment with me. He said when he used to dance with Diavolo, he would take the hands of the other company members, look them in their eyes and he would say, “I will die for you” and they would say the same. After that encounter, they were then ready to perform because they knew they had each other’s backs. Well, he then took my hands into his, looked me in the eyes and sincerely said, “I will die for you” and I said to him, “I will die for you”. I teared up because it was such a touching moment. It made me feel more connected to Nick. We were in this together, ready to share our story with the world.

The show begins with drawings of the genocide by child survivors on a projection screen with an ending projection that reads, “Healing through Art”. I stood backstage and peeked through the curtain as these drawings flashed one by one. Every time I see them, I am reminded how important it is for us to share this story. The pre-recorded prologue plays, “They came to our house in the morning. Some of them were our neighbours. The president had been killed in the night. There was a curfew. On the radio they said nobody can go out or they will be shot. My father was very worried. We all stayed together the whole night. And in the morning there was a knock at our door. We saw it was our neighbours and my father thought this is maybe good, they will help us hide. Then we saw the others, eight or nine of them, with machetes. ‘What’s going on?’ he said. Our next door neighbour he said ‘Now is the time for all the Tutsi cockroaches to die.’

The play felt complete for the first time. We told the story truthfully and with no interruptions. We had Leigh Clemons, a theatre faculty member, in the audience. She was great! She was invested from beginning to end. That was wonderful. After we were finished, I felt

completely drained and just wanted to go home and rest. Christine gave us several notes, we worked a couple bits, and then we called it a day.

I got home, turned off the lights and did some *daydreaming*. Then, I thanked God for bestowing us with the gift of this play and went to bed.

Entry #20 05/03/06

It's opening day! Today, I wanted everything to be as beautiful as it was yesterday. I was not sure how that was going to happen, but I knew the way to start. I had the same thing for lunch, a Filet-O-Fish Combo from McDonald's. It was great! Then I went over to my Hatcher Hall office and did the same warm-up sequence I did yesterday. Half an hour before the show, I went downstairs and put on my costume and makeup then said a prayer.

As Nick and I walked out of the dressing room, we paused before entering the theatre, Nick took my hands, looked into my eyes and said, "I will die for you" and I said to him, "I will die for you". Then we walked into the theatre and gave the audience our hearts. They received them and gave us their love and appreciation. It was fulfilling to have an audience. I was not sure how I would respond. A major part of my text is directed to the audience, looking them in the eyes. That is a very intimate act. I have to expose all that I have with nothing left to the imagination. There are no tricks. There is no deceit. Only the truth exists in the eyes. They say the eyes are the "pathway to the soul". That scares me, but after tonight, I know what it means to tell the truth and I never want to be dishonest again.

I went home, did some daydreaming, went over my notes, connected with God, and then went to bed.

Entry #21**05/04/06**

Today, I need to do the same thing I have done over the last two days. I am being a little paranoid, but why take a chance? Okay, so I went to McDonald's and ordered the Filet-O-Fish Combo, then I went to my office an hour before the show and walked in. To my surprise, someone was there! I was taken aback because my flow was being interrupted. I had to find a way to have the office to myself. After spending too much time trying to come up with something, I just asked if I could have the office to myself to warm-up and it was given without a fuss.

Lord, now I am running behind in my warm-up. So, I had to do a slightly faster version. I then went to the dressing room, put on my dress and Puma sneakers and sat down to talk to Nick. It was show time so I said a prayer, and we walked out of the dressing room. We stopped in the hall, Nick took my hands and looked me in the eyes and said, "I will die for you". I looked him in the eyes and said, "I will die for you". I watched the slides through the curtain. We told our story.

Again, the show was very connected. Tonight, most of my classmates were in the audience, so I was afraid that I would be self-conscious. I thought that I would be so aware of their presence that I would not commit to my life on stage. I was wrong. When I looked in their eyes, I did not see judgment. I saw love and encouragement. They were with us.

When Christine gave notes afterwards, she said I was too indulgent in each moment of scene 17 tonight. She said I needed to experience what revealing the information feels like in my body, but I also need to move the story along. She said indulging in each moment takes away the momentum. The story flattens out and does not build. It was ironic because I felt Scene 19 went better than any other time. I now needed to go home and process what she said.

Why did I feel it went so well? It was probably because I was indulging in every moment. How can I tell when I am overindulging and when I am moving the story along? Well...I guess the best way is to move the story along! I should be mindful of too many pauses. I did do more pausing tonight as the images appeared in my mind. I wanted to give the audience every single moment for every image in my mind. That means that by indulging in the imagery, I am getting lost in my thoughts. In so doing, I am stopping the flow of the story. I think one way to help is to refrain from daydreaming tonight because I still have very strong images etched in my body.

Entry #22 **05/05/06**

I started my process today the same way I have been starting it. I headed to get my Filet-O-Fish meal, went to my office to warm-up, said a prayer, and then went downstairs to get dressed. My mind was on my sister who was on her way in town as the show was about to start. Nick and I headed for theatre, and before entering said to one another, "I will die for you". We entered the doors and we told our story to the audience.

It went fantastically tonight. It felt fresh. It fed my soul. We were full of wit and spontaneity. Christine remarked that I indulged less. She was filming so she could not give it the same attention she usually does. My note tonight was about allowing the laughter from the audience to soften before continuing with my lines. She said that I should give them permission to laugh. Allow them to experience their response without them having to apologize for it. They should not feel like they are interrupting, but interacting. In other words, if the audience is laughing, do not talk over the laughter. Simply hold for a moment, and when it softens, continue.

Entry #23**05/06/06**

It is our closing night! I am glad we did a Saturday show because that was the only one my sister and friends could attend. I talked to my sister about my now established daily pre-performance routine and she laughed at me. She challenged my reasoning and my faith. She said if I have faith in God, then there is no need to believe that not doing exactly the same thing everyday will hurt my performance. I took what she said into consideration, and then I headed to McDonald's for my Filet-O-Fish Super Value Meal... just kidding. I ate something different today because it was important for me to break the cycle and still tell a beautiful story.

When I arrived at the theatre, I warmed up and said a prayer before stepping out of the dressing room. Nick and I joined hands and for the last time he looked into my eyes and said, "I will die for you" and I looked into his and said, "I will die for you". Wow, those **five** words still have such an amazing impact on me. Trust is a glorious thing.

Well, here we go! I stood backstage and looked at the slides of the children's drawings and it broke my heart as it had every night. Every time I see them, I am reminded of how important it is to tell their story so that this will never happen again.

After the show, we were pooped. Tonight did not go as smoothly as it had the last few nights. Our relationship was not as playful. The energy was not where it should have been. For some reason, I was more emotional than usual during some of my scenes. It worked well because it was very connected to what was going on, but it surprised me. My sister, Kalesha and my friends, Adia and Nsikan, were very moved by the play. I was proud that they had an opportunity to see me do something that was meaningful for our culture and also brought a mirror up to the lack of action from world powers where Africa is concerned. I thank God for this experience because it has been pivotal to who I am as an actor and as a human being.

About nine years ago, I made a choice not to take an interest in political or governmental issues. I avoided all conversations and information dealing with these topics. I absolutely abhorred being in the presence of people talking, debating, or even mentioning politics. It made me sick. It was unconscious in the beginning, but once I realized what I was doing about two and one half years ago, those issues continued to be last on my priority list.

After having a glimpse of the world of the Rwandan people through this play, how can I deny myself the privilege of being informed? I will no longer walk in premeditated ignorance. It isn't helpful to me or anyone else. From now on, I will ask questions about world events. I will not tune out political conversations (this one is difficult). I won't loathe people who try to sway me to care. I will vote. Most importantly, I will never forget the impact that *I Have Before Me A Remarkable Document Given To Me By A Young Lady From Rwanda* had on my body, my heart, my soul, my mind, and my life. I thank God for giving me this blessing.

CONCLUSION:

BECAUSE OF THE JOURNEY...

From the day the show closed and even now, I am absolutely certain that having the privilege of playing Juliette Niyirabeza has been pivotal in my development and understanding of who I am as an artist.

Recently I read an article where Douglas Turner Ward stated,

...the natural route to learning the craft of *acting* involves your *imagination*. Do whatever else later, but first start out and deal with what you know and have experienced, what you've heard, things like that. Don't start out fantasizing as a beginning step. The route to opening your *imagination* is to first access it through the concrete specifics of the known, the heard, the experiences and so forth. What you start out with in *acting* is basic. Yourself. The only vehicle for *acting* is you--your body, your mind, your experiences in life. No agency other than yourself. And since you will start from there, you have to start from that which is most familiar to that self. What you know, what you experience, what you've heard.

If you want to be an actor you're going to have to deal with self. You're going to have to deal with that particular history of self. There's no way that one can represent, interpret, any experience except from the nature of one's consciousness. And one's consciousness is not a blank slate. It is based on what one has experienced.

If a *black* person wants to become an actor, the route is an exploration of self. And exploration of self is to explore the roots of your day-to-day experiences within the family, within the context of your environment, within the psychology of your personality and whatever goes into that. That is the starting point. That gives you the access to the commonality of how to relate to everybody else.

...So the source, the starting point of *acting* is not a mystical thing, but something very pragmatic. You start from the basis and the concreteness of your own life and your own experience. From there, you have access to everything else...

This struck a chord with me because it made me realize how important it is to educate actors from a place of familiarity. I am currently in a professional acting program with little opportunity to be cast as characters to which I can culturally relate. When I made a choice to come back to school, I made it with the expectation that I would gain an understanding of my

place in this art. Little did I know that what I needed first, I already had. In the past, I made the mistake of looking to outside sources to find myself. However, my connection to my work as an actor comes from inside of me. It comes from **my** experiences and **my** background. The work that I do must first connect with the person I am. I always thought that I knew who I was but I would struggle with the roles in which I was cast. I attributed it to inexperience and fear. Now I realize that what was most challenging was trying to understand a culture that is foreign to me without first being given the opportunity to understand myself and be cast in roles that are more consistent with who I am.

Ward explains it as follows:

...But when you talk about interpreting characters, there will be a particular rhythm to the cultural experiences. I am not going to be believable playing a Russian before I can first play my grandfather. That is going to give me closer access to the character of my own experience. I will come to find out after playing my grandfather that my grandfather's experience might be similar to those of the peasants of the Gulag, or pre-Czarist Russia, during Turgenev's time. But I'm not going to be able to do anything with Czarist Russia, I'm not going to be able to do anything with Chekhov, until I know what those peasants down on the Southern American plantation were like. I can't skip over that experience and say, I'm going to be a Chekhovian actor. I can't play Chekhov worth a damn unless first I come at it through the route and particularities of my own subjective personal/historical experience. It is not separate; it is related. It gives me access. It is first things first.

I have to be exposed to work that allows me to be a black woman. That means having the opportunity to play an array of archetypes. Being consistently cast as maids and prostitutes is not advantageous to me as a black actor. These are stereotypes that people of color fight against daily and I oppose reinforcing them on stage. Subservience was forced upon my ancestors and I do not identify with subservient archetypes. Though I do believe exploring all archetypes is informative, I would prefer to avoid servile roles in my work. As an emerging black actor, I am most inspired by the opportunity to expand in a direction that is culturally empowering.

Having the opportunity to explore Juliette, I realized that it felt less stressful. I experienced an ease in making her words my own. At the time, I could not articulate the reason why it felt so refreshing and serene. However, since that discovery, I began to make a concerted effort to bring that knowledge and sense memory to my work. It was not until I read this article written by Edwards I could clearly understand why. I cannot play a role specifically written for someone of a different race, culture, social status, and/or ethnic background expecting to find an instant connection without first doing research and asking questions, while at the same time staying true to who I am, in order to bridge the gap. If I knew at the beginning of my training three years ago, what I know now, I would have approached my work very differently.

When an MFA program takes on actors of different races, ethnicities, and cultures, it makes a commitment to train and prepare these actors for the professional arena. Does that commitment include addressing the unique learning needs of members of minority groups?

Ward notes that:

All over the country, including the place where I taught most recently, you see this error being compounded. You wouldn't believe how many young **blacks** are being taught to be everything else but themselves first. It got to the point at the school where I was that even a member of the debate team came to me and said that when they participate in these debate competitions, the white teachers tell the **black** actors they don't want them to do anything from **black** works, because that's too easy for them. They want them to do something more difficult. So I asked, do they ever tell the white kids at the same competition that they shouldn't do white works because it's too easy for them? They told me no. It never occurred to them that it's the same thing.

They tell **black** actors not to do *A Raisin in the Sun*. Again, because ostensibly it's too easy for them. Do they tell the white actors not to do Tennessee Williams because it's too easy for them? No, they don't. That's not the same thing as far as they're concerned. In the first place, this view is a misapprehension. Nothing is easy for an actor to do. Creating or developing a character in a dimensional way and then communicating it to an audience is a very difficult task.

Through the experience of *I Have Before Me A Remarkable Document Given To Me By A Young Lady From Rwanda*, I now understand the feeling of having a character truly resound in my body. I appreciated the opportunity to discover greater breadth in my acting through the role of Juliette; the chance to develop a character in a “dimensional way” and then “communicate it” effectively to the audience. My heritage, my experience, and my reality were in Juliette. It is because of those things that I am who I am and it is because of my journey that those behind me will flourish. I am a young black actor and I will never compromise my ideals, my existence, or my truth. It is my hope that no actor in training will ever have to do so.

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APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY

GLOSSARY

1. **Daydreaming:** An exercise, as articulated by Sanford Meisner, which involves using the imagination to create memories for your character.
2. **Touch of Sound:** Kristin Linklater describes it as the simplest sound vibration the body releases with complete relaxation and support of the breath.
3. **Sense Memory:** The recall of physical sensations as defined by Uta Hagen.

APPENDIX B: HISTORY OF THE CONFLICT IN RWANDA

RWANDA: BEFORE AND AFTER THE GENOCIDE



by Andrea J. Dymond, Literary Manager/Resident Director.
Victory Gardens Theatre

More than ten years after the Rwandan genocide of 1994, the country continues to struggle in the aftermath of the atrocities that took more than 800,000 lives in a mere 100 days. Though the genocide was planned, encouraged and initially carried out by the Hutu government militia, what explanation can there be for the overwhelming numbers of incidents in which neighbors who were friendly hacked those friends to death with machetes on the next day? And in a world in which the refrain, "Never again" has echoed since the Holocaust, how is it that so many people were murdered with so little outcry from the international community? Certainly there are no simple answers to a problem that has its roots in a long and tangled political history. The scale of the horrors unleashed in the genocide can hardly be explained in a cause and effect equation. Still, it will be helpful to know a little about the conflict if only to get some idea of the scope of the tragedy and its aftermath.

Rwanda: A Primer

Located in central Africa, Rwanda is one of the smallest countries on the continent. Its population of 7 million people is primarily made up of two ethnic groups, the Hutu and the Tutsi. Considered aristocrats, the Tutsi dominated the Hutu peasant population, despite being

outnumbered by the Hutu, nine to one. These tribal differences were encouraged under Belgian colonial rule. In 1962 with their independence from Belgium, the Hutu majority took power, oppressing the Tutsi through systematic discrimination and violence. Over the next 30 years, nearly a quarter million Tutsi fled to neighboring countries and, in 1985, formed the rebel guerrilla force called the Rwandan Patriotic Front.

In 1990, the rebels invaded Rwanda and after 2 years of fighting, forced the Hutu president into signing an accord through which Hutus and Tutsis would share power. However, tensions remained high and many Hutu violently opposed the idea, seeing it as the opening gambit of a power grab by the Tutsi. When the popularly elected Hutu president in neighboring Burundi (a country of much the same ethnic make-up) was assassinated in 1993, ethnic tensions heightened in Rwanda. In response, the United Nations sent 2500 peacekeepers to Rwanda to help preserve what was always a fragile cease-fire between the Hutu government and the Tutsi rebels. On April 6th, 1994, returning from one of several peace treaty meetings with Tutsi rebels, the Rwandan president was killed when his plane was shot down on its approach to the capital city, Kigali. That night, the killing began.

Anatomy of a Genocide:

The Hutu militia ranged the countryside armed with machetes, clubs, hammers, guns and grenades indiscriminately killing Tutsi civilians and moderate Hutus. They quickly overwhelmed the U.N. peacekeepers, capturing 10 Belgians and torturing them to death. Despite pleas from the U.N. mission commander for 2000 reinforcements, the US, France, Belgium and Italy began evacuating their personnel, leaving the besieged Tutsis to their fate. Meanwhile, the government broadcast continuous hate propaganda on the radio, urging Hutus to slaughter Tutsis. By April 21st, three weeks later, Red Cross estimates of those murdered was in the hundred thousands. At

this point, the U.N. Security Council voted unanimously to pullout of Rwanda, leaving only 200 troops behind and effectively abandoning the country.

Without even token opposition from the international community, the slaughter took on epic proportions. Hutus of every class and profession were among the murderers. Tutsis who sought refuge in churches or missions were killed en masse in some of the worst massacres. By mid-May estimates of the dead had reached a half million. Though the U.N. Security Council, when confronted with international media reports of genocide, finally voted to send 5000 troops, they did not act in time to stop the massacre. The killing ended in July 1994 when Tutsi rebel forces invaded from neighboring countries, defeating the Hutus and ending the genocide. The total number of those reported killed ranges from 800, 000 to nearly a million.

Rwanda in the Aftermath:

The ten plus years after the genocide have brought exclamations of horror, apologies and recognition of culpability from those nations around the world who saw the storm clouds gathering, but did nothing to shelter the vulnerable from the storm. Inquiries have been held in individual nations as well as at the U.N., which has recognized that the protection of civilians, especially women and children, must be central to their mandate to manage peace and security across the globe.

Reconciliation and recovery is an ongoing struggle for Rwanda. Despite international assistance and substantial political reform, the region suffers from a deep instability, much of it exacerbated by, if not a direct result of, the genocide. There have been two wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo with deep ties to the trouble in Rwanda, as well as an insurrection in the north of the country and a civil war which officially came to an end earlier

this year. Clearly repercussions of the genocide will be felt in Rwanda, central Africa and the international community for some time to come.

www.new-theatre.org/play_rwanda_4.php

APPENDIX C: DIALECT NOTES

DIALECT NOTES

I separated the Rwandan dialect by sounds. First the word spelled in English is listed and then the International Phonetic Alphabet symbols for each word.

The vowel sound, ɛ becomes eɪ as in “pace”.

yes = jɛɪs let = leɪt

The sound, ɜ becomes ɑ as in the British pronunciation of “bath”.

work = wɑk Over = oʊvɑ learn = lɑrn

early = ɑrli dinner = dina

The vowel sound, æ becomes ɛ as in “let”.

matter = mɛtə bad = bɛd

category = kɛɛrʊəi African = ɛfrikə

The vowel sound, ɪ becomes ɪ as in “leave”.

winner = wɪnɑ British = brɪtɪʃ

medicine = meɪdɪsn

The vowel sound u becomes ju (liquid “u”).

knew = nju

curfew = kafju

The vowel sound i becomes ɪ as in “live”.

leave = lɪv

The vowel sound ʊ becomes u as in “shoe”.

good = gud

book = buk

The ar sound becomes a softening the “r” sound.

park = pak

The ʊə sound becomes ou as in “coat”.

court = kout

The vowel sound, ɔ becomes a as in “bomb”.

thought = eat

almost = almoust

Scene 19 required the use of the **Kinyarwandan** language. Sonja Linden included a pronunciation guide of the words. I have the words listed first, then the English pronunciation.

1. **Kera:** Chera

Translation: Once upon a time...

2. **umutima w’ Africa:** umutima wa Africa

Translation: ...in the heart of Africa...

3. **hari igihugu cy’amata n’ubucyi ijihoogoo:** harijihoogoo chamatanawbootchi ijihoogoo

Translation: ...there was a small paradise, a beautiful country of forests and lakes and mountains...

4. **cy imisozi:** chimisawzi ijihumbi

Translation: ...which we called the land of milk and honey...

APPENDIX D: PRODUCTION AD,

PROLOGUE SLIDES – DRAWINGS OF CHILD SURVIVORS, & PROGRAM

LSU

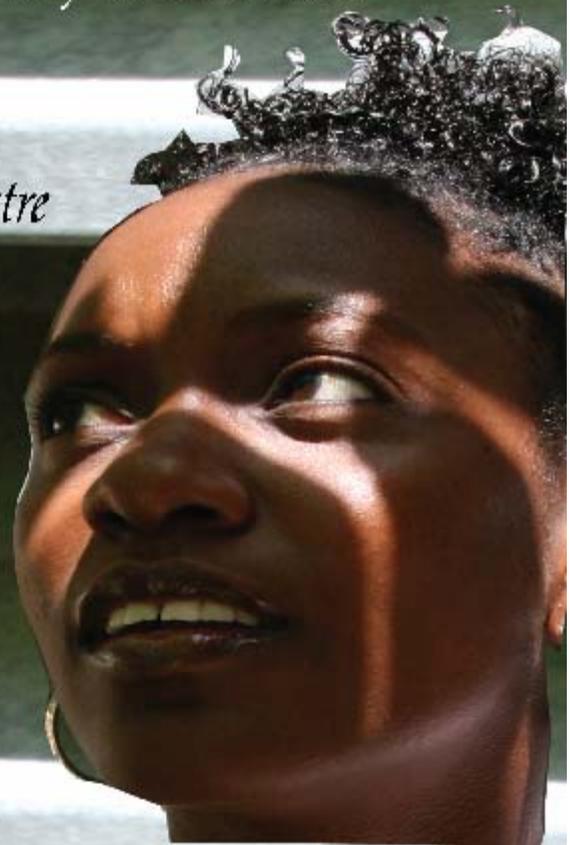
LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY

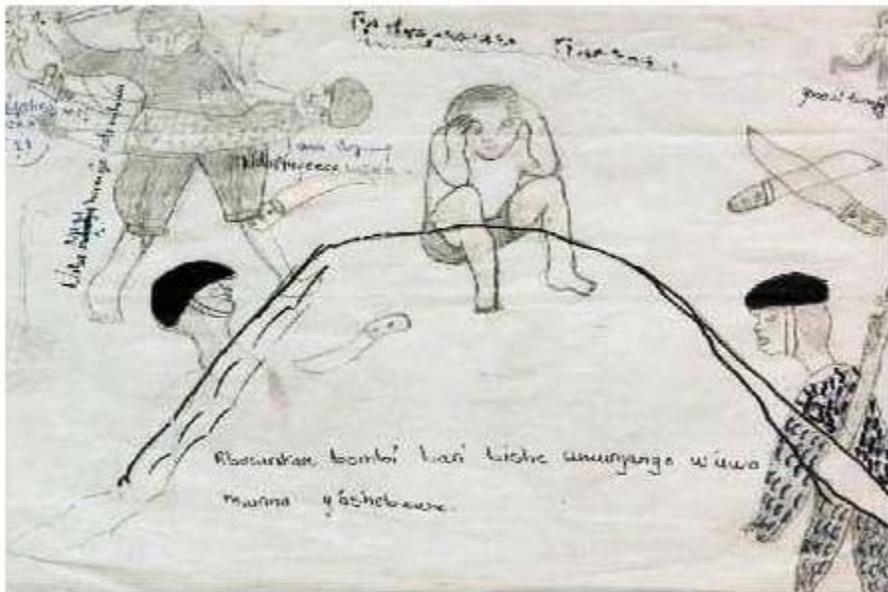
Department of Theatre
presents

*I Have Before Me a Remarkable Document
Given To Me by
a Young Lady From Rwanda
by Sonja Linden
directed by Christine Menzies*

*May 3-May 6, 2006
4:30 p.m. Hatcher Hall Theatre*

FREE ADMISSION



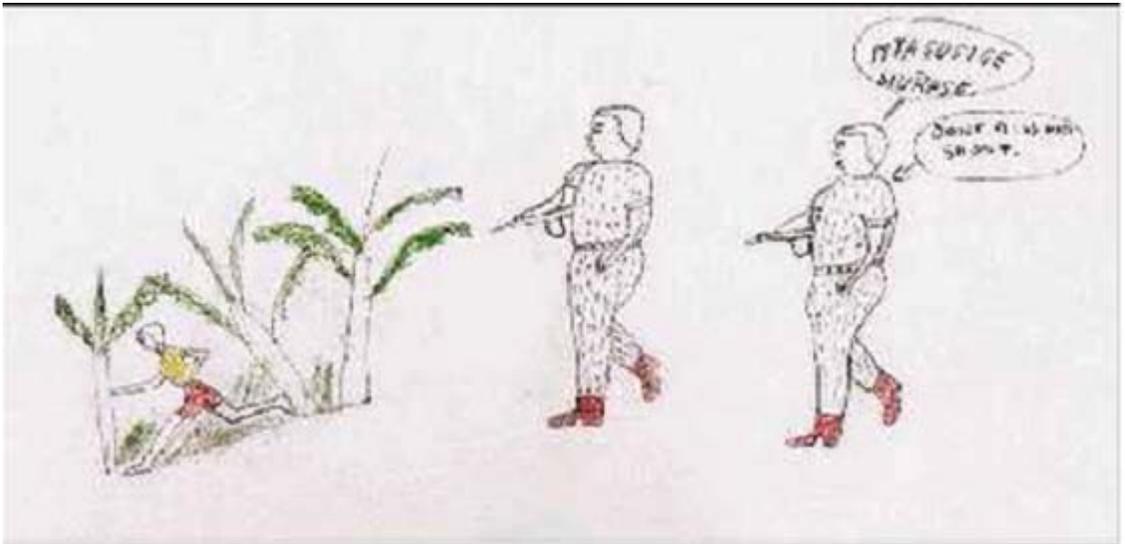


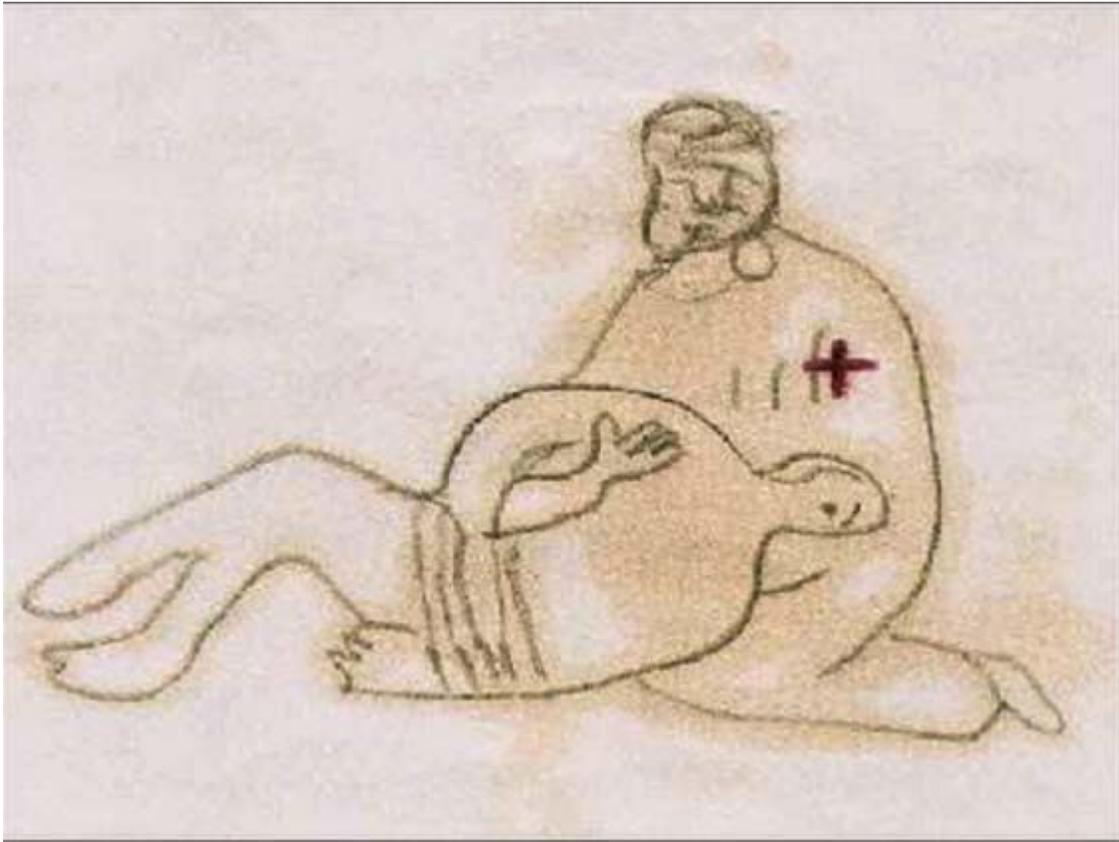












THEATRE DEPARTMENT

Faculty and Staff

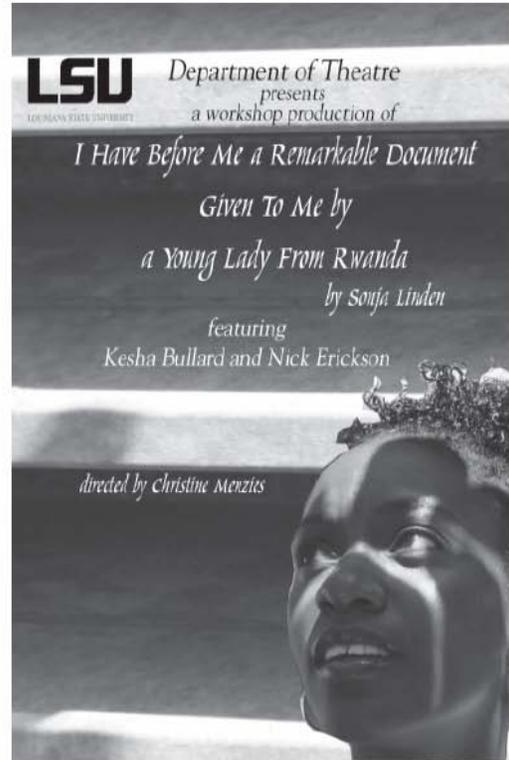
Patrick Acampora	Theatre Technology
F. Nels Anderson	Scenic Design
Stephen Barr	Asst. Technical Director/Scene Shop Foreman
Polly Boersig	Costume Design
Jane Drake Brody	Director of Undergraduate Performance
Molly Buchmann	Director of Dance
Jim Bussolati	Properties Master
Eun-Jin Cho	Sound Design
Leigh Clemons	Literature, Theory and Criticism, Theatre History
John Dennis	Director, M.F.A. Acting Program
Gresdna Doty	Alumni Professor Emerita
Nick Erickson	Movement Specialist
Femi Euba	Dramatic Literature, Directing, Playwriting
John Fletcher	Theatre History
Heather Gilbert	Lighting Design
Christine Menzies	Voice and Text
James L. Murphy	Production Manager
Kelly Pepper	Development Director
Susan Perlis	Dance
Doris Glass-Heckert	Accounting Coordinator
Ginger Robertson	Costume Director
David Rodriguez	Admin. Assistant
Kristin Sosnowsky	Managing Dir., SP, Arts Administration
Kathleen Spinazzola	Dance
Vastine Stabler	Director of Marketing and PR
Geniyn Tandberg	Theatre Studies
Michael S. Tick	Chair, Dept. of Theatre
Les Wade	Dramatic Literature, Theory and Criticism
Rana Webber	Costume Shop Manager

M.F.A. Acting Program

Director	John Dennis
Graduate Students	Kesha Bullard, Mark Jaymes, Reuben Mitchell, Derek Mudd, Ronald Reeder, Anna Richardson, Nikki Travis

Ph. D. Program

Director	Les Wade
Candidates	Elizabeth Cawns, Suzanne Chambliss, Ashleigh Dowden, Reounodji Enoch, Jessica Gray, Kristin Hanson, Shih-Yi Huang, Christopher Krejci, Charlie Mehler, Jeannie Musick, Kirsten Ogden, Saejoon Oh, Pete Richardson, Elissa Sartwell, Jera Winters, John Wright, Aaron Yeboah



DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Lea Chantal [is] a young woman from Rwanda, whose 'impulse' to write occurred to her in a refugee camp, shortly after the murder of her entire family in the genocide of 1994. What started out as a testimonial act, the writing out of her family's experience, also became an act of healing. The healing she achieved was done at enormous cost, since it meant confronting and expressing with full force the negative emotions that overwhelmed her in the years following the genocide. Hence the following extract from an early draft:

"When the genocide started on the 6th April 1994, I was sixteen and therefore, old enough to see and record the atrocities committed. Even after my miraculous survival, I have psychological wounds that will never heal. I cannot remember a day that I do not have headache coupled with insomnia. While I thank God for my survival, I regret that I was conceived and subsequently born. I would probably have been better off dead in my mother's womb.....If I had perished together with my family, I would probably be in an eternal resting place and at peace with myself. I decided I owed my people a service. I had to write my book."

So inspired was I by Lea Chantal's story, that when I came to write something of my own, my play, *I Have Before Me a Remarkable Document Given To Me by a Young Lady from Rwanda*, it was infused with her spirit and her struggle to write.

-Sonja Linden

Every now and again we are thankfully presented with a reminder of the fundamental relationship between art and survival. This play is one of those,

-Christine Menzies

I Have Before Me a Remarkable Document Given To Me by a Young Lady from Rwanda
by Sonja Linden

CAST

Juliet Keisha Bullard
Simon Nick Erickson

PRODUCTION TEAM

Director Christine Menzies
Stage Manager Adrienne Remy
Lighting Design Heather Gilbert
Lighting Operator Charlie Funderburg
Costume Design Rana Webber
Props Kathleen McMurray
Sound Design Eun Jin Cho
Media Production Derek Mudd
Pat Acampora
Marketing/PR Lindsey Lanson

SPECIAL THANKS

Derek Mudd, Kim Douet,
Reuben Mitchell, Charles Pineda,
Matthew Bertucci, and the 2's

APPENDIX E: AUDIENCE RESPONSE – E-MAILS

#1

...about half my class attended, and two older students said they were going back with their kids to see it again. Congrats on a job well done...please share with Kesha.

One student said she sounded like she had just stepped off the plane from Rwanda...

Dr. Zetta Elliott

Visiting Assistant Professor
Department of English
LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY

#2

Prof. Elliott,

I attended "I Have Before Me a Remarkable Document Given To Me by a Young Lady From Rwanda" on Thursday, May 4th. Needless to say, it was intense. I brought a friend with me who I thought would be unmoved by the performance but found him, like myself, moved to tears at the end of this play. I had only heard about the genocides before in the news, but this play brought it to life for me in a way I found almost unbearable. The sound design was well thought out; it invoked the appropriate emotions at the appropriate times. It spoke to me in a way the lines could not and gave every horror an even more haunting feel. I thought Kesha Bullard did an amazing job. I have been in a play before, and to perform in such a small setting (like Hatcher Hall Theatre) is very difficult. I found her incredibly believable and felt she was speaking a truth about something she had been through. Also, I thought Bullard and Erickson had wonderful chemistry together and I didn't notice a single slip on the lines!

The only criticism I have toward the play is the set. I found myself getting bored with it, but I understand why it had to be so meager. Actually, the sparseness of it did add a certain element of loss to the play that wouldn't have existed with an elaborate set.

I found myself wondering why a play with such an important message was not advertised more. This has given me a new interest in trying to attend more productions by the LSU Department of Theatre.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to see this production. I would have never known about it otherwise.

Sincerely,

Kristin Bienvenu

#3

Dear Christine, Kesha and Nick,

I am writing to thank and commend the three of you for your work in "I Have Before Me a Remarkable Document Given to Me by a Young Lady from Rwanda." I was truly moved and inspired by the play, its clever direction and intelligently crafted production values, and especially the sheer honesty in the portrayal of these wonderful characters. I must say it is a bit humbling attempting to write about an incredibly well-written piece of theatre that focuses on the importance of writing well.. Nevertheless, I shall try.

Kesha, I am so proud of you! Simon is right, you *are* beautiful and your commitment to Juliet's truth is ever present. You are elegant and strong; clear and vulnerable. Your candlelight vigil and description of your family's murder is absolutely heartbreaking. What an incredible challenge to go there. I am so happy to have seen your work. I forgot I was watching you. Both of you! And holy cow you guys had some lines to learn!

Nick, the Scribbler, I've told you before what a great actor I think you are, but please let me say it again. You have a wonderful way of putting an audience at ease. You are charming, witty, smart and above all, humble. Great, really great work.

Christine! Thank you for inviting me and thank you for doing this. It is so evident how much this script means to you. Her message, so poignant, resounds even louder with this latest, desperate attempt for peace in Sudan's Darfur. I watched an interview with Kofi Annan tonight on LPB and it's amazing to think that Ms. Chantal's story is only one in thousands and thousands and counting.

You guys: Well done. Have a great third show today. I won't say 'last' because I hope this show's future is as bright as ...Juliet's flowers waving at her. :)

Congratulations!

All the best,

Andrea Frankle

#4

“I Have Before Me a Remarkable Document Given To Me by a Young Lady from Rwanda”

I expected to find a factual account of Rwandan history and the genocide that effected many generations. Instead, I took a wealthy knowledge and a deep insight of a certain gifted actor. Kesha Bullard was profound and beautiful. She was able to personally dive into her work and handed me a realistic account from the playwright's mind and director's vision.

This show takes a topic of enormous weight and cruelty and turns it into a charming and tender meditation on the healing power of writing. Kesha balances her partner, Nick Erickson as Simon, wonderfully with beauty and grace. Kesha conveys the refugee experience with salient acuity. With no money or resources, Juliet lives like a prisoner in a hostel, and in one of the

play's most affecting sequences, describes the room and her surroundings as nothing but shades of gray. I can still today see the images she painted for the audience. There are two standout moments that stick in my mind. The first takes place on a darkened stage when Kesha commemorates the beginnings of the slaughter by lighting a candle for each family member lost, with a tender memory of each person. I felt as though Kesha was talking about her family members back at her own home. The other scene is when she unloads the raw reality of the day her family died by machete and bullets, innocents betrayed by a neighbor and friend. The production lit Kesha's strong points as an actor and I believe rendered as Kesha's best delivered performance at Louisiana State University. Her voice with a lilting accent, her emotions balancing anger to pathos and gentle humor created a warm and rounded Juliet. The beauty of the play and this production is that it is a universal and human story, with few melodramatics. It was staged simply; however, revealed the power of art to heal the most ragged of souls.

It was so easy for me to slide into Kesha's beauty and sincerity due to her openness and truth that dripped off of her strong shoulders. One of the first things that she provides the audience is a unique accent, both clear and understandable. Nick Erickson, from London, sets off his proper language and lets the audience set a place where the action of the play is taking place. Kesha, from Rwanda, has a heavy African-Rwandan accent. It is exceedingly interesting to hear where people come from, to find their origins and trace their history. Kesha's accent allowed information to be transferred to the audience about her character's history without notifying, "I am from Rwanda". As Juliet, she moves to a new world where her language must transform, she comes from a different heritage than Simon (Nick), and cannot always communicate with people around her. The two actors' accents play such a strong foundation in this play; if a director were

to choose to dismiss these accents, the impact would not have been as grave and the audience would not be as readily to follow.

Kesha is a focused individual who willingly gave a performance that made me move to the edge of my seat to grasp what would unfold next. Kesha's voice came across as a very steady and pure sound. Her vocal energy was solid throughout the run of the show, resonating through the bodies seated in the theatre. I was able to hear all of her words even though she had an accent set on top of her lines.

There are also times where Nick and Kesha used their voices to introduce a different setting. The two characters were able to differentiate the specific levels of talking: to themselves, to each other, giving a speech, talking in a confined room, praying, reading poetry, and talking with projections. This reminds me of different levels of neutral mask work. The public, social, personal, and intimate settings of a neutral mask relationship. Each of these scenes told a different story with the way they delivered the text. I did not notice this until I heard Nick speak into the microphone and realized how their voices change for different kinds of settings. Kesha's connection to her breath was noticeable, in a good way, it helped the audience to breathe with her. She took the audience along with her emotions through her control of breath. I could physically see how strong she became when she spoke.

I do not know what kind of exercises the actors did before performing. Knowing that Christine was the director, I would think one of the focus points would be a good vocal warm-up and working on being connected to that inner life that helps us to perform as our most natural state, releasing tension, and working with the strange sensations we hold in our body after a complete warm-up. The use of her vowels and articulation of consonants often made the audience giggle or become more intrigued. The audience responded this way because we are so accustomed to rushing our speech and not hearing the beauty or construction of the words we are

saying. There is one time when Juliet speaks about a strange work “scribble”. The way she pronounces “scribble” with such fascination and articulation makes one look at the word differently. In comparison, Nick relays “scribble” as an everyday meaningless word.

Kesha’s personalization to Juliet and the lengths of providing the audience with such a defined and developed character helped the audience to run with the play and jump into the scenes with Juliet and Simon. In the past, I have often seen Kesha give a strong front, a false pride, when performing. Although, when watching Kesha in this production of “I Have Before Me a Remarkable Document Given to Me by a Young Lady from Rwanda”, I noticed that she let go of her tough skin; she relaxed the stature of her body and let the words affect her. She has grown into a “grounded”, truthful actor of layers, and that’s beautiful.

Lindsey Lanson

#5

If you have not seen, "I Have Before Me a Remarkable Document Given to Me By a Young Lady From Rwanda," directed by Christine Menzies and featuring Kesha and Nick, please do so.

The work is really quite wonderful.

Michael S. Tick

Chair, LSU Department of Theatre

#6

Dear Christine, Nick, Kesha,
Yesterday I attended "I Have Before Me a Remarkable Document Given to Me By a Young Lady From Rwanda" and enjoyed it tremendously. Congratulations on your fine work.

Kristin Sosnowsky

VITA

Kesha S. Bullard was born in Newark, New Jersey, the second of three children to Drs. Lester and Carol Bullard, natives of Trinidad and Tobago. She was raised in Decatur, Georgia, where she received her primary education as a Rainbow Elementary School Tiger and secondary education as a Southwest Dekalb High School Panther. She then left home to pursue a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina. She soon realized that her love for performing and oral interpretation were too great not to take the opportunity to develop them. She then changed her major to focus on theatre and public speaking and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in communication studies in May of 1999.

After experiencing corporate America and the food service industry for a few years, Kesha made a decision to focus all of her energy on acting, which meant furthering her education. She received acceptance to graduate school and left her jobs. She is currently enrolled in the Professional Acting Training Program at Louisiana State University, working toward a Master of Fine Arts degree to be awarded in May of 2007. Upon the completion of her master's degree, she plans to spend the rest of her life enriching the lives of others through art.