

My relationship with William Shakespeare did not begin in the early 1960s in the all-girls high I attended in New Rochelle, NY. Forced to memorize a speech with no teacher explanation and certainly with no passion for the words of William Shakespeare other than the grade book in front of her, I presented\_\_\_\_\_. Yes, what I presented remains a blank.

In the later 1960s, my relationship with WS blossomed under the tutelage of my college English professor, Dr. Harriet Joseph. When I graduated, she presented me with a book she had written on Dr. John Hall, Shakespeare's son-in-law and inscribed with the words "To a budding colleague." Her book now graces the table in Act I, scene 4 of *The Merry Wives on Windsor* one of the pieces in *Shakespeare's Greatest Hits: Slings and Arrows, Fits and Starts*. More about that later.

When I became a middle school English teacher rather than the college English professor Dr. Joseph hoped I'd become, I found my calling: English teacher by day; Shakespeare director after school. In the years between 1974 and 2013, my relationship with William Shakespeare took flight and flourished in various Shakespeare productions (not simplified versions but rather slightly edited ones) as I directed and costumed approximately 5,000 middle and high school students in some of the perennial favorites: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Richard III*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Love's Labor's Lost*, *As You Like It*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Romeo and Juliet* as well as various productions of Scenes from Shakespeare. Recently one of my students, John Cerna now 53 and a writer, producer, and actor, moved to St. Petersburg. He reminded me he was Touchstone in *As You Like It*. The memories of all those kids like John, ages 13-18 embracing and still remembering their parts, are the stuff that dreams are made on. For many years, our company performed two different Shakespeare plays: 10 shows in six days, double cast. The assistant producers, stage managers, crew, and performers comprised nearly 80 members; 99.9% stayed with the company for their four years of high school.

And then I moved to Florida with my memories, costumes, Shakespeare memorabilia, and my passion. I discovered thriving

community theatres in Pinellas County alongside professional and mostly equity ones. In a conversation with one of the owners of an historic Tarpon Springs antique shop, he graciously offered to introduce me to former Cultural Arts director, Dr. Kathleen Monahan. A new Folio, as I like to think of it began, not with children but with adults, most of whom had somewhat similar high school introductions to the Bard as the one I experienced fifty years ago. Through the generosity of Tarpon Springs Cultural Arts, I have been given the opportunity to share my passion for Shakespeare with so many dedicated community players and with my partner, Graham Jones.

William Shakespeare always reminds us what it means to be human. May that never become a lost art.

Please join twenty-four community players playing 72 different parts, and Graham and me as we present *Shakespeare's Greatest Hits* in two completely different shows with a shared finale.

*Slings and Arrows* on October 12 at 7 pm and October 13 at 2 pm.

*Fits and Starts* on October 19<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm and October 20<sup>th</sup> at 2 pm.

The production is comprised of scenes from *King Lear*, *Henry IV, Part II*, *Hamlet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Richard III*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Macbeth*, *As You Like It*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* with music ranging from Mozart to Queen and with costumes reflecting the mood of each scene.

Tarpon Springs Performing Arts Center, Ring and Pine Streets.

For more information, please contact [tarponarts.org](http://tarponarts.org).