DOROTHY MIDDLEDITCH

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I helped Alice [Crawley] and that was enough for me; that finished me for life. I would do the office work, but I would not do costumes or scenery again.

It was all hurry-scurry. The main thing was keeping Brian at bay. Brian would call up at 11 at night. He'd say, "I want this; I want that; I want the other. We're going to do that—the other," and everybody had to run around and pick up things. I did collect props for the sets. The costumes for the first year or two were almost all borrowed and improvised. The Welland Little Theatre lent us all theirs for Candida and we adapted them. It was the little theatres. I think there was a little theatre in Niagara Falls, Ontario, but that died. But Niagara Falls, NY, Maynard Burgess mainly was responsible for being interested and he was from there. There were several of them. Almost all the actors were little theatre actors, and the costumes came from the Welland one. I know there was a bit of a fou-fah when we returned them because they said something was missing.

Don Juan in Hell was done as just a reading, so there were no costumes, just suits, and for Candida they were almost all from St. Catharines. Alice Crawley did the sets, and the costumes were by Louis Berai, dear Louis. Louis adapted them, as we didn't have the money to buy anything or any material, so Brian called up all these little theatre people. The first costumes we ever made were, I think, in 1963; we must have made something but I was not involved. But I know that in 1963 they did How He Lied to Her Husband with Denise Ferguson and Michael Tabbitt, and they ordered a dress for Denise to wear which was red and black. That was the first thing that was ever made specially for the theatre, and it was criticized by some of the board members because they paid $75 for that dress. It was considered exorbitant. That dress hung in my basement because I was the repository for all the things that were left over, so I brought home the dress and it hung there in the bag for several years. I think finally I gave it back to The Shaw, and what they did with it I don't know, whether they've got it or not.

Another one that I had for ages, and it eventually disintegrated, was the lion's head for Androcles and the Lion. That was there, and of course it was only good for another Androcles and the Lion. Those costumes and things were designed by Martha Mann and they were made by Betty Taylor, who got involved in 1963 and 1964. She sewed them. I remember they took a machine up to the Court House and they would work up there, but mostly it was done at home. This was a home industry, all the way from the top to the bottom for the first few years. There was no place to put anything, there was no storage.

But it was fun, because it was something that only went on for three weekends. I see in the paper they mention something about an eight-week season, but the first one was only three weekends. Eight performances we did, the first year of Don Juan in Hell.

Interviewer: There must have been matinees as well.

Dorothy Middleditch: A matinee, probably. The readings were very good. I mainly did the tickets at the door, with Marie Usher and Jim Usher. Buy-ahead tickets could be bought at the Ushers' real estate office, and at the door we had a little folding table and we'd sit there and sell tickets. One night I went in early to sell the tickets, or take the tickets, because we didn't have ticket-tearers—nothing as sophisticated! We had ushers. Brian enlisted all the teenage girls he could. They had to come in white dresses and they looked very pretty. Anyway, this night I went in there and there was an awful commotion coming out of the jail, right next

to my table. This voice was yelling and hoarse, and screaming, "Let me out, let me out." One of the policemen came in, because the police office at that time was in the front of the Court House, and I said, "What in the world is going on?" He said, "Oh, we found a drunk in the park"—they were always rolling around in the long grass there—"and we locked him up." The man was having DTs. He was awful, he was screaming, and I said, "You can't have that man down there, we're doing Don Juan in Hell upstairs." I thought for a moment it would be better to leave the drunk there; it would add to the sound effects. But Chief Warner came along and they took him in the police car to St.Catharines and put him in the jail there where he could make all the noise he wanted.

Paxton always said that it was enough for the Shaw Festival to stage an opening for us to have a thunderstorm. That was a very hot summer and the Court House was like a Turkish bath, because of course they had darkened the windows with cardboard and pieces of brown paper. There weren't even any curtains. You couldn't open a door or window, and then you got 200 or so people in there and before the thing was over you were sticking to the chairs. So Brian sent out a call that he wanted electric fans. Calvin and I went up and down the main street. McClellands at that time had one, a standing one. I got it and put it at the back, going from one side to the other trying to cool it off. But that balcony was really purgatory. And imagine sitting through three hours of George Bernard Shaw, because that was the funny part of it. I guess a few people did get up and walk out, but fortunately they chose very light plays; the heaviest one was Heartbreak House in 1964, that was the longest one.

For that first play, Candida, Alice Crawley worked on the sets. We had the little stage, of course, and Candida uses just one set, a living room. Alice wanted the lace curtains draped, and I remember at two o'clock in the morning we were draping curtains on the set, which was not even up yet. It eventually got up before the next day, before the opening, but I came staggering home and thought, "That set will never be up in time."

Another time when we had a rush was when Barry Morse was in charge, in 1966. They had designed the stage then, with the steps, for the first year, and they had ordered the cushions—that was a great innovation. But the cushions were delivered a bit late by Lincoln Upholstery. The audience began arriving and the cushions had just arrived with the audience. Barry pressed everybody who was there into service, and we were in there tying on cushions at the last minute. And he'd been hammering nails, and oh, I don't know, right to the last. Ray Wickens was standing at the door keeping the people at bay until the cushions were all on and we could open the door.

Another year I remember Margherita Howe and I and several others went up, and they had been painting sets. They had painted all over the tables, and we had to scrub the tables, because we had the opening parties there. Paul from the bakery would appear with his candelabra and we had champagne and a white tablecloth and everything—but the floor was filthy with paint. They hadn't cleaned the floor—they didn't have a proper janitor either; the theatre at that time didn't clean anything—so we set to with a mop and a broom, and I remember scrubbing the tables. This was all the afternoon before the opening. Then you were supposed to go home and dress up and look glamorous. You were barely lucky if you got out of there at eight o'clock.

But Brian, of course, wanted champagne served beforehand and the directors felt that it shouldn't be served because people wouldn't get into the theatre. But he'd say, "Now, get everybody in there. Champagne! Get everybody into the small hall." Of course the small hall was always full.

Then I think it was in 1965 or 1966 that the theatre finally bought the air conditioner, and I remember the day

that went up, too. I was always there, somehow or other, when the things went on, but this huge, big thing was brought in and it was put in the basement, and then there was another condenser brought upstairs, and they had an awful time getting it up the stairs, it was very, very heavy.

In Androcles and the Lion we really involved a lot of people in the town, too, which was rather nice. Barbara Spigel was the one who helped us at the beginning, a great help. She had been involved with the Niagara Falls, NY, Little Theatre and that was why Barbara and her husband moved over here, because of her interest in the Shaw Festival.

Brian would call up people like Mary Walsh and Betty Rigg because he knew them so well and he'd say, "We need a desk, we need a chair, we need lamps." I know we had a bit of an argument because he had a lamp but it was an oil one, and he insisted on having oil-burning lamps, not electrified, on the stage with all this flimsy stuff, and we were very worried about fire at that time, but he said it lent authenticity and he wanted it to be authentic. We didn't have a fire, thank goodness; nobody knocked it over.

Chris Newton was here in 1964. He acted in Village Wooing, with Linda Livingston and Dr. Blue. Oh, Dr. Blue was a great enthusiast; he had one foot on the stage in every season. He was either a waiter or some walk-on thing. Chris was also in Heartbreak House as Hector Hushabye.

In 1963, a lot of girls who had acted as ushers appeared in Androcles and the Lion. Brian got them interested. Boys were in it too, but they were just Roman soldiers, they stood around. I know my son got very bored and he vowed he would never do another thing. He said, "That was terrible, standing around all time." But these children got a bit of stage education. I remember them saying that Percy Rodriguez was very nice to them and showed them how to do make-up, so it was like a little theatrical school for those children in those early days, although we didn't go to the government for a grant, unfortunately.

Louis Berai, who did the costumes, would turn up in some of his fantastic outfits. One year he was be a Turkish man with a turban. He always added colour to the opening-night parties.

We didn't get a grant from the government until 1965, so it operated for three full years until it got a grant, and that was from the Ontario Arts Council. The Canada Council was established about that time, I think, and we went to them but they were a bit slower although they were already giving grants to Stratford. We got a lot of help from Stratford, from Bill Wylie, one of the managers.

In 1965, Ray Wickens was hired, and then we had a small business office on Queen Street. At least then I could unload the mailing lists and there was a place to park things. Brian supplied an old oak legal cabinet and everybody donated bits of furniture. I think they bought a typewriter, but things were always donated and given and borrowed—there was no establishing of anything with an overhead.

But the theatre never lost money, even in the first years, and we were very lucky in that. Somehow the $3.50 admission we charged covered everything. I remember we debated whether or not to charge $5, and a lot of people thought we'd lose a lot of customers. There was no difference in price, no matter what night you went, opening night or during the week. For the opening-night parties, usually the champagne was served at the Court House and then there was a follow-up party at Randwood, which was usually quite hysterical, a lot of fun. I think it was at Randwood only until the new theatre was built and then it was felt that the party could be held there. I don't know how Pat Rand put up with it.

About the second or third year it was decided that we would have people leave their name and address to establish a mailing list, so we had little bits of paper and they would leave those. Then there were also letters because people were beginning to write in ahead of time wanting tickets, so there was a good deal of correspondence. Jim and Marie Usher handled the mail order for years from their office, did it all voluntarily. We had a big list; a lot of people came from New York State, not that many from Toronto at the beginning. Come the end of the season, cartons would come in to my house and I remember sitting on my sofa while my husband was watching television, me with piles of paper and checking to see if the names were on the list and throwing the slips out if they were.

Then I remember the Guild got involved. Brian decided we'd have an "'auxilliary," as he called it, and officially then the auxilliary took charge of opening nights and the mailing list. I remember we'd start off with a luncheon, which was held at somebody's house. Everybody would be asked to bring lists. I remember from across the river Barbara Spigel brought a list of the members of the sailing clubs. We got all kinds of lists: garden clubs, medical—Brian knew all the medical profession so we got all the doctors' lists. We got the medical lists from St. Catharines, Niagara Falls and Fort Erie. We got lists and we got lists and we got lists, and then we began sending out folders about the festival. There was a lot of work.

In 1965, when they finally decided they could hire Ray Wickens, then there was an office where everything could be deposited, but up until then it had been at my house, or Calvin's or Brian's. Bas Mason had a printing press here so of course he did all our printing for us. He was the one who kept pressing us to get grants, grants, grants. Everything started about the same time—the Niagara Horticultural Society and the Shaw Festival in 1962 and the Niagara Foundation the next year—so there was a sudden blossoming out in the community. They were exciting years because we were all new, and the funny part of it was that Niagara-on-the-Lake was a very closed community, with people descended from generations of living here. They would count the newcomers on the fingers of their right hand. I remember hearing at St Mark's that there were three new families who had moved in in one year and it was really quite an accomplishment. You were sort of told when you came here that you were a newcomer and you were not supposed to interfere. You had to live here 15 years before you could be accepted as a full resident. So it was sort of a gathering of people who were newcomers who really wanted something to do, because so many of the things here were closed to newcomers. There were the little cliques and the little groups that had been here all their lives. Not that they really meant to close you out but they just looked at you up and down and said, "What are you doing here?"

Interviewer: Did the oldtimers, as it were, have anything to do with helping Shaw?

Ms Middleditch: Very little. Well, oldtimers—I'd say Mary Walsh and Betty Rigg, they're all oldtimers; and Betty Taylor. No, there were.

Interviewer: I mean the local people who had been here perhaps two or three generations. Did they get involved at all?

Ms Middleditch: Some of them did. People that knew Brian did, because it was mainly Brian's clique and friends. I know how I got involved. I had just arrived a year and a half before. Brian had his preliminary meeting at Jean Marsh's. Then he put a notice in the Advance to say there was a group trying to form for some summer theatre. I thought it would be amateur—it was amateur, the idea was to have a little theatre. Brian had been adjudicator at the little theatre competitions for the Dominion Drama Festival awards. He had

gone around and seen all these little theatre groups and that they were quite thriving. He felt maybe Niagara-on-the-Lake could have something like that which they could do in the summer which would keep the interest of the people, because it was quite a dead little town. If you weren't involved in one of the churches' activities there wasn't anything else. There was no horticultural society; there was the historical society, I believe. Anyway, he really started it for that reason.

We had lived in England and I was bored to tears here culturally. I would go up to Toronto as often as I could but all they had in Toronto was the O'Keefe and the newly renovated Royal Alex. The O'Keefe was not my idea of a theatre, having gone to the theatre at least once or twice a week in England. I read about it in the Advance and did it because I thought it would be fun, so I volunteered. Then Brian wanted somebody who could type and I could type. At that time I was working as a stringer for the Standard, so I thought I would help with the publicity. So I was publicity and typing, and being able to take shorthand and type, I got the job as secretary.

Gertrude Gordon, who lived in the little house that was torn down for the Prince of Wales, took care of elderly people and lent us a lot of old things. She had lovely old oil lamps and I remember carrying one oil lamp back and forth.

They wanted a carpet one year. When we bought our house the lady left us certain things and there was an old brown carpet rolled up in the basement. I trotted the carpet out and had them come and pick it up. I'll never forget, we went to the show and my husband said, "That's our carpet," in a loud voice. I had to shush him. He said, "Don't ever lend anything again without my permission." He was very English. I said, "Yes, dear; yes, dear." Then in 1971 they had War, Women and Other Trivia, and by that time the theatre had enough money that it would rent the furniture from Toronto. When the curtain went up my husband said, "You've lent them our chairs." I said, "I did not. That's not our chair." We went through the whole show arguing in whispers whether that was our chair or not our chair. When he came home, the first thing he did was count the chairs to see that there wasn't one missing. I said, "You see, I told you it wasn't our chair." My poor husband was very forbearing because we would be in bed and the phone would ring. It would be Brian wanting something done immediately the next day. My husband would say, "Why doesn't he pay you? He has you on the end of a string." I said, "I hate to say no to Brian."

Jean Marsh was another who worked very hard for Brian. She was really his personal assistant. I only took minutes at the meetings, but Jean went around with a pencil and pad and took down all the notes from him about what he said had to be done and she would follow up. Until we got the office established the chain of command went down that way. Everybody did their little bit. But it got too big then. It was becoming established.

The year that put the theatre on the map was when Barry Morse came in, 1966. Before that, I used to cover council for the paper and Calvin would go to council and we would file a letter saying we would like a grant for the next year. They would all sit there: "What? Grants to the theatre? That's the last thing the town would ever want to give its consent for." In fact, every year we barely got approval for renting it to the Shaw. There were great reservations some years: that they hadn't cleaned it up properly. Well, I agree it was messy with the paint and what not. So there was quite a bit of feeling, and there were a lot of people in the town who objected to the Court House being used for that. It was a desecration. There still is a lot of feeling against theatre here. I know people who have drawn themselves up in horror and said, "I wouldn't be seen dead crossing the doorway of the theatre."

Interviewer: Yet it has brought so much to the town.

Ms Middleditch: Yes, but they don't care. They really wouldn't want that. It's just that it's not in them to go to the theatre. They think theatre people are evil or something.

Interviewer: They had quite a fight to put the big theatre up, didn't they?

Ms Middleditch: That went through very easily. No, that went through much— Everybody was so exhausted after three sites and all the battles that I think they were glad to get it in there and forget about it. They felt it was enough out of town. No, the battles were all before. I think Tom Burrows smoothed a lot of people over because he had a very good, easy manner. He assured them. Of course, in the sixties it was the time of the hippies. You would go down the main street and see these hippies with their long hair, sitting on the curbstone in front of Kennedy's drugstore—filthy—and people would all say, "I suppose those are Shaw Festival employees." Some of the employees were long-haired, and still are, but they were not hippies. We had an influx of hippies, like everybody else, and a lot of them probably wanted jobs. We had some unfortunate problems with some of the students that Niagara College sent us as apprentices one year. I know Muriel Sherrin said she wouldn't take them another year. I think that now people realize theatre is not something that is ostracized but I think there are still a lot who are not interested in it culturally. When we were fighting over the site, I've seen a delegation go to council and when the mayor said to them, "If you don't want it on that site, where would you suggest we put the theatre?" they said, "We would like to have it sent to Moscow." Out of town, completely. Ed Mirvish tried his best to get it in the early days. We were offered the Royal Alex but he wanted the Shaw Festival to go there and the board turned that down. It was tempting because there was the big audience in Toronto, but Brian insisted that Niagara-on-the-Lake was the only place for a festival of this type. He was following Tom Patterson in Stratford.

Stratford, by the way, got rid of its women's auxiliary. I remember Bill Wylie telling us that when we were having problems with women here over the site. Bill Wylie came down to the board and we asked him. He said, "We had so many problems with those women that we decided to disband it." They don't have any guild or women's auxiliary at Stratford. They had one in the early years and apparently there was a lot of trouble.

I hang on to those first years because they were really fun. There was a lot of fun later, too, when we finally got the site decided, raising the money for it. We sold shingles, we sold lottery tickets at the door. Where it all came from, I don't know. I could hardly believe it when we talked about $2 million. I think it cost just over $2 million with all the preplanning. At one time we had the whole architectural plans practically for the Court House site and we signed an agreement with the town. Then there was furore with the people and the Shaw withdrew. Then Parks Canada came forward and said we could have the present site. We had tried to get a piece opposite Fort George where the parking lot is but Parks Canada wouldn't have any theatre near the fort. They were right, of course. They didn't want anything on any of the Common.

Then they said, "Would you like to put it on the golf course, because we're going to terminate our lease with the golf club and the plan is for the golf club to move." So we said we didn't mind. Brian was elated then, he was just in seventh heaven. It was ideal, he said, with the view of Toronto and the lake. He could see the patrons strolling out there at night looking at the water. He wanted to build it at one time on a floating thing opposite Queen's Royal Park. There's one on a lake on the border of Austria and Switzerland. It's a floating platform and they have concerts at night. But we decided the lake was too dangerous in winter. It would have

been monumental to build anything out there. And the Queen's Royal Park was too small. He had looked at that. He wanted water, to have the theatre somewhere near the lake.

So the board discussed the golf course site and said sure, if they were offering the land and the golf club was going to move. Then all hell broke loose. The guild resigned *en masse*, the people sent delegations to the town council. I think everybody was surprised. There were a lot of people who felt strongly and who were sort of at the head of the guild and the members followed them. I know we had an opening night coming up early in the year, I can't remember which year, and I went around trying to find out who was still with us. I found five. We had a meeting of the guild and we had five: Jean Gent, Grace Moog, Mrs Butler's daughter—I can't remember her name. That was enough; we had a guild organized. We did the opening night. I ferried plates of sandwiches. Then people began to come back. I got enough people to donate sandwiches and I ferried plates of sandwiches in three lots. I remember it was a horrible day, one of those awful muggy days when the humidity is 150 percent. It had rained for three days and still had not cleared up. I put all these platters of sandwiches in the back of the car and took them out to Randwood and we had a good party. Afterwards, I remember Marjorie Rand, who was one of my dearest friends, called me up and was furious with me. She said, "You should not have had that party." I said, "Why? I respect your opinion and everybody's opinion who has resigned from the guild and if you feel that strongly and if you want to, fine, but you and your friends are not going to tell me what I should do. I feel differently so you go your way and I'll go mine. We'll still be friends." We're all friends now; it doesn't really matter. But at that time I was not going to be told what I had to do. There were a lot who followed on, not wanting to be different from the crowd. That was the Shaw-bashing year. They all came back when the Queen came. It was quite interesting to see them all.

Tom Burrows was very diplomatic. He was a wonderful person that way, because he could talk people into doing things nicely and the moment Tom came a lot of irritations and hard feelings were completely smoothed over. He was very active in the town. I don't know how he did it because he would work all day and then he would go to the meetings. He was very active in the chamber of commerce. He got the town to sign an agreement to give us the land behind the Court House and that caused another uproar but not as bad as the golf club. I was happy with that site.

I went around saying, "I think the Court House is ideal." It was beginning to be rundown, there was no money in the town to restore it, and the Shaw would have got government grants because included in the money we could get from the government would have been money to restore the Court House. There would have been an above-ground link between the upstairs and the theatre. Ron Thom designed it so there would be a passageway linking the two buildings. Everybody was beginning to talk about the parking problem and I said, "Then you can park your cars out of town." People would have parked their cars and walked into town to the theatre, which would remove cars from the centre of town. I still think it would have been a great solution. But we've got a more beautiful theatre where we are. That would have been a very cramped theatre. They haven't enough space now for storage and that would have had much less.

Then we didn't have the Royal George, we only had the Court House. The idea was to keep the Court House and put the money into restoration and structural improvements. The library objected strongly. The library people were one of the key groups that objected to that because they figured they were going to be overshadowed with another building and it was going to make it very dark. It's true, it would have been dark, but I think the library should have moved anyway. It would have been a way for them to get a better place for the library. Of course, it is historic there but they are very cramped.

When the big theatre opened with the big opening and all that, and everyone was coming—Trudeau and the Queen—I was absolutely stunned that year. I kept saying to people, "I feel like the story in the Arabian Nights about the fellow who unstopped the bottle and the genie came out and it was so much bigger than he thought. We've unstopped something we never dreamed would be like this." We never dreamed it would have the acclaim that it had.

I started to talk about Barry Morse. The delegation had gone to council every year and never got a cent. In fact, the council in this town has never given one cent to the Shaw Festival. There has never been a grant given by the town or the region. The grants have come from Toronto and Ottawa. This year I see they've put in for a grant and I think they're going to get something, split up over three years—say $2,000 a year, which is nothing. The town would argue that it gave us a grant because it gave us the theatre at a cheap rent, and it's true that for years they let us use the theatre for $1,500 a season which was very reasonable in the first few years. If we had been, say, in St Catharines and had to rent a theatre we would never have been able to make money at $3.50 a seat or $5. But the year Barry Morse came, a lot of people changed their tune. The first one out there to shake hands and have his picture taken was the mayor. Barry, of course, was wonderful because he loved everybody and he would talk and smile and chat. Another was Zoe Caldwell. She would go into Sayger's, the dime store, to buy things and she would chat with people in her Australian accent and people couldn't get over how nice and friendly she was. That was the year the Shaw really began to get accepted by the people of the town. He was the tops then because of his TV series; it was like having Paul Newman or somebody like that come. Now we don't care, we take it in our stride.

Interviewer: Everyone we've spoken to remembers it as fun.

Ms Middleditch: Yes, it was. It still is. Even when the guild was five of it was fun. I don't remember how it sort of grew or gained but it was mainly when the new theatre was being built. Then everybody knew there was nothing to fight over, everybody was satisfied. There were no objections from the local people because Tom met with them and assured them that they would never open the street there with cars coming out, which has made that parking lot very hard to get out of, but that was his promise at the beginning. It was unfortunate in a way that they didn't get the extra land, but I wasn't that keen on that other theatre. I liked the Court House and I think it's nice that the people can stay in the town and we're not keeping people out. Just to have people strolling up and down in the evening, I like. It used to be much nicer in the days when everybody wore long dresses.

Adam and Eve—I don't remember who Adam was; Jonathan White; we've never seen him again. Franny was Eve. There was all this weird backdrop, modernistic linked flowers Brazilian-style. And there was going to be these lights playing on it. And this washer, she was doing the diapers—washing clothes, Eve, and she had this white jumpsuit on. I wasn't there the opening night but the whole thing broke down and there was no sound.

Another time somebody was sick and Stanley Holloway entertained for the whole night. Another year we had Gielgud's brother Val directing and he was so nice. They stayed in the little cottage, the Burrows cottage. That's where the Holloways stayed too. I don't know whether it was Val's or Stanley's wife but she was a typical English woman. She had a big wide straw hat and would go down the street with her basket on her arm to do her shopping. They all loved Niagara-on-the-Lake. It was just like a little English village.

I had never seen much of Shaw. My husband liked musicals and I liked straight drama or comedy. He would

always be bored. He would say, "It was so long-winded. Why don't they cut out half of it?" I would say, "If they cut out half of it, it wouldn't be a Shaw play." But afterwards he and hundreds of others got completely won over and they would complain if we didn't give three Shaw plays, or we would do a play by another author—We did Somerset Maugham one year—and then people would leave the theatre and say, "But it's not as good as Shaw." There's so much wonderful meat and wit and humour in Shaw that you get spoiled and you realize others just haven't got as much depth to them.

Brian thought it was a real coup when he got Gillie and Moya Fenwick to come down, and Tony van Bridge, because of course he was really good. We always used a great many local people, except for the few—and the funny part is— I don't know whether you ought to quote me on this.

Interviewer: We can stop the tape if you like.

Ms Middleditch: Yes.

Curtain