

CONNECTIONS AND CONFLUENCES:  
THE PERSONAL AND ARTISTIC JOURNEYS IN THE WRITING OF  
*SURVIVAL DANCE*

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By

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

CONNECTIONS AND CONFLUENCES:  
THE PERSONAL AND ARTISTIC JOURNEYS IN THE WRITING OF  
*SURVIVAL DANCE*

presented by Kate Berneking Kogut,

a candidate for the degree of doctor of philosophy,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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## ABSTRACT

Ways in which plays are written are simultaneously known and unknown, similar and different. The writing, in general, is guided by traditions of story and theatre. Specifically, the writing is guided by the life of the writer. Similarly, the path of healing from traumatic experiences is also known and unknown, similar and different. Therapeutic encounters are acknowledged to be helpful on a healing journey and certain stages of healing are known to be part of the process. Specific ways in which these therapies and stages are incorporated into a person's life are as individual and unique as the person herself.

Using autoethnography as both the process and the product of research, this study explores the connections between life and art and how each informs and guides the other. This dissertation offers a greater understanding of a specific playwriting process helpful both to those studying the writing process as well as artists embarking on a their own writing journeys. Similarly, the story of healing from traumatic experiences offers insights into one woman's journey to make sense and meaning from her experiences and how she used art to help accomplish her goals.

## PROLOGUE

This dissertation focuses on my journeys in writing a play entitled *Survival Dance*. The play is about a woman's journey of healing from the emotional aftereffects of an abusive relationship. Haunted by flashbacks and memories, the main character is unable to move forward in her life and must learn to reconnect with the parts of her *self* she thought she had lost in the abusive relationship.

The play has undergone numerous revisions. In the current version of the play, the main characters include: Older Annie, a woman struggling to come to terms with her past; she addresses the audience; Annie, the part of her self during the abusive relationship; Younger Annie, the spirited, child-like part of her self she believed she had lost; and Tom, the abusive husband who is a vice detective in the police department. Other characters make up a chorus that interacts with Annie and Older Annie. They include: Phyllis, Tom's mother; Jill, Annie's sister; Doctor, Annie's new physician; Jared, Tom's partner on the police force; Bobbie, a diner waitress - this actor doubles as Gran, Annie and Jill's beloved grandmother; and Mankato Smith, a concerned neighbor of Annie and Tom.

*Survival Dance* was produced three times through the University of Missouri - Columbia Department of Theatre:



First, in the regular theatre season in the fall of 2002; second, it was an invited production to the Region V American College Theatre Festival (KC-ACTF); and third, it was the university's *Mizzou on Broadway* showcase at the York Theatre in New York City on September 6, 2003.

Understanding the aforementioned details about the work will help the reader through my processes - my journeys - that I explore in this dissertation.

## CHAPTER ONE: PACKING FOR THE JOURNEY

I often struggle with how and where to begin. Many might suggest that I begin "at the beginning." However, through the course of my personal, artistic, and scholarly journeys I have realized that it is not always necessary to begin at a traditional beginning and follow through in a pre-determined chronological order. Nor is that method always the best way in which a story should unfold. Before I begin this story, with whatever beginning I choose, I must give you one basic fact:

*As a young woman I was involved in an abusive relationship.*

There. I said it. I wrote it. That fact is there for anyone to see. It is there for me to see and to reflect upon.

I was young when I was with him. When I say that, I wonder if I am making an excuse for myself and for why I stayed with him. Am I?

We make such excuses so we can trick ourselves into believing that we are outside the reach of abuse. We're older. We're wiser. We're more educated. We're stronger. The truth? It can happen to anyone. And when I was eighteen

years old, *anyone* became me. For the next three years I was in an abusive relationship with an intimate partner.

You have questions? So do I. But first I'll answer your questions. You ask and I answer:

Were you abused as a child? No.

Did your father abuse your mother? No.

Were you married to the man who abused you? No.

Did you have children with him? No.

Were you reliant upon him for financial support? No.

Did you think you deserved to be abused? No.

Were parts of your relationship good? Yes.

Did you care about him and hope he would stop? Yes.

That long-ago relationship left a tear in the fabric of my *self*. That tear became a wound that I couldn't completely heal. And so I carried the scar. For years I treated that scar as alien. The scar felt tender and raw and I was afraid of it. I never knew when it would break open and reveal my wound. I was embarrassed by the scar and cultivated ways to hide it, both from others and from my self. It wasn't *my* scar. It was *the* scar. I viewed the scar as something that was not a part of me. I viewed it as something to be despised.

Through exploration as a woman and as an artist, I eventually came to accept that the memories of that

relationship were not alien, but a part of me. Gradually the scar became less tender. The tissue of the scar was tougher than I had thought. Healing offers a resiliency. If those memories of that relationship were part of me, I must learn that they were not something to be despised or feared. Instead, they were a means of growth as an individual and as an artist.

This dissertation focuses on the writing of *Survival Dance*. It is not the story of that long ago abusive relationship. I will not give details of the violence or of injuries suffered. Nor will I give details of the perpetrator. That is not what this story is about. This is my story . . . not his. This autoethnography contains the stories and the analyses of my journeys: my personal journey of healing and my artistic journey as a writer. It is an exploration of the connections and confluences I have discovered on those journeys and how each of those journeys empowered the other.

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore through autoethnography the connections between the creative writing and personal healing processes. By examining my writing process of *Survival Dance*, as well as my journey of

healing from an abusive relationship, I identify connections and confluences to offer a model for others involved in the creative and/or healing arts. I ask two key questions: "What influences did my artistic journey in the development of my play, *Survival Dance*, have on my personal journey of my healing process?" as well as "What influence did my personal journey of my healing process have on my artistic journey in the development of *Survival Dance*?"

My process of writing *Survival Dance* and my process of healing started with methods that might be considered traditional for their expected outcomes. For my writing process, the goal/outcome would be the text of a play; for my healing process from the aftereffects of the trauma of intimate partner violence (IPV), the goal/outcome would be for me to feel whole, to regain my *self* again. I wrote the first draft of *Survival Dance* using a traditional 'seat of the pants to the seat of the chair' method of playwriting. I formulated a deliberate plan for a script: character development, idea, and conflict - the textbook ways in which to write a play for the stage.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the steps I took toward my process of healing from the aftereffects of that violent relationship might also be considered

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<sup>1</sup> For useful information on traditional playwriting methods, see Egri; Garrison 2001; Hall; McLaughlin; and Wright 1997).

traditional: I sought support and counseling, read the literature on domestic violence, and followed through on my therapist's "homework."<sup>2</sup> During and after my traditional steps in both processes, I believed that somehow my two journeys were connected. But how?

*MOMENT: Connections*

*Just south of the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers stands the Old Chain-of-Rocks Bridge.<sup>3</sup> When I was growing up, this was the bridge my family crossed to visit my grandparents in rural Illinois. After the opening of the new bridge when the Interstate highway opened in 1967, the old bridge was closed. It endured years of neglect and in the 1970s barely escaped demolition. Today, this beautiful bridge has a new life as a walking and biking bridge. And it still connects: Missouri to Illinois, people to the river, individuals to their history. Walking to the middle of the bridge I can look north toward the new bridge with the cars and trucks speeding toward their destinations. I can look south and see the sun glinting off the Gateway Arch. I can look up and see the same beautiful man-made structure I remember from the weekend journeys to Illinois. And I can look down and see the river flowing. And I remain connected: to my past, my present, and my future.*

# # #

Both my writing and healing processes quickly moved beyond what might be considered traditional methods of development. After the writing of the first draft of *Survival Dance*, the process moved into a less traditional method of playwriting. I developed personal narrative

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<sup>2</sup> The scope of this dissertation cannot embrace all forms of therapeutic processes and healing. For additional information regarding trauma associated with intimate partner violence, see: Campbell and Kendall-Tackett 123-40; Eyer and Cohen; Hawker 139-44; and Jordan et al.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on this St. Louis landmark, visit [www.trailnet.org](http://www.trailnet.org).

performances in three of Dr. Heather Carver's Performance Studies courses<sup>4</sup> that not only addressed the writing and reading of the text, but also ultimately helped shape the *Survival Dance* script. Dr. Suzanne Burgoyne had proposed to direct my domestic violence play and the production was scheduled for the fall of 2002 at the University of Missouri-Columbia. As we moved toward production, some of the "non-traditional" writing methods continued. An improvisation in rehearsal would trigger a personal memory that inspired a rewrite that in turn became the seed of thought for a new line or scene. I also continuously drew upon my talks with medical students about my experiences in an abusive relationship.

And the unplanned as far as therapeutic work unfolded: talking with medical students about my experiences in a violent relationship; writing a play about intimate partner violence; and performing a personal narrative about my experiences. These activities were empowering. The telling of my story encouraged personal growth . . . a new sense of agency. As I moved into less traditional methods of playwriting and healing, I began discovering my journeys

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<sup>4</sup> The three courses include: Performance Studies: Texts & Contexts, Winter Semester 2001; Performance of Auto/Biography, Winter Semester 2002; Advanced Performance of Auto/Biography, Winter Semester 2003.

were not only connected, but also they often flowed together.

*MOMENT: The Confluence*

*I am intrigued by the idea of confluences. Growing up in North St. Louis County I was minutes away from the confluence of two great rivers: the Mighty Mississippi and the Missouri - the Big Muddy. Popular belief has it that the Missouri flows into the Mississippi - which is why from the confluence of these two rivers on south to the delta, the great river is known as the Mississippi. Others, however, argue that the Missouri is the dominant river and that the Mississippi actually flows into the Missouri. Regardless of what you believe, you can, at first, see the difference in the waters of each great river. Emphasis on at first. Soon the waters blend. Rolling, churning . . . doing all the things that rivers do, the waters of each river become indistinguishable from the other. But are they? Might someone with expertise be able to identify molecules from a soil that originated in the Dakotas rather than Minnesota? Might pollutants be traced to effluence from a specific upstream factory dumping into the river, thereby identifying that water molecule as coming from a specific region? I'm not sure. But using that idea, I ask: Might a scholar/artist with expertise in writing and performance be able to trace the paths of the personal journey from those of the artistic journey, finding how the flow of the one connects with the other? Possibly . . . if that artist has been on those journeys and if that journey is examined under the metaphoric microscope of autoethnography.*

# # #

An example of the connections and confluences of my artistic and healing processes can be seen in the following situation: In some of my first talks with medical students I would begin by telling the story of my abuse. Telling my story, however, proved to be incredibly difficult. During these talks I found myself emotionally re-experiencing the



abuse. Oftentimes I became so upset it took a great deal of effort to focus on telling my story. Robert Blake Jr. M.D., my former family physician with whom I presented these talks, eventually suggested that I begin these sessions by introducing myself and who and where I am today. In that way I would not only inform the students of who I am, I would also remind myself of my strengths and accomplishments. I tried such an introduction. I told students how I had returned to school as a graduate student in theatre and that I have had several plays produced. I told them I was married and that I had two children. When I used such an introduction I felt much more empowered, remaining the more self-confident self that I am today instead of re-experiencing the emotions of a young woman in an abusive relationship. Although I didn't realize it at the time, this change had an impact on me not only personally, but also artistically.

While the aforementioned method of introduction worked for the circumstances of talking with medical students, it also influenced me artistically both generally as a way to approach my art, and specifically, as I eventually rewrote *Survival Dance*. First, the more general artistic influence came as I realized that as a storyteller I could begin a story wherever I chose to begin it - whether that story was

the truth of my experiences in that relationship or the fiction in the play I was writing. This technique is one I could not have learned from a textbook or sitting in a class - I needed to experience firsthand how a non-linear introduction and structure could influence the meaning and flow of a story.

Specific influences on *Survival Dance* came in rewrites of the play. One example: talking with medical students about my experiences in a violent relationship, I became the guide to my story. As memories arose or questions were asked of me, I skipped back and forth in time. The experiences and my feelings about those experiences were shared out of chronological order. When I eventually added the Older Annie character to *Survival Dance*, she became a similar story guide. Art was drawn from life . . . not only in content, but also in structure. What were the bridges that connected my journeys and where did they flow together? In the current draft of *Survival Dance*, the character of Older Annie states: "I have a story to tell. I haven't always wanted to tell it. . . ." The line was originally performed in my personal narrative performance *Resisting Myself*<sup>5</sup> however, the origin of those words and the

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<sup>5</sup> *Resisting Myself* was written, developed, and performed in Dr. Heather Carver's Performance of Auto/biography class, Winter semester 2002. Additionally, the paper *Resisting Myself* was presented at the Central States Communication Conference in 2005 and was awarded Top Debut Paper.

need for that line came from my talks with medical students. What other influences would an examination of my processes reveal? Could I trace the influences of my personal narrative performances to my playwriting? Are there connections between my talks about intimate partner violence to my performances of personal narratives? Does my playwriting flow into my personal journey of healing from partner violence? By examining how I moved through my artistic and personal journeys, both through traditional and non-traditional methods, I learn how they each influence the other.

#### **SCHOLARLY CONTEXTS**

In this dissertation, I examine the literature in playwriting, trauma recovery, intimate partner violence, personal narrative performance, and the use of story in the healing process to demonstrate the potential connections between these fields of study. I then explore the idea that while the potential for connections does exist and has been addressed between some of these areas, the *specific* ways in which these fields merged in my personal and artistic journey in healing and writing are unique to my experience.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

To situate my work within theatre scholarship, I will address not only areas within theatre, but also areas within other disciplines. I will address playwriting, trauma recovery, personal narrative performance, intimate partner violence, and the role of storytelling in the healing process. Additionally, I address autoethnography as a research process and a product. While covering a wide range of disciplines, the combination of these areas of study is what eventually resulted in the script of my play, *Survival Dance*. Searching the literature in these areas offers multiple ways in which to examine my processes: my personal and artistic journeys. The broad background of reading offers me the tools with which to see the connections and confluences.

### **Playwriting**

Since the artistic product that is the result of my processes is a play written for the stage, it is essential to refer to the literature on playwriting to show what is and isn't emphasized in traditional playwriting texts. The use of life experience within playwriting is being addressed in a small way within current playwriting literature. Most playwriting texts concentrate on the

writing process of a new play and, to a lesser degree, the subsequent development of the text of that written script as it moves toward production. These texts offer few, if any, ways in which to draw from the playwright's life experience as a method of creating new theatrical works. Popular textbooks such as *The Playwright's Process* by Buzz McLaughlin (1997), *Playwriting in Process* by Michael Wright (1997), *Writing Your First Play* by Roger Hall (1998), and *The Art of Dramatic Writing* by Lajos Egri (1946, 1960), offer a variety of methods and exercises for developing characters, refining play structure, demonstrating conflict, and exploring theatricality within this writing process. These texts include exercises that enhance the creative process for writers, offering springboards for development of story ideas for the stage. In Chapter Two I address how all of the above-mentioned methods were part of my original writing of the first drafts of my script. They are also essential foundations tools for writers creating dramatic play texts.

While some of the above texts include a brief review of ways in which to draw from life experience in playwriting, this information is quite limited. For example, in *Writing, Producing, and Selling Your Play*, Louis Catron simply recommends that playwrights "write

about something that touches [their] heart" (46). In *Playwrights Survival Guide*, Gary Garrison states that by turning to look at himself he realized he already had "the resource to write any character or story I'd ever want to create" (3). Buzz McLaughlin states: "drawing from life is a major reason some plays have the power to grab you and hold you until the final curtain. The writer cares deeply about what's being dealt with" (48). Acknowledgement of the importance of being personally connected to or passionately interested in the material about which one writes is an excellent first step in mining the self for plays. While some texts only mention such personal connection and interests, other writers and teachers explain the process in more depth.

In *Writing Your First Play*, Roger Hall dedicates a chapter to writers drawing from their own experiences. In "Writing from Life" he discusses the advantages and pitfalls of a writer drawing from his or her own experience, both artistically and psychologically. Writing about that which you know can create work that "contains particulars that imbue the scene with depth and richness and give the characters a set of very human idiosyncrasies" (71). However, because the writer retains an emotional connection, there is the possibility of retaining too much

of what 'really happened' without sufficient regard to the needs of the dramatic work and the plausibility of a character's actions (72). Hall also cautions the writer: "sometimes those things in our lives that are inherently the most dramatic are also the most threatening or the most disturbing" (73). While a journey of self-discovery can be an important aspect of anyone's life, Hall suggests that writers should be aware of the risks when approaching painful material from life. He states: "Such exploration has led both to excellent plays and to some tortured, damaged lives" and that one choice in such a situation is for the playwright to "seek professional counseling" to aid in dealing with difficult or traumatic experiences (74).

While writing from life experience is acknowledged to be an important part of the process by many writers, I am again reminded of the unique way in which I blended my life experience with fiction. During my writing process, I also blended the 'seat of the pants to the seat of the chair method' of writing with getting up on my feet and performing my narrative as a means of script writing. My performance of my story - my personal narrative - became an integral part of the writing of *Survival Dance*. It is essential to have a basic understanding of the current playwriting literature. Without such an understanding, we

cannot build upon that body of knowledge to explore additional methods of creating play texts. To offer an understanding of ways in which I moved from traditional playwriting methods, in the next section I will discuss the literature of personal narratives and personal narratives in performance.

### **Performance of Personal Narrative**

Personal narratives are the stories we tell about our lives. They are stories about the "small" and "large" moments, the everyday as well as the special occasion or extraordinary event. Whether it is the story of an incident that happened to a friend or a recounting of a problem we are experiencing, we reach out to others to share our story--to tell our personal narrative. The *performance* of a personal narrative can be seen as when the teller breaks away from an everyday telling and develops the performance of the story for an audience (Bauman, 1977: 22). Such movement toward a performative mode might include an introduction to the story, such as: "Did I tell you about running into Jan at the game?" Additionally, through subsequent tellings, a storyteller might repeat a story, crafting the telling for his or her audience based upon responses from previous audiences. The teller may also



refine her story, guided by who the audience is and what purpose the story is to serve (Lawless 2001: 37-40; Allen 237; Langellier 1989: 269; Bell 101).

Our stories connect us not only to our culture and community, but they also help us connect with our *selves*, helping us define who we are. In *Storytelling in Daily Life*, Langellier and Peterson state: "storytelling matters: it is an integral and consequential part of daily life" (1). In *Performance: Texts & Contexts*, Stern and Henderson state that these narratives:

tell about personal, lived experience in a way that assists in the construction of identity, or reinforces or challenges private and public belief systems and values, and either resists or reinforces the dominant cultural practices of the community in which the narrative event occurs. (35)

Our stories, then, are a way in which we define our *selves*. They are our building blocks to understanding our experiences and how those experiences shape and define our lives and our relationships, both with our *selves* and with others.

Performance Studies brings to the table a broad definition of the theatrical event. In "A Paradigm for Performance Studies" Pelias and VanOosting challenge the idea of traditional theatre that is often "bound by fixed temporal/spatial settings and artistic purposes" stepping

across the footlights onto a social stage" (224). Personal narrative performance as a theatrical event takes that step "across the footlights." The writer is also the performer, challenging an audience with the real, lived experience of the performer. Peterson and Langellier discuss ways in which such methods politicize the personal experience in "Politics of Personal Narrative Methodology." They state: "There is no way as narrator, researcher, or performer to 'step out of' or 'hide behind' the performance of personal narrative" (146). With the performance being part of the creator and the creator being part of the performance, such theatrical events change with the growth of creator/performer. In other words these texts evolve throughout the run of the performance. This process is different from the traditional writing and performance of a play in which the text of the play is what is performed each night.

While it is readily accepted that a *performance* of a play is different each night it is performed, this difference comes through the fact that the performance is live, with a different audience each night, different reactions, and differences in actor delivery of lines--the same lines. So while the *performance* is somewhat different, each night, the *text* remains the same. In contrast, the

personal narrative performance is different because the act of performing continues to shape the performer and his or her identity, thereby changing the performance itself.

Some scholar/artists have explored the therapeutic aspects of the performance of personal narrative as one part of the larger picture of the development of a performance. In "Verbal Promiscuity or Healing Art?: Writing the Creative/Performative Personal Narrative" from *The Future of Performance Studies*, Carilli asks "Is performance studies a healing art? By healing art, I mean a personally transformative study of the self" (233). Throughout my research for this dissertation I discovered that creating a personal narrative about my experiences with IPV became one step in *my* personal journal of healing. I cannot speak for everyone who creates personal narrative performances, declaring that everyone who creates such a performance is "personally transformed."

To situate my autoethnography within the framework of what has been seen as artistic representations of the lived experience, I explore works of two scholar/artists who have developed and performed personal narratives about life challenges. These individuals cross over into my next subject area: Story in the Healing Process. Both have used the theatrical performance of personal narrative as a way

of connecting with the audience to bring issues of importance into the public eye, putting a face on an issue. They have also found that the development and performances of their stories connect or re-connect them with themselves, offering a way to "make sense" of their challenges.

Linda Park-Fuller wrote, developed, and performed *A Clean Breast of It* partly as a way of dealing with the emotional and physical challenges of her experiences with breast cancer. Tami Spry used her performance of *Skins: A Daughter's (Re)construction of Cancer* as one method of dealing with the loss of her mother. These scholar/artists are among the many who have explored the multi-faceted aspects of performance of personal narrative. Park-Fuller states that there were "Three dynamics [that] operated in the formation of" *A Clean Breast of It*: "an educational impulse, a sociopolitical impulse, and a performative impulse" (214). Spry discusses what it means to perform a personal narrative:

Although the performative autobiographical location is a space of intense personal and cultural risk, it is simultaneously a space of profound comfort. It has become for me a site of narrative authority . . . [and] the process of generating and performing autobiography offers me the power to reclaim and rename my voice and body privately in rehearsal, and then publicly in performance. (361)

My transformation in the way I told my story moved from silence, to talking with a few trusted individuals in private and therapeutic settings, to discussions of my story with half a dozen medical students, to larger groups of medical students,<sup>6</sup> to a performance of my story, to the fictionalizing of my experiences into a stage play. My progression was not always linear. By examining how others view the telling of their own stories, I better situate my own analysis of how my journeys progressed. In the next section I will discuss story in healing process, from sharing stories for purposes of caring for our health to the healing aspects of the story in writing and theatre.

### **Story in the Healing Process**

Visual and performing arts have become important as therapeutic tools over the past few decades.<sup>7</sup> Although my dissertation has to do in part with my own healing process, since I am not a therapist, I do not attempt to suggest specific therapies for others. Although my readings of various arts therapies inform my work, my autoethnography will address my own artistic and personal journeys so that

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<sup>6</sup> I have labeled my talks with medical students as “pre-performance narratives.” Additional pre-performance narratives include private conversations with significant others and within counseling encounters.

<sup>7</sup> For more information on arts therapy, see: Blatner 1973 and 2000; and Spencer.

therapeutic aspects of my healing journey will be filtered through my own lens.

What happens if we *don't* tell our story? If stories are a way of connecting us with our selves and our community, does *not* telling our story isolate us? The stories we tell help us to construct our identity (Fivush 1998: 79; Roberts & Holmes 13; Stern & Henderson 35; and Leah White 81). Prior to telling my own story of involvement in an abusive relationship, I continually stood on the edge of an emotional precipice. Roberts and Holmes state in the Preface to *Healing Stories*: "At the heart of any therapeutic encounter there is always a story" (ix). Decades after leaving an abusive relationship, I had still told only a handful of people. I never talked about it - "it" was over. But sometimes, *sometimes* I would become stuck somewhere between the safety and joy of my current life and the flashbacks and fear of my previous life.

Eventually I began to talk about "it." And as I began to tell my own story of relationship violence, I began developing a sense of agency. Was I re-constructing my self? The more I told my story, the more I discovered the possibilities of healing and helping through the telling of my story. I wanted to educate others and I needed to find a

way to empower my *self*. Was *story* a way to fulfill these needs?

In the Introduction to *Healing Stories*, Roberts expresses concern about the "loss of the person" in a case history. For health care providers to serve the needs of the patients, Roberts argues for the need to have *both* the narrative provided by the patient, often seen as subjective, and the clinical accounts of the providers, often seen as objective. When providers work toward a balance between the dualistic subjective vs. objective points of view, they will not remove the illness from the patient. Providers will treat the illness not as a separate entity, but as part of the whole person. When the whole person is treated, it is easier to integrate the entirety of life experiences as being part of the building blocks of the self. The idea of integration informs my work on both the personal and the artistic levels. Personally, to acknowledge and accept my experiences with abuse encourages my acceptance of my experiences as being part of who I am. Artistically, exploring my experiences brings me a greater understanding of the character in my play, which allows me to make creative choices that are dramatically interesting.

In "The Role of Narrative in Medicine: A Multi-theoretical Perspective," authors Smyth, Gould, and Slobin

suggest that stories "are structured to communicate, evaluate, and culturally encode complex events" (2000: 3)<sup>8</sup>. Because of these roles of narrative, the authors propose: "stories characterize significant aspects of the therapeutic encounter" (3). While the time crunch of many practitioners in a clinical setting is common knowledge, the authors examined other ways in which to enable patients to tell their stories. The authors report the conclusions of a 1999 study (Smyth et al.) in which the findings discussed patients *writing* their stories. They conclude that:

First, writing a narrative about stressful life events can produce symptom reduction in patients with chronic illness . . . [and] second, an explicit 'listener' or 'audience' may not be required for the narrative to be helpful. (6)

They further state: "the narrative itself may constitute an important part of the healing process" (7). Such information about narrative reinforces what others in various fields have said about the importance for individuals telling their story to make sense of challenges and traumas in their lives. It also encourages me to explore my need for an audience in my own work.

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<sup>8</sup> The page numbers for this article are based on a print out of the article accessed online rather than the print version of the article.



*The Self on the Page: Theory and Practice of Creative Writing in Personal Development* offers several essays of interest about storytelling in the healing process. Editors Fiona Sampson and Celia Hunt draw from various sources to respond to the growing interest in the UK of the "practice of autobiography and creative writing as a means of gaining insight into oneself, of coping with . . . emotional trauma" (10). In "Writing or Pills: Therapeutic Writing in Primary Health Care" Bolton reports on a research project based at the Institute of Primary Care and General Practice at Sheffield University in which six general practice physicians offered writing therapy to patients who were anxious or depressed "as an addition, or an alternative to other forms of management of their symptoms" (82). While not without challenges, the program was embraced by the patients involved, prompting one to state: "it helped people understand themselves better" (85). My own writing process was instrumental for me in dealing with my healing process from partner violence. Exploring the literature of ways in which others have used writing as therapy gives me another way to view my own work as well as explore possibilities for further connections of my processes.

In "Autobiography and the Psychotherapeutic Process" Hunt discusses assumptions regarding goals in both

autobiographical writing and goals in psychotherapy. She concludes that self-analysis should be in conjunction with therapeutic encounters and that while "fictionalising from [the] self" does not constitute a 'writing cure' [it] can be a valuable tool" (195). This essay serves as a reminder to me that although I found the artistic process therapeutic, it might not be for everyone.

The author also differentiates between the methods of writing that are therapeutic and therapy that is writing. For the above-stated reason I also find the Sampson and Hunt essay "Towards a Writing Therapy? Implications of Existing Practice and Theory" to be of interest. In the essay, the authors define creative writing and personal development. They discuss creative writing that "includes imaginative or literary writing across the genres, from drama to poetry, including literary travel writing, [and] autobiography as well as fiction" (199-200). The authors define personal development as "any process of beneficial self-reflexive change which an individual chooses to undertake" (200). Most important for my work is their emphasis that the work reflects practices that "*explicitly link* personal development with creative writing" (199-200).<sup>9</sup> For me, the definition is important because it validates

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<sup>9</sup> Italics are those of the Sampson and Hunt.

that creative writing can be an important part of personal development.

Sampson and Hunt additionally offer three models of purpose in writing: 1) Literary or product-oriented work, in which the writing becomes therapeutic "by default rather than by design" as well as writing that "consciously uses self-exploration to produce a literary work." 2) Writerly or process-oriented work in which writing is seen as a means to "feel better" and as a therapeutic activity and 3) Therapeutic work that incorporates writing. In this model therapists use writing "as one means of therapy" (201). My artistic, scholarly, and personal work is both product and process-oriented. By product-oriented, I mean the purpose of the work is the end result. I define process-oriented work as an exploration of ways in which to work - the product is, in part, the process. Using Sampson and Hunt's definitions offers a framework for where and how the goals of process and product, personal healing journey and artistic writing journey, connect, separate, and flow together.

Another way in which healing may result from the process of storytelling is in social activist theatre. Creating theatre specifically to give voice to marginalized individuals as well as to shed light on social injustices

continues to be an important part of theatre worldwide.<sup>10</sup> In "Going the Distance: Trauma, Social Rupture, and the Work of Repair," Ellen Kaplan discusses several theatrical events in which individuals worked to give voice, create empathy, and initiate dialogue. In some of the projects she discusses, the individuals performed themselves before performing someone else, while additionally watching others perform themselves. This development process is of interest because of the various ways in which I worked on the text of *Survival Dance*, both performing my own story and writing a fictional character that I watched another actor perform. Discussing a program in South Africa, Kaplan states:

Survivors, in acting out their stories, have indicated that repeating stories in public has given them agency, reversing the (self) perception of victimhood. Through speaking and performing, people became agents of their own healing. (180)

The use of story in the healing process addresses numerous life challenges for a variety of individuals from various cultures who have survived various tragedies and traumas. To focus on my own experiences, I next look to the literature on recovering from traumatic experiences.

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<sup>10</sup> For additional information about individuals and theatre groups involved in various aspects of social activist theatre, see: Blank and Jensen 2005; Boal; Colleran and Spence; Kuflinec, 2003; and Saldana.

## **Trauma Recovery**

Discovering literature regarding trauma recovery has been especially helpful in my exploration of my personal journey of healing. I had long wondered why, after so many years, my experiences with abuse still haunted me to the degree they did. Two books on trauma, treatment, and recovery offer an overview of the physiological and psychological effects of trauma. Both *The Body Remembers* by Babette Rothchild and *Trauma and Recovery* by Judith Herman address the "how" and "why" of reactions to and healing from traumatic experiences. Rothchild's work explores much of what happens neurobiologically when an individual experiences trauma. Herman guides the reader through the healing processes of survivors of various traumas. Although I am not an expert in the field of trauma therapy and recovery, the study of these works has clarified the process of my personal journey. Additionally, they give a theoretical lens through which I now view how my personal process was integral to and resulted in an artistic product, and vice versa. In Chapter Two, I further discuss details of my connections with the material and how those connections impacted my analysis of my process.

Two articles from the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* discuss the long-term effects of intimate partner

violence. In "Intimate Partner Violence and Long-Term Psychosocial Functioning in a National Sample of American Women," Zlotnick, Johnson, and Kohn state that: "existing research suggests that the effects of IPV on the health of women are likely to be long term" (263). Similarly, Loxton, Schofield, and Hussain report on a study of midlife Australian women. They state: "the psychosocial impact of domestic violence may be long lasting" (1094). Although not as helpful for my purposes of this autoethnography, both articles offered me validation of my own experiences. Writing this dissertation, I expected to have moved past my challenges of my past abuse. I realized, however, that I once again felt validated in my own experiences because my challenges and feelings about my abuse were similar to those of other women. I realized that I still need some validation from other women's experience to make the reality of my own experiences meaningful. The process is never quite finished. As in other areas of life and growth, aspects of a healing from abuse can be a continuing process.

An exploration of the literature regarding trauma offers me explanations of my responses to the long-ago abuse I experienced, as well as ways in which my artistic work impacted my healing process. To offer a focus on

specific reasons for my own trauma, I will now examine literature about intimate partner violence.

### **Intimate Partner Violence**

To place my work within the context of the literature on intimate partner violence, I have reviewed various aspects of the available information. There is a wealth of self-help books geared for assisting women who are experiencing abuse or who have recently left an abusive relationship (Dugan and Hock; Levy 1993). For purposes of this dissertation I found the more helpful IPV literature includes books and articles that tell narrative stories of women's experiences and writing by and for medical professionals on the subject of IPV.

The literature including stories of women who have been abused varies in style from the author of the book sharing the stories of the women to transcripts of the women speaking their own stories. In *Not to People Like Us: Hidden Abuse in Upscale Marriages*, Susan Weitzman weaves the individual stories of women into the broader story of abuse in middle and upper-income relationships. Weitzman discusses how a woman constructs a complex identity through the "story" of her self while she is involved in an abusive relationship (114-116). Afterward, the woman must learn to

re-construct her life narrative (192-94). Therefore, once the woman begins to tell her story, she begins to find her *self* again and is then able to tell and view her story through her own eyes and not the eyes of her abuser. Weitzman's discussions reveal connections to my own storytelling, both in my own life and as I approached rewriting my play.

In the Introduction to *Surviving Domestic Violence: Voices of Women Who Broke Free*, Elaine Weiss states that this book is "a travel guide to a country no one visits willingly, the collective of tales of past travelers making the landscape less threatening, less alien" (5). Weiss offers the stories of twelve women from across the country that left abusive relationships. Weiss's use of "travel guide" (5) meshes with the idea of journey in my own work.

Additional stories are found in Elaine Lawless' book *Women Escaping Violence: Empowerment Through Narrative*. An ethnographer, Lawless paints a vivid picture of her interactions with women living in a shelter, while allowing the women to speak in their own voice. The recognition of the importance of women telling their stories, as well as the self-reflective nature of the work, serves as a model of ways in which to explore my own narratives. For example, discussing violence against women, Lawless recognizes not



only the importance of what we can learn from the telling of women's stories, but also that "the very act of telling their stories, and our own, is the significance of the project" (8). I take her idea another step. In my autoethnography I tell my story of my journeys beyond the abuse I experienced.

Building on Lawless' idea, I find the *act* of telling my story of my journey is significant not only from what might be learned from listening to my journey story, but also *because* I am telling it. As Lawless states: "we can learn about the significance of speaking" the story (8). While she refers to women's stories during the violent relationship, I refer to a process of recovery after a violent relationship. The act of claiming the voice of my *self*, of being the one to name my experiences, becomes, as Lawless suggests, "the significant moment, the *now* of the process" (8).

Lawless also continuously reminds her readers of her presence in the process. Whether discussing books that inspire her as she writes her own (73) or drawing the reader into the lives of the women's stories by asking a question that won't allow us to look away (103), Lawless is part of the story. By acknowledging her own self-reflective process story within her process of collecting women's

stories, Lawless offers a model upon which I draw for this dissertation.

There is also a body of literature guiding the medical professions in working with women during and after an abusive relationship. These works range from ways in which a provider might identify patients within their practice who might be a victim or a batterer, to guidelines for intervention and prevention within a clinical setting, post-traumatic stress disorder and how it relates to the trauma of intimate partner violence, and the identification and treatment of anxiety and depression of women involved in or recovering from an abusive relationship (Eyler and Cohen; Gomel; Liebschutz, Frayne, and Saxe). I find several useful insights in the IPV literature for and from the medical community. Such insights include 1) gaining another way to look at my role in talking with medical students and how the medical community might view hearing my story; 2) how my talks with medical students may have influenced how I envisioned the audience as I wrote *Survival Dance*; 3) the idea that some of what I wanted the audience to understand about IPV is similar to the understanding medical professionals have regarding abuse; and 4) additional understanding of my self in my personal and artistic journeys.

I cannot look at the process of healing without an understanding of intimate partner violence. By examining the literature on IPV I gain insight into both my artistic process in the play as well as my personal journey of healing. By looking at theories of the causes and explanations of such violence, as well as theories of women's responses to IPV, I can better understand the connections and confluences of personal and artist choices.

In "Theories of Intimate Partner Violence" from *Family Violence and Nursing Practice*, authors Fishwick, Campbell & Taylor review theories of causes of IPV, including psychobiological, substance abuse, social learning perspective, family systems and family stress theories, and feminist or power imbalance theory (38). To explain the problem of intimate partner violence more thoroughly, the authors explore various frameworks that integrate the theories of causation. The Sociocultural model incorporates the theory that abusive behaviors are learned in childhood (social learning perspective), and the family stress theory minimizes batterer responsibility with social and cultural factors (similar to imbalance theory). The Ecological model is, according to the authors, a "multi-faceted phenomenon [that] integrates research findings from several disciplines, including feminist theory, into an explanatory

framework of gender-based IPV" (41). Theories of women's responses to IPV include the sociocultural and the psychological. The Sociocultural Perspectives Theory seeks to explain women's responses to IPV by focusing on the idea that "social barriers" such as male dominance and family privacy, inhibit a woman's ability to change her situation (48). The Psychological Perspectives Theory has moved away from the idea of "learned helplessness" (48) toward a "survivor model" (49). The authors state that a survivor model employs:

an important unifying theme [in which] women's responses to abuse reflect a dynamic process that evolves according to the nature of the abuse, their interpretations of the abuse, and the relationship as a whole. (50).

The point of view that an abused woman should be seen *not* as a victim but as a survivor is reflected in both scholarly research as well as anecdotal IPV literature (de Becker; Hawker; Kelly and Radford; Weiss). It is important to see the survivor model explored in the literature, because moving beyond the label of "victim" toward the more empowering idea of "survivor" is a key element in the journey of my character in *Survival Dance*. Since I am working autoethnographically, such a model reinforces what I have done artistically as well as personally.

Although many women, advocates, and professional education programs still accept Lenore Walker's (1979, 1984, 2000) Cycle Theory of Violence (tension building, acute battering, and honeymoon phase) as the norm for abusive relationships, Fishwick, Campbell, and Taylor discuss research in which the honeymoon phase of apology did not occur. They further discuss a "qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews" with women survivors of IPV from which they found the following four phases of intimate partner violence emerge: binding, enduring, disengaging, and recovery (51). An important note is that while all the women studied reported moving through all four phases, they were *not necessarily linear* (italics mine). The four phases offered by Campbell, Fishwick, and Taylor give me a theoretical lens through which to look at my autoethnographic work. Until recently, I compared my experiences with Walker's Cycle Theory of Violence. While some of the cycle was true to my experience, there were numerous differences. Exploration of the four phases of IPV and the non-linear way in which these phases impacted my experiences encourages my connections between my own IPV experience and my artistic and personal journeys.

On first examining the literature review, some readers might not seem directly related to my study. That idea is

false. Since my study is autoethnographic, all literature reviewed serves a dual purpose in my study: It broadens my understanding of abuse in relationships while allowing me to also focus on my *self*. Performing both functions simultaneously is at the heart of autoethnography: the other is the self; the self is the other.

Performers continue to develop and perform personal narrative performances, and those who are scholar/artists analyze and write about their work.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, some playwrights write about their process of specific works or their writing process in general.<sup>12</sup> As previously stated, the writing and rewriting of the text of *Survival Dance* combined several processes outside the lone writing method that is traditionally taught in playwriting classes. My process included pre-performance narratives, the development and performance of personal narratives, and finally, the fictionalizing of the lived experience through these performances into a script performed by other actors. The current research in writing for performance should include an in-depth, self-reflective analysis of one

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<sup>11</sup> For more information on performance scholars who offer narrative scripts, essays on the development of performances, and theories regarding aspects of personal narratives such as healing, performance theory, and auto/biography, see Carver, Jones, Miller, Park-Fuller, Spry, and Taylor in *Voices Made Flesh*, ed. Miller, Taylor, and Carver.

<sup>12</sup> Blank and Jensen, Mamet, Nelson, and David M. White are examples of playwrights who have reflected upon and written about their process of writing.

woman's response to and healing from the trauma of IPV through the steps that blend the personal and artistic journeys in the writing of a stageplay. By giving voice to these processes, I hope to encourage others to explore how they find connections and confluences in their own journeys. In the next section I discuss my methods and the literature that informs the processes and products of ethnography and autoethnography.

## **ETHNOGRAPHY AND AUTOETHNOGRAPHY**

To become an ethnographer who writes new ethnographies requires . . . habits that are beyond method. These ethnographic practices involve a craft that anyone can learn, but there is also an art to it, a confluence made out of a persona and the process, one that separates those who know about and can theorize new ethnography from those who know about, theorize about, and do it. (Goodall 10)

### **Ethnography**

It seems that I have done something akin to ethnography my entire life: in-depth watching, exploring, listening, observing, touching, tasting, asking, experiencing, and watching some more. In *Ethnography: A Way of Seeing*, Harry Wolcott states: "all humans do what ethnographers do, only on a more modest scale and for personal rather than professional reasons" (16). So how does the watching, listening, and exploring that we all

perform daily differ from a researcher's use of ethnography as a method of scholarly inquiry? How do the personal reasons differ from the professional reasons?

To answer these questions, I will first offer a brief background of ethnography. Traditionally, ethnography was viewed as objective research, offering "observer neutrality" (Denzin and Lincoln 2002: 2). With its roots in anthropology, ethnography has continued to evolve as an accepted research tool for various additional disciplines, including performance studies, sociology, folklore, and health professions. Ethnography is research of and writing about a specific culture and/or a particular event through in-depth observation. Ellis defines ethnography as "writing about or describing people and culture, using firsthand observation and participation in a setting or situation." (2004: 26). Ethnography is descriptive, engaging the senses and how the sights, sounds, and smells reveal meanings and impact the culture or event and those engaging in it. Such detailed and descriptive observations and the analysis and writing of those observations, is the work of the ethnographer (Emerson). Ethnographic description also allows the researcher to connect her work to other political and/or social spheres. Ellis and Bochner describe ethnography as "what ethnographers do. It's an activity.



Ethnographers inscribe patterns of cultural experience; they give perspective on life" (1996: 16). Field research, in which ethnographers lived, worked, and played with the 'subjects' of their research, eventually became a struggle as some researchers began to realize that they could not remain entirely objective as they became participants in the culture studied (Emerson 37; Lawless, 1992; Ellis, 2004: 9).

Such self-reflection is defined by Goodall as the "new" ethnography. He states: "By new ethnography, I mean creative narratives shaped out of a writer's personal experiences within a culture and addressed to academic and public audiences" (9). Such ethnographies are also, according to Goodall, sometimes labeled autoethnography.

### **Autoethnography**

In *The Ethnographic I*, Carolyn Ellis discusses goals of autoethnography:

The goal is to practice an artful, poetic, and empathetic social science in which readers can keep in their minds and feel in their bodies the complexities of concrete moments of lived experience. These writers want readers to be able to put themselves in the place of others, within a culture of experience that enlarges their social awareness and empathy. (30)

Scholars have continued to push the self-reflexive boundaries of ethnography and ethnographic writing. In the Introduction to *The Qualitative Inquiry Reader*, editors Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln demonstrate how the labels various scholars have placed on types of ethnographies are interconnected. In their discussion of reflexive ethnography the authors remind us that the ethnographer is "morally and politically self-aware, self-consciously present in his or her writing, often speaking with the first-person voice" (xii).

To further an understanding of the expansion of ethnography to autoethnography, I will identify definitions and interpretations of autoethnography. The autoethnography continuum begins with the point of view that autoethnography is seen *only* as the self-reflexive portion of a larger ethnographic study. David Hayano used the term in his research about poker players. An experienced player himself, Hayano situated himself within the world of the poker players, becoming an active participant-observer in his ethnography. The self-reflective portion of his ethnography he labeled autoethnography. Other scholars embrace multiple aspects of the definition of autoethnography. In *Auto/ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social*, Reed-Danahay stated the "term has a double

sense - referring either to the ethnography of one's own group or to autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest" (2).

A broader perspective of autoethnography comes from scholars who embrace a definition of autoethnography in which the autoethnographer is self-reflexive within his or her own experience and culture. In *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel About Autoethnography*, Ellis offers her "brief answer" to the question of "what is autoethnography?" She states that autoethnography is "research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political" (xix). Addressing the cultural, social, and political impact that can be drawn from performance of personal narrative, Ellis states that such performance "makes hidden issues visible and in doing so, opens the possibility of cultural transformation" (207-8). In other words, if we refuse to allow a voice to remain silenced, we make an impact culturally, politically, and/or socially. If the individual to whom we give voice is our *self*, we then connect our personal experiences to the broader picture.

Some researchers have explored the feminist influences on the autoethnographic process (Jewett; Mykhalovskiy). At question is western culture's traditionally accepted idea

of dualisms in which there is a distinct separation between mind and body, reason and passion, objective and subjective (Ramazanoglu 26-28). In *Feminist Methodology*, Caroline Ramazanoglu states: "The valuing of personal experience, however, is not the same as subjectivity being separate from, or superior to objectivity" (53). Ellis and Bochner offer a similar critique. They suggest that some individuals are educated to "treat human subjectivity as a threat to rationality" and that "objective truth has to be given priority over emotion and opinion" (1996: 21). Similarly, Eric Mykhalovskiy states that autobiographical writing "does indulge the self of the writer by treating the writer's experience as worthy of inquiry" (235). To work autoethnographically, one must accept the mind (brain) and body as one inseparable whole. What the body experiences, the mind (brain) also experiences.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, an autoethnographer regards reason and passion, thoughts and feelings as equally important parts of the whole person - knowing and feeling become entwined, and feeling *is* one way of knowing. Finally, objective and subjective points of view can occur simultaneously.

If one maintains a strict, dualistic point-of-view, autoethnography will not be an acceptable method of

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<sup>13</sup> For more details on the "mind-body connection" see Rothchild.

investigation. If one accepts the idea of interdependence to maintain and reveal a 'whole,' then autoethnography should be accepted as a valid and scholarly method of research and production of knowledge.

If researchers view an experience as *either* an 'objective' truth or an 'emotional' truth, are they negating the *wholeness* of that experience? In *Forbidden Narratives*, Kathryn Church both defends autoethnography and defines two important uses of the process. She states that autoethnography:

is not narcissism; it is not ego-centric self-indulgence...the social analysis accomplished by this form is based on two assumptions: first, that it is possible to learn about the general from the particular; second, that the self is a social phenomenon. (216)

The aforementioned scholars suggest that the *self* is a worthy subject for research. Such research, however, must be undertaken with an understanding that not everything can (or should) be separated. If our stories are not separate from our *self* and our *self* is not separate from the culture, then our stories are not separate from our culture. For my project, I cannot remove my writer and survivor selves from my researcher self. How the personal and artistic journeys connected and flowed together is the focus of my exploration in this dissertation.

Drawing from various sources and disciplines, Carolyn Ellis identifies qualities and goals of autoethnography that some qualitative researchers have embraced (2004: 30).

These qualities and goals include autoethnography as:

- 1) "Evoking an emotional experience in readers."<sup>14</sup>
- 2) "Giving voice to stories and groups of people traditionally left out of social scientific inquiry."<sup>15</sup>
- 3) "Producing writing of high literary/artistic quality."<sup>16</sup>
- 4) "Improving readers', participants', and authors' lives."<sup>17</sup>

To address the goals suggested by Ellis, in this dissertation I draw the reader into specific experiences in my life through what I hope is readable and engaging narrative (Ellis' numbers 1 and 3) and I give voice to myself as a survivor of IPV and as a playwright (Ellis' number 2). Additionally, I hope by offering a way in which to further understand IPV trauma and the use of art as a tool in healing from such trauma, I might improve the lives of others. I know I have improved my own (Ellis' number 4).

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<sup>14</sup> See also Ellis, 1997.

<sup>15</sup> See also DeVault, 1990.

<sup>16</sup> See also Richardson 2000.

<sup>17</sup> See also Denzin 1997 and Fine 1994.

Other researchers have used autoethnographies to accomplish the above goals. In her dissertation at Louisiana State University, Laura Jewett researched Zydeco dancing. As a white woman dancing "mostly with black Creole men" (55) Jewett explores the process of learning, while simultaneously reflecting upon the racial and gender issues inherent in "intimate" research such as Zydeco dance (2006). In the heartfelt autoethnography "My Mother is Mentally Retarded," by Carol Rambo Ronai recounts her own story of growing up and intellectually outgrowing her own mother by the time she was seven years old. She offers information on abuses and neglect suffered during childhood while also reflecting upon the impact of her past on her life today (109-31). Lisa Tillmann-Healy, in "A Secret Life of Thinness," offers a portrait of her *self* living with bulimia. Through memories and poetry, Tillmann-Healy draws the reader into her lived experience without revealing "what it all means" (104-105). All three women place themselves, as their subjects, within the broader social, cultural, and political framework. They give voice and evoke emotion. By viewing the world of each woman, readers are able to broaden their own awareness and, as Church suggests, "learn about the general from the particular (216)." I too, will place my self and my process center

stage in this work. I will reflect upon my self, and then by turning the mirror, I will ask the reader to reflect upon his or her own processes, biases, work, and life.

Since theatre as a discipline has not engaged in a significant amount of autoethnographic work, the field is open for exploration. From the beginning, theatre as an art has offered a voice and created empathy in audiences. Theatre has also been political and it has been personal. Because autoethnography recognizes the importance of, and gives voice to, the artists' own in-depth exploration of her process, I find it exciting to use autoethnography within scholarship of theatre. The use of this method is empowering for both the field and myself.

## **ORGANIZATION**

This dissertation consists of six chapters. Guided by the idea that form follows function, I use a traditional chapter organizational method that is informed by the structure of a play. I also draw upon "moment work," a technique developed by Moises Kaufman for the writing and staging of *The Laramie Project*. Kaufman explains the idea of such structure:

A moment does not mean a change of locale or an entrance or exit of actors or characters. It is simply a unit of theatrical time that



is then juxtaposed with other units to convey meaning. (xiv)

For my purposes in this dissertation, I use the idea of 'moments' to explore units of *life* time. Then, when "juxtaposed with other units" as well as the scholarly literature addressing the issues surrounding such moments and their uses, I explore how such units "convey meaning" in the writing and healing journeys. This organizational method enables me to use both a creative structure that is guided by the needs of the telling of a story--as well as the more traditional chapter structure that encourages scholarly focus on the research.

These Moments, indeed, much of this dissertation, might be defined as performative writing . . . yet performative writing defies definition. In the Preface to *Green Window*, the participant/contributors dance with the idea of performative writing. Jonathan Gray describes many possibilities, including that performative writing is "a call for the celebration of aesthetic writing as scholarly writing; a critique of the norms of academic writing" (viii). "What is performative writing?" Lesa Lockford asks the question and then argues that such a question "is positively unanswerable . . . and yet, performative writing is knowable" (xi). Nathan Stucky suggests that performative

writing “. . . requires faith that language inked on a page can ‘do’ as well as ‘be’” (xii). Fred Cory states that, “No one definition of performative writing can or will exist” (xii). It is, as Lynn Miller and Ronald Pelias describe, “writing where the body and the spoken word, performance practice and theory, the personal and the scholarly, come together” (v). For me, performative writing is a methodology that is at once an invitation and a confirmation. I am invited to express myself wholly - I am not asked to separate my self into selves: artistic, scholarly, personal. In *A Methodology of the Heart*, Ronald Pelias describes being drawn to working without “hiding behind the illusion of objectivity” because of a “feeling of lack” in some traditional scholarship. He “seek[s] another discourse, . . . a scholarship that fosters connections, opens spaces for dialogue, heals” (1-2). My writing *is* a performance and performance does not separate my mind from my body from my voice. Performance writing as a methodology was not only an important part of my development of *Survival Dance*, but also as a way in which I conducted my research. My form of writing functions as integral to my work.

The Moments are placed within the body of the text of each chapter. Sometimes the placement may be recognized as

a smooth transition - the reader will see and understand the "why here and now?" of a particular Moment. Other times, however, the placement may seem an abrupt shift in the continuity of the dissertation. Such Moments are abrupt shifts in focus. The *function* of the Moments is to reveal life information necessary for the reader to understand the writing and development of the script of *Survival Dance*. The *form* of the Moments is sometimes a traceable, linear progression of thought - and sometimes not. They are like thoughts darting through your mind: sometimes you can trace what precipitated the thought, sometimes you cannot. *Was it another thought that brought the new thought? Was it a sense memory?* Similarly, sometimes if you trace the actions that preceded a violent act, you can see a build to the violence. That does not justify or excuse the violence nor is it a way of blaming the survivor. I know that thinking back over a violent experience, I have sometimes been able to trace the path that led to the violence. Other times, the violence occurred out of the blue. It is the same with flashbacks. Sometimes I could find a trigger and sometimes the trigger was elusive. If you find you are sometimes surprised by the placement of a Moment within this dissertation, I will have succeeded in the form of the Moments.

Although there has been much crossover between each of the parts of my journeys, I divide this dissertation into three basic parts: pre-writing, writing, and development. The chapters are as follows:

## **CHAPTER TWO: THE PRE-WRITING JOURNEY**

In this chapter I discuss the beginnings of my journey of healing and writing. I discuss my pre-performance narratives, including the discussions presented with Robert Blake, Jr. M.D. to medical students and residents and my first classroom performance as a survivor. I explore how these pre-performance narratives informed the writing of *Survival Dance*. I draw from the literature of IPV and trauma recovery to explore how the pre-writing steps of my artistic journey were part of my personal journey of healing from a long-ago abusive relationship.

## **CHAPTER THREE: THE WRITING JOURNEY**

In this chapter I continue my autoethnography as I explore the writing of the play using traditional playwriting techniques. I include original developmental materials as well as character development, dream work, and the use of the self in writing. I will also explore the connections of my writing process with my personal journey.

I draw from the literature on playwriting and IPV to explore how my experiences with abuse impacted my writing process.

#### **CHAPTER FOUR: THE WRITING JOURNEY**

In this part of the dissertation I address the personal and artistic journeys that followed the writing of the original scripts. These journeys include the development of my personal narrative performance, *Resisting Myself*, the rehearsal process for production, guided actor improvisations, rewriting the script, productions, and feedback. I continue drawing from the literature of trauma recovery to explore my personal journey of healing through the development process.

#### **CHAPTER FIVE: THE SCRIPTED JOURNEY**

To demonstrate the creative work that emerged from my journeys, I include the most recent draft of my play, *Survival Dance* as well as the script for my personal narrative performance: "Resisting Myself."

#### **CHAPTER SIX: THE CONTINUING JOURNEY**

How did one woman guide her process of healing through connecting it with her art? In this part I will offer a

summary and conclusion of what I have learned and ways in which others may draw from the confluences and connections of my journeys.

#### **AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF AUTOETHNOGRAPHY**

I have studied autoethnography throughout all the years of my graduate education. I continue to use it as a research tool and as a method of documenting the results of my research. Additionally, I have taught the basics of ethnography and autoethnography as a research tool in the creation of new theatrical works. I have discovered, though, that apparently there was something about autoethnography that I was missing. In order to create a quality work, I needed to be certain that I understood the process. I had heard skeptics describe autoethnography quite differently from the methods I had studied, so I believed it was necessary for me to conduct additional research based on such descriptions.

Step One: investigate the charge that autoethnography is *self-indulgent*. Had I been spending too much time examining my research? Too much time on critical analysis? Had I been placing too much emphasis on situating my own work within the broader cultural and social framework? Could that be possible? Apparently, if I was to succeed

with my autoethnography, what I truly needed was to become a bit more *self-indulgent*. After much deliberation, I decided that chocolate might be considered a cross-disciplinary indulgence. And nothing says "indulgence" quite so nicely as bonbons. So my research, it seemed, would require a trip to The Candy Factory.<sup>18</sup>

Sunny day. Bright, blue skies. I found a parking place directly across from the store. When I entered the shop, it smelled of chocolate . . . always a good sign. I browsed throughout the store. There was a lot of candy: nonpareils, licorice, fudge, and candy sticks. A lot of the candy begged me to indulge, but I was on a mission: bonbons. I took a deep breath. The insides of my cheeks tingled with sweet anticipation of the taste of chocolate.

I smiled as I approached the counter. As I stood before an old-fashioned candy case with a wood frame and glass front, a young woman asked how she could help me.

"Do you have bonbons?"

She returned my smile. "Describe to me what you mean by bonbons."

I smiled bigger. "A chocolate confection with a fondant filling . . . ?"

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<sup>18</sup> The Candy Factory is a locally owned business situated in the heart of 'The District' in downtown Columbia, Missouri. With the exception of some national and international brands, most candies are handcrafted on site.

She grinned. "That sounds like our truffles. Would you like to try one?"

"No thank you. I need to take them with me." My smile grew even broader. "They're for research." I selected my truffles: dark chocolate, raspberry, and a mint chocolate.

The transaction complete, I headed toward the door. And then it happened. I stepped out of the shop and into a slow motion world of self-indulgence. My hair blew in a slow-motion breeze and my eyes closed in a long, slow motion blink. As I lifted the truffle to my mouth and took a bite of my research, a symphony reached a crescendo. If *this* was autoethnography, why weren't more people doing it? I threw my head back and, still in slow motion, shook my hair as if I was in a shampoo commercial. A throaty laugh escaped me.

How could I have missed this? Six years of coursework, research papers, IRB applications, conference presentations, performances, publications, plays . . . and all I really needed to do to be an autoethnographer was to indulge myself in a rich, creamy, chocolate morsel? Enlightenment is a double-edged sword. Although I was grateful for my newfound discovery, I realized that I had missed out on six years of creamy confections, opting instead for late nights of critical analysis.



But I wasn't finished with exploring my new autoethnographic research techniques. Still savoring the lingering sweetness of my bonbon/truffle, I headed back to campus for Step Two. Next on my research agenda? Navel-gazing.

I struggled with finding just the right spot on the campus. I wanted to situate myself so passers-by might include scholars familiar with the ethnographic process. I wanted others to know that I was engaged in research and should not be disturbed.

Although I have recently started working out, my abs are still a far cry from my dream abs, so I was a bit shy about exposing my abdomen in public. But, a researcher's gotta do what a researcher's gotta do. I must have chosen my spot well, because although I couldn't see the passersby - I was, after all, gazing at my navel - I could hear them. Whispers. A chuckle. And then I heard it: someone said "autoethnographer" followed by what at first I took to be a scoffing sound . . . but surely I was mistaken. After all, these were fellow ethnographers.

Time ticked on. I wasn't sure where my navel-gazing was supposed to lead. I mean, chocolate stands on its own, but navel-gazing? I was getting bored. My neck ached. I

began thinking I should look into the literature questioning autoethnography a little more.

I headed back home to my study. Back to my stacks of books and articles. Back to my computer, my notes, my research, and my writing.

\* \* \*

Could it be true? *Is* autoethnography nothing more than narcissistic, egocentric, self-indulgent navel-gazing? I returned to two writers who addressed such labeling by other scholars. Both Andrew Sparkes and Judith Okely countered the charges. In "Autoethnography: Self-Indulgence or Something More?" Sparkes states: "Autoethnography can encourage acts of witnessing, empathy, and connection that extend beyond the self of the author and thereby contribute to sociological understanding" (222). Okely offers an additional lens through which she focuses the goals and methods of autoethnography. In "Anthropology and Autobiography: Participatory Experience and Embodied Knowledge" she states: "Self adoration is quite different from self-awareness and a critical scrutiny of the self" (2). While both authors firmly align themselves with scholars who view autoethnography as a valuable method of critical inquiry, they also acknowledge potential pitfalls.

Sparkes states that autoethnographers "need to be aware that their writing can become self-indulgent" (214). I agree. We *do* need to be aware. Awareness of such pitfalls helps us retain our focus as researchers. It enables us to explore our personal connections and discover how those connections flow together with the cultural, political, and social issues with which we are faced.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE PRE-WRITING JOURNEY

### PRE-WRITING

To call this chapter the Pre-Writing Journey might be misleading. Writers are always “writing” even when we’re not *writing*. We write on keyboards, scribble in notebooks, and fill legal pads. We write when we don’t realize we’re writing: whether we’re gazing at the stars, taking a walk, or muttering under our breath as we’re stuck in traffic. We’re never quite sure how, when, and what of any of the “stuff of life” that we have hunted and gathered will become our art that reflects back on life. And so we work hard to be open to it all. We are writing when we’re writing as well as when we’re not.<sup>19</sup>

I define my pre-writing journey as the steps I took prior to the actual writing of the first draft of *Survival Dance*. Since writers are always writing, this chapter includes not only the linear progression of steps prior to the writing of the script, but also connecting Moments from my life.

All such experiences during the early part of my journeys were vital steps in both my personal and artistic

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<sup>19</sup> While many writers experience the “writing-without-really-writing” I have described, I particularly like the description William Miller offers in *Screenwriting for Film and Television*. He calls this stage of writing “incubation” and claims this stage is “one of the most valuable writing tools” (2). I agree.

processes. In *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman lists the "common pathways" of trauma recovery as: "establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story, and restoring the connection between survivors and their community" (3). As a writer, I also have a basic three-stage process: establishing foundations (gathering materials and tools), constructing the story (writing the script), and connecting the story with an audience.

#### **PACKING FOR THE JOURNEY**

Whenever I pack for a trip, I go overboard in the planning stages. On my bed I lay out neatly folded tops - usually two or three for each day of my trip so I have options. I fold several pairs of black slacks and usually throw in a pair of khaki slacks for good measure. Yet, how can I be sure that I have everything I need for the trip?

I then survey my bed filled with neatly folded stacks. Each piece of clothing is ready for the journey, but they can't all go. I can take only the essentials and so I carefully consider each article, examining whether or not it is necessary for this journey and then I put some away. Gradually I am left with what I need for my trip.

As I prepared for *this* journey, my autoethnographic exploration of the interrelationship of my personal healing

process and the writing process, I searched the far recesses of my memories. There I encountered joy and sorrow, laughter and tears. I revisited lazy summer afternoons of my childhood. I explored the big moments of my life: I married; I gave birth; I held the hand of my dying mother and with my sister sang "You Are My Sunshine." And I sifted through the small moments: I listened to waves splashing on rocks as I combed the beach for sea glass; I watched sunrises and sunsets and I sipped tea. I washed blood from my dress. Some memories I stumbled upon, some I excavated. All are important to me. My memories are the foundation of my *self*. So how did I choose? Since this autoethnography is about the connections and confluences of my personal and artistic journeys in the writing of my play, *Survival Dance*, I examined each memory. Did it fit for *this* journey? Is it a memory in need of critical examination that might illuminate how my artistic journey informed my healing journey? How my healing journey informed my artistic journey? And if so, how?

And so I have put many memories back. Most. I have put *most* back. I will save them and savor them in private. What remain are those memories that are the building blocks of this autoethnography. They are the essential elements to understanding my journeys.

## MOMENT: Acting Sick

One January I was told 96 times that I had pancreatic cancer. That's a lot of bad news. But the news wasn't real for me. Hearing such news and reacting to it was my job. I was a Standardized Patient. I acted sick for medical students.<sup>20</sup> When the University of Missouri School of Medicine changed its program in 1993, I became one of the first Standardized Patients to work with medical students.<sup>21</sup>

In the Introduction to Patient Care labs, Standardized Patients were used to allow students the opportunity to practice skills including basic interview techniques, basic physical exam, and more advanced skills such as delivering bad news to a patient, discussing substance abuse, and eliciting information from the patient regarding symptoms presented to the student doctor.

For ten years I performed this function in various capacities. I performed in training videos, worked in videotaped examinations for second year students, demonstrated interview techniques before lecture classes, and worked with small groups of first year medical students in IPC labs. Eventually, while working in Family & Community Medicine at the medical school, I met with each third year medical student as part of his or her learning experience in that department.

For emotional intensity, it is impossible to match the four-week marathon of the ninety-six bad news interviews. Several preceptors in the small group labs offered helpful suggestions of ways in which I could take care of myself emotionally during these training sessions. The emotions felt very real with many medical students. Although it was an artificial environment, these first year medical students had been learning about what happens when you can't "fix" someone - when you can't cure the disease and send the patient on his or her way to live a long and healthy life. They were learning about how to work with patients as individuals and not simply as patients. As these enthusiastic students approached our artificial

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<sup>20</sup> Simulated, or standardized patients have been working in medical education since the idea was introduced by Howard S. Barrows M.D. in the 1960s. For more information of the beginnings of the role of standardized patients, see Barrows 1971 and 1993; Blue et al 2000; and Whitehouse, Morris, and Marks 1984.

<sup>21</sup> The structure of the program during the first two years of medical school includes student participation in lectures and small group labs including Introduction to Patient Care (IPC) and Problems Based Learning (PBL). PBL labs cover the "application of basic science concepts [to] clinical scenarios." In other words, students move beyond memorizing the facts of science and apply their studies to real cases, further developing their knowledge base and diagnostic skills (muhealth.org).

encounter, they would offer the diagnosis, the prognosis, and reassurances that they would do everything they could to keep me comfortable. I encountered a variety of reactions from the students as they discussed pancreatic cancer with me: several students shed real tears along with me. While it was good to witness their compassion, I hoped they would learn to balance their feelings to take care of themselves. One student held my hands to reassure me. In his nervousness and discomfort, he gripped my hands tighter and tighter. And even tighter. Some, when I would cry, would listen to me sniff. They would watch me wipe my eyes on one sleeve and my nose on another. After the encounter they were mortified when they realized they had neglected such a basic and supportive courtesy as offering me a tissue. My personal favorite came from a young man who looked at me empathetically and explained, "I'm very sorry. You have prostate cancer."

Standardized Patient work was, and remains, some of the most rewarding work in my life. With each medical student I envisioned the hundreds or maybe even thousands of patients that individual would interact with in the course of his or her medical career. If what I was doing had even a small impact on that future physician's ability to communicate with patients and if even a small percentage of those patients benefited from the future physician's improved awareness of the importance of communication, the number of lives I might impact was tremendous. That felt good. Very good. Practicing with me as a "patient," students were free to learn about communicating with empathy, yet without the fear of devastating a real patient and her family if they "messed up."

These encounters with medical students influenced me as much as I hope they influenced some of the students. As an actor, it was the best practice in improvisational skills I had ever encountered. As a writer, I was constantly put into the position of viewing a scenario from various points of view while simultaneously being aware of my own thoughts and emotions. As a patient, I was able to see at least a glimpse of the other side of a medical interview - I became a more informed patient. And finally, as an individual, I discovered a part of my self that drew satisfaction and strength from helping others. Thinking about all those patients and their families that maybe I indirectly helped a tiny bit continues to offer me a sense of purpose and satisfaction.

# # #



My own traumatic experience, the experience of being involved in an abusive relationship, left me different than I had been before the relationship. I often felt a lack of control over my own life. I sometimes didn't trust others. I felt I had lost part of me. But decades had passed. With the passage of so much time I should have gotten over *it*. Right? I thought so.

### **SAFETY FIRST**

As Judith Herman states in *Trauma and Recovery*, the first stage in trauma recovery is the establishment of safety (155). I was safe from my abuser. (Wasn't I?) After all, I was no longer in a relationship with him. I hadn't even seen him in over twenty years. He couldn't hurt me any more. (Could he?) Plus we lived in different cities so he didn't know where I was. (Did he?) So . . . I was safe. (Wasn't I?)

Physical safety is one thing. Emotional safety is another. Herman states, "Trauma robs the victim of a sense of power and control" (159). Even years after a woman is free from the abuse, the sense of loss of her own power can leave her vulnerable to continued fears that her abuser still has the power to hurt her (Weiss; Rothchild). Although I often denied it, I was sometimes still afraid of

how he might be able to hurt me. He was in a position of power and I had witnessed his abuse of power before. I was afraid to talk about the relationship for fear he would come back and find a way to hurt me again.

I had skipped over essential steps in healing for more than two decades. I had assumed that if I was physically away from him I would be safe. I hadn't taken into consideration my emotional recovery. Herman further states: "Failure to complete the normal process of grieving perpetuates the traumatic reaction" (69). I had tried to dodge the necessity of the healing process. If I wanted to feel like myself again, I needed to quit dodging. Like all my processes to come, both artistic and personal, my sense of emotional safety came in small and often convoluted steps. It came as I began to tell my story.

### **STORY IN HEALING**

Our stories are one way in which we struggle to situate our selves and our lives in our family, community, and world. They help us define how we see ourselves and how we want to be seen; they help us become who we want to be. In short, our stories help us make sense of our selves and

our relationships within our communities, our cultures, and our worlds.<sup>22</sup>

Sharing a story in the form of a joint reminiscence reinforces interpersonal bonds. Through such story sharing we learn to organize our past experiences and "communicate effectively about these experiences" both to others and to ourselves (Fivush, Haden, Reese 341). Story sharing also occurs in a storyteller-story listener encounter. Such encounters may occur within a personal relationship such as between family members, friends, or intimate partners. Additionally, a storyteller-story listener relationship may occur in the form of a professional relationship such as a narrative encounter in a therapist-client or doctor-patient relationship. Whether in a personal or professional encounter, storytelling and story sharing can be part of a healing process (Sunwolf, Frey, and Keranen).

If our stories help us define who we are and help us make sense of our world, what if we don't tell part of our story? Do we lose part of our *self*? Part of who we believe we are? Does our world make sense to us? For years I did not talk about my long-ago abusive relationship. I didn't tell that story. I only told a 'handful' of people and to

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<sup>22</sup> The role of story as one means of defining the self can be seen in various disciplines such as Performance Studies, Communication, Psychology, and Medicine. For more information see: Abma; Bolton 2001: 1-3; Neisser; Roberts and Holmes 1999: 13; Rybarczyk and Bellg 6; Smyth, Gould, and Slobin 3; Stern and Henderson 35; and Leah White 81.

those few individuals I only told what seemed essential. I would say that "he used to hit me" or "he was abusive." There were few, if any, follow-up conversations. The abusive relationship was in the past. It was over. I was finished with *it* and *him* and so why should I talk about it?

The years leading up to the abusive relationship and the years following it were good. My childhood was basically secure and happy. My teen years were fun, angst-ridden teen years. And then, post-abusive relationship, I filled my life with many positive stories: I married a strong, intelligent, gentle man. We were busy raising two kids and building a life together. Besides, I wasn't always in the midst of anger and fear, facing flashbacks and bad memories. I was enjoying my life. Sometimes, though, unwelcome memories would sneak up, taking me by surprise.

*MOMENT: The Broken Glass*

*I remember it like it like it was yesterday. I was standing in the kitchen right in front of the refrigerator when I dropped the glass I was holding. I don't know how. It simply slipped from my grasp and shattered across the kitchen floor. Slivers and shards of glass were everywhere. And there I stood in the middle of it all. Barefoot.*

*A flash of something . . . some thought, some feeling, some . . . thing . . . gripped me. As the glass hit the floor my body and mind were already reacting. Conscious thought and rational behavior? Those reactions were not part of the equation. Emotions flew at me from all directions: Fear. Should I apologize? Remorse. Why did I do that? Anger. Why am I scared? Frustration. What will he do? Sadness. Why? I heard footsteps and the familiar numbing calmness returned.*

Numbness helped me steel myself for the words I knew I would hear. Words like: stupid, moron, idiot, clumsy, klutz, or dumb. Or phrases that would include one of the above words clumped together with "ass" or "bitch" or possibly both. Example: "clumsy-ass bitch." And when I heard such words I would wonder if it would end with the words. Or would there be more?

This time I didn't hear the words.

In the time it took for the sound of the glass breaking to travel from our kitchen to the living room, for my husband to close his book and stand up and take two steps . . . that was the length of time for me to be thrown back into the middle of all the negative feelings from that previous relationship. I experienced the same dread, the same fear, pain, embarrassment, and shame I had once known.

But the footsteps had not been his footsteps.

The voice that broke through my barrage of emotional flashback was not the voice from that long-ago relationship. It was a good voice filled with concern backed by love and respect. It was my husband's voice.

And then I knew I was in my kitchen . . . my current kitchen. I saw my husband . . . a true partner . . . standing with a dustpan, a broom, and a clean-up plan.

He asked if I was okay. Well, yes, I was okay. My husband suggested that I not move until he could "get this." He knew I was barefoot. He swept up the glass, got me some shoes, and proceeded to damp mop the floor to make sure that all the little slivers of glass were up.

And suddenly I was exhausted.

# # #

How did I handle such flashbacks? As I've stated, I rarely, if ever talked about my experiences. I now ask myself the question: *could* I talk about them? I was living a good life. I functioned very well in most circumstances.

However, just as I hadn't always known what would trigger my former partner's verbal or physical abuse, I also didn't always know what would trigger a feeling or memory. I

didn't understand why certain experiences sent me back into a state of fear.

In *The Body Remembers*, Babette Rothchild explains memory systems of explicit and implicit memory. Explicit memory is a conscious memory process in which information is cognitive, fact-based, verbal, and descriptive. This part of our memory constructs narrative. Implicit memory is the opposite. Implicit memory is unconscious memory in which information is emotional, sensory, and automatic. During a traumatic event or flashback, explicit memory is suppressed and implicit memory is activated. Where explicit memory constructs narrative and meaning from one's life experiences, implicit memory is "speechless." It is the "learned procedures and behaviors" of our lives such as feeding ourselves or riding a bicycle. Rothchild states that implicit memory "operates unconsciously unless made conscious through a bridge to explicit memory" and that "when it comes to memory of traumatic events, implicit memories not linked to explicit memories can be troublesome" (29-31). I now understand that certain sensory stimuli triggered my painful memories and feelings. When I dropped the glass in the kitchen that day, it might have been the sensation of the glass slipping from between my fingers that threw me back or possibly the sound of the

glass shattering. Unexpected sensory triggers caused flashbacks. When I was able to emotionally prepare, I could usually avoid flashbacks. When I could prepare, I created a bridge between my memories: the implicit reaction to pain and potential pain versus the explicit knowledge that I was far removed from that situation. Similarly, unexpected media violence could also trigger upsetting memories. While some movies about domestic violence didn't elicit flashbacks, some films with more surprising partner violence did. Watching *Titanic*, for example, I physically jumped when the character of Rose was unexpectedly slapped and knocked to the floor by her fiancé Cal. When such emotional reactions and flashbacks occurred, rather than acknowledging them as flashbacks and processing them within the context of my past and present, I struggled to hide them.

So as love and laughter filled most of my life, I pushed the bad memories away, avoiding potential negative stimuli whenever possible. When avoidance failed, I struggled to forget the flashbacks as soon as they occurred. With all the good things in my life, why should I need to talk about that *other* relationship? It had been painful and embarrassing while I was living it and it was painfully embarrassing to revisit it.

I concentrated on telling the stories I wanted to hear. The stories I wanted to use to define who I was: the positive stories of my present and not the negative stories of my past. Present stories made sense to me and wouldn't embarrass and humiliate me and force me to answer questions I didn't want asked or ask questions I didn't want answered. I refused to acknowledge the abuse by giving it a place in my life. I did, however, tell a story of abuse to myself. It went something like:

"I'm over it." Silence. "I'm fine."

Collecting narratives of women in a shelter, Elaine Lawless found there were parts of women's stories that they could not tell. She states:

I believe the women narrating these life stories are aware that to name the evil, the violence, the abuser, is to continue to give it/him continued power in and over their lives" (72).

While I agree with Lawless, I now must ask, did I not tell my story of abuse because I didn't want to give him power? Partly. Or did I remain silent because I was ashamed and embarrassed? Yes. Or was it that I had not yet found the bridge that would connect my traumatic implicit memories with my conscious explicit memory of my life experiences? Probably.



The abusive relationship had been part of my life and by not acknowledging the abuse I was denying a part of my self. I wanted to hide the young woman I had been. Still, there were parts of that young woman of which I was proud, parts of my conscious memory of those years of my life that had nothing to do with the abuse or that relationship, parts of my life story I enjoyed.

*MOMENT: Reaching for the Sky - Flying Lessons*

I used to think that maybe it all started when I read Jonathon Livingston Seagull. (Oh, come on - if you're a Boomer there's a good chance you've read it, too!) As I look back, though, I realize my fascination with the sky started long before Richard Bach chronicled the adventures and spiritual enlightenment of a seagull.

As a youngster I used to lay on my back on hot summer afternoons watching the clouds drift by: white and billowy or streaked like the sweep of an eraser on a brilliant blue chalkboard. If I got lucky, a sky-writer would form puffy white words against the blue background. It was a game to try to figure out what they were writing before the wind broke the letters apart.

The Missouri sky wasn't always a sweep of blue. There were skies filled with swirling snow, grey and rainy skies, and an ominous sky that I call tornado green.

The sky always held, and still does hold, a fascination for me. It is that liminal space between earth and the cosmos . . . our gateway from something we believe we know to something we acknowledge not knowing. To me the sky has always seemed an adventure waiting to unfold.

When I saw the ad in the newspaper I was intrigued: *Flying Lessons*. It was a package deal: ground school and 40 hours of flight time, including both with the instructor and solo. Everything that was necessary to get a private pilot's license. I signed up. Paid my money. And then, every Monday evening I filed into a small room at the airport to join my fellow students - all middle-aged men - and listened to lectures on VOR (VHF omnidirectional range) and VFRs (visual flight rules). We discussed transponders,

*instrument approaches, and weather systems. And we answered questions about clearances, loads, headings, and stalls.*

*I liked being up in the plane. I liked flying with my instructor and I liked flying solo. I liked how everything on the ground seemed smaller. And I liked that I knew I was capable when I was at the controls of the Cessna 150.*

*I never got my pilot's license. My forty hours of package-deal flight time ran out before I fulfilled all my flight requirements such as night flight and cross-country flying. My money I had ear-marked for flying ran out, too.*

*But for one brief, fascinating stretch of time -  
I flew.*

# # #

Hiding parts of the young woman I had been during the years of the abusive relationship eventually turned into hiding all of her. I was ashamed of her. She had betrayed me. I wouldn't - or couldn't give her a voice. In "How Women Define their Experiences of Violence," Liz Kelly states "In order to define something a word has to exist with which to name it . . . [and] what is not named is invisible and, in a social sense, nonexistent" (114).

Nonexistent? I never intended to have part of me *not exist*. But *that part* of my life would exist in secret. And so I shoved and stacked flashbacks and memories into a mental closet that very quickly came to resemble a precariously overstuffed sit-com closet. You know the ones I'm talking about. When the door is opened the contents spill all over an unsuspecting individual and the studio audience laughs. I, however, knew better than to open that

closet door. I knew what was hidden there. Pain lurked there. And insults, anxiety, and accusations. I couldn't face the laughter if the contents of that closet tumbled over me. And so I denied my precarious stack of flashbacks and memories and I didn't talk about that relationship. I denied that the memories of that relationship upset me. I denied that I was still frightened of him. I denied that I was angry that no one reached out to me when he hurt me and I denied that I was angry with my self. I didn't talk about *it* because nothing about staying in an abusive relationship for three years made sense to me. *His control* - I thought I had left it when I left *him*. If I acknowledged that I was still affected by the past relationship, somehow he still controlled me. So I wouldn't acknowledge it. I was a rock - solid and strong. Nothing could break me. But rocks erode. Water trickles into cracks. It freezes and the expansion widens the cracks into fissures.

I hid the hurt, angry, frightened part of my past from others and I would hide it from my *self*.

But I couldn't. Not really.

Although I continued to stack and shove and shove and stack, the flashbacks and memories I struggled to hide made

the closet bulge. I tacked little bits of denial over the door in the hope that it would hold.

It would not.

The fissures expanded and the rock broke apart. The contents of my over-stuffed closet could not be contained.

*MOMENT: The Big Crumble*

*There is a commercial that has aired on television, in which athletes pushed to the limit suddenly dissolve into a pile of rubble, ending in a scattered pile of stones. I had small crumbles. Crumbles that I was able to keep inside, and for the most part, hide. However small, somewhat hidden crumbles have a tendency to escalate if they are not stabilized and repaired. I eventually came to the point where I could no longer hide my small crumbles. They had become too large. And I found myself in the middle of what seemed to be a large crumble in my life. I felt like my life was coming apart and might end up in a scattered pile of rubble. Life, however, is not a thirty-second spot in which a glass of Gatorade® can keep a person from crumbling.*

*Finally, when my life began to crumble I sought help. My personal journal recounts some of my first efforts at asking for help. I met with my family physician to "discuss some things with him about what's been bothering me all these years . . . the [abusive] relationship, the anger. I need to get this stuff out. It's eating me alive. . . ." (1997) Until that meeting, I had told fewer than five people about that past relationship: I had told my husband before we were married, but we rarely discussed it; a friend I had known during the years of abuse later guessed what had occurred and had asked me; and I had told my two children - by this time, each had voiced some concern about high school friends who were in relationships that seemed controlling and potentially abusive. That was it - four people with whom I had discussed the abuse. Once I sought help, I could add my physician and therapist to the list. And then there were six.*

# # #

And out of the rubble rose a story. My story.

In *Not to People Like Us*, Susan Weitzman states that once women finally break their silence about their abuse, "telling the story sets them on the path toward freedom" (115, italics in original text). While Weitzman was talking about women involved in an abusive relationship, I believe it holds true for someone who needs to recover from the aftermath of such abuse.

I didn't completely crumble. I did, however, crumble enough to know I needed to reach out. When I broke my silence and started to tell my story, to acknowledge I was still haunted by my past, I only spoke of it to a few people. Although I was still very guarded, I talked to my husband about my experiences and feelings. I also spoke with my family physician and then began to meet with a therapist. My story was disjointed. I rambled and I repeated and rambled some more. I couldn't make sense of it all. I tried using logic to explain my experiences, but there seemed to be no logic. I was impatient. I was almost ready to shove the memories and flashbacks back into the dark closet where they belonged.

Almost.

*MOMENT: River Dreams*

*I return to the river a lot in my dreams.*

*My river dreams always take place in about the same location: The Mississippi River, a short way below the*

confluence of the Mississippi and the Missouri. The river is wide here. The current is swift. It is, after all, the Mississippi River.

In my dreams I always have to cross the river from Illinois to Missouri. Through the years I have crossed the river numerous ways. On several occasions I have dreamt that I drive underwater until I reach a series of rectangular concrete islands that I must drive over as I make my way to the Missouri side. That is one of my easier crossings. I always struggle to cross the river in those dreams. Once I had to use a swinging, rope footbridge that little by little kept falling down toward the river. Finally the bridge was touching the ice floes that clogged the river and I began feeling the icy water on my feet.

I've often had to swim the river in my dreams. Once I had to swim while pulling a raft filled with people across the river. The problem was compounded by the fact that the front of the raft kept dipping into the water, creating more drag on the raft. Swimming the river in the best of dream circumstances was always a challenge, but pulling the people-filled raft safely across the river was nearly impossible. I remember being very close to the riverbank on the Missouri side, but I don't remember reaching it.

More recently I had a crossing the river dream - the first river dream I've had that was not the Mississippi River. The river was rising quickly and I had to get across. There were a lot of people all around and I kept telling them that they needed to get away, that the river was flooding. And all the while I was warning people I kept looking for the way that I would be able to cross the river. Finally I stopped and asked myself why I needed to cross right then. I reasoned that the river was rising quickly, but that it wouldn't stay in a flood stage forever and when the waters receded I would certainly be able to cross then.

I haven't had a river dream in a while.

# # #

## **BREAKING MY SILENCE**

For years I had a story I couldn't tell. To tell a story, one must have words. I had few words to describe what I had felt. "He used to hit me" doesn't come close to

the depth and breadth of what I had experienced. One must also have a listener and I had none. Except for the "I'm over it. I'm fine" story, I would not even listen to myself. And how I could I ask someone else to listen to a story that had few words and that I wouldn't even listen to myself? Without an audience, either internal or external, there was no one to hear my story . . . no one to validate my experience. Not even me.

Allowing myself to fully acknowledge my past experiences of abuse fits with Herman's "remembrance" part of stage two. My acknowledgment led me to ask the questions "Why?" and "Why me?" I wanted a reason. An explanation. When I couldn't find answers I sometimes got angry. While I sometimes didn't like feeling angry, it felt better than powerless and confused. Herman's second part of stage two is mourning. But why did I need to mourn? I loved my current life and I loved my family and I had nothing to mourn. I should be celebrating what I had in my life, not giving any more precious time to that man. No . . . I didn't want to mourn. It didn't seem productive. And although I didn't like anger, it made more sense than being sad. Herman states:

The survivor frequently resists mourning, not only out of fear but also out of pride. She may consciously refuse to grieve as a way of denying victory to the

perpetrator. In this case it is important to reframe the patient's mourning as an act of courage rather than humiliation. To the extent that the patient is unable to grieve, she is cut off from a part of herself and robbed of an important part of her healing. Reclaiming the ability to feel the full range of emotions, including grief, must be understood as an act of resistance rather than submission to the perpetrator's intent. Only through mourning everything that she has lost can the patient discover her indestructible inner life. (188)

I resisted. But those around me encouraged me to *allow* myself to be sad when I discovered I did indeed, feel a sense of loss.

My healing process did not follow a neat pattern. Small steps toward feeling safe occurred when I first reached out to others. One moment I would feel emotionally safe and the next I would fall back into not being "safe." Sometimes I would talk about my experiences to select individuals and sometimes I wouldn't want to talk about it. I feared that if my abuser heard that I had spoken to *anyone* about what he had done that he might try to harm me. Or he would hurt me by causing trouble for my family. I still feared him.

Gradually I began to acknowledge that I mourned . . . a little bit . . . rather I mourned incrementally. Actually, I did everything incrementally. I am not alone in this experience of a non-linear healing process. Although



Herman offers three basic stages in trauma healing, she explains:

no single course of recovery follows these stages through a straightforward linear sequence. Oscillating and dialectic in nature, traumatic syndromes defy any attempts to impose such simpleminded order. (155)

When I first discovered Judith Herman's work and read the word "oscillating," I laughed out loud. The word so perfectly described my process and offered me such a visual image that I realized I had finally found a way to frame how I had moved back and forth through so many steps.

A little bit at a time I would confront the young woman I had been. With my counselor I worked on embracing who she was; I worked on not blaming her for what had happened. I carried a picture of my younger self in my wallet so when I would begin to feel vulnerable to my fear of *him*, I could look at my photo and remind myself that I could take care of myself.

Once I started telling my story my small supportive network continued to listen. They accepted my fears, anxieties, embarrassment, and anger without question. I was fortunate. Such non-judgmental support is an important response for those who have experienced abuse (AMA 1992, Jenkins and Ustun 452, Herman 61). The validation of my experience was a huge first step for me. As I began to find

words to name my experience, I discovered something about telling my story: it felt good. Somewhere amidst all the jumbled emotions and disjointed memories of experiences from long ago I found a quiet space . . . a sense of peace. I didn't know Herman's stages of trauma recovery. I only knew that whatever I was doing was beginning to help. I wasn't having flashbacks as often.

My early story listeners had more patience with me than I had with my self. They validated the difficulty of my situation and acknowledged my fears. I believe that once I started to tell the story of my experience in greater depth, however hesitant and disjointed that telling was, it was essential that I was offered the opportunity to speak open and honestly. Discussing a survivor's shattered sense of self, Herman states: "that sense can be rebuilt only as it was built initially, in connection with others" (61). I was finally beginning to connect with others about my experiences, and had I felt at all judged in these early "tellings" I more than likely would have gone no further. I would have patched what dignity I could salvage and struggled to shove more memories into that overflowing dark closet.

MOMENT: The Day I Almost Said It

Once upon a time, long before I started telling my story to **anyone**, I had an appointment to see my doctor. I don't remember why I was seeing the doctor, but I do remember rehearsing for my appointment. Rehearsing? Was my overstuffed closet bulging too much? Were there cracks in the veneer that I presented to the world? Something was going on inside me. In retrospect, it was probably the early signs of the Big Crumble that I was feeling. And so I knew that this time I would say it. It would be a relief to finally talk to someone about it. And if I could trust anyone else besides my family with my story and fears, I knew it would be him. Although Dr. Robert Blake, Jr. had been my physician for many years, he was not my physician during the years I experienced the abuse. I knew he didn't have a clue about my past . . . it was my well-guarded secret and I was certain I would have a difficult time saying it, hence the rehearsals:

"I think I need to talk about something . . ."

"A long time ago . . ."

"I'm not sure what I should do, see . . ."

"I used to be involved in a relationship that . . ."

"Maybe, well see, I, um . . ."

When I arrived for my appointment I found out my physician had a medical student working with him in clinic that afternoon and so I let myself off the hook! I told myself I wouldn't have to "say it today." In fact, I could put off saying anything about being haunted by the abusive relationship indefinitely because, after all, I really liked working with medical students. It felt good, like I could do something important. I had a good excuse not to say anything that day. No, I had a great excuse. I had the perfect excuse, so . . .

My story could wait.

In looking back I find it interesting. I once used talking with a medical student as an excuse not to tell my story of abuse. Eventually medical students became an important audience for the telling of my story . . . of my pre-performance narratives.

# # #

My first steps telling my story privately became a foundation on which I was able to build. I began to find

additional paths to take in my struggle to be heard and make sense of my story of abuse.

As helpful as talking with my family and counselor was for me, I needed something more. It was as if I wanted my experiences to count for something. I wanted to be able to help someone and somehow make a difference in someone's life. I trained as a volunteer for the women's shelter in my town. After the training I never scheduled myself to work at the shelter. I was working full time as well as taking graduate courses and I struggled with the time commitment for volunteering. Or was it that I wasn't yet able to make the emotional commitment necessary to work at the shelter? I don't know. I *do* know that I was still struggling to make sense of the abuse I had experienced. The outlets that I began finding for the telling of my story were varied.

### **TELLING MY STORY**

One outlet came from my positive experiences working as a Standardized Patient. As memories often are, my recollection of the exact sequence of events is somewhat hazy. Sometime after I had started working in Family and Community Medicine, I knocked on the door of the academic office of my physician. I kept telling myself that I was

ready to do what I was about to do, but still my palms were sweaty. My throat was dry. I like to think that I seemed "together" and "strong" and yet the reality is that as I entered his office I was more than likely accompanied by a few tears of my own creation. My basic idea was that if he thought that telling my story might help medical students in some way, I would be interested in telling about my experiences.

There. It was out. The offer was on the table and I would not take it back. My physician was the faculty advisor for the student chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR). He suggested that talking with some of the students involved in this organization might be a good idea. He set up a meeting for me with the president of the organization in order for me to have the opportunity to get to know her.

I remember the meeting well. Elizabeth and I walked across campus and settled into a table. She had brought her lunch - I bought an "everything" bagel with garden vegetable cream cheese and iced tea with one sugar. Why do I remember something so specific? Was I staring at my food? Taking extra time to stir my tea? Yes. And yes. It was difficult to make eye contact at first. As I told Elizabeth about my experience and wondered if talking about it with

med students would help, I constantly fought back tears. Sometimes, *often* times, the tears won. Brown paper napkins are not as soft as Kleenex® tissues, but they still dab tears. We decided that Elizabeth would set up a meeting with a few medical students that she knew would be interested in the subject matter. She would select students she knew would be supportive as I began to tell my story. This would be our first meeting. It would be my first public admission that I had been abused.

The day of the first PSR meeting arrived. My physician and I walked to the small lab room where we were meeting the students. I never thought of this encounter as "performing" - I did not rehearse what I was going to say to the students and I don't even know how I started. What I remember about that first meeting was that I was sitting at the other end of the table from my physician. I felt vulnerable and alone. While the medical students were friendly and seemed supportive, I *knew* that my physician was supportive. Finally I couldn't handle it any more - I kept breaking down - and I asked if I could switch places with a student who was sitting next to my physician in what I felt was, emotionally speaking, a "safer space." We moved and I felt better immediately. Elizabeth couldn't find any more tissues, so she went to the restroom and pulled a huge

bunch of toilet paper off the role for eye wiping and nose blowing. A huge bunch. *Huge*. Institutional toilet paper is not as soft as brown paper napkins, but it is functional.

Why did I choose medical students as an audience when I began to tell my story? My experience with the medical school as a Standardized Patient had shown me how much could be learned from staged encounters, so I hoped that students could gain insight by talking with someone who had really experienced abuse. Additionally, the medical students provided a safe community for me to connect with - I trusted the confidential relationship I had with them.

Herman's second stage of recovery, in which the survivor restructures her trauma story, is centered around remembrance and mourning. Where traumatic memory is "wordless and static," reconstructing of the trauma story is a several-layered process. The trauma story itself may be fragmented or repetitious. Herman recommends: "the patient should be encouraged to talk about her important relationships, her ideals and dreams, and her struggles and conflicts prior to the traumatic event" (176). During the first meetings Dr. Blake and I had with medical students I constantly struggled with my emotions. Dr. Blake suggested that instead of beginning immediately with my story of abuse, I might try introducing myself by talking about my

present life and experiences: returning to school, writing plays, and about my family. This method of introduction reminded me of the positives in my life now and put my past experiences into context with my present life, thereby reinforcing my healing process. In addition to being helpful for my healing, this suggestion eventually led me toward a non-linear method of storytelling in rewrites of *Survival Dance*.

In listening to my own story, I needed to examine how that relationship impacted my life and the lives around me. The more I told my story, however, the more confident I became. I began to find that the positives of telling my story outweighed the negatives. I was discovering aspects of Herman's third phase of recovery: reconnecting. Medical students respected my privacy. I knew they would keep my story confidential, yet I was able to connect with a larger aspect of the community other than my first circle of confidantes. Medical students were moved by my story - they asked important questions - some of which I could answer and some of which I could not. They wanted to know if I had had a regular physician at the time of the abuse. I did not. They asked what a physician might have done for me? They asked why I finally left and if I blamed myself or believed that I deserved the abuse. As time went on, we



moved the PSR talks from the small lab rooms into a lecture hall. E-mail announcements to all the medical students replaced phone calls to a select few students. Telling my story to medical students became an important part of my process of the rebuilding of me.

I have always been amazed at the support and empathy of the medical students. I am equally amazed at the number of medical students who have sought me out over the years to share their own stories with me. There was the rape victim who never speaks of her ordeal and who had only told her current boyfriend. One student told her mother about the PSR discussion and her mother then revealed that thirty years ago she had been in an abusive relationship - the adult daughter never knew. Another woman shared the story of her father, a physician, who spent time each year practicing medicine in the country of his birth. In that culture there is no term for domestic violence and a woman would shame her family if she left her husband and so the violence remains silent and hidden. Her father felt helpless to help. I was told of sexual molestation and childhood abuse. I was told of a girlfriend who had been beaten in a previous relationship and of husbands who were

jealous and controlling.<sup>23</sup> Just as I had trusted them, so they had trusted me. Did the students need their stories to be heard? Were they reaching out to me to show me I was not alone? Did they reach out to me because they knew I would understand?

Eventually Dr. Blake and I spoke with the Family Medicine residents. Because I was still not comfortable "going public," only the residents and the attending physicians who worked directly with the residents were invited to the meeting. The hall door was locked so individuals attending the meeting would have to come through the residency office and that office door was "guarded" by one of the physicians. My name was not used on the meeting schedule. I was still embarrassed and ashamed and I didn't want other physicians with whom I worked to know about my past relationship. This meeting with residents became another step in my healing journey.

Gradually, as I told my story, I found a freedom I had not experienced before. Was I performing? I suppose it depends upon your definition of performing. Did I consider that I was performing? No. I did not have a script. I did not rehearse what I was going to say to the medical students. And I did not consider them an "audience." When I

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<sup>23</sup> For the privacy of those sharing their stories, details have been omitted.

first began to "go public" and talk about my IPV experiences with medical students, I did so to offer something helpful to others. I didn't - or couldn't - simply tell my story to someone for my own purposes. My decision to tell my story to medical students was a positive one. I believe that, for me, the medical community I spoke with was the most supportive community with whom I could share my story. I had entered a community of individuals who understood that the "first principle of recovery is the empowerment of the survivor" (Herman 133). While I was still struggling with my embarrassment and shame, the students and physicians with whom I spoke treated me with friendly and open respect. Many went out of their way to thank me and express that by sharing my story, I had helped them understand a bit more about IPV. The abuse I had experienced had, as Herman suggests, robbed me of "a sense of power and control" (159) over my own life. The students and physicians then, became an important part of the community responding to my long-ago trauma (70). Seeing myself through their eyes helped me tremendously as I rebuilt "a positive view of self" (63). And so I will continue to tell my story to medical students as long as there is someone who wants to listen.

MOMENT: *Reading the Violence*

Long after that relationship had ended, long after I was in a committed relationship with a wonderful man, long after I had children, long after . . . long after. I was still haunted. I couldn't ask the questions. But that didn't stop me from wanting answers. What did other women experience? How did they deal with the abuse? Why did it happen? Why did I 'let' it continue? Who does this happen to? What can be done? What can I do? How do I know that I'm safe from him now? Are other women safe? How do I protect my daughter? I desperately needed answers.

And so I read about domestic violence. Intimate partner violence. I read books by therapists and for therapists, by women and about women, how to get away books and how to stay away books. I read articles in a variety of popular magazines as well as academic and medical journals. I read, as I had lived the experience, silently. I absorbed it all and yet I continued to live with the fears, the embarrassment, and the shame.

I kept thinking that I was over it.  
I wasn't.

# # #

**ANOTHER OUTLET: PERFORMING SURVIVORS**

Another outlet for the telling of my story came in the form of creating a performance for a class assignment for a theatre graduate seminar. Our assignment was to interview a person or persons and perform them telling their story. We were exploring ways in which to connect the personal with the social and political through performance. Anna Deavere Smith and her research and performances of *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and Other Identities* and *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* served as a model for

explorations. I was intrigued by the idea of connecting the personal with the social and political.

I knew what I wanted to perform. I was ready to take my personal interest in IPV to the next level: I wanted to create a performance that could initiate a dialogue about intimate partner violence. My embarrassment and shame of having been in an abusive relationship still loomed over me, keeping me close to silent about my experiences. Performing the stories of *other* survivors would offer me the opportunity to shed some light on IPV without having to break my own silence.

Listening to some individuals discuss women in abusive relationships, I had come to believe that many people felt women in such relationships fell into a stereotype: they were uneducated, emotionally weak, financially dependent upon a man, and had low self-esteem. There is, however, no single personality type for women who are in, or have been in, an abusive relationship. Herman discusses research regarding women involved in abusive relationships, as having "no consistent profile [that] . . . has emerged" (116). In "Bonding With Abusive Partners" from *Dating Violence*, Graham and Rawlings argue that "it makes no . . . sense to attempt to explain why particular women get into abusive relationships . . . by analyzing their childhoods

or personalities" (119). Categorizing abused women as a personality type leads us into a false sense of security. We can tell ourselves that as long as we are not that type we cannot become a victim. If we believe we can identify who might become a victim then we can continue to stick our heads in the sand and say 'not to me and not to women I love.'

My main goal in my graduate seminar assignment was to show that women who have been abused are not all the same 'personality type.' By giving voice to the stories of survivors, I hoped to break the stereotype. If I could break it, maybe others would understand that such violence *could* happen to anyone. And if I could give survivors a voice, break the stereotype, *and* create an understanding of the intricate web of IPV, then maybe I wouldn't be so embarrassed and ashamed of my past. It was a tall order.

To create the performance I envisioned, I needed to interview women. Finding the subjects proved to be a more daunting task than I had originally thought. My unwillingness to discuss my own abusive relationship created a major barrier in soliciting interviews. I couldn't ask others to discuss something so potentially embarrassing and degrading . . . could I? And if I *did* ask them, what might they ask *me*? I wasn't ready to open myself

up to the scrutiny and judgment of others. And I was still viewing the fact that I had been in an abusive relationship as shameful and embarrassing.

I remembered a friend who had once told me about her former boyfriend's abuse and about the time she remembered being pinned down on the kitchen floor while he punched her in the face over and over. I could ask her for her story. I tried to call. I really tried. Several times. I could never actually bring myself to pick up the phone and dial, but I looked at it. Stared at it. But I couldn't bring myself to ask her. I was still unnerved by the look on her face when she had said "**over** and over and over and . . . over. . . ." She still seemed haunted and I couldn't face her demons in addition to my own.

I refused to ask any of the medical students. They occupied a special place in my healing journey and I didn't want to intrude upon that safe and trusting relationship.

Without specifically asking anyone, I discussed plans for my performance with friends and colleagues. I found individuals willing to discuss the issue on a third person level:

"There's a woman my office who was in that situation."

"My sister-in-law was married to a man who abused her for sixteen years."

"Bill had a friend who beat his wife."

"A friend whose husband hit her said I probably thought she was crazy for staying with him. I hope I said the right things to her."

And finally: "That's an important subject. People *should* talk about it." Silence.

Where did my silence and the silence of others leave my project?

And then I remembered "Debbie."<sup>24</sup> Ever since I met her, Debbie had been open about her abusive ex-husband. I called her. She was excited and more than willing to discuss her relationship her abuser - with a warning that I should change the names and circumstances if I performed her story, because she "had no doubts" that he would be able to find out about it and she was worried about my safety.

Debbie asked if we could meet in her office during her lunch hour when we would be guaranteed privacy. We scheduled a date and time. I planned my questions carefully. In reviewing interviews conducted by others, I remembered that for the interviews for *Women Escaping Violence: Empowerment Through Narrative*, Elaine Lawless felt it was important to hear each woman's story and so in the interview she often suggested that the woman relate her

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<sup>24</sup> "Debbie" is a pseudonym.



earliest memory. I wasn't as interested in a linear story. I wanted to hear how Debbie framed her own story: how she remembered the abuse. I settled on an open-ended request: Tell me about the relationship. If needed, I could follow up with more specific questions. I hoped I would allow Debbie to guide her own story.

When I arrived for the interview, Debbie greeted me with a smile. She said that she was glad that it was a sunny day because she believes the soul recovers better on a sunny day. Somewhere in the back of my mind a bell went off: Did she feel she would need to recover after our interview? We took care of preliminary business and I set up my recorder.

"Could you tell me about your relationship?"

I was amazed at her openness in discussing her abusive ex-husband. They had been divorced for eleven years. She started by telling me that he had always been *mean*. She said the first time he ever hit her was when he found out she had had an affair with a neighbor with whom she had fallen in love. That's when her husband's *physical* meanness started. He pulled a knife on her that night but she couldn't see which knife he was threatening her with because he had already knocked her glasses off of her face. On one level she believed she might deserve the abuse

because of the affair. But "his meanness" kept getting worse. At one point they went to their minister for counseling and the minister told her husband that there was "no difference" between what he was doing and rape. Debbie's husband replied: "Of course there's a difference! She's my wife." Debbie couldn't look at me as she said: "So it was that sort of thing." Debbie had described her husband's behavior as "mean" so often that I finally asked her what she meant by saying he was "mean." She replied:

You know how when you're nursing your nipples are really tender? He'd pinch them. Hard. And he knew I couldn't stand to have anyone's hands on my throat, so when he grabbed me, he'd grab me there. You know. Just *meanness*. ("Debbie": 2001)

The above actions were experienced "before the physical" abuse started. Debbie said that she thanked God every day for the life she has now. Her children are grown and she has good relationships with them. She eventually married the neighbor with whom she had fallen in love. Currently she felt content and happy . . . and somewhat haunted. She still dreams about her ex-husband. She dreams that he's dead and as she is walking past his casket he reaches out and grabs her arm and she can't get away. Debbie closed her eyes briefly. When she opened her eyes, she smiled. On her way to work that morning, Debbie had seen a bumper sticker

that read: 'Mean people suck.' She said it seemed appropriate that morning.

Recently I scoured all my notes from before and after the taped interview, I've revisited the transcript of the interview, and I cannot find the answer to my question: Did I share with Debbie the fact that I had been involved in an abusive relationship? I don't think I told her. At that time I still didn't want to hear myself say those words out loud. I regret not telling her. Although I know that I was an empathetic listener during our interview, I wish I would have taken the next step and told her that I, too, had been abused . . . that she wasn't alone in her thoughts and fears and nightmares.

As I left Debbie's office I was emotionally drained. I had listened to her story. I had thanked her profusely for sharing her story. And she thanked me for listening. I was glad it was a sunny day, too. I hoped both of our souls would recover quickly.

And so I had one interview for my performance. I didn't think I could get another. I didn't want to face the emotional task of asking other women for their story. I decided to perform my own story along with Debbie's. I would not, however, perform it as myself. I would perform "Karen."

I discussed my challenges with the instructor, Dr. Heather Carver. I told her that I was thinking of performing myself as well as another woman. Although part of my performance would be autobiographical, I wouldn't claim it as such. I wouldn't (or couldn't?) perform the role as myself. Instead I would perform *as if* I was a survivor of IPV. (Wasn't I a survivor?) Dr. Carver's primary suggestion regarding creating a performance that incorporated my *self* in the performance was that I "interview" my self. By focusing on an "interview" I would be able to hear my story. Sitting alone at home I asked myself the same questions I had asked Debbie, beginning with the open-ended request "tell me about your relationship." I found that I was a much more difficult interviewee than Debbie had been. Where she remained composed, I became emotional. My interview with my self immediately led me to concerns about performance: every time I told my story I experienced intense emotions. How could I separate the *real* emotions I experienced from a re-creation of an emotion within performance? I didn't know. I searched for ways to take care of myself emotionally.

Self-observation was another method I used to prepare for my performance. I first revisited previous discussions with medical students. Re-exploring earlier PSR meetings, I

thought about not only what I had said to them, but also how I had said it. How did I sit? When did I become emotional? How emotional had I become? What did I do to minimize my emotional reactions? Since I was scheduled to meet with medical students before my class performance I tried to prepare myself for the PSR meeting. I thought it would be ideal if I could try to be two places at once so I could observe myself while I was talking about my experiences. Fortunately I wasn't successful. Fortunately? My concerns about "tainting" my reasons for talking with medical students were beginning to rear their heads. I wanted to talk with medical students for the "right" reasons. I wanted to give my story to them . . . if I got something out of it other than feeling good about what I was doing, maybe I wouldn't feel as good. Maybe the students would feel cheated somehow. So, *fortunately* I had become too engaged in the discussion with the medical students to try to analyze my behavior during the meeting. It wasn't until afterward that I could reflect back on the experience.

While self-interview, observation, and reflection informed the development of my performance, it was rehearsal that became my most valuable method of preparation. I was used to gathering my ideas then sitting

down and writing a script. The performance for this class, however, couldn't be developed using the seat of the pants to the seat of the chair method. I needed to *perform* my own words so I would know which of my words I would use in performance. As in performative writing (see Chapter One), by including my whole 'self' as the process of development I did not create artificial boundaries. I needed to *perform* my own words so I would know which of my words I would use in performance. I needed to re-inhabit my body so that I could write my story.

There were phrases I almost always said to the medical students, such as "I don't remember the first time he hit me . . . I would think I would remember something like that." Such phrases became part of my performance for class. The remainder of the class performance, however, was developed through the rehearsal process. Alone at home I would talk *as if* I was talking to an audience of medical students. Through this process of quite literal solo performance, I was able to develop a cohesive narrative that became the second half of my performance for the graduate seminar.

While what I finally performed was partially an autobiographical performance, I had found safety in telling my story *as if* the woman was someone other than me. My

experience with the performance of this piece was both terrifying and exhilarating. I could feel the acceptance and empathy of the audience of graduate students. More important than having the class members listen to my story was the fact that *I* was listening to my *self*. Throughout my rehearsals and development of my performance it was necessary for me to reflect on my story and how I told it. In the process I was reminded of the many positive results that continued to happen because I had begun telling my story. I was reminded of the genuine appreciation, concern, encouragement, and validation I received each time I met with medical students. I was reminded how it "felt good" to tell my story.

In the discussion following my class performance, fellow graduate student Eric Love stated that he connected more with the story of the second woman because in my performance I seemed more connected to the story. At that point my carefully planned cover-up of my autobiographical performance dissolved. I blurted out that I was, indeed, the second woman.

Why did I so readily acknowledge that I had performed my self when I had worked *so hard* not to reveal it? I have searched my memory and I have come up with nothing. I have searched my class notes and still nothing. Reflecting on my

process, I believe that through the development of my scripted performance I found the beginnings of a freedom I had not experienced before. In *Skins: A Daughter's (Re)construction of Cancer: A Performative Autobiography*, Tami Spry states: "Storying myself has been liberatory and excruciating, but always in some way, enabling" (361). *Liberatory and excruciating and enabling*. Through rehearsals for this performance as well as the telling of my story to medical students, I had not only been *telling* my story . . . I had begun to *listen* to my story. Opening old wounds is difficult, but through my processes, I had begun my oscillating journey of healing.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The phases of IPV, according to Fishwick, Campbell, and Taylor, can be seen as binding, enduring, disengaging, and recovery. Judith Herman describes the process of trauma recovery in basically three categories: establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story, and restoring connection between survivor and community. I have described my own writing process as also having three broad categories: establishing foundations by gathering materials and tools, constructing the story through writing the script, and connecting the story with an audience. All



three of these different processes, IPV, trauma recovery, and my writing, are acknowledged as often being non-linear. For me, phases of my healing and writing journeys have sometimes naturally flowed together and at other times I have consciously created bridges. One way or another, they continue to connect.

My early work as a standardized patient opened a door to a community of medical educators. When I was finally ready to talk about my experiences with abuse, I sought out this community as a "safe" place to tell my story. With guidance, the sharing of my story numerous times helped me place my experiences within the context of my life. To my fellow graduate students I demonstrated an interest in IPV through my choice of subject matter for my performance. My growing comfort level in sharing my story, coupled with the supportive environment developed in the graduate seminar by Dr. Carver and her graduate students, allowed me to take the next step. For a survivor who has been as silent about her abuse as I had been, eight individuals in a graduate seminar seemed very public. It was to that public that I took the step to state that I had been abused.

While I recognized my actions were part of my personal journey of healing, I still did not recognize that what I was doing might be part of an artistic journey of writing.

I did not acknowledge that all these separate, yet connected, pieces were part of my pre-writing journey.

Pre-Writing? It's impossible to have Writing without first having the Pre - even when we don't know that it's a Pre. Before I began writing the first draft of *Survival Dance* I didn't know I was in the middle of "pre" anything. I never planned to write about an abusive relationship. Certainly not. No. Not ever.

I wrote comedy with meaning.

End of story.

### CHAPTER THREE: THE WRITING JOURNEY

Why do I write? The question is multi-layered. First is the need: Why do I *need* to write? Second I must ask: What are my goals in a specific writing project?

My need to write is not only about writing. It is more a question of: Why do I create? I create to express myself and to have my voice heard. It is not only that others will hear my voice, but also that I, too, will hear my voice. Writing, then, is my means to an end. I am driven to write so I might develop a greater understanding of my self and my world. I am driven to write to use my voice to make a difference in my self and my world.

While my overall writing journey is an ongoing exploration of who I am and where I fit in this world, each individual writing project has its own journey. My goals in writing projects build upon my overall need and want to express myself. I write to entertain, to make people feel they are not alone, to initiate dialogue about issues, and finally, to open pathways to greater understanding.

While my reasons may sound altruistic, they're not. Not completely. Remember that at the heart of my reasons lies my own need to be heard and validated. And while that need sounds a bit, well, needy, it's not completely. Needs

and wants for the self and others are not necessarily separate. They can be viewed as indistinguishable parts of the same whole.

*MOMENT: About Bears*

*Mom reached across her kitchen table handing me her Reader's Digest Magazine. "Yours." Noticeable symptoms of Primary Lateral Sclerosis included slow speech and walking difficultly. These days Mom didn't waste words.*

*"You're finished with it?"*

*She nodded. "There is a bear attack story." She shook her head. "HORRIBLE!"*

*Mom knew I was interested in bear attack stories. And this one might be horrible, but the ones in Reader's Digest usually had at least a partially happy ending: usually at least one of the unsuspecting hikers in the story survived.*

*Bears intrigue me. Is it their natural beauty? Their strength? Their ability to hibernate? Beauty in nature is always appealing and strength continues to be important to me. And hibernating? After six and a half years of graduate school the ability to sleep for several months does hold a certain appeal. But bears also frighten me. The huge claws and teeth are necessary for the bear's survival, yet when I see them I know that they can also hurt, maim, and kill.*

*And so, for years when my mom would receive her new issue of Reader's Digest I would immediately see if there were any bear attack stories. Why? Am I trying to make sense out of the attacks? Find a reason for them so they won't happen to me if I go hiking in bear country? You can only control the variables to a certain extent when walking through wild areas, though. You can make noise, sing, ring a bell, but sometimes bears will still attack. You can mean the bear no harm, but sometimes he will still attack. You can avoid fresh bear scat and skirt their trail and not separate a bear from her cubs, but sometimes the bear still attacks. You can do everything you're supposed to do to avoid an attack, but sometimes a bear is unpredictable and an encounter becomes unavoidable. It's a terrifying thought.<sup>25</sup>*

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<sup>25</sup> For more on bears, bear attacks, and surviving bear attacks, see: [www.udap.com/safety.htm](http://www.udap.com/safety.htm), [www.arcticwebsite.com/BearSurvival](http://www.arcticwebsite.com/BearSurvival), and [http://mountainsurvival.com/news\\_articles/bearattack.html](http://mountainsurvival.com/news_articles/bearattack.html).

## THE CLASS: PRE-WRITING DEVELOPMENT

In the winter semester 2001, I was enrolled not only in the Performance Studies course with Dr. Heather Carver,<sup>26</sup> but also in Advanced Playwriting with Dr. David Crespy. Thinking of the two courses as different, I didn't connect them, either in content or process. I thought of the playwriting class as a course in which I would write a script for others to perform, and the performance studies class as one in which I would perform the work I developed.

In Advanced Playwriting class I knew I would be required to write a full-length play, and I already had ideas. The main one I liked was what I described as "an environmental comedy." My goal would be to keep the audience laughing and enjoying themselves so much that they wouldn't realize how much I had swayed them to go out and reduce waste, save the rainforests, recycle, and "go green" in all aspects of their lives.

Dr. Crespy, however, required each student to develop more than one play idea. Using Buzz McLaughlin's Play Idea Worksheet<sup>27</sup> as a springboard for exploratory work, Dr. Crespy encouraged us to explore within ourselves. His idea was that writing should "cost" you something. Did he mean I

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<sup>26</sup> See Chapter Two for information on my IPV performance in the Performance Studies seminar, *Texts and Contexts*.

<sup>27</sup> For more information, see McLaughlin 69-81.

should always write about something that means a great deal to me? Or did he mean that I should look into the shadow areas of my self? If it was the former, I was in good shape. I care deeply about environmental issues. If Dr. Crespy meant the latter, well, I didn't want to go there.

The previous semester in an Intermediate Playwriting class, however, I had written in a class journal for Dr. Crespy's class, the fact that years earlier I had been involved in an abusive relationship. I told Dr. Crespy it was something I didn't discuss and I would appreciate it if he kept the information confidential. I stated that someday I *might* write about it, but I wasn't ready yet . . . not at all ready. By the time I was in the Advanced Playwriting class I was admonishing myself: *Why the #&!+ did you tell him that?* I didn't have a clue.

As I said, though, we were required to submit more than one idea. Along with my environmental comedy and a romantic comedy, I submitted an idea sheet for an IPV play:

**Play Idea Worksheet:**<sup>28</sup>

**Working title:** *Survival Dance*

**Central character:** Annie Stratton

**Dominant need:** Annie must get away from her husband, Tom, before she loses her life, or her reason to live. She was terrified she might be pregnant – which made her realize that as much as she wants children, she cannot bring a baby into this life. And Tom is pushing to have a baby.

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<sup>28</sup> Play Idea Worksheet submitted as partial fulfillment of an assignment in Advanced Playwriting, February 13, 2001.

**Obstacle:** She doesn't want to give up on love – if that's what you can call her feelings any more. She doesn't want to have a "failed" marriage. And she is afraid of what he will do if she does leave.

**Other major characters:**

- Tom Stratton: police detective, vice squad; amiable towards most people; violent nature around Annie. Wants to buy a house and start a family.
- Dr. Alison Page: Annie's new physician.
- Bobbie: server in a local restaurant.
- Jared: Tom's partner in the department.
- Jill: Annie's sister.
- Mancato Smith: lives in a neighboring apartment.
- "Other Annie": the 'essence' of Annie

**Setting:** The apartment of Tom and Annie. (Plus various locations i.e. the doctor's office, the restaurant, etc) Other Annie usually stays in her space, which is a place of escape in Annie's mind. This space is stage left, up, and is elevated.

**Occasion:** Their fifth wedding anniversary.

**Conflict/dilemma:** If she doesn't leave, Annie will die...emotionally, if not physically. But he says he loves her and she still cares.

**Resolution:** She takes what he dishes out one last time. And she dances. First Other Annie dances, one at a time the chorus members join in, then finally Annie joins in the dance. Tom is part of the dance.

**How the central character changes or adjusts:** She learns enough (about herself?) to leave.

**Dramatic premise:** Self-respect leads to living.

**The "What" or controlling image:** Survival dance.

**Theatrical elements:** The Other Annie where Annie retreats in her darkest moments to live the life she dreams would be worth living. The use of the chorus who interacts with Annie, but who also watch and react to the action of the play; the use of masks on Other Annie when Annie looks at herself in the mirror; the use of dance to represent violence.

**Structural image:** Rounds of a boxing match.

While I saw the potential for this play, it was still a play I never intended to write. Developing a performance was one thing – a performance is here and then it is gone. Although my performance for Dr. Carver's class would have a script, I did not intend for my script or performance to have any audience outside of the seminar. For me, my performance was ephemeral. Writing a play, however, seemed

more permanent. It was something that could someday be performed for a larger audience. A script might move beyond the emotionally safe place of the Performance Studies seminar or my meetings with medical students. It was something that *he* could somehow find out about and that idea scared me. It made me ache. And frankly, I didn't want to dwell on my feelings and fears. And so, although I would draw from my life experience in my writing, although I would write what I care passionately about, I would not write a play about an abusive relationship. I wouldn't, or couldn't do it. No, I would not write a play about partner violence.

But I did.

*MOMENT: Nice Words*

*Nice Words. I remember exactly what the man said to me when my short play was accepted as the runner-up for the Kennedy Center . . . but I'm not going to repeat them. I savor them in the privacy of my memory. Yes, I was disappointed not to be going to Washington D.C. in the spring, but runner-up was nice. After the awards a man I didn't know who was sitting in front of me turned around and introduced himself. "Kate? I'm Paul Hustoles from Minnesota State University in Mankato." And then he said the Nice Words.*

*Nice Words about my writing.*

*Nice Words that sometimes kept me writing.*

*Nice Words that sometimes keep me writing.*

*Nice Words.*

*Kate smiles.*

*Fade to black.*

# # #



*Survival Dance* was a play I needed to write. Even in the beginning stages of developing the story, however, I questioned whether I was ready to write a play about domestic violence. My writing journal shows my arguments with myself about this project:

I'm not sure I'm to the point where I'm ready to tell this story. I'm not sure it's ready to be told. But, I believe I'm going to push ahead and do it...I know people who write for therapy and that's fine, but it comes out sounding like therapy. This needs to come out sounding like a play I care passionately about. Oh, is *that* all? I'm trying to talk myself into writing this play as much as I'm trying to talk myself out of writing this. Hopefully a little bit more.<sup>29</sup>

And so I forged ahead. David Crespy remembers my struggles with the idea behind *Survival Dance*. He told me "I remember being struck at how different a lot of the work was from what you were doing previously. And [by] the rawness of it."<sup>30</sup> The work felt raw to me. My own story felt raw. I needed to explore ways in which to create a fictional play from the raw emotions and my lingering memories.

To begin our writing process, Dr. Crespy had us create a plot treatment without using dialogue. Using my Play Idea Worksheet, I described my vision for the play:

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<sup>29</sup> Writing journal, February 20, 2001.

<sup>30</sup> Author interview with David Crespy, September 20, 2006.

## Plot Treatment<sup>31</sup>

The cabin is upstage. Lace curtains billow in front of open windows. A large, overstuffed chair is a focal point in the room – an old, white porcelain kitchen sink is attached to the back wall next to a small, old-fashioned white stove. The air is scented with pines, fresh flowers, and baking bread. Pillows are tossed around the furniture – vintage prints with cabbage roses and ivy, black and red buffalo plaid, solids in forest green and pink. There is a feeling of airiness about the cabin – room to breathe, and room for Other Annie to dance.

The apartment of Tom and Annie is center stage. It is furnished with a matching love seat, sofa, and chair, with coordinating coffee tables. Non-descript, but color-coordinated prints hang on the walls. Through a wide doorway is the kitchen. I may want this space to look less realistic than the cabin.

Downstage are other, versatile playing spaces, including a diner, the doctor's office, the apartment front.

The chorus is made up of the other characters in play: the doctor, the neighbor, the server, the sister, the partner, and the mother-in-law.

The chorus begins talking about love. What happens when two people meet: the initial heart-stopping attraction, the breathless anticipation of seeing your lover again, the sense of finally – in all the world – there is someone you can count on. Someone who will hold your hand in a crisis...someone you can rely on to believe in you when you barely believe in yourself...someone to share a smile, a soft word, a favorite song. The joy of knowing you can move forward together.

Annie looks young – twenties to early thirties – but if you can look at her eyes when she doesn't know you're looking, you see something different. Inside this attractive young woman is a tired soul: tired of not knowing, tired of walking on eggshells around everyone, tired of uncertainty, tired of pain – physical and emotional. But on the outside, the public side of Annie, she acts the part she was assigned: the caring, fun loving, and compliant young wife. She enters their apartment. She wears a light blue button down blouse with khaki slacks and sneakers, carrying a potted geranium. At the same time, Other Annie enters the cabin wearing a white t-shirt under a light blue shirt open in front. Her khaki slacks are rolled up, her feet bare. She carries a bunch of wild flowers. Annie picks up newspapers and tidies up while O.A. gets an old pitcher for the flowers, then curls up in the chair to read a book. Annie continues straightening as Tom enters from the kitchen. He carries a dozen roses. He calls her "Toots." He tries to make up with her. O.A. continues to read in the cabin.

The chorus talks about lover's quarrels and how relationships grow.

Annie sees her sister, Jill who asks her questions about life in general. Annie is evasive, but slyly so...or so she thinks. Jill expresses concern, but what could possibly be wrong? Do they talk about the possibility of kids at this point? Whenever the subject comes up, Annie is uncomfortable, but she says the opposite of what she means. Tom has been talking about starting a family and Jill knows this...she also knows Annie loves kids and has always wanted them.

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<sup>31</sup> Plot Treatment assignment for Advanced Playwriting, February 27, 2001.

The following are scenes that are still taking shape and are in no particular order:

Annie visits to doctor. She feels tired and has been experiencing non-descript pains and headaches. She lost her purse with all her birth control pills in it and needs a new prescription from the doctor. The doctor knows they had been talking about children and questions Annie about this.

Annie runs into the neighbor. They talk about everything and nothing.

Jill drops in for a visit with Annie, who looks drained. Jill presses her for what is going on. Does she question her about Tom? Jill and Annie argue.

Jill visits Other Annie right after the argument between the two sisters. Jill loves the cabin – it's so "Annie."

Tom arrives home to find nothing done in their apartment – a few things are out of place, dishes haven't been done, and dinner isn't cooking. She explains she was visiting with Jill. Tom yells about her relationship with her sister. It escalates. She tries to pacify him: she'll get dinner started, she starts cleaning up, she apologizes...for what? Nothing is good enough. Nothing. He blows up. And Other Annie dances.

Tom throws a frozen meatloaf at Annie. There's no way he's going to eat the meatloaf. They go out to eat. Tom orders meat loaf.

Annie tries to talk with Tom about their marriage. He shuts her down. She tries to say she always thought marriage was a partnership. He says he already has a partner, what he needs is a fucking wife!

Annie tries to talk to Tom's partner.

Annie lies to Tom about something. What? We see she has done it. Is it justified? Is it to save herself or just get her something she wants? Does Tom find out? Probably. He now has a fresh reason to distrust her.

The mother-in law visits. The talk revolves around where they should buy a house. Which neighborhoods would be best, especially when they have children, and buy the way any news on that front?

Tom finds Annie's birth control pills. Major confrontation. She can't bring a child into this. Into what? He's not a bad person, look what he does!

**The story of Annie:** How much can she take? How much is she willing to risk to make a dream happen? Can you force a dream? What is the final blow that proves that nothing is moving forward? That you're trapped by the rising flood waters, and no matter how quickly you stack the sandbags, no matter how good you can swim, there comes a time when you either move to higher ground or you risk be swept away in the current and drowning.

Who helps her? Does anyone? Or does her help come in small bites, tiny blocks that help her rebuild herself until she gets to the point of being able to stand on her own against the raging flood.

Her final choice: Does she live in the realm of her dream life, her cabin? Does she retreat there and never move? Or does she face the real world and all the pain, struggle, and beauty found there? As survivors gain strength, that becomes the most dangerous time for them. Leaving or just after leaving is when the most

brutal attacks and when most homicides from domestic partners happen. Does she know this? Does she have a plan?

Bottom line is she chooses to leave. She gets out. She survives. And she can dance.

There are lots of questions in this treatment. But that's okay. They help frame the story of Annie. She has a lot of questions. And I think that is a lot of what this play is about...her search for answers to her questions:

- Why can't I leave? Why do I feel I have to stay?
- Why does he say those things? Why do I believe him?
- What did it take to get me to the point that I would not only believe him, but that I would accept his violence toward me?
- What will it take to change him back? What can I do?
- Why won't he stop?
- Can I leave? Do I want to? Why do I still love him?
- How could anyone else ever love me?
- How could I ever love myself again?
- But if I want to, isn't that a start?
- I want to. I want to live. And love.
- To do this, do I have to leave?
- Yes.

Notes from Dr. Crespy regarding the plot treatment

applauded my pre-writing explorations, but also suggested that I needed to move beyond ideas and formulate the story. He stated: "you need to commit yourself to at least: an intrusion (what starts the action?); a first act climax (just before intermission); a second act climax; [and] a real resolution."<sup>32</sup>

While my plot treatment created the emotional tenor I was seeking, it lacked in the dramatic structure necessary for a play. Was I too close to my own story and healing process to create the play I envisioned? I sometimes wonder

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<sup>32</sup> Plot Treatments notes from David Crespy, February 2001.

if I had not had the structure of a class, if I would have shelved the project. I was in a class, though, and so I pushed onward. I hoped that through the development of my characters I could solidify their story into a workable dramatic structure.

### **DEVELOPING THE CHARACTERS**

Ideas for stories come from everywhere. I have been inspired by a place, a moment in history, a theme, an idea, or a specific subject. Once I embark on the writing journey, however, I usually cannot find my direction until I get to know my characters. I am not alone in my belief in the importance of understanding characters. In *The Playwright's Process*, McLaughlin explains that "The more you know about your characters before you start your first draft, the more they will be able to engage with your play on their own terms" (110). Linda Seger, in *Creating Unforgettable Characters*, suggests that if we "infuse [our] characters with an emotional life, with specific attitudes and values, they will be multidimensional (41). In *Making A Good Script Great*, Seger states: "Character development is essential to a good story" (141). For me, the character development process is fun. I pull little quirks and habits I have observed from various individuals who have passed

through my life and offer them to my characters. I study body posture, mannerisms, and speech and mix them all up with various life experiences I have had or heard about and offer those to my characters as well. I play with my characters until they seem as real as possible. It is then that they begin to take on a life of their own and their story is revealed to me.

For character development, I often return to Lajos Egri. Many writing texts have expanded upon Egri's character work,<sup>33</sup> but Egri is how I first explored character development in playwriting as an undergraduate.<sup>34</sup> Egri approaches characters on three levels: physical, sociological, and psychological. While I don't always begin with this tool, when I explore my characters in the depths suggested by Egri, I always discover insights into what drives my characters.

While researching this dissertation, I revisited my character development worksheets I created while developing *Survival Dance*. In those character descriptions I discovered that the physical description of Annie closely matched my own physical description from the time when I

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<sup>33</sup> Although many writers and scriptwriting texts acknowledge the helpfulness of exploring character backstory either on paper or as an exercise in imagination, some of the authors who demonstrate a direct Egri influence in their character development exercises include Clark, Davis, Miller, and Yourke.

<sup>34</sup> My first playwriting professor, Dr. Steven Archer, introduced me to Lajos Egri's *Art of Dramatic Writing* in 1986. I will always be grateful.

was involved in the abusive relationship. Additionally, my physical description of Tom, the abusive husband in my play, had some similarities of my abuser. There were also some similarities between my reality and my fictional character of Annie that could be found in the sociological and psychological portions of the character development work. The dramatized situations, however, consisted of both fiction and fictionalized scenes inspired by my experience. What I struggled to keep realistic were the emotional and psychological experiences of being in an abusive relationship: feelings of love and betrayal, of fear and loathing, of having no place to turn, and of constantly walking on eggshells. I needed to remain true to those feelings so I could validate my own experience.

If the audience doesn't care about what happens to your characters, why would they care about your story? In order for my audience to care, I must care. I must be fascinated with my characters. Michael Hauge, in *Writing Screenplays That Sell*, suggests that the writer must immediately establish audience identification with the hero of your story. Hauge recommends using one of the following three techniques to establish immediate identification: create sympathy for the character, put the character in jeopardy, or make the character likeable. Additional ways in

which the writer can further establish audience identification with the hero include: introducing the character as soon as possible, showing the character in touch with his own power, placing the character in a familiar setting, and giving the character "familiar flaws and foibles" (45). While Hauge's guidelines (41-46) are meant for identification with the hero, I have found these techniques helpful for creating a connection between all my characters and the audience. Using Hauge's techniques encourages me to round out all of the characters, giving the story many layers created by the characters and their relationships.

#### **CREATING THE CHARACTER OF TOM**

I knew early in my process that I needed to create action and tension that were as dramatic as possible. One way to accomplish such tension was to show the abusive husband as not only being abusive to his wife, but to up the stakes for his potential for violence and for being able to cover up the violence. I wanted to make sure that he was someone who abused his power and authority. In making Tom a police officer, I set it up that he had legitimate authority. I also could draw on some frightening facts about abuse in police families, including the fact



that violence in police families is "substantially higher than levels obtained with civilian samples and somewhat higher than military samples" and that because of the "close bonds" formed by officers reluctant to "break the code of silence" such violence often remains secret (Van Hassett and Sheehan 2-3).

While making Tom a police officer could heighten the tension in the script, I still needed to explore ways in which to make him a well-rounded character. In my early character development Dr. Crespy commented:

Tom is going to be difficult for you - but for us to believe that Annie would stay with him, we have to see how exciting, daring, virile, whatever he is that draws him to her . . . we have to see how seductive he is as well as what a monster he is. Now all we have is a monster.<sup>35</sup>

When a character physically, verbally, and emotionally abuses the protagonist, it is easy to create a "bad" guy. My challenge, however, was that I needed to create an abuser who wasn't all "bad." For Annie not to look foolish for falling in love with him, we had to see the 'good' in her husband. I needed to make sure I could show both sides of Tom. While I needed Tom to be a character who would be unrecognizable as an abuser, I also needed to be aware that showing a woman staying with an abusive partner because the

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<sup>35</sup> Notes from David Crespy on Character Development worksheets, February 20, 2001.

man is so magnificent doesn't give us the full picture of an abusive relationship. While Dr. Crespy was looking at the dramatic structure and the need to create a believable relationship for the world of the play, I needed to find a balance between the needs of the dramatic structure and the reality of abusive relationships. In the sociological portion of my character development of Tom, I had stated: "Before joining the police force, Tom graduated from a state college with a degree in physical education. He is certified to teach P.E. grades K-12." Dr. Crespy noted the importance of knowing this about the character I was creating. He asked: "Does he love kids?"<sup>36</sup> This question became important as I searched for ways to make the character of Tom likeable.

*MOMENT: Preschool Days*

*Once upon a time, in a little town in Missouri, I was a director and teacher at a preschool. There is something very real about little kids - they play, they love, they laugh, they cry, they mope, and then they play and love and laugh and cry some more.*

*Young children touch my heart.*

*They make me smile.*

*They remind me to play and love and laugh and cry.*

*I painted a mural on the preschool wall: a rainbow over a green field and a babbling brook with leaping fish and hopping frogs. When I left my job at the preschool, the staff made a quilt for me. Each of the children painted a square for the quilt and one of the teachers replicated my mural in the center of the quilt.*

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<sup>36</sup> Character Development by Kate Berneking Kogut; comments by David Crespy, February 20, 2001.

Today most of those children are all grown up. Sadly, three are deceased. Those who continue to thrive include a social worker, a backhoe operator, two actors, a builder, a realtor, one writer, a chef, a teacher or two, one graphic designer, and a store clerk. In the local paper I sometimes read about their engagements, weddings, or the births of their children. Occasionally I see one of them, all grown up and competent. But I remember the little children they once were: snacking on cheese and apple slices, singing, learning to tie their shoes, playing in the snow, listening to stories, and showing off their paintings when Mom or Dad came to pick them up. And when I remember the children they once were, I am reminded again of the mysteries and beauty of life.

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Intellectually I knew that the man who had abused me must have had some good qualities. When I tried to think of them, though, I became confused. How could someone who had abused me be "good"? But if he wasn't "good", why had I stayed with him as long as I had? After the relationship had ended, I continued to postpone much of my emotional healing process. It was only recently that I had begun to confront my anger and fear and it was still painful to think about the real man. To explore ways in which to make the abusive character likeable, I needed to look outside of who the "real" person had been. In *Creating Unforgettable Characters*, Linda Seger states: "Wherever you begin in the creation of your character, ultimately you will have to draw on your own experience" (25). I had thought that I was drawing on my own experience when I was drawing from the real abuser to create a fictional character. What I didn't

acknowledge yet was that this was going to be a play and although the story was *inspired* by my own experiences, it was a work of fiction. I didn't have to depend upon the real abuser to create a well-balanced and interesting character. And so I began to cast my net wider.

*MOMENT: Comfort Food*

*For me, sandwiches are a comfort food. They bring back warm memories of growing up. Back in the days when Walt introduced "The Wonderful World of Disney" on Sunday evenings, grilled cheese was one of my favorite sandwiches. Every day when I was in third grade I carried a bologna sandwich neatly wrapped in waxed paper and safely tucked into my plaid, metal lunch box. It made me feel close to home. A Braunschweiger and sweet pickle sandwich on white bread with a little bit of mayonnaise accompanied by a Trixie Beldon mystery seemed to make all my woes of later childhood disappear for a little while. Summers during my teen years I discovered a new favorite: American cheese and sliced tomatoes, fresh from my grandmother's garden. A touch of salt for the tomatoes. No condiments. White bread.*

*And then there's the Old Faithful of comfort food sandwiches: peanut butter and jelly. There is an ageless appeal to a good PB&J. It conjures up memories of simpler times. I love the taste and texture of peanut butter. Does the sugary sweetness of jelly make me feel like I'm getting away with eating dessert first? Comfort food: peanut butter and jelly. Grape jelly.*

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Ultimately, I did draw from my experiences to develop the character of Tom. However, rather than wrestling with the conflicting feelings of searching for "good" in my abuser, I put parts of my self into the character. First, I gave the fictional Tom my own delight in youngsters and

found ways to show his love of children. In the script, during a conversation with his mother, the fictional character of Tom responds to a question about his partner's new baby:

"He's great...seven months old, crawling all over the place. I love it when he laughs...he has this incredible, wonderful laugh. It's so, I don't even know how to explain it . . . so natural. And contagious!"

When Tom's mother says that babies also cry, Tom responds:

"Don't I know it! With him it's this huge bellow of a cry. The thing I love about the little ones is there's nothing fake about them . . . they're so . . . real."<sup>37</sup>

These lines show Tom's enjoyment of the baby and that he had taken the time to observe the child's behavior.

Casual conversations with women I know led me to the idea that many women find romantic gestures charming. The beginning of *Survival Dance* shows Tom apologizing with a bouquet of roses for Annie. To show Tom's attempts at being romantic, I also created a picnic scene where Tom surprises Annie with a song he wrote for her. Later versions of the play would see additional tries at romance from Tom,

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<sup>37</sup> First draft of *Survival Dance*, Act I, Scene 5.

including showing Annie a meteor shower and filling their apartment with balloons for her birthday.

Some women also seem to enjoy men who exhibit a playful, little boy quality at times. I decided that Tom's love of a good PB&J sandwich might show the endearing, little boy side of him. At the same time, his teasing insistence that strawberry jelly with peanut butter is somehow "un-American" offers a small insight into his methods of control and having things his way.<sup>38</sup>

I had created a fictional character that was inspired and informed by my own experience, but was also a product of research. I had drawn from my earlier readings other women's stories, intimate partner violence, and power abuse. Creating this character was one thing. Living and working with a character that brought up so many bad memories was another challenge. I decided to interview Tom.

Drawing from a writing exercise suggested by Marshall Cook in *Freeing Your Creativity: A Writer's Guide*, I decided to "interview" Tom as a way in which to see if he worked within the story I planned. Additionally, I would find out how I would react to "spending time" with this character for the duration of the writing of the play.

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<sup>38</sup> *Survival Dance*, first draft. Act I, Scene 9, page 35.

## CHARACTER INTERVIEW: Tom Stratton

I met Tom at a little Irish pub he likes to frequent. They cater to the police crowd. The atmosphere is dark, but friendly. Walking through the bar I overheard snippets of conversations about various police operations.

Tom hadn't arrived yet, so I ordered a bottle of Bud Light and waited. It was obvious the bartender knew Tom and just as obvious that I wasn't the first woman Tom had met here. This isn't a place the cops bring their wives except on special occasions like St. Patty's Day, so it made me wonder how many other women Tom has met here.

I knew him when he arrived. He was handsome...like in my description of him. Boyishly handsome. He knows it, too. He had on a sport coat over a crisp white cotton oxford. Khaki trousers made him look like a thousand other 30-something businessmen. He waited at the door while his eyes adjusted to the darkness of the pub. Slowly he surveyed the room. This was going to be interesting. The keen observer observing the keen observer observing the keen observer. The bartender gave a subtle nod toward me. Tom's face shifted into a wide smile...endearing. But I was skeptical. I knew a guy like Tom once. The bartender had Tom's beer ready for him and as he passed the bar Tom picked it up. Heineken. Tom planted his feet wide as he stopped at the booth. Feet planted farther apart give you a broader base from which to move and keep your balance. It was force of habit...I don't pose much of a physical threat to a police detective. He introduced himself while he was standing. I stood and extended my hand. He didn't like that. And already he didn't seem to like me. But I needed information, so I tried to put him at ease...I sat down first. He smiled as he took his seat, casually allowing his jacket to fall open so I could catch a glimpse of his shoulder holster. To intimidate? Or impress? I wasn't sure. I struggled to get the conversation off to a good start. Returning his smile, I thanked him. "I appreciate you agreeing to meet with me."

His gaze was steady. "I'm not sure exactly why you wanted to talk to me, but it sounded interesting."

"When I write a character I like to make sure they're well-rounded. I didn't want you coming across as one-dimensional."

He scowled. "I'm not one-dimensional, so why would you write me that way?"

I didn't like the feeling of floundering I was beginning to experience. "I'm not planning to...that's why I wanted to meet you."

"You talking to Annie, too?" I nodded. He stared at his beer for a long time. "You know, sometimes, she's a little...I'm not sure how to say this...." He took a slow swig and fiddled with the napkin. I had to remind myself that I could outwait him. He looked at me. Green eyes. Little gold flecks in them. I got the feeling he wanted to make sure I noticed the flecks. He continued, "She's – well, I worry about her." He paused. "I get real protective of her, you know?" He put the bottle to his lips again. When he brought it away he licked the remainder of the beer off his lips and smiled at me. "It's nice of you to listen to me." I nodded. He touched my arm. "Nice sweater – brings out the blue in your eyes."

I started to pull my arm away, but his fingers were playing with the fabric of my sweater. “Soft.” His statement was almost inaudible. I wondered if he was going to pull out all the stops. He pointed to my beer to see if I needed another. I shook my head and he motioned to the bartender for another Heineken for himself.

“So, could you tell me a little about your work?” I wanted to keep him on track...needed to make sure I stayed in control of the interview.

His gaze was steady. “Sure. I love my work. It makes me feel good to be able to help people...you know, getting some of the scum...the criminals off the streets and making it safer for folks like you and me.” I tried to figure out if he was serious or if he was bullshitting me. I thought he was serious. “Sometimes it really sucks, though, you know? You work your ass off on a case and then some high priced attorney finds some loophole nobody’s thought of before so the prick walks. Those are *not* good days, lemme tell ya.” He stared at his bottle.

“I’m sure it’s difficult to deal with that sort of frustration.”

“What are you, some kind of fucking shrink?” His smile was gone, his eyes narrow.

“No. It just seems like there’s a lot to deal with sometimes, and I wonder how you manage.” He wasn’t buying it.

“Are you judging me?” I assured him I wasn’t, but he continued. “If it wasn’t for people like me, people like you would be scared shitless to go out at night, so don’t go pulling that holier than thou crap on me!”

I struggled to find a neutral position in the interview. “When you say I’m judging you, it bothers me because I’m trying to understand you a little better. I can’t understand you if I’m judging you.”

Was he diffused? He smiled. Sat back for a minute. His eyes scanned the room, pausing for a moment on a man at the bar. His gaze settled back on me as he leaned forward. He motioned for me to lean in to hear his secret. I complied. “Puttin’ away the bad guys. That’s what it’s all about. You do the work, build your case, then go in and stop the scumbags from fuckin’ up some good person’s life.” He took a drink. “And all the while you’re just prayin’ that somebody’s covering your ass. You gotta trust your partner, you know what I’m saying?”

“I think I do.” My reply was a mistake. I should’ve let him go on.

“No. When you know what it’s like to walk into a room and not know whether you’re gonna walk out or be carried out in a bag – when you wonder every day if you’re wife’s gonna see your face in one piece at the end of the night, or whether your dreams of kids and a big back yard are gonna end with some fucker’s bullet stuck in your spine...maybe then you’ll know what I mean.”

He finished his beer, stood suddenly and looked down at me. He pulled his sunglasses out of his pocket and put them on. “Interview over,” he stated flatly. He walked out.

I ended up paying the tab. I’m still not sure what the hell happened here.

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When I finished writing the interview I *wasn't* sure exactly what had happened. But the exercise worked. I found that Tom had a drive to do something good and, at least in his own way, wanted to help people. I discovered that he cursed a lot, didn't always like "the system", that he was neat and clean, and that he sometimes got scared. I also realized that during the interview he had set traps for me to keep me off-guard. For the most part, I was able to sidestep his traps and keep control of the interview. While I didn't trust him, I wanted to know him. While I didn't want to like him, I found him intriguing.

In the interview, Tom came across as being very good at his job. Hauge states that making a character good at what they do is one way in which to make the audience like the character (41). And although it would be Annie who would be in jeopardy within the play, the audience would understand that Tom is in jeopardy every day in his work. So Tom was good at what he did and he was often in jeopardy in his work - facts that might help the audience identify with him. Additionally, I had given him traits and backstory similar to parts of my own, so at least in theory, I would be able to connect with this character.

MOMENT: Gagi's Garden

My sister and I called our maternal grandmother Gagi.<sup>39</sup> Credit for coming up with the nickname belongs to my sister. Gagi was magical . . . beautiful inside and out. She made up adventure stories about children lost in the snow or building homes inside of massive tree trunks. Gagi was an amazing piano player whose eyes danced when she laughed. Materially she had very little, but she made the most with what she had. When I was growing up she made me hot tea and let me drink it out of breakable cups. Today her yellow teapot sits on my shelf. It makes me smile.

You know that feeling of acceptance that is complete and unconditional? It's like being tucked between a feather bed and a handmade afghan where you're wrapped in love and comfort. That was how it was with Gagi. But with her you got it all: the love and comfort and the feather bed and handmade afghan.

My grandparents lived in the country outside a small town in Illinois. It was the place of many childhood adventures. Especially vivid memories, though, are Gagi's gardens. When she was a little girl, Gagi dug violets from the woods and planted them in her mother's yard. Years later, she dug some of those violets from her mother's yard and planted them along a woodland path at her own home. My mom dug some of Gagi's violets and planted them at her house, and in keeping with tradition, I transplanted some from my mom's house to my own. The woodland path Gagi had created was only one of many garden spots.

In the spring and summer her yard blossomed into color: cherry trees, apple trees, daffodils, mock orange bush, lilacs, snowball bush, rose-of-Sharon, and a rambling yellow rose bush. The rose bush was near the gate to the vegetable garden. Through that gate was row upon row of vegetables and flowers: tomatoes, potatoes, zucchini, peppers, corn, sunflowers, rhubarb, zinnias, peanuts, beets, radishes, and more. Grapes grew on one side of the garden and on the other side was a bramble of raspberry bushes. They took forever to ripen! Once they did my sister and I would dive into the brambles to fill our buckets, sometimes eating the juicy berries right off the bushes. My mouth tingles as I remember the sweet and tart smooch-in-the-mouth of the fresh berries. Warm memories.

# # #

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<sup>39</sup> Pronounced GAHgee – both 'g's are hard.

## CREATING THE CHARACTER OF ANNIE

Annie gave me trouble from the beginning.

In working to remain true to the emotions of being involved in an abusive relationship, much of what I created when I created Annie was very close to myself. In Annie's character development worksheet I wrote: "She feels like she loves life . . . or should" and that "she has a streak of independence that runs totally opposite to the life she is living." Dr. Crespy noted: "She's not a victim, she's a fighter."<sup>40</sup> I wanted Annie to be a fighter just as I wanted to be a fighter. I was afraid of revealing too much about my *self* in my play, though.

After I "interviewed" Tom, I did the same with the character of Annie.

### CHARACTER INTERVIEW: Annie Tyler Stratton

Annie was my next stop. I went to the store where she works. She seems very well respected there but I found myself wondering if she'll ever move up or if she'll find herself stuck. Annie showed me into her boss's office so we could close the door. As I watched her, in many ways it was like looking in a mirror. Only she was older than I had been. I thanked my lucky stars I had wised up when I did. I wanted to tell her things, tell her what she should do...but that doesn't work. She has to know it inside of herself first. All I could do was listen and extend an offer.

"Phyllis<sup>41</sup> is out of town. We can talk in here." We sat at a round table. "So, you met Tom?" I nodded. She motioned to my note pad. "You probably wrote down that he's 'boyishly handsome' and has a 'winning smile.' 'Endearing'

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<sup>40</sup> Character Development Worksheet of Annie Tyler Stratton with comments from Dr. David Crespy, February 20, 2001.

<sup>41</sup> Phyllis eventually became the name of Tom's mother in *Survival Dance*. In the early stages of the development process, when I created these character "interviews," I did not plan to include Tom's mother as a character in the play.

is what most people say.” She knew the effect her husband had. “And he is, just not...not...to, well, not to me. I mean usually. It’s not that he’s *not*...” She covered her face with her hands. “Why do I do that? I continue to defend him not matter what!”

“It’s easy to see why a woman could fall in love with him.”

She smiled. “You’ve got that right!” She started to say something. Stopped. Smiled again. “But love’s not enough, do you think?”

Did I ever sound this unsure of myself? I think I must have. “No. It’s not.” She relaxed, sat back in her chair.

“I just wanted to get across one thing, to you, okay? It’s just, well...I’m not a dumb person. I don’t secretly *want* to be hurt, and I certainly know that what he’s doing isn’t...it isn’t ri.... It isn’t they way married people are supposed to act toward each other. I should *know* better. But, you know, I have a hard time giving up on things.” I noticed her seeming to be more protective of herself.

“And...well...I guess that’s mainly what I wanted to say. I’m not stupid. Sometimes, he makes me...you know...sort of ...afraid.”

Annie sat quietly alone for several minutes. Her face had become dull, lifeless. Where had all her energy gone? She looked at me.

“Sometimes I get scared...”

###

That was all.

I hadn’t fictionalized much. When I read what I had written it seemed like it was Kate “now” interviewing Kate “then”. And neither of them seemed very willing to reveal much. As I reread the interviews for this dissertation, I discovered that the writer seemed to be trying to take care of the character; the Kate “now” trying to take care of the Kate “then”. Where I had found Tom intriguing as a character when I interviewed him, I found Annie bland and uninteresting. The word count for Tom’s interview was 808. Annie’s was 381 - less than half of Tom’s. What was I saying to myself? About my *self*?

Using Hauge's methods of connecting with characters, I decided that since Annie would sometimes be in jeopardy, that fact could serve to connect her to the audience and make them care about her. Additionally, I could create sympathy for her because she wasn't to blame for what is happening to her.

But still, Annie remained elusive.

## **CREATING SUPPORTING CHARACTERS**

### **Other Annie**

The character of 'Other Annie' was always an important part of how I envisioned the story. I created Other Annie to fill two needs for Annie: 1) Other Annie was a survival mechanism for Annie during times when Tom became violent and 2) Other Annie represented freedom to Annie: freedom of expression, freedom of self, freedom from abuse.

In *The Body Remembers*, Babette Rothchild explains how "dissociation implies a splitting of awareness. During a traumatic incident, the victim may separate elements of the experience effectively reducing the impact of the incident" (65). As a survival mechanism, Other Annie offered Annie a place to retreat. While Annie knew what was happening to her, she was able to separate herself from the physical and emotional pain of Tom's abuse.

My other need for Other Annie came directly from me. Other Annie was the *essence* of Annie. She was spirited and fun and capable. She lived in a world without verbal, physical, or emotional abuse and she had the freedoms for which Annie longed. They were longings I remembered well from the abusive relationship: the longing to be accepted for who and what I was, the longing for respect and appreciation, and the longing to be able to voice those needs of self, acceptance, and respect without fear.

In notes regarding my plot treatment, Dr. Crespy questioned whether or not Annie would need to tear down her imaginary cabin. Whether Annie would need to "kill" Other Annie in order to move ahead with her life. Although I found this to be an interesting concept, I knew immediately that action would not work for the script I was planning. Annie should not have to destroy what she saw as a part of her *self* that offered her hope.

In response to a developmental writing assignment in class, I created a monologue for Annie that became an in-depth look at Other Annie and the purpose she served for Annie:

(ANNIE steps into the spotlight. She glances around, waiting for someone to tell her what to do. She brushes her bangs out of her eyes, blinking in the bright light.)

VOICE

Go ahead, Annie. Tell us.

ANNIE

I have a cabin. It's in the mountains somewhere, but there's also an ocean close by...like within walking distance. I know that's not very realistic, but....

(She bites her lip, shuffles her feet.)

VOICE

Go on.

ANNIE

Well, I can walk on the beach, then follow a winding path up to my cabin. It's really peaceful. I can smell the pines...hear the wind. And this place is *all mine*. I can breathe there. Not like our apartment. Nothing in that place is mine...everything is perfectly matched.

(Beat)

I hate perfectly matched. In my cabin I have a big overstuffed chair - the arms are wide and worn. The chair really exists...it does! It was Gran's and when she died I wanted her chair, but Tom said **we** didn't **want** any old crappy chair.

(sarcastic)

We **DID** have a new living room set, after all. Perfectly matched.

(Beat)

Jill took the chair. I sit in it when I visit.

(smiles)

But in my cabin...it's all mine. I can sit in my chair, I can enjoy a fire and eat chocolate cake without anyone telling me I'm gonna get a fat ass. You know, he complains about me eating too much, but then he tells me I'm too skinny.

(as him)

"You're gonna be an ugly old lady - with that bony face...UGLY old lady!"

(Beat)

In my cabin I don't have to listen to him. And, well, like I said, I can breathe.

(smiles)

I bring in bunches of wildflowers and put them in old pitchers...I open the windows to let the breezes in...I love the way the lace curtains look when they blow in the breeze.

(Beat)

When things get bad, that's where I go. I mean, I *dream* about my cabin, but I also *imagine* it. Like when Tom starts...when he....

(Beat)

One time I imagined planting daffodil bulbs outside my cabin. I think I planted almost three hundred bulbs before he was finished....

(weak smile)

They looked pretty the next spring.

(grins)

And I can dance there - dance and no one laughs!

Whenever I need to escape, I go there. Later I look, you know, in the mirror and I know I was **really** with Tom - I can feel it AND see it...but it's easier to take it...I don't feel things as much when I escape.

(beat)

I wish I had a real cabin....

# # #

This monologue was never meant to be part of the script. It was a method to get to know my main character. Although the exercise was a monologue for Annie, it revealed that Other Annie was the embodiment of the freedom for which Annie longed. Her description of place became her inner world that was inhabited by Other Annie, the self into whom Annie escaped when her world became too painful. Through this monologue I can see how I drew from my own likes and dislikes. In this character development exercise, I can see my own love of daffodils. I am drawn to the sensory images: of the scent of pines, the sound of the wind, the beauty of wildflowers, the sound and smell of the ocean, and the peaceful comfort found in Annie's dream cabin. Additionally, I recognize the 'gaps' in her narrative of her experiences.



## **Creating the Chorus**

Supporting characters in a play serve to move the story forward. Their interactions with the main characters reveal or create needs, conflicts, and obstacles for the protagonist. In *Survival Dance*, though, I needed something more from my supporting characters. I needed them to be able to step into and out of the action of the play, interacting not only with the main characters, but also with each other while commenting upon the story of which they were both watchers and participants.

Haven't we all questioned a relationship involving someone we know? What are the signs of abuse? What is the best way to handle the situation if we suspect abuse? How can we approach a loved one about our concerns? What can we do to help a friend? Or even a stranger? And how can we handle our own frustrations if she doesn't leave him or if she goes back to him? I couldn't answer all of these questions within the play, but using a chorus of individuals who populated Annie's world, I hoped to encourage audience members to see themselves and ask questions. I envisioned the chorus as an audience to the action of the play. I wanted the theatre audience to enter the world of Tom and Annie through the eyes of the chorus members.

In my original planning stages, I included five chorus members: Jill Marie Tyler, Annie's sister; Dr. Alison Page, Annie's new physician; Bobbie, a world-wise server at a restaurant; Jared Hoerner, Tom's partner; and Mankato Smith, a 60-year old neighbor with questions about what he hears through the apartment walls. By the time I started writing the first draft of the play, I had expanded the chorus to six: Jill Tyler: Annie's sister; Doctor: I no longer referred to the Doctor by name so there could be non-gender specific casting; Bobbie/Gran: the actor playing the world-wise server would double as Annie's beloved Grandmother; Jared: Tom's police partner; Phyllis: Tom's loving and widowed mother; and Mankato Smith: I now described Mankato as a "friendly neighbor, thirties to forties."<sup>42</sup> This character was meant to lend some humor to the play as well as offer Annie a few nice words . . . words that might keep her going. It was my own personal tip of the hat to the nice professor from Mankato whose words of encouragement sometimes kept me writing.

Remarkably absent from my background work was the main character of my play, Annie. She was there and not there. She would not assert herself in my writing process. Or was it that I wouldn't allow it?

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<sup>42</sup> Character description page, *Survival Dance*, first draft 2001.

*MOMENT: Falling Dreams*

*I have dreams that I'm falling. I can't control my fall and so I plunge.*

*Farther.*

*Faster.*

*I'm afraid.*

*I struggle to call out but my screams are swallowed by my terror and I awaken, my pillow moist with tears.*

# # #

**ADDITIONAL WRITING EXERCISES**

David Crespy incorporates dream work into his own playwriting process.<sup>43</sup> He is quoted in Michael Wright's *Playwriting Master Class*, saying:

dreaming has been an organic way to develop an honest, intuitive, and disciplined stylistic approach to breaking realism's death grip, while avoiding throwing the baby out with the bath water. (42)

Everyone understands the strange quality dreams can have, and such qualities can create theatricality in a script. Dr. Crespy states that using dreams is "a shorthand everyone can understand" about such theatricality (42). As part of the requirement for the Advanced Playwriting class, Dr. Crespy expected us to keep a dream journal.

I don't always remember my dreams. Those I do remember range in tone from silly to terrifying. I have often faced challenges in my dreams such as the aforementioned river

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<sup>43</sup> For more on David Crespy's dreamwork processes in playwriting, see Chapter 2 in *Playwriting Master Class* by Michael Wright.

crossings. I have also been chased through my dreams: across rooftops, down alleys, through unknown forests, and through abandoned buildings. But I had never dreamt about being challenged by an animal . . . not until the Smart Bear visited me in my sleep one night.

March 2001. Dream Journal. I described a dream about a bear. I explained he was:

a very smart bear. He kept trying to cut me off whenever I would try to move to get away from him. He was in the back of a pick-up truck for a while, but every time I would start to move he had sort of this bear smirk on his huge face and he'd anticipate my moves, outsmarting me.<sup>44</sup>

I remember in my dream I stepped right: two, three, four - the bear countered: two, three, four. I tried left: six, seven, eight - he countered: six, seven eight. He was agile and adept at anticipating how I would move to get away from him. He knew how I would try to get away and he kept me from it. He kept me right where he wanted me. He was very large and very frightening. I wrote about the bear dream in my journal, I told my husband about the smart bear, and then I promptly stored the dream in my memory. But the dream would not be stored away for long.

Three days later I received an e-mail from my daughter who was in school at Northern Michigan University. She told

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<sup>44</sup> Kate Berneking Kogut, Dream Journal, March 2001.

me she had a terrible night's sleep, mostly because of what had seemed to her to be her longest dream ever . . . about a bear. She said it was a very smart bear and she was having trouble getting away from it because it was so clever. She wrote: "It was amazing how the bear could read my mind and outsmart me. Clever animal."<sup>45</sup>

After receiving my daughter's e-mail I began to look more closely at my own bear dream. Because I had not told Casey about my own Smart Bear dream, I was a bit 'freaked out' by the similarities in our dreams so close together. David Crespy states that: "Nobody can imitate your dreams"<sup>46</sup> but can dreams of people who are closely connected imitate each other? It was a strange occurrence. For whatever reason, it had taken a dream bear three days to travel from Columbia, Missouri to the shores of Lake Superior in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The Smart Bear visiting my daughter was frightening for me in many ways. By visiting her in her dream, Smart Bear had forced his importance on me. I wouldn't forget him.

The assignment came in my playwriting class to add a dream scene to the play. At first I balked. I didn't want to . . . it didn't fit . . . a dream in my play would feel

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<sup>45</sup> Casey Kogut e-mail, March 8, 2001.

<sup>46</sup> Author interview with David Crespy, September 20, 2006.

contrived . . . and I grumbled on and on. What kind of dream would I put into *Survival Dance*? It wouldn't make sense. However I was a dedicated student. And so I wrote the Smart Bear into the dream. In the dream scene, the abusive husband was seen as a bear by all the characters except Annie. The stage directions did not state anything about the husband as a bear, only that "Tom leans against a post, leering at Annie."<sup>47</sup>

As previously stated, in this first version of *Survival Dance* there were only two Annies: Annie and Other Annie. Other Annie was not involved in this scene and Annie was the only character that saw Tom as Tom. The chorus saw Tom as a bear, warning Annie of the danger. In this version, Annie's challenge in the dream was to get off the boat that the bear was on, however she was warned that the bear might be able to swim. Mancato asked her "Can you swim faster than a bear?" (II-6-76). What I had first balked at became a very important image to me as I continued writing *Survival Dance*.

*MOMENT: Tanner's Shoe*

*We once lived in an old farmhouse in Harrisburg, Missouri. During an especially rainy season, what was usually finely tilled garden soil had become thick mud and while dirt and mud were two of the favorite playmates of*

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<sup>47</sup> *Survival Dance*, First draft: Act II, Scene 5, page 73.

our young son, this garden mud had certain qualities of which he was unaware.

A terrified scream from Tanner ignited my maternal instincts and I raced to throw myself between my child and whatever forces of evil threatened him. But there were no monsters. No birds of prey swooping low to carry him off. No violent criminals on a rampage. As my hugs and reassurances helped quiet sobs, I learned what had happened. Running through the garden as fast as his two-year old legs would carry him, Tanner had run right out of one of his shoes. It sat stranded and alone - a tiny red sneaker mired in a sea of mud.

Tanner had run many times and never had this unseen and unexplained force from the Earth gripped his shoe and ripped it from his foot. And only one shoe - the other was in place on his other foot. What a mysterious phenomenon this must have seemed.

I have been like that shoe several times in my life. Or is it that I have been like the child running, who senses something powerful ripping his shoe from his foot, yet able to retain the other one and keep running? Maybe I am both. The self and the other. The whole and the parts.

# # #

#### **WRITING THE SCRIPT**

As I began writing the script and drawing inspiration from my own life story, I wrote the play as if the abuse was happening to the main character in the present. Annie was involved in a marriage that was abusive. So while the play was inspired by incidents from my past, it was far removed from where my life was in the present - where I continued to battle my own demons from the past. The action in the play was driven by the main character's need to get away from the abuse.

As I wrote the scenes using my Plot Treatment as a basic guideline, I continued to bring my self into the play. I included my love of gardening, wildflowers, and old varieties of flowers. In the opening scene when as offstage voice asked Tom and Annie to talk about love, Annie states:

ANNIE

There's a woods I used to walk in. in the spring it's filled with wildflowers – they're not always easy to see...you have to be willing to look for them. Some are really small, but they're wonderful. I especially love one called the trout lily. Sort of an ugly name for something so beautiful. It can take up to seven years of just coming up as these leaves every spring before it finally blooms. You'd think after going to all that trouble it would be this incredibly showy flower. But it's not. It looks delicate, but it's strong. And no matter what, it keeps blooming...year after year...Maybe what I love most about flowers is that they're a reminder, you know, that we really only need a few simple things...It's like they're saying, "A little rain, a little sun, then just watch me grow!"...and bloom...I don't want to forget the bloom part!<sup>48</sup>

After Tom presents Annie with a bouquet of roses, Annie and Other Annie list flowers they love, including *old roses*, "Like Gran had in her garden."<sup>49</sup> These old roses, of course, and all the other old varieties of flowers listed, were inspired by memories of my grandmother's garden.

Although I knew there needed to be violence within the play, I didn't want the play to be overwhelmingly violent. I wanted to show the emotional and psychological abuse that accompanies the physical abuse. In *Trauma and Recovery*, Herman discusses how methods of psychological domination

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<sup>48</sup> *Survival Dance*, first draft: Act I, Scene 1, pages 1-2, March 2001.

<sup>49</sup> *Survival Dance*, first draft: Act I, Scene 3, page 13, March 2001.



establish control over the victim: "It is not necessary to use violence often to keep the victim in a constant state of fear" (77). Threats against others may be used as well as threats against the battered woman. Herman argues that "systematic, repetitive infliction of psychological trauma" (77) establishes one person's control over another. Additionally, Herman explains that along with fear, "the perpetrator seeks to destroy the victim's sense of autonomy" (77). Many women view such psychological abuse as causing the longer-lasting scars of IPV. In *Surviving Domestic Violence*, Elaine Weiss states that psychological abuse is "the most devastating type of abuse, leaving the deepest wound" (7). I knew for myself the psychological scars had lingered. Those scars were like tentacles stretching through time and across miles, continuing to control me more often than I would readily admit.

To show Tom's campaign of controlling behavior, emotional and verbal abuse, I created scenes that viewed separately might not show the negative effect of his actions, but when viewed together, the cumulative effects of the separate actions could reveal a campaign of control. Such scenes included when Tom squirted ketchup on Annie and blamed her for being clumsy; and when belittling her relationship with her sister, he threatened Jill to Annie

saying "one of these days I'm gonna kill that fucking bitch."<sup>50</sup> I also included moments when he belittled her, made fun of her, and sugarcoated hateful insults. One example is when Tom holds her hands tightly so she can't pull them away and says: "God, you have beautiful eyes. And your smile . . . your teeth are just crooked enough to be cute . . .(kisses her hands) I'm a lucky man."<sup>51</sup> Juxtaposing such scenes with loving memories and moments of joy and playfulness, I hoped to create a realistic feel of an abusive relationship while simultaneously working within a dramatic structure necessary for a play.

For Dr. Crespy, one thing that seemed to be missing from this first version was dancing. I am not a dancer. My vision of the dance was two-fold: Other Annie would dance in her cabin - her dance represented the freedom to express herself that Annie dreamed about. The other "dance" was my central vision of the meaning of the title. It was the mental and physical movements of Annie struggling to "step" where she was supposed to step and to perform as someone else (Tom) had choreographed her to perform.

The first ending I wrote for the script included a confrontation between Tom, Annie, and Other Annie. In the

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<sup>50</sup> *Survival Dance*, first draft: Act I, Scene 12, page 52.

<sup>51</sup> *Survival Dance*, first draft: Act II, Scene 5, page 67.

scene, Annie took a stand with Tom, telling him that some day she would be gone. Annie also told Other Annie that someday Annie would be able to live the life that Other Annie had been living for her. It was a weak ending. I was on shaky footing and I didn't know why. About that early draft, David Crespy states: "At the end of the semester you had a lot of scenes, but you still had to shape it more. It seemed to me that the play was unfinished and needed something to pull it together . . . some glue."<sup>52</sup>

As the semester came to a close, we were scheduled to read my second act in the class. My daughter came home from college and I asked Dr. Crespy if it would be all right for her to come to class to read the part of Annie. He agreed.

Sitting in the classroom next to my daughter as she read the words I had written was difficult for me. She was the age I had been when I was involved in that long ago, abusive relationship. Casey's voice sounded like mine. Annie's dialogue sounded like things I might have said. It terrified me to hear her speak those words of denial and excuse, words of pain and sorrow and terror; words that were so similar to ones I had once spoken.

At the end of the reading, I knew the emotional tenor of much of the script rang true. I had accomplished what I

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<sup>52</sup> Author interview with David Crespy, September 20, 2006.

had set out to do in the first and second drafts of the script, but the play was a long way from being finished. I knew this was a play I needed to continue working on - hearing my daughter speaking Annie's words and having Tom's words spoken to her reinforced that this play could possibly open people's eyes and initiate a dialogue about IPV. I felt a renewed commitment. But I was emotionally drained. I was ready to put the play aside for a while and concentrate on other stories. Preferably comedies. And maybe when I came back to the play I would find the "glue" I needed.

#### CHAPTER FOUR: THE DEVELOPMENT JOURNEY

Writing the first draft of *Survival Dance* was emotionally draining for me. At the end of the semester I was relieved to put the script aside to work on other projects. Then in the fall of 2001 Dr. Suzanne Burgoyne expressed interest in looking at original scripts to possibly direct in MU's 2002-2003 theatre season. I immediately wanted to give her my comedy, *Another Trail*. I believed that although the script still needed work, it was definitely the most production-ready script I had written. I would relish the experience of further development of the script with a director, dramaturg, and cast. And although the play addresses some dramatic issues, it is funny. I needed funny. At the suggestion of Drs. Carver and Crespy, though, I also gave Dr. Burgoyne a copy of *Survival Dance*.

I hoped she would choose to direct *Another Trail*. I wasn't sure I was ready to spend more time revisiting the maelstrom of emotions I stirred up when I was writing the first drafts of *Survival Dance*. I knew the development process would entail rewriting and I didn't know if I wanted to do that work on the script. Yet. I kept my fingers crossed she would choose to propose *Another Trail*.

She chose *Survival Dance*.

I took a deep breath. Part of me was thrilled. Most of me was terrified.

The thrilled part of me was jumping up and down, excited to have the opportunity to work on the production of a new play. Also, I felt the selection validated intimate partner violence as an important issue that might benefit from a voice in the arts. And finally, if Suzanne Burgoyne wanted to direct *Survival Dance*, maybe I was a pretty good writer. I began to believe in my abilities a little bit more.

Then there was the terrified part. That was the part of me with sweaty palms and a nervous stomach that wondered how I would get through living with this story again on a daily basis. Would I need to talk about my own experiences with abuse during the development process? The idea of "coming out" about being a survivor of domestic violence terrified me.

*MOMENT: Rafting*

*The guy . . . that man . . . you know the one I'm talking about? Yeah. Him. The last summer we were together we took a trip. A vacation. For me, though, the vacation became a journey. As we started out, I felt a sense of adventure. Rafting on the Colorado River would be an adventure. We drove to Moab, Utah. No, he drove to Moab. I rode. He didn't want me driving. Once there we joined a group of other adventure-seeking vacationers along with two river guides to raft on the Colorado River.*

*I had come to another river.*

Three days on the Colorado River. Three. That isn't much time for a vacation, but it was plenty of time for a journey . . . enough time to get reacquainted with my self.

The setting was amazing: red rock bluffs, the huge, open sky. The river was low, so sometimes where the guides expected to encounter rapids, there were none. We would, however, occasionally come upon rapids where the guides weren't expecting them. The calm floating, the occasional dips into the river for a swim, back in the raft, and then around the bend in a river we'd see it ahead: the churning water . . . the dips . . . the eddies. The sound would reach us, the boatmen made their approach and then we were in the middle of the rapids.

Calm . . . and then -  
Not calm.

One time as we were going through a set of rapids the raft seemed bent in half with the front of the boat at almost a ninety-degree angle from where I was sitting. Looking up I realized I was gazing directly at the portable toilet looming above me - or more specifically, the box that held the portable toilet that was strapped into the front of the raft. I laughed out loud.

There was a feeling of aliveness I experienced while on the river: the power of the river, the beauty of the landscape, the enormity of the sky. . . . I found myself feeling more like me. Was I beginning to see my self more through my own eyes and lens rather than the filter of an abusive partner?

I clearly remember that although he was verbally abusive at times during the trip, he wasn't physically abusive.

Before we left the river I took an empty film canister and filled it with Colorado River water. I had it for years. Sometimes I would shake it and hear the water. After leaving the river, I never opened the canister again. I no longer hear the water when I shake the canister, only a gentle whisper of grain and grit. Did the water evaporate from what I thought was an airtight container? It sounds as if all that remains is sand and grit that had once been suspended in the water. That is what my logic tells me. My emotional imagination, though, finds magic in the transformation.

# # #

*Survival Dance* was put into the university's theatre season in an October-November production slot. As a way to prepare for the work that would need to be done on the script, *Survival Dance* was scheduled for a reading at the Missouri Playwrights Workshop. After the reading I would revisit my script to work on rewrites.

My continued process of development and rewriting became anything but straightforward. I incorporated performance of personal narrative, I revisited my pre-performance narratives of talking with medical students, I used the rehearsal process with actor improvisations and psychodrama techniques guided by the director, and I had the opportunity to be involved in three different University of Missouri productions of the play with the same cast, director, dramaturg, and choreographer. Additionally, I was able to receive written and verbal feedback from audiences.

#### **CREATING THE PERFORMANCE "RESISTING MYSELF"**

In the winter/spring semester 2002, I was enrolled in Auto/biographical Performance, a graduate seminar with Dr. Heather Carver. Assigned the task of developing a personal narrative performance, I found myself drawn to sharing my story of an abusive relationship. The issue of IPV is



important to me and I knew through my experiences with medical students that telling my story was not only educational to them, but also empowering for me. However, a large part of me did not want to perform myself.

But I wanted to.

And I didn't want to.

No. I wanted to.

I continued to resist myself. My experience with abuse is a difficult story to share and I certainly didn't want my performance to turn into a therapy session. IF I decided to perform the IPV story, would my performance be part of my healing process? I remembered Theresa Carilli's question about whether Performance Studies is a healing art? She defines healing art as "a personally transformative study of the self" (233). By studying my *self* for performance, would I transform myself? My discussions with medical students had already given me the opportunity to find a positive side to negative experiences. I found the PSR meetings to be helpful to me as I struggled to make sense of my experiences. So did I need to develop an IPV personal narrative performance in class to help me heal? In the previous performance studies class I had not been willing to perform as myself in the IPV performance. Would I be able to do so now or would it still be too difficult?

If I *did* create a performance, where and how would it fit into my healing process? Tami Spry states: "Thirteen years after I was sexually assaulted, profound healing came when I began to rewrite that experience as a woman with strength and agency" (2003: 171). By taking ownership of my story I placed myself in a position of power in the narrative of my life. I couldn't rewrite my past, but would rewriting my present responses to abuse help on personal journey?

Because of the healing aspect of working with medical students and the non-judgmental manner in which I was received by them, I believed I was ready to take the next step: perform myself, as myself. I would tell my story.

Or would I?

I argued every side of the issue. I found numerous other interesting aspects of my life to portray, but ultimately I discarded them. The IPV performance kept calling to me. I began to think of it as a nagging itch in the middle of my back. The sort of it that you can't quite reach and it simply won't go away. I still had that itch.

When in doubt about an assignment, try asking a professor. So I did. Dr. Heather Carver guided me with questions and encouragement. She reassured me that the struggle I was experiencing would make a "fascinating" performance.

But . . . but . . . but. . . .

I was beginning to get on my nerves.

Was my anxiety about a personal narrative performance part of my healing process? Yes. My anxiety and fears about performing my IPV story *became* the performance and eventually the performance became part of my journey of writing and healing.

My development process of the narrative took place anywhere and any time I was alone. At first I believed the deer in my woods would allow me to develop my narrative and rehearse for them; however, they seemed uncomfortable with my display of emotion and retreated to the solace of a deeper wood. So, avoiding thoughts of the picture I presented to other drivers, I tried rehearsing when I drove. Rehearsing emotional material, however, is not good for concentrating on my driving. I continued my rehearsals in the shower. As a rehearsal space, the shower had the added benefit of washing away tears my tears in a warm spray of water. As in my first IPV performance, rehearsal became my method of development. I struggled to form my story into words. How could I express the emotion in words?

One of my greatest challenges was expressing the simultaneous feelings of anxiety and elation I was experiencing. Revisiting my past and looking beyond the

abuse, I remembered learning to fly. The contradiction of a young woman involved in a relationship with a well-respected man in a position of authority being the same young woman with the self-confidence and passion to learn to fly became pivotal in the development of the performance.

Alternating my present anxiety with remembrances from my days as a student pilot indirectly demonstrated my mixed emotions. It also allowed me the emotional break I needed in performance. The non-linear approach to storytelling Dr. Blake had encouraged during my PSR talks found its way into my first version of *Resisting Myself*. In the first script I move from my past to the present anticipation of the *Survival Dance* reading and back to my past as a student pilot.

And so I performed my first version of *Resisting Myself* for an audience of fellow graduate students and Dr. Carver in the seminar. I discovered that all those people writing the essays and books I had been reading and studying were correct! 'Telling your story' can be therapeutic. Healing. Revisiting the field of medicine and psychology, Alan Parry describes the importance of telling your story: "The central goal of a narrative therapy must be the facilitation of a sense of personal authorship or

agency concerning the events of one's life" (122). For this narrative, I chose the space, the audience, and how much about my experiences I would tell. I did not tell much. My performance revolved mainly around my resistance to performing my story, which included my anxiety around the public reading of *Survival Dance* that night.

The audience for my personal narrative performance proved to be receptive, empathetic, and involved listeners. They became engaged in my concerns and connected with my story in a variety of ways. Carol Witherell addresses this phenomenon in "The Self in Narrative: A Journey into Paradox" in *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education*. She explores the uses of narrative in teaching and counseling, stating:

the teller or receiver of stories can discover connections between self and other, penetrate barriers to understanding, and come to know more deeply the meanings of his or her own historical and cultural narrative. (94)

Similarly, Tami Spry explores the mixed feelings often found in auto/biographical performance. In "Skins" she states: "Although the performative autobiographical location is a space of intense personal and cultural risk, it is simultaneously a space of profound comfort" (1997: 361).

My audience of graduate students and a professor responded to my story, joined the performance when I encouraged interaction, and in so doing, reinforced my sense of 'emotional safety.' Had I not felt 'emotionally safe' in this first performance, *Resisting Myself* would have ended when I concluded the first performance. Tracing back to my pre-performance narratives reveals a similar pattern: had I not felt secure sharing my story within the privacy of the first professional and personal relationships I had tried, I would not have been able to take the step and talk with the medical students through PSR. Had my emotional well being not been respected within the PSR talks, the next PSR talk would not have occurred. And without the PSR talks I would not have been willing to create performances about my story or write a play about IPV. Gradually I was enlarging the circle individuals with whom I was willing to share my story.

The first performance of *Resisting Myself* was another step in my personal journey. The development of the performance was another way in which I was redefining myself as a person in charge of her own life. In the Introduction to *Listening to Life Stories: A New Approach to Stress Intervention in Health Care*, psychologists Bruce Rybarczyk and Albert Bellg argue: "storytelling is the

creation of personal meaning, identity, and relationship” (6). As much as I did not want to be known as a ‘spokesperson for survivors,’ the fact remained that I was a survivor of IPV. It was part of who I was. Who I am. The choice of what to do with my past was mine. I knew after the first performance I could end the development of this personal narrative. Or, I could try to connect a story with a larger audience.

Drama therapists understand the therapeutic value of performance; it is the basis of their work. Those of us in theatre sometimes forget this aspect of what we do. In the seminar performances the students rediscovered the theory. Susana Pendzik in “The Theatre Stage and the Sacred Space: A Comparison” discusses the ‘sacred spaces’ found throughout most cultures. She states that:

A sacred space can be both a place of magic healing and a source of danger. On the one hand it appears to be the safest spot on earth; on the other, there is a fear of being lifted to a level of existence that is higher and beyond the human natural ontological state. (27)

While the physical space the group inhabited changed - sometimes we occupied a black box theatre, at other times we were in a classroom - it was the group of people in this seminar became a ‘sacred space.’ For me, the seminar became a safe place for me emotionally, much like the talks with

medical students. I was willing to risk the danger of those spaces to seek 'magic healing.'

I was nervous for my first performance of *Resisting Myself*. I wanted to retreat from it all. Was it because I knew that a few hours after my performance we were scheduled to read *Survival Dance* at the Missouri Playwrights Workshop? The idea of the reading made me even more nervous.

I performed my personal narrative for a supportive audience. I don't remember much of the performance. It remains a blur. I was listening to an internal (or infernal?) ticking of a clock, counting down the time until the reading that evening.

*MOMENT: Moose Sighting*

*Characters: Katie, 8ish, a shy girl  
Barb, 11ish, Katie's sister*

*Time: early 1960s*

*Place: Gagi and Gapa's house in the country*

*A weekend visit to the country and the adults insisted upon sitting around the kitchen drinking coffee and talking. Barb and I decided to take a hike. We trudged off behind the garden. We kept walking past the woods that had the old cemetery - not really a cemetery, just three or four very old headstones. We wandered into another field.*

*The fields were plowed, leaving huge clumps of dirt and deep furrows. In and out of the furrows we walked, jumping from dirt clump to dirt clod. Clump to clod to furrow to clump. We talked the talk of young girls. Of sisters. Our eyes were trained on the uneven ground. As we approached the next wooded area we both looked up. There he stood.*

*Huge.*



*Bigger than huge.*

*Enormous! Terrifyingly enormous.*

*A moose. A very, very big moose.*

*We ran. Fast. Jumping the clods of dirt, running in the furrows. My memory is blurred from the moment we started running until we burst through the back door into the kitchen yelling, "Moose! We saw a moose!"*

*Adults, even loving adults, are still adults. And when two suburban girls visiting the southern Illinois countryside claim to have seen a moose questions are bound to arise.*

*"Maybe it was a deer. . . ?"*

*We described it. Big. Really big. Huge. "Up to here!" My hand stretched as far up as I could reach.*

*"Bigger!" Barb countered.*

*We described it: he looked like Mr. Moose on Captain Kangaroo . . . except not a puppet . . . and really, really big! The antlers? Solid and sort of flat . . . until the ends.*

*No one ever completely believed us. Through the years it has always been one of those special stories - the kind that siblings share because they were the only ones that experienced those exact moments together. One day I received a letter from Barb that had a news clipping of a moose spotted in Missouri. We figured if a moose came to Missouri, certainly one could've strolled into Illinois.*

*The moose connects my sister and me. Always has. Always will.*

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#### **PLAY READING AT THE MISSOURI PLAYWRIGHTS WORKSHOP**

*After my performance in the seminar I only breathed a short sigh of relief. With my first performance under my belt I was able to face the next step: the reading of *Survival Dance*. I was nervous. Actually, I was more than nervous. People would be there. Possibly people I didn't know? Would they think I was Annie? Was I Annie?*

As the small crowd gathered for the reading of the play, I began to worry that some individuals whose presence was important to me wouldn't make it to the reading. I wanted their feedback as well as their emotional support. Seven o'clock. Were they running late? In my anxiety of my earlier performance as well as the evening reading, I had forgotten that author and physician Oliver Sacks was going to be speaking upstairs from my reading. Traffic on campus had gotten horrendous. Eventually most of the individuals I was waiting on arrived. The space became a little 'safer' for me.

And so they read the play while I listened.

I survived.

I received feedback from the audience and knew that I would need time to sort out both my own perceptions of my play as well audience responses. In the days that followed, I sought out critiques from actors who had read as well as from individuals who had participated in the talkback.

One statement reached out to me. When I discussed the script with fellow graduate student Eric Love, he shared his thoughts that he "couldn't hear the playwright's voice" in the play. Knowing about my past experiences with abuse, we discussed how much it continued to affect me. Interrupting himself, he extended his hand toward me and

said: "This is where the drama is . . . it's you . . . and that twenty-five years later it still effects you so much. That it still hurts."<sup>53</sup> Eric's comment was similar to what Dr. Blake relates to medical students in our PSR meetings: that he was shocked to discover how much - after all these years - I was still affected by the abusive relationship. Thinking about the idea that I was still haunted by my past, the veil drew back a little for me. While I had been addressing the issue of my self in my auto/biographical performance, I had been skirting it in the play.

One thought continued to nag me after the play reading: I didn't care very much for the main character of Annie. If I didn't care, how could I expect an audience to care? I had major work to do on my main character.

I had not been willing to explore Annie or her spiritual center, Other Annie. Much of Annie's action or inaction did not feel true to the story. How could I find ways to develop the character that would make her a person the audience would care about? I needed to go back to the original source material for the character: I needed to look at myself.

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<sup>53</sup> Although Eric Love remembers our conversation, he does not remember the specifics of what we said. I, however, will never forget the moment and words that had such a tremendous impact on the way in which I eventually rewrote *Survival Dance*.

Could I explore my *self* and the character development of Annie through continuing the process I started with *Resisting Myself*? Would looking at my experiences and myself be a valid way to breathe new life into Annie as well as Other Annie? And since the explorations of myself would expose me to difficult memories, would I be able to do this in an emotionally safe way? Where did the character development portion of playwriting correspond with my personal journey?

#### **CONTINUED DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONAL NARRATIVE PERFORMANCE**

For me, performance had proven to be a valuable tool, an outlet for my self on my personal and artistic journeys. In "Methodology of the Heart: A Performative Writing Response," Carver describes what performance is and what it does:

Performance is a method that not only shows the complications in one's life, and one's daily experiences, but it allows for critique, analysis, and expression of differing perspectives, lenses, and emotional paths. Performance can make the raw self real to an audience, with a vulnerability that exists in the very moment of expression. Performance is a simultaneous method of inquiry and discovery in the very moment that the performer and audience share air, space, and time together. (2007: 7-8)

Through my first two IPV performances I had been critiquing my emotions as I struggled to connect my experiences with

an audience. My first *Resisting Myself* performance led to my second *Resisting Myself* performance and as I expanded the text, I expanded my understanding of my *self*.

My continued process for my second performance of *Resisting Myself* led me in several directions. First, I continued exploration of my past while gathering props for my performance. I dug through boxes in my basement to find my pilot logbook and flight tests. I sorted through old photos. The memories that flooded back to me when viewing the photos reinforced a non-linear pattern of thought. I would discover a recent photo that would reinforce who I am now, including the positives in my life. The next photo might be a photo from an earlier time when I was in the abusive relationship. Moving back to the more current photos, I once again achieved what Dr. Blake had suggested to me regarding our talks with medical students: it reinforced who I am today, including my accomplishments and strengths. I could then view the older photos with more of a sense of empowerment and control of my life. Steps I had taken on my personal journey reinforced my actions as I prepared for my performance, my art. My present self reached out to my younger self with acceptance and help.

The act of gathering props was a reminder of ways in which we can sometimes observe ourselves by the "things" we

hold dear to us in our lives. In my first performance I had used few props. One prop was important to me, however, and that was a garden stool. The first year of our marriage, my husband had built the stool for my grandmother. Since her death, I have had the stool at our home. The stool represents a great deal to me: the love and craftsmanship that went into creating the stool; the strength of the wood; the love and acceptance I felt from my grandmother; and the way the stool represented her garden. Having it with me in performance offered me a solid foundation from which to share the story I performed.

For additional props I enlarged photos to use in my performance: a wedding photo, a picture of my children, and a picture of myself as a child. I planned to use these photos as a structural framework to guide the audience through my second performance of *Resisting Myself*. The question occurred to me, though: How do I visually represent "him"?

Enter a box of 64 Crayola® crayons.

The act of creating a picture of my abuser was funny for me. Even now as I am writing about the process of re-creating him in crayon, the memory of the activity makes me smile and eases my current tension in my shoulders and neck. At the time I drew him, I didn't stop to think about

the reasons I laughed. I remember feeling free while I drew him. I carefully chose various shades of crayons to create his shaggy hair. I drew his eyes, nose, and mouth. The process of drawing him in crayon put *me* in control. It was empowering for me to have total control over the drawing. I played with the idea of making him monstrous looking. I didn't. I chose to create a crayon drawing with features similar to the real man. Ultimately, Crayon Man *did* resemble Abusive Man . . . a little. As a finishing touch on the picture, I cut a long rectangle of black construction paper and glued it over his eyes as in a television show where the accused should not be recognized. When creating emotionally challenging material I find it helpful for both the audience and myself if I offer a break in the intensity expressed in performance. The process of drawing the man in crayon, therefore, served not only as an emotional release for me in the development of my performance, I also hoped the finished picture would add a moment of humor for the audience.

We experience much of life through our senses: we move and touch, we listen and speak, we see, and we taste. I had used the power of the senses when I wrote about Other Annie's cabin. Our imagination is capable of using these senses "in the creation of new meaning" (Levine and Levine,

11). In my second performance of *Resisting Myself* I drew upon my senses: the slightly rough texture of weathered wood; the smell of Crayola® crayons and the sensation of gliding them across the paper; and the visual images of the photos. Although not labeled rehearsal, research, writing, performance, or therapy, my preparations with props became an important method of engaging a more playful and creative side of myself. I became caught up in a stream of ideas, one flowing into another.

My second performance of *Resisting Myself* was much more fun. Through mutual respect, reflective critiques, and encouragement in performance experimentation, Dr. Carver created a trusting and emotionally safe work environment in the graduate seminar. Such an environment is essential for the creation of auto/biographical narrative work. Having experienced the supportive environment in previous performances, I was more willing to experiment and take risks within my performance. I didn't feel as anxious about performing the rewritten script. One highlight of the second performance was when all the audience members made loud noises like the stall horn in a Cessna 150. In such an environment, it is possible to take risks and work on more difficult subject matter.



Although I wasn't aware of expressive arts therapy at the time, I have since gained a basic understanding of the multidimensional approach on which such therapy is based. In the Introduction to *Foundations of Expressive Arts Therapy*, Stephen Levine and Ellen Levine define such therapy as being "grounded not in particular techniques or media but in the capacity of the arts to respond to human suffering" (11). They further describe the field as being rooted in the "possibilities of sensory expression originating in lived bodily experience" and "in the unity of the imagination as a creative source of meaning" (11). Examining my process in the continued development of *Resisting Myself* reveals that I was drawing from many areas of my life for the performance. My willingness to draw from my life was possible for me because of steps I had recently taken: therapy, writing, and talking with medical students. Those steps had boosted my trust and knowledge in my *self*: If I wanted to sit on a garden stool in a performance, I could sit on the stool. If I wanted to draw with crayons and use the result as a prop in the performance, I could do so. Practicing empowering my *self* in life was spilling over to empowerment in my art.

Through my performances of personal narrative I continued to rediscover the young woman I had been. I

revisited my young adult years - the years of abuse. During my talks with medical students I sometimes told about the power and strength I felt when rafting on the Colorado River. In my autobiographical performance I had reacquainted myself with the tenacious young woman I had been. Getting to know my self again through the performances allowed me to continue to sculpt a strong and multi-dimensional character. From my continued development of *Resisting Myself* I drew inspiration for my rewrites of *Survival Dance*.

The development of the personal narrative led me on a journey that included personal healing. Within the healing came the knowledge that I didn't have to pretend to be perfect; it's okay for me to make mistakes. This journey reminded me that even though I have made mistakes, I did not deserve the physical and psychological abuse I experienced. His abuse of me was not about whether or not I did something 'right' or 'wrong' - it was about power. He had an unhealthy need to exert power over me. My shift in understanding of my self allowed me to develop Annie as a more complex character. As I grew, Annie grew. She became more interesting. I was more willing to give flaws to Annie. Regarding the Chorus, I didn't have to pretend that all the characters that care about Annie are clueless about

the abuse. Usually someone close to a survivor knows about or suspects abuse. Oftentimes that individual chooses to do nothing. Or he or she doesn't know what to do. And I didn't have to pretend that the abuser was completely bad. In reality, few batterers are, and mine was no exception. It is partially through this auto/biographical development process that I have realized that to make the batterer a man who can be likeable and caring does not justify his actions, nor does it indicate residual feelings for him. It is simply a statement of what is. What was. . . .

#### **A CHANGE IN THE SCRIPT**

The greatest change in my characters based on this process, was to explore having not two Annies, but three. The older Annie who is looking back, needing to find a way to forgive herself; the Annie who is living the experience; and the younger Annie, the spirited essence of Annie who views the world through a veil of innocence and struggles to make sense of the loss of that innocence.

Adding a major character to a script is a huge leap. I decided that not only did I need to add a character, I also needed to change the focus of the script so the story of the play would be the new character's journey. I spoke with the new play dramaturg on the project, Dr. Heather Carver.

Being familiar with my auto/performances, she believed it was an idea worth exploring and suggested I talk with Dr. Burgoyne, the director. I remember my conversation with Dr. Burgoyne as going something like:

Me: "Suzanne, I need to add another Annie. . . ."

And her response: Suzanne: "O . . . kay. . . ." And then she asked why and I mumbled something about my conversation with Eric Love and that the *Survival Dance* story was *similar* to my story, but it wasn't my story and even though there were similarities, I wasn't Annie and I was nervous and could this be done and on and on. And on. Somehow Dr. Burgoyne understood the core of where I needed to head with the script. Her support of my work never wavered. Or if it did waver, she never let on.

*MOMENT: Sea Glass*

*On our vacation after our wedding<sup>54</sup> my new husband and I went to Maine to sail on the J&E Riffin, a schooner he had helped rebuild for the tourist trade. I had already fallen in love with the man. Now I fell in love with the rocky Maine coast, lobster, the creak of a wooden boat, and the sound of the ocean. And I discovered sea glass. Beach glass. Little pieces of broken bottles that have been worn smooth by the ever-changing and always-constant action of the waves and the sand.*

*Transformed treasures.*

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<sup>54</sup> I don't like the word "honeymoon." Never have. Never will.

## ABOUT REHEARSALS

We built a solid core team for the first production of *Survival Dance* at the University of Missouri. Dr. Suzanne Burgoyne was director and Dr. Heather Carver was the dramaturg. Fellow graduate student Patricia Downey joined the group with multiple positions: she was choreographer, fight choreographer, and was eventually cast in the role of Older Annie. Patricia and I were in classes together, she had seen my performances of *Resisting Myself*, and we shared an office in the bowels of the building in which *Survival Dance* would be performed. As grateful as I was to have this multi-talented group of women with me on this leg of the journey, over the course of the next year I discovered how truly fortunate I was to be part of such a remarkable team. Eventually, the Department of Theatre resurrected this production twice after its original seven-day run in the fall of 2002: once when we were an invited production to the KC-ACTF Region V Conference in January 2003 and again as the *Mizzou on Broadway* showcase production to be performed at the York Theatre in New York in September 2003.

Heading into rehearsals for production I was still working on the script. I needed to tweak the script, rewrite, and then tweak some more. And I still did not have

a satisfactory ending. I had written an ending that included a carnival scene. In it, Tom applied his marksmanship in a target-shooting game in which he was determined to win Annie a stuffed bear. I wanted to show the continued threat of violence through his shooting ability, while he was simultaneously doing something sweet and seemingly innocent. In the scene, Tom and Annie would encounter Mankato and then we would all witness Tom's beating of Mankato. At fifteen pages, the scene was long and clunky. Along with the tweaking and rewriting of the rest of the script, I still needed to nail down a solid ending.

Over the summer, Dr. Burgoyne had led me in some psychodrama explorations with the Annies. I suggested to her that we might try that process again, this time with the actors she had cast. I was nervous about the process, but trusted that she would lead us in exercises that might spark some ideas as I proceeded with developing the end. We made plans to discuss my story with the cast at a rehearsal. Dr. Burgoyne would then lead the character explorations. As new play dramaturg, Dr. Carver attended the rehearsal and discussion, documenting detailed notes of the explorations and dialogues.

It was a Tuesday evening in late September. Dr. Burgoyne and the actors had worked through the Prologue and the first twelve scenes of the script. I was nervous. I knew that in a short time I would be sharing with the cast parts of my self I rarely shared. Two of the actors had been in Dr. Carver's Auto/biographical performance seminar with me and had seen *Resisting Myself*. In a university production the previous spring, I had performed with the young man who was cast to play the abusive husband, Tom. He was the same individual who had read the role opposite my daughter when we read *Survival Dance* in the Advanced Playwriting class. Those three individuals knew a little about my story. I don't believe any of the other seven actors knew. Additionally, the actor playing the role of Mankato was one of my former preschool students. Even though he was all grown up, having known this young man when he was two years old made me feel somewhat protective of him. When I was director of the daycare, it had been my responsibility to care for him and protect him. Going into that Tuesday evening rehearsal, part of me was still concerned about protecting him. I now believe my feelings were a way to deal with my own anxieties about sharing my story: if I worried about him, I wouldn't be as concerned about myself. I had practiced similar denial in various

forms for years. As the evening progressed, I was impressed with the maturity with which he handled my story.

Preschoolers do grow up and can become responsible and compassionate adults. He was proof.

After I told the cast the basics of my story and how I came to write *Survival Dance*, the actors asked questions: "When you left, how did you leave?" "Did you have contact after you split up?" "Has he moved on?" Some of the questions were similar to those asked by medical students. Other questions, however, differed. While medical students wanted to understand my experiences so they could incorporate a greater understanding of IPV into their medical education, the actors were more interested in how my experiences impacted the writing of the script and the development of the character. The actor playing Phyllis, the abusive man's mother, asked if I had a relationship with my abuser's mother. Another actor asked about the bear symbol. And finally, the question came about the characters: were they real people, composites, or what? I explained that although real individuals inspired some characters and represented certain relationships, ultimately, the characters were fictional. The Chorus represents the community at large.



Dr. Burgoyne then moved us into improvisations. I approached the improvisations simultaneously playing multiple roles: the character of Older Annie, Kate, the woman who had experienced an abusive relationship, and Kate the writer of the script. During the improvisations I met each character in the theatrical playing space. Dr. Burgoyne had me create the dialogue for the characters and myself. She also suggested that the actors could improvise if they felt moved to do so. I met with the characters of the Doctor, Bobbie, Mankato, and Jill. These were helpful and added additional depth to my character development. When I met with Gran, the *me* part of my Older Annie/myself felt overwhelmed by the memories of loved ones in my life at the time I suffered the abuse. I said: "I wish I could've told you." I gave Gran the line: "I wish you had." The actor playing Gran said the line I gave her and then smiled, took my hands, and looking me straight in the eyes, and with compassionate firmness added, "No regrets." When I met the character of Phyllis, I could only think about a mother's love for her children . . . no matter what. I was reminded that the character of the mother might be experiencing her own denial about her son's behavior as well as being clueless as to how to address the issue of violence.

Meeting Younger Annie was fun. The actor said her lines lying on the floor. She was playful. Meeting Older Annie was a positive experience. It wasn't simply Older Annie and Older Annie; it wasn't just Older Annie and myself or even myself and myself. It was Patricia and Kate: two friends, fellow students, and officemates who were collaborating in an artistic project. It was a mutually supportive encounter filled with high fives.

When I met the actor playing Tom, he said he couldn't speak in Tom's voice. I gave him words and the actor spoke them. I stated: "I want you to say you're sorry and that what you took from me I can't get back. I know you're not going to say it, but . . . I don't think it matters." I had spoken the words as thoughts I wanted to express as well as thoughts that the character of Older Annie needed to express. We improvised a few more lines, and the encounter was over. I was surprised. What I thought would be the most challenging improvised encounter was surprisingly easy. It seemed emotionally anti-climactic for me. In *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman states:

Once the survivor has mourned the traumatic event, she may be surprised to discover how uninteresting the perpetrator has become to her and how little concern she feels for his fate. (190)

The emotional ease with which I entered into the improvisation with the actor playing Tom was the first time since beginning my active process of healing that I experienced such a sense of calm with the subject of an abuser. In my personal journey, I was now stepping to center stage. And I did it quite literally through the improvisations. While the perpetrator was becoming uninteresting to me, my play and the characters within it were becoming more interesting.

For me, the two most difficult encounters came with the characters of Jared and Annie. When the actor playing Jared walked into the stage space, I felt an odd combination of emotions that came not from Older Annie, but from me. I faced a sudden realization: more than likely, my abuser's close friends and colleagues had known of the abuse. And they had done nothing. I remembered times when there were indications of abuse when I was with them - things my abuser said, actions they saw him take, and visible injuries too fresh for me to hide. I shared some of these memories with the cast. Within the improvisation, though, I didn't know what to say to the actor. Herman states: "The victim's greatest contempt is often reserved, not for the perpetrator, but for the passive bystander" (92). Meeting the actor on the stage became an important

part of my personal journey as I confronted the realization of the number of "passive witnesses" there may have been during those years of abuse. I was both saddened and angered. Dr. Burgoyne asked if I wanted the character to say he was sorry. I said "yes." And the actor said, "I'm sorry." I continue to appreciate the talent and patience of the actor within this improvisation. My reactions to meeting this character influenced revisions of the play in both dialogue and stage directions. I began looking at specific times in which Jared would excuse or defend Tom's behavior, as well as a stage direction in which Jared and Phyllis are physically turned away from the abusive action (I-12-43). Additionally, when we were finally settling on the ending, the character of Jared was the last of the Chorus that Older Annie would confront.

The other time I had difficulty staying solely in the role of Older Annie during the improvisation was when I met the character of Annie. I could feel the sting of tears in my eyes. I could see the tears in her eyes. The actor playing Annie was outgoing and fun. As I was getting to know her, I realized her personal sunny exterior sometimes masked the depths of her emotions. I felt bad saying to the actor the thing I had to say to Annie and my own younger self: "It has taken an incredibly long time for me to even

come close to liking you again." She responded: "I know."  
As Older Annie, I hugged Annie. As Kate, I hugged Lauren.

In a paper presented to the Mid-America Theater Conference, Dr. Burgoyne states: "The session was very intense for everyone, leading to discoveries about how each character felt - what they could or couldn't say." What Dr. Burgoyne didn't say, was how the encounters with actors helped me revisit my own feelings about my past, and how I brought those feelings to the rewrites of *Survival Dance*. At the time of the presentation of her paper, I was not yet ready to publicly state that I had been in an abusive relationship. Dr. Burgoyne respected my privacy.

Artistically, the improvisations inspired specific lines for the end of the play. They also helped me focus character reactions and interactions. On a personal level, I had taken one more step in the sharing of my story with a slightly larger group. And once again, I had been met with respect and empathy. The willingness of the actors to work through these improvisations benefited me both artistically and personally. Their generosity with their thoughts, feelings, and talents is a gift I treasure.

*MOMENT: Dogs I've Loved*

*Mac was a puppy that our dad brought home from the Humane Society when we were kids. A mid-sized mutt with a*

heart of gold, Mac was smart. Really smart. He treated everyone, whether human or canine, with gentle respect.

Sheba was, as are most dogs, wonderful and loving. We had her the same time we had Saint. Sheba was small for a German Shepherd, Saint was big, even for a German Shepherd. Sheba loved everyone, Saint loved the family.

Then there was Rebel - I got her during my rebellious teen years. A black lab, she was my companion, confidante, and friend. She came to an untimely end.

I have never known a more beautiful dog than Buck. Another German Shepherd, Buck had the same heart of gold as Mac, but without the intelligence. I took him to obedience school and he won class clown. He was always in a good mood.

Jackson was my son's dog. A mixed breed. Is there any better kind? He adored my son and lived to please him. The feeling was mutual. Jackson left this world way too soon. We all miss him.

And then there was Nikko. Another German Shepherd Dog, Nikko had it great. I even baked him homemade treats. He began to challenge us early. We took him to obedience school and although he knew what he was supposed to do, he didn't like being told to sit or stay or walk with me.

By the time he was a year old, he was 120 pounds of muscle. One day just after his first birthday, I was walking him and he decided that he had had enough. I think he was, indeed, the alpha male. And so he came at me. He knocked me down so I was at his level - head to head. His growl threatened. His lips curled back, teeth bared. The deep growl never ceased. I kept a hand on his leash, but I kept one arm in front of me . . . in front of my throat. Before I could get him into the fenced yard. He bit my arm several times and bit me once on my chest.

Finally I asked my daughter to run and get some dog treats. She tossed them where he could see them. That broke his concentration and he went for the treats. I moved and got us closer to the yard and he swung back at me, growling and bit my arm again.

Finally, thankfully, I got him in the yard. He threw himself at the gate, snarling and snapping. I hugged my daughter and we cried.

We took Nikko back to the breeder.

It broke our hearts to leave him there.

# # #

## OLDER ANNIE MONOLOGUES

When I added Older Annie to the script, the story became Older Annie's journey. The question posed by the play was now "Will Older Annie be able to move forward with her life?" rather than "Will Annie survive her husband's abuse?" Through the character of Older Annie, I wanted to express the long-term impact of relationship violence, the sadness of the loss felt, and the anger and frustration aimed at the self in the times before, during, and after the abusive relationship. Herman states: "a traumatized person loses her basic sense of self" (52). As the creative team moved toward production, we each connected with the idea of a woman struggling to 'pull herself together.' In her structural analysis of the play as she moved toward production, Dr. Burgoyne sees the root action as a:

. . . play about a haunted woman who journeys into the dark hole of her past in order to piece together the truth, to "judge" who's to blame for what happened to her; as a consequence, she rediscovers her own innocence and pieces together her fragmented self.<sup>55</sup>

In a brief description of the play I wrote that it was: "One woman's journey to rediscover her soul after a terrifying relationship." Patricia Downey, the actor who originated the role of Older Annie at the university,

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<sup>55</sup> E-mail to author from Suzanne Burgoyne, Summer 2002.

described the character as "one third of the total character."<sup>56</sup> The character was in pieces. As choreographer, Downey worked toward embodying the pieces of Annie as they separated and then again as they came together.

Older Annie's evolution as the guide of her own story presented challenges to me. By the time we started rehearsals, the idea of having the character of Older Annie in the play was still fresh for me. I felt timid about the idea. While Older Annie interacted with the rest of the characters on various levels, she also had the ability to speak directly to the audience. Older Annie struggled to ignore Younger Annie, the self that represented carefree joy, while she showed her contempt and anger toward Annie, the self who was in the abusive relationship.

Wait. Stop.

I have been struggling with how to write about Older Annie and her monologues. I could draw from information about trauma recovery. I could quote the director, the actors, the choreographer, and dramaturg. I could examine the literature about IPV and the empowerment one can find in telling one's story for another twenty pages. But none

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<sup>56</sup> Author interview with Patricia Downey, February 2005.



of those words would come close to describing how it felt for me to put Older Annie into the play. None. Not even close. It's a struggle to think about my feelings about putting Older Annie into the story.

My struggle has taken me to my screened porch - right now as I'm writing. I often sat on this porch as I wrote early drafts of the script. I wrote scenes in longhand and edited and rewrote on printed scripts. I sit in my same chair now. The temperature today, however, is a single digit. Why am I compelled to sit here writing? In the past as I sat here writing I relaxed enough to open my *self* onto the page. Possibly today I need a change of scenery? Or fresh air? Or both? The beauty of this place, my woods, embraces me, surrounds me, inspires me. I remind myself of the good feelings I continually rediscover here. The sound of the wind through these trees calms me.

And I remember that it's okay to remember.

I hurried back inside to reread what I had written while sitting and shivering outside. I wondered about my need to physically move out of my study and onto my porch to be able to write about developing Older Annie. I wondered what part of my action I should examine and how I

should include such a brief exploration, and what, if any, theoretical lens I should use as I examine it.

Suddenly I realized: All my "wondering" was pure, unfiltered, and unapologetic procrastination. The idea struck me as humorous. The simple fact is: examining Older Annie's words and actions is difficult for me because I am much closer to the actions and words of that character than I am to those of Annie. While I was developing the character of Older Annie, I was simultaneously rebuilding my *self*.

I will re-explore my "Older Annie process." While I wrote and rewrote words for Older Annie I had continually mined my recent memories and activities. I had revisited flashbacks and meetings with medical students. I remembered carrying a picture of my younger self in my wallet so when I felt vulnerable I could remind myself that I could take care of my *self* now.

There were ideas I longed to, needed to, *had* to express and Older Annie was my voice. I hoped that by confining Older Annie to her small circle of light I had shown, through actions I had written in the play, how trapped Older Annie felt: Older Annie's circle was the physical manifestation of her inability to escape her emotional prison. I also hoped that her words could paint

pictures of her anger, sadness, joy, and fear. They were emotions I shared with her.

I had spent so many years hiding my experiences with abuse from others that found it easier if I imagined the audience as a group of supportive individuals I trusted. Developing Older Annie's monologues as I spoke her words aloud on my porch, I found it helpful to visualize an audience of medical students. I felt emotionally safer. And so I became freer with thoughts and feelings that I could give to Older Annie to express.

I remember the stinging sensation that would begin close to my ears and gradually move toward my nose before finally settling in my eyes as they filled with tears. I continued to craft the monologues of Older Annie during the weeks we were in rehearsal. I would sit on my porch and pour out my thoughts and feelings onto legal pads. I read them aloud, often crying as I did so. Then I edited, honed, laughed, cut, rewrote, and cried some more. I was performing the monologues as a personal narrative, crafting them for my audience of one: my *self*.

Older Annie spoke about her fears that her abuser would discover she had told others about his abuse. As I wrote the words for Older Annie, I imagined my abuser finding out about the play and seeing it and seeing the

*emotional* truths I expressed in the play. If he knew I told people, might he feel threatened by me? And if he felt threatened by me. . . ? I wrote:

OLDER ANNIE

It was all so long ago - but it doesn't always seem that long - see, sometimes all those feelings get all jumbled up and my imagination starts to run wild and so.... And so I *imagine* that as I leave here tonight...I'll go outside, I'll breathe the fragrance of the night air, and just when I've almost convinced myself that someday I'll get past all this - I'll hear....

TOM

Hey, Toots.

(Total, absolute defeat. Without looking at TOM, she sits. When TOM sees that she sits. When TOM sees that she is under control, he disappears.)

OLDER ANNIE

He could know. He could know that I've told you and if he does...? Somehow - somehow he's gonna make me pay.

My imaginings became Older Annie's words.

I remembered the day I broke the glass in my kitchen. I remembered how my emotions gripped me as I was instantaneously transported to another time and place. And I wrote the Prologue for Act I. Herman states: "Long after the event, many traumatized people feel that a part of themselves has died" (49). I had that feeling sometimes. It felt like a hole, a pit in the fabric of my *self* that I couldn't fix. I wrote:

OLDER ANNIE

(to audience)

Where do I begin? I have this hole - this...pit - inside me. I try to fill it, to ignore it, to cover it up. I've even tried to laugh off, because, hey. That's me - the life of the party. Everybody likes Annie. She's fun!

(beat)

And sometimes - for a while - I think that this time - finally, it might work.

(TOM walks to the outside of the circle, unseen by OLDER ANNIE.)

And I remembered how I used to cover fear and my own feelings of self-betrayal by telling myself if I ever ran into him I would be fine because I was over the pain and fear of the abuse. I had Older Annie continue:

OLDER ANNIE (Continued)

I've even imagined how it would be if I ran into him on the street. I'd be very calm, very *together*, because I'm over it, you know? I'd ask how he'd been, wish him well. And I would be fine. I would.

(She moves back and as she turns she comes face to face with him and jumps. TOM grins.)

OLDER ANNIE (Continued)

I'd be fine.

(She backs away. He circles outside her space. She moves.)

OLDER ANNIE (Continued)

I'm over it. It's done.

(She glances. He's still there.)

OLDER ANNIE (Continued)

(closes her eyes; deep cleansing breaths)

I'm over it. I'm okay. I have a great life: a fantastic husband, wonderful kids. All that...it's over. It's in the past. Over.

Recognizing the far-reaching power of the abuser was difficult. It was one thing to acknowledge in a private, therapeutic setting how, even across miles and decades, his far-reaching power still affected me. It was more difficult to move the acknowledgement of that power into the more public sphere of discussions with medical students. Writing words in a play that would express that level of control felt like total exposure.

I wanted to feel strong.

I felt vulnerable and open to ridicule and judgment. Even if I was silent about having been in an abusive relationship, others might guess. And once people know, they ask the inevitable question: *Why didn't you leave?* I didn't want to be blamed for not leaving. I didn't want to be put into a position in which I felt I had to defend myself. *Why didn't you leave?* To a woman who has experienced intimate partner violence, the question becomes an implied accusation. *Why didn't you leave?* The woman is responsible for being battered. She is held accountable for abuse perpetrated against her. *Why didn't you leave?* Herman equates involvement in an abusive relationship as a form of captivity. She states: "In domestic battering . . . the victim is taken prisoner gradually, by courtship" (82).

Struggling to come to terms with how to express the idea of abuse sneaking up on a woman, I remembered something I often told medical students. I found a moment in the play in which Older Annie could express my idea. I wrote:

(YOUNGER ANNIE dances outside OLDER ANNIE's circle. OLDER ANNIE ignores her as YOUNGER ANNIE tries to get her attention.)

OLDER ANNIE

I don't remember the first time he hit me. That surprises me. Wouldn't you think I'd remember something like that? The physical? That's over for me. But the other....

(YOUNG ANNIE dances around OLDER ANNIE.)

OLDER ANNIE (Continued)

(to Younger Annie)

Go away. There's not room for you here.

While the above lines expressed many of my feelings, I still wasn't satisfied. While the above worked in performance, I believed I could go further. Although I didn't want to sound didactic, I did want to shine a spotlight on the self-defense mechanism that leads others to questions and statements such as: "Why didn't she just leave?" or "If a man ever hit me I'd be out of there!" or "Maybe when she gets strong enough she'll leave." In *Surviving Domestic Violence*, Elaine Weiss states: ". . . people need to separate themselves from the possibility of

domestic violence in their own lives. And so they look for ways in which they are different from these women" (144). If we can find differences between ourselves and victims of IPV, we can convince ourselves we are safe. If we can say "she should have" but she didn't and then she was abused, then we can feel safe because *we would have known better*. I had grown tired of blaming myself for staying. I had grown tired of hearing the strength and intelligence of abused women questioned. The truth is, abusers are not readily identifiable. How convenient it would be if they wore signs that said "Beware of the beast in me - I'm violent!" But they don't. Herman discusses the "apparent normality" of perpetrators, saying "How much more comforting it would be if the perpetrator were easily recognizable, obviously deviant, or disturbed. But he's not" (75). Older Annie was already giving voice to many of my thoughts so I should be able to craft a way in which to address these ideas more completely.

It wasn't until the third production of *Survival Dance* that I was able to add a more personal appeal to Older Annie's monologue. It remained basically the same through the university production in the fall of 2002 and the KC-ACTF performance in January 2003. By the time we moved into rehearsals for the fall rehearsals for the *Mizzou on*



Broadway performances in September 2003, I had explored ways in which to encourage audience members to question their immunity to IPV by a personal appeal through Older Annie. I rewrote the monologue by exploring my own feelings of being an individual:

(YOUNGER ANNIE dances outside OLDER ANNIE's circle. OLDER ANNIE ignores her as YOUNGER ANNIE tries to get her attention.)

OLDER ANNIE

(composed; quiet)

I look back - sometimes it seems so unreal...

(looks at the audience)

I've read all the literature - I've seen the statistics. But I don't know. I don't feel like a statistic. You want to believe that this could never happen to a woman you love, don't you? Not to your friend or your sister...or your daughter....

(beat)

I don't remember the first time he hit me. Wouldn't you think I'd remember something like that? The physical? That's over for me. But the other.... Why does he still have so much control over me...?

(YOUNGER ANNIE dances around OLDER ANNIE.)

OLDER ANNIE (Continued)

(to Younger Annie)

Go away. There's no room for you here.

OLDER ANNIE (Continued)

(beat; composes herself)

You know, my husband said if he could fight this demon for me, he would. But the more he tried, the more I ran away.

(YOUNGER ANNIE tries to reach in to OLDER ANNIE.)

I was fortunate to have several production opportunities working with the team of individuals who

understood what I was trying to express through the text of the play. Being able to see the product allowed me to continue my process of exploration with the script development. Instrumental in my process was working with Downey as choreographer. Her influence to include movement of the Annies at the beginning of the script to show the self as a whole, offered a framework for the script on which I was able to continue development. Downey saw dance movement at the beginning functioning "as the lid on a puzzle box" so the audience would be able to "see the whole Annie so they understand what Older Annie is trying to reassemble throughout the play" (Downey, 2003: 4) She explored ways in which to represent the idea of the split selves of Annie through movement and dance. What she created for production influenced how I rewrote parts of the text. One example: The script we had performed in October 2002 and January 2003 opened as follows:

IN THE BEGINNING....

(In the *Dance of the Annies*, the three Annies start out together, then fragment. OLDER ANNIE struggles to keep them together, but to no avail. Throughout the following, the *Dance of the Annies*, the CHORUS and others move into the periphery of the playing space. OLDER ANNIE removes herself from ANNIE. She speaks to the audience as one by one she gathers and places each of the characters. During the first part of the Beginning, TOM sets up OLDER ANNIE's space, then gradually herds her in a spiral, until there is nowhere else for her to go except in her circle.)

OLDER ANNIE

(to audience)

There are so many pieces of my life -

(TOM cuts her out of the herd.)

OLDER ANNIE (Continued)

Pieces of my self - so many people who live in my memories -

(She smiles at MANKATO and guides him to his place. The sound of TOM's placement of the table in her circle startles OLDER ANNIE, but she barely skips a beat. TOM watches. OLDER ANNIE continues her placement. She leads JILL to her place, barely making eye contact with Jared as she motions him toward his place.)

OLDER ANNIE (Continued)

People I knew. People I know.

(TOM again cuts her from the herd, moving her steadily toward her circle. She motions for BOBBIE, DOCTOR, and PHYLLIS to take their places. ANNIE and YOUNGER ANNIE watch OLDER ANNIE; TOM looks at them. OLDER ANNIE closes her eyes, thinks for a second, then changes the arrangement of two CHORUS members. When she turns, TOM is right there, backing her toward her space.)

OLDER ANNIE (Continued)

I wish I could make some sense out of it all.

(TOM backs her into her space. She sits. LIGHTS OUT. SOUND of shattering glass.)

Going into production for the September 2003 *Mizzou on Broadway* production, I still struggled to bring more of myself to *Older Annie*. I wanted to demonstrate ideas that were important to me without relying solely on the monologues.

The cast would begin rehearsals in August 2003 to prepare for the New York performance at the York theatre in September. During the summer the 'team of four' met: Suzanne Burgoyne, Heather Carver, Patricia Downey, and me. Continuing to explore ways in which to tweak the script, I asked Downey to read my autobiographical *Resisting Myself* script. As she read, I took notes on parts of the my story in the script that jumped out at me. Being able to listen to my autobiographical story, I made a connection between my own feelings and the character of Older Annie. "I have a story to tell. I haven't always wanted to tell it, but like that itch on your back that you can't quite reach - it refuses to go away." With an additional year of emotional distance, I was ready to commit myself more completely to the character of Older Annie. On August 12, 2003 I sent a new opening to Burgoyne, Carver, and Downey.

IN THE BEGINNING....

(LIGHTS up on YOUNGER ANNIE on stage beginning a playful dance to light music. OLDER ANNIE stands in the audience; takes hesitant steps.)

OLDER ANNIE (Continued)

I have a story to tell - I...I haven't always wanted to tell it...

(ANNIE enters from the back of the audience, passing OLDER ANNIE without acknowledging her. ANNIE joins YOUNGER ANNIE - watches her. Wants to join in.)

OLDER ANNIE (Continued)  
(watching Annie)

But it's...

(OLDER ANNIE struggles to return her attention to the audience.)

OLDER ANNIE (Continued)  
...it's like one of those itches on your back that you can't quite reach -  
(to an audience member)  
You know what I'm talking about? It refuses to go away.

OLDER ANNIE (Continued)  
(asking an audience member to scratch her back)  
Could you...? Thanks.

(ANNIE moves to dance with YOUNGER ANNIE. She is not as fluid; struggles to find the fun. She is sometimes successful. OLDER ANNIE watches, moves toward the stage. Beat. She is split between watching the dancers and addressing the audience.)

OLDER ANNIE (Continued)  
I suppose everyone has a story. But this - this one is mine. It's my pain - my strength - my fear - my...tenacity.

(“Tenacity” brings about a “big dance moment” for YOUNGER ANNIE. OLDER ANNIE can't take her eyes off the younger women.)

OLDER ANNIE (Continued)  
Look at her....

(She watches; remembers what she was saying. She smiles.)

OLDER ANNIE (Continued)  
I've always loved that word. *Tenacity*. You know, if I ever get a boat, I'm going to call her "The Tenacity".

(Watching the dancing becomes painful. OLDER ANNIE moves onto the stage and struggles to join the dancers.)

OLDER ANNIE (Continued)  
Sometimes I dream of what it would be like to feel whole....

(OLDER ANNIE joins the dance. She is hesitant, awkward. Throughout the Dance of the Annies, the CHORUS moves into the periphery of the space. Just as OLDER ANNIE is beginning to truly join the dance, it ends with the CRASH SOUND of breaking glass. the ANNIEs crumple to the floor. CHORUS stops.)  
(Throughout the following lines, OLDER ANNIE attempts to place each CHORUS member. They do not go where she directs, settling into their own places of their own accord. During the first part of the BEGINNING, TOM sets up OLDER ANNIE's space. The sound of TOM's placement of the table in her circle startles her, but she barely skips a beat.)

OLDER ANNIE (Continued)

(rising)

There are so many pieces of my life –

(TOM begins to gradually herd her toward her space like a stray cow into a holding pen.)

OLDER ANNIE (Continued)

(dodging him)

Pieces of my self - so many people who live in my memories –

(TOM watches. OLDER ANNIE continues her attempt at placement of the CHORUS. TOM herds.)

OLDER ANNIE (Continued)

People I knew. People I know.

(TOM moves her toward her circle. Finally there is nowhere else for her to go except in her circle.)

OLDER ANNIE (Continued)

I wish I could make some sense out of it all.

(TOM backs her into her space. She sits. LIGHTS out. Abrupt SOUND of shattering glass.)

In the new opening I explored Older Annie's story on both a verbal and physical level. By dropping the invisible

wall through which I had often viewed Older Annie, I allowed myself to give Older Annie my words. Drawing directly from my autobiographical performance in Dr. Carver's class, Older Annie claimed her space: "I have a story to tell." By giving her those words, I also claimed my space and acknowledged that my story was worth sharing. Additionally, working with Burgoyne and Downey had reinforced how spatial elements can express meaning in a play. Having Older Annie stand up from the middle of the audience *showed* that the person who has been abused could be anyone . . . even the woman sitting right next to you. Older Annie would also ask an audience member to scratch the itch on her back to try to help her. That direct request reached out to the audience to show that Older Annie was not only going to *tell* her story, she was going to demand a level of involvement from the audience. I was nervous about how the new opening would work in performance; however, I was also excited about the possibilities the change represented. The script was feeling closer to the story I wanted to tell.

## **AUDIENCE FEEDBACK AND RESPONSE**

As previously stated, *Survival Dance* had three productions sponsored by the University of Missouri - Columbia: the production in the Theatre Departments regular season in the fall of 2002; the production was then invited to be performed at the Region V conference of the Kennedy Center - American College Theatre Festival (KC-ACTF) in January 2003; and it was the *Mizzou on Broadway* showcase production at the York Theatre in New York City on September 6, 2003. With each production, I received various types of feedback and responses. The first production at MU included a benefit performance for the Shelter that offered a talkback session following the performance. Another evening we had the ACTF respondent offer feedback on the script and production. Additionally, I received unsolicited responses from individuals as well as written responses in the form of papers for coursework. At the KC-ACTF Region V festival, we had a response team of three individuals who met with the cast and crew. Additionally, I met one-on-one with a national playwriting respondent. At the *Mizzou on Broadway* performances, audience members were offered a short response sheet they could fill out if they chose to do so. And finally, at each performance, there was the response of the audience.



I learned something with each response. Knowing that a lot of individuals had liked the play made listening to criticism easier. I was able to separate the intense emotions that inspired the play from the need to continue crafting the script.

### **Watching the Audience**

One of the best ways in which I received audience feedback was by watching the audience watch the performance. Each night as the tension built there was a quiet throughout the audience. There was very little movement or shuffling of programs. I heard sniffles. Often a lot of sniffles in places that, as the playwright, I was glad to hear them. Those sniffles told me I had struck an emotional chord in the audience. Other than the sniffles, there was mostly silence. Some performances there was not even applause at the intermission. As the lights came up for intermission, the audience remained in their seats, silent. Many didn't talk to their neighbors for several minutes and many nights no one moved until a moment or two before Act II was to begin.

There were also nights when the audience verbally responded to Older Annie. One evening as Older Annie spoke to the audience and proudly claimed a *small victory*, an

audience member responded with "You go, Girl!" When we traveled to Iowa for the KC-ACTF Region V festival, we received a response we had not had at home. After Tom dragged Annie to the diner for dinner, after he ordered meatloaf for both of them, after he squirted ketchup on Annie's blouse and blamed her for it, the waitress, Bobbie, first expressed concern to Annie and then turned to Tom and said: "Mister, you are a horse's ass."<sup>57</sup> The audience broke into applause and cheers and the cast had to hold until the applause died.

### **KC-ACTF Responses**

I received valuable feedback from the ACTF respondent who watched the show at MU. One point stood out above the rest: The respondent thought that Tom was dead. To the respondent, it wasn't clear that Tom's death was a nightmare. I revisited the script several times to try to fix it so most audience members would understand that Tom was not dead. If Tom dies, it takes away Annie's ability to control her life by taking away her need to leave.

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<sup>57</sup> In *Surviving Domestic Violence: Voices of Women Who Broke Free*, Elaine Weiss recounts a story of being in Manhattan admiring the architecture of a building. Her husband at the time sneered at her, insulting her interest in the building. On page 25, Weiss describes the response of a woman standing beside them who "wheeled abruptly and said, the way only a New Yorker could: "She's right, you know. That building is beautiful – and you are a horse's ass." The light changed and she strode off." When I read Weiss's book years ago, the "horse's ass" phrase stuck with me. As I began writing *Survival Dance*, I explored every phrase imaginable to capture the essence of the moment when Bobbie sticks up for Annie. No other phrase came close. Inspiration comes from everywhere.

*Artistically* I needed to make sure the audience understood that Annie changed her life and left the abusive marriage. *Personally* I needed to make it clear Tom didn't die so the audience could see that abused women are not passive. They continually make decisions for themselves and their lives. Through production, Dr. Burgoyne worked on ways to express that the scene was a nightmare: Tom was *not* dead. To draw attention to the fact that the scene was a nightmare, I eventually added lines and actions for both Tom and Annie.

I received helpful feedback and encouragement from Roger Hall, the National Playwriting respondent at the KC-ACTF conference. The panel of three respondents for our production, however, left me with confusing questions. One respondent didn't like having Older Annie in the play; another said that Older Annie in the play kept the story from turning into a television movie of the week. The other respondent seemed angry. At the play? The subject? I never knew. I diligently wrote detailed notes during the response, but all I kept wondering was "What is wrong?" and "Is this person angry?" I had never encountered a response such as I had from that respondent.

## **Student Responses**

Student responses to the play were varied and valuable. In anonymous papers, several students spoke of wanting to "kick [Tom's] ass." Other papers addressed a personal connection to the subject matter. One stated:

this play portrayed an image similar to my own experiences . . . it helped me personally face my own experience . . . and I found this to be a fresh way to look at rape and abuse, more as a survivor rather than just being a victim."<sup>58</sup>

One student identified himself as a 19-year old male. He admitted to planning to leave at intermission because he thought he could get enough information to pass the quiz by that time and he would then be able to join his friends and go out to party on Halloween. He said he found that he couldn't bring himself to leave at intermission, though. He had to stay to find out what happened. From the responses from students that I heard and read, I knew that the play had made them think about intimate partner violence.

## **Survivor Responses**

Other meaningful responses came from survivors of domestic violence. At the talkback after the benefit performance, a woman describing herself as being "seven days out" spoke eloquently of the metaphor of the bear. She

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<sup>58</sup> All students were anonymous.

said it showed how we all have a beast inside, yet Tom couldn't control the beast. Another survivor said the performance made her realize she needed to take care of the little girl inside her who had lost so much. And yet another wished that her parents could see the play. She thought it might help them understand her. More than one survivor expressed appreciation that Tom had been shown as having a charming and loving side. His positive qualities seemed to them to justify that they had not been naïve or stupid when they entered a relationship with the man who eventually abused them.

When we traveled to New York, I was able to request feedback from audience members. Again, I found a lot of positive responses, including many from audience members who work in the field of domestic violence.

The responses I had to the productions encouraged me both personally and artistically. Personally, I felt validated that others valued the story of intimate partner violence. Artistically, I felt validated that the way in which I chose to tell the story *Survival Dance* worked on the stage. I was offered critiques that included both positive and negative comments. Such critiques are the most helpful. While it feels great to hear glowing, positive comments, critiques that only give the "I liked it"

comments don't allow me to grow as a writer or to continue to develop the script. I was fortunate to have had numerous individuals take the time to express places in the play they found unclear, or when they felt there was too much child-like play for an adult woman, or that Older Annie's final decision was too abrupt. All such comments have guided me as I continue to make changes in the script.

### **Family Responses**

*Survival Dance* was not an easy production to watch. Compelling? Yes. Engaging? Yes. But not easy. It was especially difficult for my family. They knew I had drawn from experiences of abuse in my own life. They knew what writing this play had done both to me and for me. But seeing the play, sensing the *me* in the characters was difficult. My husband came to most of the performances during the run of the show at the university in 2002. He had experienced my writing journey first-hand and his support was extraordinary. Our daughter read versions of the script throughout my writing process, but was unable to come home from college during the run of the show. She was upset, but I assured her that someday she would see it. I knew she was there in spirit and her support was unwavering. Seeing the face of our son after the

performance of the play was a whirl of emotion for both of us. Tanner couldn't say anything. He could only hug me. The tables were turned. *He reassured me.* A part of me was no longer mired in the mud. And if I got stuck again, I knew that I could count on help digging out.

#### **BACK TO MEDICAL SCHOOL**

The circle of physicians with whom I've shared my story has continued to grow. After *Survival Dance* had been produced at the university, Dr. Blake and I were scheduled to speak to the Family Medicine attending physicians. The individuals from whom I had wanted to hide my past were the very ones who would be attending this session. I knew many from my previous employment in the department and from when I was a standardized patient. I also knew that some of the staff members with whom I worked would be in attendance. Dr. Blake wanted me to be sure I felt ready to be so public in my discussion. I was. I don't know how I knew I was ready, but I knew. Dr. Carver was able to attend and took detailed notes for me on the discussion. The physicians asked about my support system during the time of abuse, about my thoughts regarding love and self-worth, and if I ever tried to turn my abuser in. The meeting was empowering for me. These individuals, whom I knew and respected,,

listened intently to my story and my answers to their questions and believed that they could learn from me. From my experiences. I couldn't help but reflect back a few years and a million steps on my journey to the first meeting with Elizabeth and five other medical students.

*MOMENT: Mirror, Mirror*

*I stand between two mirrors hold a Polaroid snapshot of myself as a young woman. At first, my body blocks my view of my self . . . I only see my reflection and the reflection of the photo.*

*As I move to the side I discover a curved hallway filled with mirrors and selves that seems to go on forever. Alternating selves.*

*Alternating selves?*

*Every other reflection along that infinite hall shows my face and my decades-younger face in the photograph. The alternate selves are my self, seen from behind. I see the back of my head and my shoulder. The photo of my younger self shows no back of the person I was - only the darkness of the photo's back.*

*I examine - back and forth - now and then - past and present - is there a future self I cannot see?*

*I hum the theme song from The Twilight Zone.*

*I move and examine again.*

*I realize that I am holding up my younger self. If I let go of the photo she will fall.*

*Someone once suggested to me that now I can take care of my younger self - my self who was abused. My younger self couldn't always care for herself as she needed. She felt alone. Unsure. But on my healing journey I grew wiser.*

*I could nurture her.*

*Looking again at the photo of us I hold on tight.*

*She doesn't fall.*

*I won't let go.*

*We're connected . . . finally.*

###



## ABOUT THE DEVELOPMENT JOURNEY

The development journey was long. At the end of the semester in which I had written *Survival Dance*, I had completed the second draft of the script. By the time we performed at the York Theatre in New York City, I was on Draft #14. Along the way, I drew from various sources, both from inside and outside my own life and experience. One of the most helpful lessons I learned in my process is that for me, performing parts of my work, *by myself and for myself*, is a valuable writing tool.

To gain a clearer picture of the artistic results of my journeys, Chapter Five includes the first and second scripts of *Resisting Myself* and Draft 14 of *Survival Dance*.

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE SCRIPTED JOURNEY

Two scripts are included in this chapter: the final version of my personal narrative performance, *Resisting Myself*, and the current draft of my play *Survival Dance*.<sup>59</sup> By studying these scripts, the reader will be able to discover connections and confluences of my life, my development process through performance, and my writing.

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<sup>59</sup> Please note that *Survival Dance* is protected by copyright and should not be copied or performed without permission of the author.

## Resisting Myself<sup>60</sup>

By Kate Berneking Kogut

**Props:** garden stool; enlarged photos of my childhood, my wedding, my husband and children; drawing of a man, eyes blocked out; my binder with the journal and original scripts of *Survival Dance*; pilot log book; flight test

**Costume:** jeans and my Assumptions T-shirt

### The Script:

Everybody come on over and sit around...sort of a circle. (*I set my stool down and face the audience's semi-circle.*)

Do you know what it's like to not be able to know where you're headed because everything around you is swirling so fast you don't know where you should go? You feel caught up in the swirl it can be beautiful – or terrifying.

One time I was flying in January and I took off from Lambert...this was back in the days when small planes could fly out of Lambert...I took off and was flying up to Alton to do touch and go's...you know what those are? You land, then you take off again. You stay in the landing pattern and do it over and over.

Well, on my way to Alton, I saw a few flurries in the air...when I landed in Alton...nothing. When I took off again...snow...on the ground, nothing...in the air...snow swirling *all* around.

(*Pause.*)

I have a story to tell. I haven't always wanted to tell it, but like that itch on your back that you can't quite reach...it refuses to go away.

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<sup>60</sup> Identifiable details have been omitted from the original script.

I've always heard that only 10% of what the author knows about a character ever shows up in the story, but it's that other 90% that makes the character's actions make sense...that helps us to care about the character. I have come to believe that what is missing from *Survival Dance* is the depth of the main character. During the reading I didn't care about her that much...and if I didn't care, how could I expect anyone else to? So I need to revisit the other 90%. You're going to get the condensed version.

Okay, what we're dealing with three geographical areas: western Illinois, Missouri, and Utah. But Utah comes later. Kathy Jeanne Berneking was born in 1955 – the second daughter to adoring parents – even though she was supposed to be a boy. Her mother was a former prom queen, her dad a black sheep son of a Southern Baptist preacher.

*(Show photo.)*

They lived in Granite City IL at the time of her birth, but she was born in St. Louis. At 2 years of age, she moved with her family to a subdivision in north St. Louis County – called Glasgow Village. It had street names such as Refrew, Durness, and Dornoch – very...*Braveheart*.

*(Show photos.)*

A shy child, she had a fairly happy childhood. Major traumas were things like overhearing Anna Beth Kapron<sup>61</sup> talking about her in the girl's bathroom saying how stupid she looked in go-go boots. She was devastated. It didn't occur to her until years later that everybody looked stupid in go-go boots.

A couple moves in her youth kept her in the same area and same school system where she made good friends, learned to ride horses, and became a high school

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<sup>61</sup> Anna Beth Kapron is a pseudonym.

cheerleader. She also became a lifeguard at a swimming pool. Had a great time doing this...and that is where she met HIM.

*(Show drawing.)*

And a bunch of bad stuff happened and then she left.

*(Go to audience member to get my back scratched.)*

And then a truly wonderful person walked into her life. They met in a bar. He was a friend of a friend...fresh back from the coasts – he'd worked rebuilding a schooner in Maine, then headed to Florida and worked on a shrimp boat. Two days short of five months from the day they met, they married.

*(Show wedding photo.)*

They had two fantastic kids....

*(Show family photo.)*

...Moved to the country, gardened, built a house, stood by each other, and through it all, she kept pushing that other back. But it wouldn't stay back.

*(Pause.)*

She had flashbacks. She felt out of control and desperately tried to control anything...*anything*...she could.

*(Quietly.)*

She became someone she didn't like very much. So she began to talk. And people listened. And then people talked to her about their own experiences. And she realized she had to tell a story...a story like her own.

*(Go get someone to scratch my back.)*

So where does that leave us? Last time we spoke I was having major problems with the upcoming reading of my play. I survived. And I found a lot of supportive, helpful feedback.

*(Motion to Heather and Dave.)*

Varying the scenes when the two main characters interact will help the audience understand....

*(Look at Dave. Nod.)*

Right now, they all end in violence. I need to change that...it makes sense and will help develop the characters.

*(Pause.)*

But something was missing. I didn't care enough about *her*...about my main character, Annie. What I needed to figure out is what I had to do to make my main character work...I needed more about her.

After the reading I sought more feedback. Eric Love talked with me two days after the reading. He said he couldn't see me in the play...he couldn't hear the playwright's voice. As we were talking he looked at me and told me that: "this is where the drama is"...that twenty-five years later it still haunts me.

*(Thoughtful pause.)*

Makes sense to me.

So...let's go back to the part where "a bunch of bad stuff happened."

He was a bit older – four years. Not much now, but it was then. They had fun...but gradually things changed. He became controlling...wanted all the power in the relationship. He became...well – she was in college and she knew – as she had always

known, that violence was not an answer. She knew she wasn't stupid. I mean, not really. Well, yeah, everybody did stupid things every once in a while...but, well, she knew she was capable. She was. Okay, well maybe not about the really important stuff in life, but about some things she was. Maybe...maybe if she just tried harder to, you know, get things right? Well maybe....

And she did try harder. And she tried it his way – but by the time she did something his way, he had changed how it was *supposed* to be – so she never sounded quite right...she never dressed quite right...she never acted quite right...she never said quite the right things....

*(Pause.)*

She didn't know where she was. Somewhere along the way she had lost herself. She didn't know where to turn...I mean, he was...he was one was one of the good guys, wasn't he? She couldn't tell anyone. It was embarrassing. She KNEW better.

And he had threatened her mother's life to her. She knew what he was capable with her...and he hated her mom. "One of these days I'm gonna kill that fuckin' bitch!" And her dad...she believed he would do whatever it took to protect her...and she was terrified of what it would cost him...she had to protect her father from knowing. She needed something new in her life. And then she saw an ad in the paper. Flying lessons. She signed up. She hated her classes as school. She enjoyed the people at work, but it wasn't "her" – and she couldn't be her true self with HIM. But in the plane...up there...she was capable.

Has anyone here ever flown? Not the "Thank you for flying American Airlines, we'll be cruising at 30,000 feet this afternoon...." No, I'm talking the 'walk around the

plane doing a pre-flight check, then fold yourself into the pilot's seat of a little private plane' sort of flying. The kind where you get out on the runway and the radio comes back at you: "Cessna two-seven-niner you are cleared for immediate take-off on runway three-zero right."

And then you're going down the runway...and it's rough – it seems all runways feel rough....

*(Demonstrate hands on the steering column – rough runway.)*

And you're picking up speed and pretty soon you have enough ground speed and you pull back on the steering column and then...you're flying. And you put your nose on the horizon and continue climbing and when you look down...when you look down, everything down there is smaller. It's not as big as when you're down there.

*(Pause.)*

Still, she stayed with him. And then two things happened. First, she saw something. He did something she knew was Wrong and yet she was frozen in fear – she could not do anything to stop it. And yet she knew with every fiber of her being that it was Wrong.

*(Motion to script.)*

I wrote that with a capital W. Wrong.

That started it. Witnessing his treatment of someone else, she realized what he was – it wasn't his physical abuse of her that finally turned her, it wasn't his psychological abuse...it was seeing his total abuse of his power – of the trust people placed in him.

But still she didn't leave.



She loved flying...but what she didn't like were stalls. Power off stalls weren't bad, but power-on stalls...accelerated maneuver stalls...they terrified her. See, you have full power and you're pulling the nose up and all you can see is sky.... Do you guys know what a stall is?

*(Read definition from test.)*

“Stall...an abrupt loss of lift on the wings, when the angle of attack increases to where the air flow tears away from a wing – the aircraft stops flying.”

So, you're sitting there...nothing but sky...no connection with the ground whatsoever, and you're hearing the stall horn...

*(Make horn sound, then get audience to make sound.)*

...And it keeps getting louder and louder....

*(Have them increase the sound.)*

...And pretty soon the plane stops flying and falls off and you'd better have enough right rudder to compensate for the torque of the engine, otherwise you're gonna put the plane into a spin. So this god-awful sound is blasting in your ear...you're disconnected from the world below you...and then the world stops...

*(Pause. Stop audience-created sound.)*

...And you recover and resume normal flight. And so went that relationship – the blasting horn – the terror – the not knowing if you're doing it right...and finally – resume normal flight.

And the second thing...they went on a trip together. He drove. Remember Utah? They traveled to Moab, Utah before it got overrun with tourists. When they arrived...it was incredible. Have you ever seen the red rock canyons of southern Utah? There is a

power in places like that – it goes beyond human existence. It’s timeless. Three days they rafted on the Colorado River. And for three days she experienced the power of the river...the power of the land...of the sky...she felt it inside her...and it reminded her of something she thought she once had. Maybe she still did.

It would be nice to be able to say she found a way to break it off all on her own. She no longer trusted her own judgment, though. But then she met someone who reflected herself back to her – someone who didn’t judge her – and she started to believe in herself again.

Eventually she did break it off. He didn’t leave her alone, though. But she got through it. And she figured as nice as it would be to have a man in her life, she probably wasn’t destined to...maybe someday a child, but that was a slim chance, too. What she did NOT need to be looking for, though, was another relationship.

*(Hold up wedding photo and family photo again.)*

Never say never....

And then, the next twenty-five years.

This brings me to the winter semester 2001.

*(Hold up binder.)*

Do you know what this is? This is the journal work and the first drafts of *Survival Dance*.

But...I’m still between a rock and a hard place...and I still have that itch....

*(Go have someone scratch my back.)*

I'm looking at *Survival Dance* in an entirely new way – because it IS my story. Fiction, yes, but it embodies MY terror, MY strength, MY pain, and MY...tenacity. I love that word. Tenacity. Someday when I get a boat, I'm going to name her Tenacity.

But I still had that feeling...that desperation of not wanting to become a spokesperson for survivors of domestic violence. I mean...it's over. I can deal with it now, and I certainly don't want that to be the only "issue" I am known for.

*(Pause.)*

At the same time, I want to be able to make a difference. I feel a responsibility. See not every woman who is or has been in a violent relationship has or had what I did. They didn't all have a fairly happy childhood.

*(Hold up appropriate photos over the following lines.)*

They may not have found a supportive partner or had such terrific kids. They may never have known the power of the river or sat at the controls of a plane as it barrels down the runway and then pull back and fly....

*(Ask someone if they can come up and scratch my back. Thank him or her.)*

But my story isn't every woman's story. And I can't speak for every survivor. I can only tell the story the best way I know how...but I STILL want it to make a difference. I want to scream out that it's NOT okay for someone to hit you. I want to grab women and tell them to quit judging other women who have been there – quit saying things like – “If a man ever did that to me, I'd be out of there,” or “she left when she got strong enough” because that only makes it worse...it only keeps women from being free to open up to you...and it only gives you a false sense of security that it can't happen to

you or someone you love...because it can. It CAN be your friend, it CAN be your mother, or your daughter, or your sister. That's what I want to tell them.

But I suppose a lot of that needs to be subtext. I'm working a lot with subtext these days. And I have something that I need to say...that SHE needs to say. It may end up being deleted in the script...but I'm going to talk to him now.

*(Ask someone to come stand in for "him.")*

What you took from me...I can never get back. But that doesn't make me bad...it doesn't make me stupid...it doesn't make me weak. It doesn't make...ME.

*(Repeat twice or as necessary.)*

THE END

# **Survival Dance**

An original play by  
Kate Berneking Kogut

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Kate Berneking Kogut

CHARACTERS:

**Annie Tyler Stratton**, twenties; dresses nicely; works in Human Resources in major department store

**Older Annie**, Annie twenty years later

**Younger Annie**, the playful, youthful essence of Annie

**Tom Stratton**, early thirties; clean cut and boyishly handsome; a detective on the vice squad on the police force

**Jill Tyler/Chorus**, Annie's older sister

**Doctor/Chorus**, a physician

**Bobbie/Gran/Chorus**, server at a local restaurant/Annie's grandmother/other roles

**Mankato Smith**, friendly neighbor of Tom and Annie; thirties to forties

**Jared/Chorus**, Tom's partner

**Phyllis/Chorus**, Tom's mother

SETTING:

The conservatively decorated apartment of Tom and Annie, complete with matching furnishings; Older Annie occupies a small, circular space. Younger Annie has her own space to which she retreats. Other, less defined spaces, include a diner, doctor's office, Laundromat, beach. Each Annie wears a version of the same outfit: khaki pants, white T-shirt, blue shirt: Annie's style is conservative, but twenty years (+ or -) older than Older Annie's style, which is freer, looser – shirt not tucked in, etc; Younger Annie's outfit is more youthful. The Chorus sits opposite the audience so they are able to watch the action as it unfolds.

TIME:

Present, past, and all places in between.

## IN THE BEGINNING....

(LIGHTS up on YOUNGER ANNIE onstage beginning a playful dance to light music. OLDER ANNIE stands in the audience; takes hesitant steps.)

OLDER ANNIE

I have a story to tell - I...I haven't always wanted to tell it....

(ANNIE enters from the back of the audience, passing OLDER ANNIE without acknowledging her. ANNIE joins YOUNGER ANNIE – watches her. Wants to join in the dance.)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

(watching Annie)

But it's....

(OLDER ANNIE struggles to return her attention to the audience.)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

...it's like one of those itches on your back that you can't quite reach -  
(to an audience member)

You know what I'm talking about? It refuses to go away.  
(asking an audience member to scratch her back)

Could you...? Thanks.

(ANNIE moves to dance with YOUNGER ANNIE. She is not as fluid; struggles to find the fun. She is sometimes successful. OLDER ANNIE watches, moves toward the stage. Beat. She is split between watching the dancers and addressing the audience.)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

I suppose everyone has a story. But this - this one is mine. It's my pain  
- my strength - my fear - my...tenacity.

(“Tenacity” brings about a “big dance moment” for YOUNGER ANNIE and ANNIE. OLDER ANNIE cannot take her eyes off the younger women.)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

Look at her....

(She watches; remembers what she was saying. Smiles.)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

I've always loved that word. *Tenacity*. You know, if I ever get a boat, I'm going to call her "The Tenacity".

(Watching the dancing becomes painful. OLDER ANNIE moves onto the stage and struggles to join the dancers.)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

Sometimes I dream of what it would be like to feel whole....

(OLDER ANNIE joins the dance. She is hesitant, awkward. Throughout the Dance of the Annes, the CHORUS moves into the periphery of the space. Just as OLDER ANNIE is beginning to truly dance, it ends with the CRASH SOUND of breaking glass. The ANNIES crumple to the floor. CHORUS stops.

Throughout the following lines, OLDER ANNIE attempts to place each CHORUS member. They do not go where she directs, settling into their own places of their own accord. During the first part of the BEGINNING, TOM sets up OLDER ANNIE's space. The sound of TOM's placement of the table in her circle startles OLDER ANNIE, but she barely skips a beat. )

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

(rising)

There are so many pieces of my life –

(TOM begins to gradually herd her toward her space like a stray cow into a holding pen.

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

(dodging him)

Pieces of my self - so many people who live in my memories -

(TOM watches. OLDER ANNIE continues her attempt at placement of the CHORUS. TOM herds.)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

People I knew. People I know.

(TOM moves her toward her circle. Finally there is no where else for her to go except in her circle.)



OLDER ANNIE (continued)

I wish I could make some sense out of it all.

(TOM backs her into her space. She sits. LIGHTS out.  
Abrupt SOUND of shattering glass.)

*PROLOGUE*

(LIGHTS up on OLDER ANNIE's  
circle.)

OLDER ANNIE

I was in the kitchen earlier today - barefoot. I dropped a glass. It broke, of course, and I just stood there, waiting. I couldn't breathe. Finally I heard him walking toward the kitchen and I was bracing myself because I knew I was going to hear how stupid I was, how clumsy I was. But all I heard was "Are you okay?"

(short beat)

It wasn't him. I looked over and there was this incredible man with a broom and a dust pan saying something like "don't move" and that he'd "get this" and before I knew it I was

(smiles)

Laughing and crying and then he got concerned because he thought I was hurt - you know, that I'd cut myself, and I couldn't...I couldn't tell him that for a split second I thought he was someone else.

(She walks around in her space, staying inside, looking out. YOUNGER ANNIE dances outside the circle. OLDER ANNIE watches. She walks around in her space, staying inside, looking out. YOUNGER ANNIE dances outside the circle. OLDER ANNIE watches.)

BOBBIE

(as Gran)

Annie, did I ever tell you about the garden fairies?

YOUNGER ANNIE

They come out at night and dance in your flowers.

BOBBIE

(as Gran)

They dance in everyone's flowers.

YOUNGER ANNIE

Gran, tell me about Horace.

BOBBIE

(as Gran)

Horace was the king of the garden fairies and one day he went in search of all the flowers in the universe so he could bring the beauty of all the galaxies to everyone on earth. He was gone a very long time....

YOUNGER ANNIE

And he started to miss his garden fairies, right?

BOBBIE

(as Gran)

He missed them very much.

(LIGHTS UP on ANNIE and TOM watching shooting stars in the night sky. ANNIE wears a conservative version of the "ANNIE" outfit. TOM is conservatively dressed.)

ANNIE

And so he sent shooting stars to light up all the gardens on earth so he could see his fairies.

(OLDER ANNIE turns away from TOM and ANNIE watching shooting stars.)

ANNIE (continued)

(to Tom)

Gran used to tell me all kinds of wonderful stories.

YOUNGER ANNIE

(dancing)

Your stories are like magic, Gran.

OLDER ANNIE

I used to believe in magic.

(beat)

I used to believe in a lot of things.

BOBBIE

(as Gran)

You are the magic, Annie.

OLDER ANNIE

(watching Younger Annie as she dances off)

I wish I remembered how....

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

(beat; to audience)

Where do I begin? I have this hole - this...pit - inside me. I try to fill it, to ignore it, to cover it up. I've even tried to laugh off, because, hey. That's me - the life of the party. Everybody likes Annie. She's fun!

(beat)

And sometimes - for a while - I think that this time - finally, it might work.

(TOM walks to the outside of the circle, unseen by OLDER ANNIE.)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

I've even imagined how it would be if I ran into him on the street. I'd be very calm, very *together*, because I'm over it, you know? I'd ask how he'd been, wish him well. And I would be fine. I would.

(She moves back and as she turns she comes face to face with him and jumps. TOM grins.)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

I'd be fine.

(She backs away. He circles outside her space. She moves.)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

I'm over it. It's done.

(She glances. He's still there.)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

(closes her eyes; deep cleansing breaths)

I'm over it. I'm okay. I have a great life: a fantastic husband, wonderful kids. All that...it's over. It's in the past. Over.

(TOM and ANNIE have stools opposite each other. TOM sits on his stool. YOUNGER ANNIE and ANNIE dance. LIGHTS change.)

BOBBIE

(as Gran)

Once upon a time there lived a young girl named Annie who loved being outside. Sometime she would play in the forest among the trees and flowers - some days she would go to the beach and dance in the

BOBBIE (continued)  
waves. But she always imagined wonderful games as she dreamed  
about her future....

(OLDER ANNIE watches both her younger selves.)

ANNIE  
Growing up she was surrounded by loving family and friends, but  
sometimes she would wonder about her life, her dreams. Would she  
ever find love? Happiness? Then one day something happened.

OLDER ANNIE  
She met someone.

(YOUNGER ANNIE dances away and settles down.  
ANNIE's dance changes. ANNIE looks at TOM.)

ANNIE  
Someone who understood her. Someone who seemed to see what  
others overlooked. Someone who also had questions. Questions about  
love.

(LIGHTS dim on OLDER ANNIE. She sits in her space  
and looks at the contents of a small box.)

## ACT I

### SCENE 1

(TOM is on his stool.)

TOM  
(looking up and around)  
I'm sorry. What was the question again?

CHORUS  
Love. Talk about love.

(OLDER ANNIE slowly takes pieces of an old vase out  
of the box.)

TOM  
(to himself)  
What do I love...what do I love?  
(looks up)

TOM (continued)

Can I talk about my wife? Does that count? Yeah. That's what I'm going to talk about...her. She's what I love.

ANNIE

(dancing)

I love flowers. Oh, I know, *everyone* loves flowers - but I like ones that are different. Old fashioned ones like my Gran used to grow. I loved visiting Gran - she could find magic in anything -

TOM

When we met, I couldn't believe she'd want me. I mean, she's so - I don't know how to describe her. I pray she doesn't wake up some day and figure out that she wants somebody who makes more money or something. Somebody who can give her the things she wants.

ANNIE

Gran told wonderful stories.

(smiles)

Did you know that on moonlit nights the fairies dance?

(dancing)

You see, the garden fairies dance among the flowers and the water fairies dance on the waves. Gran told me that.

TOM

I look into her eyes - they're this swirl of color - and stars. And when I look closer I see my reflection in her eyes and then - I don't. I'm gone. It's like I lose myself in there. Scares the shit out of me!

ANNIE

So I guess that's what I love - the magic of flowers. And water! Gran always said the beach was magic because it's the only place where all our worlds meet -

TOM

She doesn't know what she has. I mean - I see the way men look at her, and I gotta be honest, sometimes I just want to take them and-

(pause)

And she's so naive about things. I mean she actually buys it when they talk about "friendship" and all that crap. Friendship my ass!

ANNIE

Flowers make me smile because I know that where there are flowers there are bound to be fairies dancing.

TOM

Guess I'm getting off the subject, huh? But that's what I really love...my wife. When I walk with her, I *know* other guys look at me and wish they were in my shoes, you know?

ANNIE

And the beach makes me smile because it reminds me of time with Gran -

TOM

It's such a high that she's with me...that she wants *me*.

ANNIE

(winding up her dancing)

You know how it feels to be around your Gran? Happy and loved. And safe.

TOM

That's all.

## SCENE 2

(On a picnic at the beach. A breeze is blowing, the sky is blue. The waves lap up on the sandy and rocky shore. It's a good day to be alive. The CHORUS enjoys the day. A picnic day with Frisbee throwing, blowing bubbles, playing catch, etc. TOM gets a picnic basket and crosses to get ANNIE. TOM and ANNIE pay no attention to the CHORUS as they look for a picnic spot. CHORUS plays and reacts to each other. OLDER ANNIE remains in her circle.)

OLDER ANNIE

Love.

BOBBIE

We want to give it,

DOCTOR

We want to receive it.

PHYLLIS

We wander through life,

MANKATO

Meander, really -

JILL

Until something - someone

JARED

Stops us.

MANKATO

And we hope and pray and wish upon a star

JARED

That this might be the one.

TOM

What about here? You like it?

ANNIE

It's beautiful.

TOM

Man, I'm glad you like it! I love it here - looking out over the water - but part of me kept wondering whether or not you'd like all this. I mean, a picnic -

JARED

Sometimes it is....

PHYLLIS

And sometimes it isn't....

BOBBIE

So we continue our search for someone to share our life.

JARED

And our love.

ANNIE

It's great here, really.

TOM

Good. Good. Hungry?

ANNIE

Starved.

TOM

Great! I love a woman with an appetite. It shows you love life. That sounds corny, doesn't it?

ANNIE

Maybe a little.

TOM

I think it might get cornier. This is embarrassing....  
(gathers his courage)  
I, um - I wrote a song. For you.

ANNIE

Really?

TOM

(can't look at her; mumbles)  
Shit. I can't believe I'm doing this.  
(he pulls a ukulele out of the gym bag)  
It's a ukulele.

ANNIE

I know, I just - I never knew anyone who actually played one.

TOM

Okay. Before I lose my nerve.  
(he strums a few notes; he more recites than sings, strumming a few simple chords as he goes)  
When I look, in your eyes - I always am surprised - that you want me - that you love me - that you're mine  
(deep breath; Annie smiles)  
When I kiss, those lovely lips - place my hands upon your hips - I feel love I've never felt - and you're mine....  
(Tom stops)  
There's more, I just can't....

ANNIE

No one's ever written a song for me before.

TOM

That's hard to believe....

ANNIE

It's sweet.



TOM

You think so?

(ANNIE nods. TOM kisses her. CHORUS watches.)

CHORUS

(an "isn't that sweet" sigh)

Awww.

JARED

But sometimes I think we might be better off with a dog.

JILL

Or a cat.

JARED

No - a dog.

JILL

Cat.

JARED

Dog.

MANKATO

(interrupting)

Then suddenly, when you least expect it, it's there.

BOBBIE

Right in front of you....

CHORUS

(playful)

Love.

TOM

Okay - this is good.

(grins)

I didn't make a total ass of myself?

ANNIE

No.

(teasing)

But don't quit your day job.

(TOM laughs; does a bear growl/roar. "New love"  
playfulness. TOM and ANNIE exit.)

DOCTOR

You never know exactly where you'll find it.

MANKATO

Some find it at work,

BOBBIE

Or school,

PHYLLIS

Or maybe a bar

DOCTOR

Or a party....

JARED

Or waiting in line in a fast food restaurant.

(Beat.)

PHYLLIS

And before you know it....

MANKATO

Love.

DOCTOR

And we become breathless with anticipation of our next meeting.

JARED

And we think that finally,

JILL, BOBBIE, MANKATO

Finally,

PHYLLIS

In all the world,

JILL

There is someone we can count on -

BOBBIE

Someone to share our life -

JARED

And our love -

JILL

Someone to love.

MANKATO

And we hope and pray and wish upon a star

PHYLLIS

That this time, it will last.

(As the CHORUS members fade to their raised outpost to take their places to watch the action....)

### SCENE 3

(LIGHTS change to TOM and ANNIE's apartment. An old, white vase is broken on the floor. A shoulder holster is on a side table. ANNIE enters carrying a small blooming potted plant. She straightens up. TOM enters from the kitchen, freshly showered. He holds roses. YOUNGER ANNIE dances on the periphery of the scene clutching an eclectic mix of flowers.)

TOM

Hi, Toots.

(Hearing him, ANNIE pauses, then continues cleaning; YOUNGER ANNIE moves quickly away, losing herself in her play/dance. LIGHTS up on OLDER ANNIE who watches the action.)

TOM (continued)

Annie?

(YOUNGER ANNIE dances outside the circle. OLDER ANNIE turns away. ANNIE continues cleaning.)

TOM (continued)

I thought maybe -

(he moves toward her, holding the roses out to her)

These are for you. I mean, you like roses, right?

(ANNIE nods.)

TOM

I thought they were pretty. Like you.

ANNIE

Thank you.

(She doesn't take the roses. OLDER ANNIE forces herself to become absorbed in piecing together two shards.)

TOM

I guess we should put them in a vase?

(ANNIE exits to the kitchen, returns with a standard issue florist vase and a small box. TOM puts the roses in the vase.)

ANNIE

(picking up shards, putting them in the box)

It was my grandmother's.

TOM

I know.... Sometimes - I just - I mean, it was really a bad day yesterday.

(beat)

You don't know the kind of scum I deal with sometimes, and then to come home and -

ANNIE

I know. I'm sorry.

TOM

(beat; he motions to the roses)

Do you like them?

ANNIE

They're pretty. Thank you.

TOM

(grins; satisfied)

I thought you'd like them. You like roses.

OLDER ANNIE

I like a lot of flowers.

(TOM sets the vase on a table.)

TOM

I thought they'd look good here. What do you think?

ANNIE

(picking up shards)

That's fine.

(Beat.)

TOM

Hey, I'm trying here, okay?

ANNIE

I know. You're right. They look good there.

TOM

Where were you?

ANNIE

I took a walk.

TOM

By yourself?

ANNIE

Yes.

TOM

Nobody was with you?

ANNIE

No.

(TOM watches ANNIE. She doesn't look at him.)

TOM

I gotta get to work.

(puts on his holster, checks the gun; motions to roses)

You like them?

ANNIE

Yes. They're pretty.

TOM

(he's trying)

Good. Good. I -

(beat)

What time are you going by Mom's?

ANNIE

What?

TOM

You said you had to do laundry today, so I told Mom you'd do it at her house. Saves money, gives you two time to visit.

ANNIE

I could do it at the Laundromat here.

TOM

(shrugs into a sportcoat)

All kinds of creeps hang out in laundromats, Toots. Besides, Mom's expecting you.

(starts to leave)

Don't forget to put some water in the vase. And you should cut a little off the bottom of the stems - the flowers will last longer that way.

(he stops, goes to her and pulls her to him, kisses her cheeks, her neck)

Man, I wish I could stay. Making up is good. Hey, how 'bout a little enthusiasm here, Toots?

(she looks at him, smiles; he kisses her)

That's better. Okay. See you tonight.

(TOM starts to leave.)

ANNE

Tom? Be careful.

TOM

Always, Toots. Always.

ANNIE

And - thank you for the flowers. They're really pretty. I love roses.

(TOM grins and exits.)

ANNIE (continued)

I love OLD roses. Like Gran had in her garden.

(YOUNGER ANNIE dances freely; inhales deeply of an old rose.)

OLDER ANNIE

Their fragrance was intoxicating.

ANNIE

And I love violets and coneflowers....

(ANNIE sways tentatively. Smiles. BOBBIE appears as GRAN.)

YOUNGER ANNIE

I love your garden, Gran.

BOBBIE

(as Gran)

You're part of it, Annie.

YOUNGER ANNIE

Someday I'm gonna plant a garden just like yours.

ANNIE

(overlapping)

Someday I'm going to plant a garden.

OLDER ANNIE

(overlapping)

Maybe I should plant a garden.

YOUNGER ANNIE

(dancing)

And I can dance there!

ANNIE

...with delphineums and hollyhocks....

OLDER ANNIE

...and dianthus and rudbeckia....

ANNIE

And an asparagus patch and berry bushes....

JILL

(to CHORUS as she watches ANNIE.)

I remember Gran's raspberry patch. We'd go to pick the berries and our arms would get little scratches all over them.

OLDER ANNIE

(good memory time)

The best berries were always in the middle of the patch.

JILL

But they were so sweet and juicy....

YOUNGER ANNIE & JILL

(little girl sing-song chant)

One for the bucket and one for me.

(ANNIE laughs; twirls tentatively. YOUNGER ANNIE twirls carefree, dances. OLDER ANNIE smiles.)

OLDER ANNIE

I wonder if Gran ever knew how many I ate before I got the berry bucket back to her....

BOBBIE

I knew. You danced like one of the fairies in my garden.

(OLDER ANNIE smiles; ANNIE smiles and dances to memory.)

ANNIE & OLDER ANNIE

I miss you Gran.

ANNIE

I miss the way you smiled when you told stories - and the way you listened to me like everything I had to say was important....

(YOUNGER ANNIE and ANNIE twirl.)

ANNIE

You made me feel like I could do anything I set my mind to.

(ANNIE knocks over her potted plant mid-twirl. Both stop dancing.)



ANNIE (continued)  
(reacting)

Shit!

OLDER ANNIE  
(overlapping; remembering)

Shit!

(ANNIE rushes to clean up the mess. OLDER ANNIE and YOUNGER ANNIE watch; OLDER ANNIE is agitated.)

BOBBIE

It'll be all right, Annie.

(beat)

Think about it...where would we be without dirt?

(ANNIE cleans.)

ANNIE

(mumbles; ignores Bobbie)

How could I be so clumsy...?!

OLDER ANNIE

(simultaneous; to herself)

Just breathe...it's over.

YOUNGER ANNIE

I'm sorry, Gran!

BOBBIE

Oh, Sweetie, a little dirt never hurt nobody. Without dirt, where would we put our roots? And where would I plant my flowers?

(OLDER ANNIE tries to sway, to remember the freedom of her dance. She cannot. ANNIE puts the now potless plant in the vase with the roses. She adds water to the vase.)

BOBBIE

If I didn't have flowers, where would the garden fairies dance?

(BOBBIE disappears. ANNIE cleans.)

ANNIE & OLDER ANNIE

(fighting tears)

I miss you Gran.

(ANNIE picks up a laundry basket; exits. YOUNGER ANNIE is by the CHORUS; OLDER ANNIE sits in her circle.)

**SCENE 4**

(TOM sits on a bench eating a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. He has a carton of milk. JILL joins him. OLDER ANNIE examines broken pieces of the pitcher from the box.)

JILL

Hi.

TOM

Hi, yourself. What is it about peanut butter and jelly?  
(grins at JILL)

I feel like I'm ten!

(picks up his milk carton)

Add cold milk and subtract another couple years.  
(he takes a swig)

JILL

So now you're eight?

TOM

Those were the days, weren't they?

JILL

Why'd you want me to meet you here?

TOM

I wanted to ask...hey, do you want some?  
(offers her some sandwich)

JILL

What kind of jelly?

TOM

Grape.

JILL

I like strawberry.

TOM

Yuck. Not to burst your bubble, but isn't there some constitutional amendment that makes peanut butter and *strawberry* jelly sandwiches un-American or something?

JILL

I don't think so.

TOM

Maybe there should be....

(finishes half the sandwich, licking his fingers)

So. Annie's birthday is coming up - I guess you know that, being her sister and all. I want to do something special. You know? She likes surprises, right?

JILL

Yeah...what are you thinking?

TOM

I think I'll start with balloons.

JILL

Balloons are good.

TOM

What else?

JILL

I don't know...she loves spontaneity.

TOM

(smiling)

I took her on a picnic when we were first dating. That was sort of spontaneous. I think she liked it.

JILL

She loved it.

TOM

She told you about that? Now I'm embarrassed.

JILL

Don't be...it sounded wonderful.

TOM  
Did she tell you about....

JILL  
The ukulele?

TOM  
(moaning)  
Oh, shit....

JILL  
No, that's so cute! Really...it's adorable!

TOM  
Just how a man wants to come across....

JILL  
You're a big kid, you know that?

TOM  
That's why I can't wait to have a kid of our own. I'll get to play with cars and trucks again and dig in sandboxes and generally just have fun. But nobody will think it's strange because I'll be this really cool dad, y'know?

JILL  
You're really looking forward to it, aren't you?

TOM  
I can't wait. But first things first. So she likes balloons?

JILL  
And surprises.

TOM  
(grins)  
I have a few ideas.

## SCENE 5

(ANNIE is folding clothes in the apartment Laundromat.  
MANKATO SMITH joins her, begins folding clothes.)

MANKATO

Sometimes I wonder what would happen if I just wore them all wrinkled.

(ANNIE smiles.)

I don't suppose the world would stop spinning on its axis or anything.

(ANNIE hesitates.)

MANKATO (continued)

Just think about all the time we could save if we wouldn't bother folding these and just pull them out of the basket as we need them. I've thought I could serve up lunches in a soup kitchen, or clean up trash from along the side of the road...or if I got *really* got ambitious, maybe discover a vaccine for some childhood ailment.

(folds)

And all because I quit folding laundry. Kind of makes me think...not selfishly of course, but for the betterment of humankind-

ANNIE

(smiles)

Yes.

(MANKATO offers his hand.)

MANKATO

Mankato Smith.

(She tentatively shakes his hand.)

ANNIE

Annie....

(TOM appears.)

TOM

Don't ever tell people your last name. There are all kinds of creeps hanging out at Laundromats.

(TOM disappears.)

ANNIE

Annie.

MANKATO

Nice to meet you Annie Annie.

ANNIE

Mankato?

MANKATO

Odd, isn't it?

ANNIE

No. I mean, it's unusual, but I like it. Isn't there a Mankato in Minnesota?

MANKATO

So you know Minnesota, eh?

ANNIE

It sounds familiar.

MANKATO

You're right. My parents, rest their souls, did two things. They moved all over the great state of Minnesota...*and* they made babies. Each baby was named for the place my family lived when that child was born.

ANNIE

Interesting.

MANKATO

You say interesting, I say strange. But at the very least my name has always been a conversation starter, eh?

ANNIE

Oh?

MANKATO

We're having a conversation, right?

(Annie smiles)

Mankato's not so bad. It could have been worse. Family lore has it that the Smith family was residing in *Duluth* when my mother discovered *yet again* that she was pregnant. She stated flat out to my father that *no child* of hers would grow up with the name Duluth.

ANNIE

So they moved?

MANKATO

To Mankato....

ANNIE

To Mankato?

MANKATO

Now the twins....

ANNIE

(laughs)

Minneapolis and St. Paul?

(MANKATO laughs and nods.)

MANKATO

After *that* birth the newspaper did an article on the family. My mother's fifteen minutes of fame.

ANNIE

Are you from a large family?

MANKATO

Nine children.

ANNIE

Wow.

MANKATO

(he recites)

Owatonna, Wheaton, Shakopee, Mankato-that's me- Minneapolis and St. Paul, Red Wing, Morris and Buffalo.

ANNIE

Buffalo, New York?

MANKATO

Yes, my grandmother became ill and we moved there for a year to care for her.

ANNIE

Oh.

MANKATO

That's where my youngest brother was born. I often wonder if our presence there helped my grandmother, or if the onslaught of a well-intentioned family of eleven might not have hastened her departure from this world.

ANNIE

I'm sorry.

MANKATO

And what of your family? Brothers? Sisters?

ANNIE

One sister.

MANKATO

And your husband?

(TOM appears.)

TOM

It's very simple. You don't give any information to anyone. *No one.*

(ANNIE doesn't answer MANKATO.)

MANKATO

My apologies. I'm making you uncomfortable.

TOM

You have to be careful, Annie. Some of these people I see at work...hell, they're almost not even human...I don't want you to even have to know how bad some of them are....

MANKATO

I certainly don't mean to intrude upon your personal life.

TOM

What they do for money.... I don't want you exposed to that side of life. I couldn't stand it if something happened to you.

MANKATO

I'm sure he doesn't trust people easily...in his line of work and everything, eh?

ANNIE

What?

TOM

You gotta be careful, Toots. That's all I'm saying, okay?

(TOM disappears.)

MANKATO

He's a police detective, right?



ANNIE

You know him?

MANKATO

Only by sight. The shoulder holster sort of gives it away.  
(ANNIE stares at him.)

I live in your building.

(Beat.)

MANKATO

I'm sorry, I thought you had seen me before. I feel ridiculous. I'm terribly sorry.

ANNIE

No, no. That's fine. I was surprised, that's all.

MANKATO

No, here I was going on and on....

ANNIE

I have to...I'm sorry...I have an appointment....  
(she shoves the rest of her clothes in the basket)  
I enjoyed talking with you.

MANKATO

And I you.  
(he finishes, puts his clothes in the basket)  
But alas, all good things.... Perhaps we shall meet again.

(ANNIE exits. MANKATO exits. LIGHTS change as....)

## SCENE 6

(The CHORUS wanders downstage from their post overlooking the apartment.)

DOCTOR

I remember when they got together.

BOBBIE

Everyone said they're such a perfect couple....

PHYLLIS

They look so cute....

JILL

So happy.

JARED

I was glad when they got together.

PHYLLIS

She's like the daughter I never had.

JARED

He'd been looking.

JILL

(overlapping Jared)

She'd been looking.

BOBBIE

For someone.

PHYLLIS

Everybody wants someone.

JILL

She couldn't stop talking about him.

PHYLLIS

I want him to be happy.

MANKATO

They seemed to go together.

CHORUS

Like peanut butter and jelly?

## SCENE 7

(ANNIE enters the DOCTOR's office. She sits, uncomfortable. Still sits. Sits longer. She squirms. DOCTOR enters. OLDER ANNIE watches.)

DOCTOR

Sorry to keep you waiting. Your test was negative.

(ANNIE nods, relieved, but reserved.)

DOCTOR

It was a little early for you to think you might be pregnant, Annie.

ANNIE

I know - I, um - I lost my purse and my pills were in it....

DOCTOR

I see.

(beat)

So - tell me how things have been going with you -

ANNIE

Fine. Good.

DOCTOR

(very long pause - Doc leans in)

You know, Annie, sometimes patients have concerns they find difficult to bring up -

(DOCTOR watches her. She says nothing. Nods.)

OLDER ANNIE

(agitated)

Your perfect opportunity....

DOCTOR

Other than the pregnancy test, do you have other questions today?

ANNIE

No. No, everything's fine.

DOCTOR

If you don't want to start a family right away you might want to think about another form of birth control....

ANNIE

I know. It's not that I don't want  
Kids. We're just not....

OLDER ANNIE

(angry; to Annie)  
Oh, please! Just say it!

OLDER ANNIE

(to audience; points to Annie)

See? This is the reason I'm....

(indicates her confinement)

It's her. She could never stand up for herself.

DOCTOR

If there's ever anything....

ANNIE

Everything's fine -

OLDER ANNIE

Even now.... I finally have what I want - I'm surrounded by people I love and I'm - I'm driving them away. And now I'll probably end up alone. He always said I would. Said that eventually everyone would see what I'm really like.

(looks at Annie)

Everything is not fine. Why couldn't you say it?

(OLDER ANNIE turns away. LIGHTS down on the DOCTOR's office.)

## SCENE 8

(JILL is waiting at a diner table for ANNIE. A pile of straws in paper wrappers are on the table in front of her. Some straws are out of wrappers. A glass of tea is on the table. The CHORUS is in the diner as other customers. DOCTOR enters and sits with JARED.)

JARED

(to Bobbie)

Could I get a refill, Bobbie?

(to Doctor)

Busy place.

DOCTOR

Sometimes busy is good. Sometimes it's not so good.

JARED

Oh, jeez...you're gonna pull some philosophical, psycho-babble crap out here now, aren't you?

DOCTOR

What do you think?

JARED

I think we came here for coffee, not to solve major world crises.

DOCTOR

Good coffee.

JARED

Okay...where are you headed with that one?

DOCTOR

I was only commenting....

JARED

You want me to spill my guts or what?

DOCTOR

Do you need to?

JARED

No. Yes. Hell, I don't know!

(BOBBIE refills coffee.)

JARED

Thanks.

BOBBIE

Everybody needs to talk sometimes.

DOCTOR

And all we can do is listen.

BOBBIE

And watch.

DOCTOR

Maybe ask a few questions.

(looks at the DOCTOR's office where he left ANNIE)

Hopefully we ask the right ones.

JARED

Smart doc.

BOBBIE

It's in the coffee. Makes anybody smart.

JARED

Anybody?

BOBBIE

I drink it!

(ANNIE enters and rushes to JILL.)

ANNIE

Sorry I'm late.

JILL

Not a problem. Gave me time to practice my new trick. Watch.

(JILL adjusts a straw in the wrapper and makes a  
"moose call" sound. ANNIE laughs.)

ANNIE & JILL

Moose call!

ANNIE

Where did you learn that?

JILL

Some guy at the office. He knows about our thing with mooses.  
Mooses? Moose? Moosi? What's the plural for moose?

(ANNIE shrugs.)

Anyway, he taught me....

BOBBIE

(approaching the table as a server)

And she proceeded to teach everyone in the restaurant!

JILL

I hope it wasn't annoying.

BOBBIE

Added excitement to my day.

(to ANNIE)

You see how exciting my day's been! What can I bring you?

ANNIE

Iced tea, please.

JILL

I'm ready to order...do you know what you want?

ANNIE

Chicken salad on white, please.

JILL

I'll have the tuna on wheat.

BOBBIE

It'll be right out.

(BOBBIE exits.)

JILL

So what took you?

ANNIE

I had - laundry and um, some errands. Sorry.

JILL

Not a problem.

ANNIE

I just thought if I got everything done I could enjoy the rest of the weekend.

JILL

Tom's working?

ANNIE

(nods)

He's off Tuesdays and Wednesdays this month.

JILL

That's kind of nice. I mean, it gives you a little time to yourself on the weekend, and he can do his own thing during the week. Plus the added benefit of dinner on the table when you get home from work, huh?

(ANNIE gives a non-committal smile.)

JILL

Yeah. Okay - hey, I'll be right back. Guess I drank too much tea this morning!

(BOBBIE approaches with ANNIE's iced tea, sets in on the table.)

BOBBIE

Your sandwiches will be right out.

ANNIE

Thanks.

(ANNIE tries to relax in her chair, her face is drawn. She reaches for packets of sugar. TOM appears in the chair behind her.)

TOM

Do you really think sugar is such a good idea, Toots? I've been noticing your jeans are looking a little snug on you.

(ANNIE drops the packets of sugar and drinks her tea plain.)

TOM (continued)

I'm not saying you look bad –

(ANNIE leans forward, elbows on the table, she covers her ears.)

TOM (continued)

Hey, are you listening to me?

(JILL returns, watches ANNIE.)

JILL

Annie?

TOM

I don't think you should spend so much time with your sister. She's trying to turn you against me.

(ANNIE shakes her head.)

TOM (continued)

She's probably been bad-mouthing me, huh? That woman wouldn't know a decent man...you listening to me, Toots?

JILL

(overlapping "Toots")

Annie?

(TOM disappears.)

ANNIE

What?



JILL  
You okay?

ANNIE  
Yes.

JILL  
You seem kind of out of it.

ANNIE  
I'm tired, that's all.

JILL  
(excited)  
Are you pregnant?

ANNIE  
No!

JILL  
You sure? Penny, at work, she was never sick, just tired like crazy when she was first pregnant. She could hardly....

ANNE  
I'm *not* pregnant.

JILL  
I'm just saying....

ANNE  
No.

JILL  
Tom is so cute when he starts talking about kids.

ANNIE  
(groans)  
I forgot - I was supposed to call my mother-in-law.

JILL  
Why?

ANNIE  
Tom told her - nevermind.

(BOBBIE brings their sandwiches.)

BOBBIE

You gals need anything else?

JILL

I don't think so, thanks.

(BOBBIE leaves.)

JILL

So are you going to call her?

ANNIE

Who?

JILL

Your mother-in-law? Phyllis? Are you sure you're okay?

ANNIE

I'm fine.

JILL

Okay.

(pause)

Hey, are you up for hitting the antique mall this afternoon? I'm looking for a table -

ANNIE

(forces a smile)

Sounds fun.

(ANNIE glances around the diner. She sees TOM standing opposite her; he smiles. It is a threatening smile. She stares.)

JILL

What's the matter?

(she turns around to where ANNIE looks - nothing)

You sure you're up for antiquing?

(ANNIE scrapes her chicken salad off the bread; picks at chicken salad.)

ANNE

I'm sure.

(LIGHTS fade.)

## SCENE 9

(PHYLLIS irons shirts in TOM & ANNIE apartment. TOM glances at his watch; sees the plant in the vase, takes it out, puts it in the trash.)

PHYLLIS

She never called, so finally I came over and let myself in.

TOM

You didn't have to iron those, Mom.

PHYLLIS

It's no problem.

(TOM looks around, sees the slight dirt spot and frowns.)

PHYLLIS (continued)

So, how's Jared and Paula's new baby?

TOM

(grins)

He's great...seven months old and crawling all over the place. I love it when he laughs. He has this incredible, wonderful laugh. It's so, I don't even know how to explain it...so natural. And contagious!

PHYLLIS

They cry, too!

TOM

Don't I know it! He has this huge bellow of a cry. The thing I love about the little ones is there's nothing fake about them. They're so real.

PHYLLIS

Sounds like someone is smitten.

TOM

Yeah. Believe me, I'm looking forward to one of our own.

(ANNIE enters carrying an unusual old lamp – maybe with a moose on the shade or a lamp in the shape of a bear. She's in a good mood.)

ANNIE

Hi!

PHYLLIS

Hi, Annie.

ANNIE

Phyllis, you didn't have to iron these.

PHYLLIS

I thought as long as I was here, I'd make myself useful.

TOM

Mom said you never called.

ANNIE

I'm sorry. I wasn't near a phone - Jill and I were at lunch, then at the antique mall.

TOM

Uh, huh.

ANNIE

(back-pedaling)

Well there was a pay phone but it was broken.

TOM

(looks at the lamp)

What's that?

(ANNIE is relieved at the change of subject.)

PHYLLIS

Thomas you know good and well it's a lamp!

ANNIE

Isn't it great!?

TOM

It doesn't go with anything.

PHYLLIS

That would be darling in a little boy's room.

(TOM takes the lamp from the table and sets it on the floor.)

TOM  
Those places are filthy, Toots.

(ANNIE sits. OLDER ANNIE ignores them. PHYLLIS finishes ironing chores and puts it away.)

TOM (continued)  
Are my girls ready?

(TOM shrugs into his shoulder holster and puts a lightweight jacket on)

ANNIE  
Could I have a minute?

TOM  
We need to hurry if we're going to beat the rush. I don't want to be out late. I work tomorrow. Remember? Besides, you look great.

ANNIE  
I just need a minute.

TOM  
Then you should've gotten home when you were supposed to. C'mon, we're starving!

(TOM herds them to the door, the following lines are while exiting.)

TOM (continued)  
So what do my two favorite ladies want this evening?

PHYLLIS  
Italian?

TOM  
Sounds good.

(They're gone.)

**SCENE 10**

(The CHORUS is on their platform, a light on them.)

MANKATO  
How did it all begin?

DOCTOR  
What?

BOBBIE  
Everything.

MANKATO  
The relationship, the problems....

PHYLLIS  
Problems? Everybody argues.

DOCTOR  
Everyone has problems sometimes.

(JARED and JILL move downstage.)

JARED & JILL  
I remember when they met....  
(JILL joins ANNIE and JARED joins TOM downstage.  
The groups are separate, each talking to the person they  
are standing with.)

JARED & JILL  
So...?

TOM  
I met somebody. She's incredible.

ANNIE  
I met somebody. He's incredible.

TOM  
We met in a

ANNIE  
bar...but it's not like it

TOM  
sounds. It was through

ANNIE

mutual friends.

TOM

Some guy she works with,

ANNIE

Dave. He knows one of the detectives he works with,

TOM

Brad. You know how sometimes you meet someone

ANNIE

and you just

TOM & ANNIE

know.

ANNIE

We went to a movie

TOM

and out to dinner.

ANNIE

I know it sounds traditional, but it was nice.

TOM

It was great!

ANNIE

He said next time we went out it would be my turn to choose.

TOM

and I think she said something about going to the

ANNIE

botanical gardens.

TOM

Kind of different

ANNIE

but he seemed willing....

JARED & JILL

It sounds great.

TOM

She's so easy to talk to.

ANNIE

He's so interesting.

TOM

I don't know....

ANNIE

Maybe....

TOM & ANNIE

This could be the one.

## SCENE 11

(OLDER ANNIE gets up from working on gluing her vase together.)

OLDER ANNIE

Have you ever gotten so involved in something that you lost all track of time? You simply lose yourself in the sheer joy of doing - the magic of being. Gran found it when she was in her garden.

(beat)

Do you know how long it has been since I danced?

(A small dance movement; she stops herself, touches the vase pieces.)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

Everything matched in that apartment: the sofa, the loveseat, the chair, two matching end tables and a coffee table. Above the sofa was a landscape print - the copper color of the sunset brought out the copper in the sofa cushions. Personal photos were kept in an album in the drawer in the coffee table. It was all very - coordinated. There was no room for anything that didn't match.



## SCENE 12

(TOM and ANNIE enter the apartment. TOM takes off his shoulder holster and sets it on the table. OLDER ANNIE is in her space.)

TOM

You want to tell me what was going on today?

ANNIE

What?

TOM

Don't you EVER embarrass me like that again! And you WILL treat my mother with respect. Do you understand me?

ANNIE

What are you talking about?

TOM

Are you really that stupid or are you just acting like it?

(beat)

I asked you a question.

ANNIE

Tom, I really don't know....

TOM

You did NOT do laundry at Mom's house like you said you were, you did not call her like you were supposed to, and I get home to find *her* ironing my shirts, that you didn't bother to fold. So not only is she doing the ironing, *you* made it more difficult because you were too fucking lazy to fold them!

ANNIE

I'm sorry, I would've ironed....

TOM

I am NOT finished talking to you yet.

(he grabs her face, forcing her to look at him; Older Annie's turns away; Younger Annie struggles to dance)

No one gets away treating me like that. No one.

ANNIE

How am I treating you? What did I –

(TOM pushes ANNIE onto the sofa. She looks to YOUNGER ANNIE to dance; she does.)

ANNIE

Tom, please don't - don't act like this....

TOM

Like what? Like you're some ignorant little slut hell-bent on making me look like an idiot?!

ANNIE

Don't call me that!

TOM

What? Ignorant? Or slut?

ANNIE

Both....

(YOUNGER ANNIE's dance loses strength as TOM talks.)

TOM

I don't think it's too much for a man to ask his wife to treat him with respect!

ANNIE

(fighting tears)

I DO respect you. It's just - sometimes....

TOM

You've got the floor, Toots!

ANNIE

Sometimes - you don't - respect - me.

TOM

And why do you think that is?

(YOUNGER ANNIE dances, needing protection. ANNIE is distracted watching her.)

TOM (continued)

Hey. Hey! Are you listening?

(charges at Younger Annie)

TOM (continued)

You need to grow up, Annie!

(Terrified, YOUNGER ANNIE stops.)

OLDER ANNIE

(to Younger Annie)

Please don't stop.

(to Tom and Annie)

Don't make her stop!

TOM

(to Younger Annie)

When are you gonna quit acting like a little girl and start behaving like an adult!?!

OLDER ANNIE

(to Annie)

Don't let him take it all away -

TOM

(to Annie)

See, Toots, I respect you when you act like you should, okay?

ANNIE

Please -

TOM

But when you lie about things,  
when you make light of things  
that are important in OUR life  
together.

OLDER ANNIE

(to Tom)

Why can't you just stop it!?! What  
is wrong with you that you have to  
prove yourself by belittling....

(TOM charges across the stage threatening OLDER ANNIE in her circle. She stumbles back, bumping into her table and falling into her chair, terrified. She desperately tries to get out of his way – he keeps after her.)

TOM

(to Older Annie)

Someday you're gonna end up all alone! People will figure out what kind of a person you are and they're all gonna leave you and you'll be this ugly, pathetic, lonely, old woman.

(YOUNGER ANNIE and ANNIE are crying.)

TOM

(whirls toward Younger Annie.)

Shut up! Shut up!

(to Annie, disgusted)

Yeah, when you lie to me - why should I respect you?

(OLDER ANNIE tries to get away; to get out of her circle.)

OLDER ANNIE

Stop it!

(He jumps up and gets the lamp.)

TOM

I do NOT want this piece of crap in my house. I don't give a *fuck* what your sister says! It's just a bunch of old shit.

ANNIE

I like it.

TOM

You would.

ANNIE

It's just one lamp.

TOM

Take it back.

ANNIE

What?

TOM

You heard me. Take it back.

ANNIE

I –

TOM

Take – it – back.

(TOM exits to the bedroom. OLDER ANNIE stands alone, watching. YOUNGER ANNIE sits, staring. The CHORUS watches in disbelief except JARED and PHYLLIS who are turned away from the action.)

MANKATO

This is....

JILL

That son of a bitch.

DOCTOR

What is happening?

BOBBIE

(to Jared)

Have you ever seen him like that?

JARED

Like what?

BOBBIE

What do you mean "like what?"

OLDER ANNIE

(to Chorus)

Did any of you see?

(JILL can't look at OLDER ANNIE.)

MANKATO

Is she talking to us?

BOBBIE

I think so.

OLDER ANNIE

Did you know? Did you ever suspect?

PHYLLIS

What was I supposed to think? He's my son!

JARED

It's - private.

PHYLLIS

You had a lot of good times -

OLDER ANNIE

Good times.

(beat; she's exhausted)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

I don't know which is more difficult - remembering the bad times or the good -

(LIGHTS change as....)

### SCENE 13

(TOM and ANNIE enter onto the beach. TOM parks himself as ANNIE searches the shoreline.)

JILL

Now what....

(YOUNGER ANNIE bounds out, skipping through the water. YOUNGER ANNIE and ANNIE splash water on TOM.)

TOM

Hey!

ANNIE

Come on in, the water's great!

TOM

The water's cold.

ANNIE

It's beautiful here.

(ANNIE and YOUNGER ANNIE dance in the water.)

TOM

Where do you get your energy?

ANNIE

It's the beach! It radiates energy if you open your mind -

(ANNIE stands over him.)

TOM

You're blocking my sun.

ANNIE

Help me build a sand castle?

(TOM reaches up to have her help him up. Instead, he pulls her down on top of him and kisses her.)

TOM

You know what I love about you?

ANNIE

Just one thing?

TOM

You gulp life.

ANNIE

Is that a good thing?

TOM

That's a very good thing.

(ANNIE jumps up, pulls him up.)

ANNIE

A castle –

(ANNIE wanders back into the water.)

TOM

A castle for m'lady.

ANNIE

(finding sea glass)

Tom, look. Sea glass.

(shows it to him)

Isn't it pretty?

TOM

(takes it from her; examines it)

Looks like a rock.

(TOM plays with her, keeping the beach glass away from her – holding it high, hiding it – playing.)

ANNIE

It's sea glass - beach glass - broken glass that's been worn smooth by the waves, the sand - whatever. Gran said water fairies gather beach glass because Nora, the queen of the water fairies -

TOM

Your grandma sure knew a lot of fairies -

ANNIE

Oh, this is great, though - see, a long time ago, the water fairies used to be able to dance across the waves on moonlit nights - but then this great beast came and destroyed Nora's castle, which was made from glass -

TOM

A great beast?

ANNIE

Yes! Gran said

ANNIE & BOBBIE

...he had the strength of a bear and the heart of a troll -

ANNIE

...and he was ferocious! See *he* wanted to be able to dance on the waves but he couldn't - because - well, he was a beast.

ANNIE & OLDER ANNIE

...so he destroyed the castle -

(TOM starts to unbutton her blouse.)

ANNIE

...and when the castle walls

TOM

Looks like we're alone -

ANNIE

(continuing)

...shattered, the water fairies could no longer dance on the waves -

(laughs)

Not here -

TOM

Passion on the beach!



ANNIE  
(laughing at Tom's overtures)  
You see the power of the water fairies –

OLDER ANNIE  
– was in the glass –

ANNIE  
That's why it needs to be saved!  
(tries to pull him up)  
Help me look for more.

TOM  
(pulling her back down)  
I've already found what I want.

ANNIE  
Tom, it's a public beach. What if a little kid comes along?

TOM  
(shrugs)  
Life lesson?

ANNIE  
Tom.

TOM  
Maybe Nora really had a thing going with this beast and they ran off  
together.  
(playful beast/bear growl)

ANNIE  
(plays along)  
Not Nora –

(TOM kisses her; passion builds.)

TOM  
I think she'd have a pretty tough time resisting the twinkle in that ol'  
beast's eye.

ANNIE  
He shattered her castle.

TOM  
Maybe he took her to his cave and fed her strawberries and mango.

ANNIE

He stole her power -

TOM

Ripe, juicy mango -

ANNIE

She couldn't dance on the waves

TOM

She could dance with him.

ANNIE

What about her water fairies?

TOM

They can move to the garden.

(They laugh and kiss. TOM growls beastly/sensuous;  
they run off.)

PHYLLIS

That's how they are.

JILL

Not all the time....

ANNIE

Julie?

MANKATO

Nobody's like that all the time.

JILL

But women like her don't -

MANKATO

What do you mean, "women like her?"

JILL

She's so -

JARED

So what?

ANNIE

Julie?

PHYLLIS

She looks happy.

ANNIE

Julie, do you have that workman's comp report?

BOBBIE

Shh. Here she comes.

(LIGHTS change as....)

#### SCENE 14

(ANNIE enters searching.)

ANNIE

Did Charles leave it with you?

(The CHORUS looks at each other, confused.)

ANNIE (continued)

The Workman's comp report. Did Charles leave that with you?

(pause)

Julie? Hello!?

(The CHORUS mumbles about "Julie" argues about who will become her. BOBBIE is forced into the role. She rushes off the CHORUS platform and over to ANNIE.)

BOBBIE

(as Julie)

I'm sorry, I was - sort of, over there - um, workin. Yeah. Workin.

(CHORUS reacts to her inability to "go with the flow." When ANNIE turns her back, BOBBIE gives the CHORUS and "I don't know what the hell I'm doing" shrug.)

ANNIE

I'm sorry to keep you late, again. I really hate to do it, but Charles needs that sales report first thing in the morning.

BOBBIE

(as Julie)

That's okay.

ANNIE

(surprised)

You have it?

BOBBIE

(as Julie)

I - um - think it's around - here...let's see, I think I had lunch over there -

(CHORUS reacts to her ineptness as Julie; MANKATO hands BOBBIE a file.)

BOBBIE (continued)

Is this it?

ANNIE

You're a lifesaver. Hey, don't you have a couple little boys you want to get home and see?

BOBBIE

They're with their dad tonight. Why don't you head out...I can finish up.

ANNIE

Are you sure? I wanted to run by Jill's on my way home....

BOBBIE

Get outta here. I'll see you in the morning!

ANNIE

Thank you!

(ANNIE starts to exit. CHORUS pushes "Julie" to probe.)

BOBBIE

Oh, hey, Annie - is everything okay?

ANNIE

Fine.

BOBBIE

I mean, if anything is ever - not fine - you know -

ANNIE

I'm fine, Julie. Really. I'm fine. And thanks for staying.

(ANNIE exits. LIGHTS fade.)

## SCENE 15

(LIGHT comes up on OLDER ANNIE in her circle of light. She is holding a lamp like the one TOM made ANNIE take back. She smiles; holds it up to show the audience.)

OLDER ANNIE

I don't know if it's the same one. I found it stuck behind a box of glass insulators at a flea market. Paid three times as much for it this time! In the car on the way home - my palms were sweating. Strange, huh? When I showed it to my husband he laughed - a good laugh. Said it didn't surprise him at all, that it reminded him of me - "the essence of Annie" he said. I took that as a compliment. After dinner we went to the hardware store and got what we needed to rewire it. He showed me how and then I did it myself. I'd never done that before.

(beat)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

Small victories?

(LIGHTS fade on OLDER ANNIE as....)

## SCENE 16

(Lights up on the CHORUS platform. Dim light on the apartment. CHORUS arranges chairs like a theater to watch the action. TOM sits in the apartment, not moving.)

JARED

Isn't she there yet?

(JILL and MANKATO enter.)

JILL

Did we miss anything?

BOBBIE

If you didn't drink so much iced tea you wouldn't have to pee so much!

JILL

I like iced tea!

PHYLLIS

What did you bring?

MANKATO

Popcorn, Dots - they didn't have Sno-caps so I got Milk Duds -

JARED

No Sno-caps?

DOCTOR

Did you get licorice?

JILL

It makes me nervous -

MANKATO

(to DOCTOR)

Hold on -

DOCTOR

(to JILL)

Licorice makes you nervous?

JILL

No. Him just waiting like that.

JARED

Does anyone else think this is weird?

BOBBIE

I know what you mean. Just watching, but - I don't know -

(ANNIE rushes in.)

DOCTOR

Oh. Here she comes.

ANNIE

I'm sorry. I was running late at work -

TOM

Did I say anything?

ANNIE

No.

(beat)

You're not mad?

TOM

Why should I be mad?

ANNIE

It seems like somebody always wants some report or another at the last minute, you know?

TOM

Looks like you need to relax. Come here.

(They sit. TOM rubs her neck and shoulders. She closes her eyes.)

ANNIE

Mmm. That feels good.

TOM

Is that why you stayed late?

(beat)

At work?

ANNIE

There's always paperwork.

TOM

Seems like no matter how much you do, there's always more.

(TOM strokes her hair.)

ANNIE

(relaxing)

I didn't know you had such talents.

TOM

So, did anyone stay after with you? Or are you the only dedicated one there?

ANNIE

I was alone.

TOM

You be careful.

ANNIE

There's always people in the store.

TOM

But no one's in the back offices.

ANNIE

I'm careful.

TOM

But you were alone. I worry when you're alone there.

(TOM's gentle stroking becomes a hard yank on her hair. ANNIE yelps in pain and surprise. Holding her hair, he forces her head back.)

JILL

(jumping up)

No!

MANKATO

Jill, you can't -

TOM

Especially when you're not where you fucking *told* me!

ANNIE

What -

TOM

I was *there*, Annie. I came by to see you and you were gone. That little blonde, the one that looks like a bird....

JILL

I can't just sit here!



TOM

(continuing)

...she said you were gone - you'd been gone for a while.

(beat)

Why are you lying to me? Who were you with?

ANNIE

You're hurting me -

TOM

You want to know what fucking hurts? Finding out your wife is lying to you. *That's* what hurts.

(gives her hair another tug, she cries)

Jared saw you, okay? He saw your car in the parking lot at the plant store...you stop in to see your little boyfriend? Mr. Fucking Fern man?!

ANNIE

I don't have a boyfriend...!

(The CHORUS coaches her. She doesn't hear.)

JILL

He didn't see you!

MANKATO

He's guessing to get you to admit to something.

DOCTOR

Anything -

PHYLLIS

Why?

BOBBIE

Then he can accuse you.

PHYLLIS

Of what?

JILL, MANKATO, BOBBIE, DOCTOR

Lying.

TOM

Why are you lying?

ANNIE

It wasn't me.

(Beat. ANNIE and TOM freeze.)

JARED

Cops do that sometimes –

(On the platform, the CHORUS becomes an interrogation. MANKATO sits, JILL shines a light on him, JARED interrogates him. BOBBIE is good cop.)

JARED

Look, asshole, I *know* you were with Jenkins the night that kid was shot, okay?! My partner *saw* you, man. She *SAW* you!

MANKATO

(as nervous suspect)

I don't know nothin about no kid. I swear.

JARED

We got ya, man...you're goin down.

MANKATO

I'm telling you, I wasn't there. I wasn't. No way – uh uh – not me....

JARED

(to BOBBIE; overlapping Mankato's mumbling)

What's goin on here? Who was with Jenkins?!

MANKATO

I don't know.

(pleads to BOBBIE)

But I didn't have nothin to do with no kid gettin shot, okay? Nothin.

(Jared smacks Mankato's head.)

Hey I got rights! I got the right to remain silent - I got the right -

(JARED smacks him again.)

JARED

Hey, FUCK YOUR RIGHTS!

BOBBIE

Hey, Jared, come on, man....

JARED

Fuck you!

BOBBIE

(to Mankato)

Hey, Pal - if you know *anything* -

JARED

(looks at MANKATO)

He don't know shit.

(JARED comes at MANKATO who caves.)

MANKATO

I wasn't there, I swear...I - I - I - was with Foster. At the garage -

(MANKATO realizes he gave himself away.)

JARED

At the garage -

(he turns a chair around to face MANKATO)

So how 'bout you tell us what went down at the garage?

(Back to regular CHORUS mode.)

PHYLLIS

It's a dangerous job - sometimes they have to act tough -

BOBBIE

(interrupting)

You don't get it, do you?

JARED

Nobody ever saw him anywhere.

MANKATO

They were guessing in order to get him to admit to something else.

DOCTOR

Police do this?

JARED

Some do.

(TOM calms. Talks quietly, gently.)

TOM

Annie, I just want to work this out with you - but you gotta be straight with me. Jared saw your car. He's my partner - he wouldn't lie to me.

ANNIE  
(struggles not to cry)  
It wasn't me. I don't know whose car it was.

TOM  
(barely controlled anger)  
Don't do this to me, Toots, c'mon now -

ANNIE  
I - I was with Jill.

TOM  
So you weren't at work - you were with Jill.

JILL  
She was!

TOM  
Why do you spend time with her?

ANNIE  
She's my sister.

JILL  
(to Chorus)  
She's my sister.

TOM  
She hates me.

ANNIE  
No....

PHYLLIS  
Tom wouldn't make things up. Why would he?

TOM  
Why were you lying?

ANNIE  
I'm sorry.

PHYLLIS  
She shouldn't lie.

TOM  
You shouldn't lie.

(Pause. ANNIE pulls away from TOM.)

JILL

I have to do something....

DOCTOR

It's so damn frustrating....

JILL

Can't she see I just want to help?

DOCTOR

She doesn't need someone else trying to control her....

JILL

What?!

BOBBIE

She needs help.

PHYLLIS

So does he.

JILL

I'm frightened for her.

DOCTOR

Can't she see?

JILL

Why doesn't she just leave?!

MANKATO

Why doesn't he just stop!?

CHORUS

Stop!

(Beat.)

ANNIE

Tom, please....

TOM

You make me crazy, you know? We talked about having a family. We agreed.

ANNIE

What does that have to do....

TOM

(interrupting)

When did you turn into such a greedy, little bitch?!

ANNIE

Please, can't we talk about this calmly?

TOM

(calming)

We **are** talking, Toots.

ANNIE

(chooses words carefully)

When you get like this -

TOM

Like what!?

ANNIE

Sometimes I feel - hurt....

TOM

Hey, you are NOT the only one whose been hurt in this relationship. You make me nuts sometimes, you know? The way you say things, the way you look at other guys....

ANNIE

(overlapping)

What!?

TOM

(continuing)

...the way you dress - you know, you go from frump to slut in ten seconds flat - I hate that shit, you know....

ANNIE

(overlapping)

No.

TOM

(continuing)

...but that is piddly-ass crap. What I'm talking here is the biggie, Toots. The big lie.

ANNIE

Please, the way you're saying these things....

TOM

How?! How the fuck am I saying things that make you think you can justify lying to me? I'm waiting here, Toots. Waiting.

(beat)

It's that sister of yours. She's messing with your mind, Annie and you keep going back for more! WE are a family here - you and me. Man and wife. You gotta quit listening to her!

ANNIE

She's not saying....

TOM

What? Are you saying all these fucked up ideas about us are coming from you? Is that what you're telling me?!

ANNIE

I just think -

TOM

One of these days I'm gonna kill that fucking bitch.

JILL

Yeah, you just try it!

ANNIE

Don't say that, she's my family....

TOM

*I'm* you're family, Annie. Or do you just conveniently forget that whenever some skinny ass guy in tight jeans tries to get in your pants!

(TOM slaps the wall. She turns away. He spins her around.)

TOM (continued)

Don't you turn your back on me. That's the problem here, isn't it? If you got pregnant it'd make you *uncomfortable* not to know if your husband was the father, huh? Is that why you decided to take those pills behind my back? Because you're a fuckin whore?!

(TOM smashes her against the wall, pinning her there with his forearm to her throat.)

ANNIE

(crying)

I'm not -

TOM

You are not gonna get in the way of this, Toots.

(He kisses her violently. She thrashes. He smacks her. ANNIE whimpers, continues to struggle. TOM throws her onto the sofa.)

ANNIE

No...please...no....

(YOUNGER ANNIE dances terrified to OLDER ANNIE who is immobile.)

JILL

Annie....

(LIGHTS out as all sound stops. ANNIE cries quietly.)

## END OF ACT I

## ACT II

### PROLOGUE

(OLDER ANNIE sits in her circle hugging her knees; struggles to maintain composure. She chooses her words carefully at first. The partially reconstructed vase sits on the table. The lamp is behind her.)

OLDER ANNIE

Do you know what I'm going to do tonight? I'm going to go home, I'm going to fix myself a cup of tea - *with* sugar, wrap myself in my robe, and curl up with my husband on my couch that does *not* match my chair. And I will try very hard not to think of all this. That's what will *really* happen.

(Sad, frustrated chuckle.)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

(weak smile)

I still have that itch....



(As OLDER ANNIE forgets herself, she moves close to the edge of her circle. TOM lurks in the periphery of the stage. He eventually approaches her slowly from behind. He is menacing only in the fact that he is present.)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

You know, I know that he's out there someplace. I know that I could run into him on the street or I could see him in the grocery store...he could find out I told you. I have children, a husband - they had nothing to do with him - but what if...I mean -

(Sour laugh. OLDER ANNIE struggles to smile. Resigned, she half succeeds; fights tears. Never turning around, she is aware of TOM moving closer, eventually standing right behind her.)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

It was all so long ago - but it doesn't always seem that long - see, sometimes all those feelings get all jumbled up and my imagination starts to run wild and so.... And so I *imagine* that as I leave here tonight...I'll go outside, I'll breathe the fragrance of the night air, and just when I've almost convinced myself that someday I'll get past all this - I'll hear...

TOM

Hey, Toots.

(Total, absolute defeat. Without looking at TOM, she sits. When TOM sees that she is under control, he disappears.)

OLDER ANNIE

He could know. He could know that I've told you and if he does...? Somehow - somehow he's gonna make me pay.

## SCENE I

(Lights up on at the beach. A breeze is blowing, the sky is blue, the waves lap up on the sandy and rocky shore. It's a good day to be alive. TOM and ANNIE enter. He carries a gym bag and a picnic basket.)

TOM

What about here?

(ANNIE nods.)

TOM (continued)

You like it?

ANNIE

It's beautiful.

TOM

(grinning)

Man, I'm glad you like it! I love it here - looking out over the water - but part of me kept wondering whether or not you'd like all this. I mean, a picnic -

ANNIE

It's great here, really.

TOM

Good. Good. Hungry?

ANNIE

Starved.

TOM

Great! I love a woman with an appetite. It shows you love life. That sounds corny, doesn't it?

ANNIE

Maybe just a little.

TOM

I think it might get cornier. This is embarrassing....

(gathers his courage)

I, um - I wrote a song. For you.

ANNIE

Really?

TOM

(can't look at her; mumbles)

Shit. I can't believe I'm doing this.

(he pulls a ukulele out of the gym bag)

It's a ukulele.

ANNIE

I know. I just - I mean, I never knew anyone who actually played one.

TOM

Okay. Before I lose my nerve.

(he strums a few notes; he more recites than sings, strumming a few simple chords as he goes)

When I look, in your eyes...it's then I realize...that you lie...that you hurt all you touch - how I love you so much...but when you lie...all the time...to me. You are such a fucking bitch...as stupid as a dog laying in a ditch

ANNIE

Noooooo!!

(ANNIE jumps up, moving away. TOM follows her.)

TOM

(continuing "singing")

Sometimes I am still surprised that I care....

(ANNIE runs to the sofa, throws herself down, covering up with the blanket, where she thrashes and moans. TOM takes the picnic gear and disappears. YOUNGER ANNIE approaches OLDER ANNIE's circle, standing outside it.)

## SCENE 2

(OLDER ANNIE sits in her circle. YOUNGER ANNIE stands outside watching her. A knock on ANNIE's door. Nothing. Another knock.)

JILL

Annie?

ANNIE

(mumbles)

Go away.

OLDER ANNIE

(to Younger Annie)

Go away.

JILL

C'mon, Annie, open up.

(YOUNGER ANNIE dances desperately, trying to get back into OLDER ANNIE's life.)

OLDER ANNIE  
(to Younger Annie)

Leave me alone.

JILL  
I know you're home.

ANNIE  
Please....

(YOUNGER ANNIE's dance pleads with OLDER ANNIE. JILL enters ANNIE's apartment.)

OLDER ANNIE  
(to Younger Annie)  
You don't exist any more!

JILL  
(to Annie)  
Annie? Is everything okay?

ANNIE  
(still asleep)  
No....

OLDER ANNIE  
(to Younger Annie)  
No...!

JILL  
(touching her shoulder to wake her)  
Annie, honey....

(YOUNGER ANNIE dances "abandoned.")

OLDER ANNIE  
Don't blame me, blame her.

(She points to ANNIE. YOUNGER ANNIE reacts; runs away.)

ANNIE  
What!?  
(looks around, disoriented)  
No, I'm - I'm - fine. I'm - okay....

JILL

Were you having a bad dream?

ANNIE

I'm - fine.

JILL

You don't seem exactly fine.

ANNIE

(more coherent)

Oh, jeez, Jill, I'm sorry, we were supposed to go to that auction. How could I be so stupid?

JILL

You're not stupid.

ANNIE

I'm so sorry. I'll get ready really quick, okay?

(ANNIE exits. JILL looks to the CHORUS for help.)

BOBBIE

How do you get past the "I'm fine"?

DOCTOR

Sometimes you don't.

PHYLLIS

I want things to be right between them, that's all.

JARED

Maybe she should just stand up and really talk to him. Maybe he'd trust her again.

BOBBIE

What are you talking about?

(JARED shrugs.)

MANKATO

Why does it have to be her? Why can't he figure out he shouldn't....

PHYLLIS

He's a good person!

DOCTOR

Why didn't I ask?

PHYLLIS

If she's so unhappy, why doesn't she just leave?

JARED

He has a lot of stress on the job, you know?

MANKATO

Don't give me that crap.

DOCTOR

She always seemed so together.

JARED

Maybe we should focus our energies on helping, rather than judging.

MANKATO

No one's judging....

PHYLLIS

Like hell, you're not!

JILL

Annie, I want you to tell me what's going on.

ANNIE

I overslept, that's all....

JILL

On the couch?

ANNIE

I don't want to talk about it.

JILL

You're having problems -

ANNIE

No. It's nothing. I can handle it.

JILL

(quiet)

I'm your sister.

ANNIE

My sister who wants to go to an auction and is going to be more than a bit aggravated if I don't get ready!

(ANNIE jumps up and leaves.)

JILL

Annie, wait!

(to CHORUS)

What can I do?

DOCTOR

Until she's ready....

BOBBIE

Do we just stand by?

MANKATO

There has to be some way.

DOCTOR

Let her know you're here for her.

JILL

She should know that.

BOBBIE

Somebody needs to bop HIM on the head a few times....

PHYLLIS

How can you say that!?

JILL

We've always been close, but we don't always talk about - things.

(pause)

I mean, we talk about *stuff* but we never really talk about *things*.

MANKATO

When in doubt, go antiquing? Is that it?

JILL

Excuse me. Do you think you can do so much better?

MANKATO

I'm only saying that making sure she knows you'll listen....

DOCTOR

And not judge.

JILL

This is my sister. I know her. She's stubborn and bull-headed and has never listened to my advice in her life!

MANKATO

I know it's difficult.

JILL

(angry)

No, you don't know!

(Beat.)

MANKATO

I know.

### SCENE 3

(TOM holds a phone in his office. ANNIE sits in the apartment.)

TOM

C'mon, Toots - answer the phone.

OLDER ANNIE

(to Annie)

It's simple - pack a bag. Walk out the door. He's at work. He can't stop you.

ANNIE

It isn't that easy.

OLDER ANNIE

It is.

JARED

(to Tom)

No answer?

(TOM shakes his head.)

TOM

I wanted to talk to her before she heard it on the news.



JARED

We gotta go -

TOM

(to phone)

C'mon, Toots - get home -

ANNIE

I can make this work. I need to learn to compromise a little more, that's all.

OLDER ANNIE

Quit making excuses!

TOM

(hangs up phone; to Jared)

She worries about me -

JARED

Yeah, I've got one of those, too.

TOM

She's been sort of distant lately. I don't know how to explain it - she's just - I hate talking about her like this, you know? It's like she's not always telling me the truth.

(pause)

I'm wondering if she's seeing somebody.

JARED

Annie?!

TOM

Yeah.

JARED

Why would you say that?

TOM

'Cause she's lying to me - like about where she's been and shit like that.

JARED

I don't think Annie -

TOM

Hey, you don't know her! She's a flirt, man. Big time.

JARED

She's friendly.

TOM

I don't think I can trust her. I think she has some guy -

JARED

You're jumping to conclusions.

TOM

She's been lying to me.

JARED

Talk to her.

TOM

She won't listen, you know?

JARED

Hey, Tom, c'mon, this is Annie we're talking about.

TOM

Why are you taking her side on this? She's lying to me. Lying about everything.

(beat)

You know we've been talking about having kids.

JARED

Yeah, and I thought you were trying.

TOM

So did I.

(pause)

She's driving me nuts. Saying one thing. Doing another.

JARED

What do you mean?

TOM

She was taking the Pill, man. We had an agreement - two years, then kids. So I think we're trying to have a baby and all this time she's taking fucking birth control pills!

JARED

How do you -

TOM

I found them.

JARED

What did she say?

TOM

Like I'm gonna ask her? No way. I threw them out.

JARED

You what?

TOM

I just want things to be the way they used to be –

(LIGHTS change as...TOM looks across the stage at ANNIE in another place and time – TOM sneaks up behind her and covers her eyes with his hands. She's startled, grabs his hands.)

ANNIE

Tom!

TOM

You were expecting someone else?

(He begins walking her forward.)

ANNIE

Come on - you know I don't like this.

TOM

(not removing his hands from her eyes)

It's a surprise.

ANNIE

Tom -

TOM

What? You don't trust me?

(they walk forward)

You're doing fine – a little to the right –

(she bumps into something)

I said the right, Toots -

ANNIE

I did go to the right – I really don't –

TOM

Okay. Here we are.

(He takes his hands off her eyes. She looks around; he motions to the sky. ANNIE grins, excited.)

ANNIE

Did you see that?

(watches the sky; points quickly)

Another one!

TOM

Perseides...might be 75 meteors in an hour.

ANNIE

Some people say that when you see a falling star it means that a witch died. I like Gran's story better.

(They watch the sky, reacting to falling stars)

ANNIE (continued)

You remember me telling you about Horace? He's sending shooting stars - c'mon - we should dance like the fairies.

(She takes his hand and dances around him.)

TOM

(a bit sarcastic??)

I'm not a fairy.

(He won't dance with her; watches her dance. He stops her, pulls her close to him.)

ANNIE

I love shooting stars!

TOM

I see them in your eyes, you know? Shooting stars. Sometimes I think I imagine it

(he gets closer)

And all of a sudden I'm lost....

(He kisses her passionately. LIGHTS change and ANNIE is gone.)

JARED

Tom? Hey, man, c'mon.

TOM

I just want things to be the same....

(LIGHTS fade.)

#### SCENE 4

OLDER ANNIE

(to audience)

Do you have any idea how embarrassing this is? For all of you to sit there, watching - all the stupid choices she's made - all of you knowing how weak I....

(She turns her back on the audience to compose herself. YOUNGER ANNIE approaches BOBBIE carrying a dying potted plant. OLDER ANNIE sees.)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

Did I always ruin things?

BOBBIE

(as Gran to Younger Annie)

It might not be too late, sweetie.

OLDER ANNIE

I should've known better.

BOBBIE

(as Gran to Younger Annie)

We'll give it a little water and see what happens.

OLDER ANNIE

Why didn't I....

(YOUNGER ANNIE moves – sad about the plant.)

BOBBIE

(as Gran to Younger Annie)

You can't change what's in the past, Annie. You can only learn from it and move on.

OLDER ANNIE

(to Bobbie/Gran)

Oh. You think I don't remember all your little bits of wisdom?! You think I don't know!?

(BOBBIE glances at OLDER ANNIE, then back to YOUNGER ANNIE who dances "melancholy.")

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

(to Younger Annie)

Look, she survives, okay? I'm standing here as absolute proof that she lives through this "ordeal." I make it.

(Younger Annie faces her; all the wind has gone out of her sails. Older Annie is angry.)

It's a big bad world out there, kiddo.

(YOUNGER ANNIE fades away.)

BOBBIE

(as Gran)

Annie....

(LIGHTS change; OLDER ANNIE sees TOM waiting. ANNIE approaches the apartment.)

OLDER ANNIE

(to Annie)

Please - don't walk through that door. Don't do it. You can go anywhere. Anywhere -

## SCENE 5

(LIGHTS up on TOM in the apartment; ANNIE enters, drops her coat and purse on a chair; TOM glowers, she picks them up and hangs them in the closet.)

ANNIE

I'm sorry.

OLDER ANNIE

(to Annie)

Can't you learn? Either play by his rules or don't play.

ANNIE

(to Tom)

I got busy – you know how that goes? We're trying to get a report out – the one I've been telling you about, remember?

ANNIE

Things got messed up at the last minute and Charles needed some more current figures.... I'm sorry.

TOM

Mm hmm.

ANNIE

You're probably really hungry, aren't you...I should've called. I didn't think it would take as long as it did.... I guess part of me was hoping - I was remembering that pasta dish you used to make. That was so good....

TOM

I had a long day.

(Long pause.)

ANNIE

Oh.

TOM

That's it? Oh?! Don't look now, Toots, but your indifference to our marriage is showing!

ANNIE

What?

TOM

*Charles?* Who the fuck is Charles?

ANNIE

I've mentioned him. He manages the electronics department.

OLDER ANNIE

Why do you let him talk to you like that?

TOM

No. No I don't think you've mentioned *Charles*. So you were working late with him.

ANNIE

Well, Julie and I were....

TOM

Mm hmm.

ANNIE

Why don't I pull something out of the freezer....

(TOM goes to the kitchen, returns with a foil covered,  
frozen meatloaf.

TOM

Like meatloaf?

ANNIE

(hesitates)

Does meatloaf sound good?

TOM

You're proud of yourself, aren't you, Toots? You think you're clever  
because you can *freeze a fucking meatloaf*.

ANNIE

I - your mom - she thought it was a good idea.

TOM

Don't you bring my mom into this.

ANNIE

I'm sorry. I thought you wanted meatloaf. I could make spaghetti.  
You like spaghetti, right?

TOM

I like to have my wife home when she's supposed to be.

ANNIE

Maybe I could rearrange my schedule a little – I could talk to them....

(hesitates)

ANNIE (continued)

But - I have responsibilities at work, you know?

TOM

Yeah, tell me about these responsibilities, Toots. Tell me about how  
*Charles* is so much more important than your husband.

(pause)

You tell me.



ANNIE

I didn't say that.

TOM

Then why were you with him instead of with me?

ANNIE

I wasn't with him.

TOM

Oh. Did I misunderstand something? I thought I just heard you say you were with Charles.

ANNIE

I was working. That's what I said. I said I was working.

TOM

Sometimes I don't know who you are! You act so sweet and nice and then you turn around and show me this side of you that is nothing but a lying sack of shit!

ANNIE

How can you say that?

TOM

What? Does the truth hurt?

(Pause.)

ANNIE

(calmer)

Why don't I see what else I can fix....

(ANNIE turns toward the kitchen. TOM hurls the frozen meatloaf at her, hits her in the back. ANNIE drops to her knees, cries out in pain. OLDER ANNIE drops.)

TOM

Let's go.

ANNIE

(crying)

I can't....

OLDER ANNIE

(overlapping)

No....

TOM

Shut the fuck up.

(pause)

Let's go.

ANNIE

No - I can't -

TOM

I'm not eating this shit you keep around the house.

(TOM grabs her arm, yanking her to her feet. She grabs her purse as they head to the door.)

## SCENE 6

(YOUNGER ANNIE dances outside OLDER ANNIE's circle. OLDER ANNIE ignores her as YOUNGER ANNIE tries to get her attention.)

OLDER ANNIE

(composed; quiet)

I look back - sometimes it seems so unreal....

(looks at the audience)

I've read all the literature - I've seen the statistics. But I don't know. I don't feel like a statistic. You want to believe that this could never happen to a woman you love, don't you? Not to your friend or your sister...or your daughter....

(beat)

I don't remember the first time he hit me. Wouldn't you think I'd remember something like that? The physical? That's over for me. But the other.... Why does he still have so much control over me...?

(YOUNGER ANNIE dances around OLDER ANNIE.)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

(to Younger Annie)

Go away. There's no room for you here.

(beat; composes herself)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

You know, my husband said if he could fight this demon for me, he would. But the more he tried, the more I ran away.

(YOUNGER ANNIE tries to reach in to OLDER ANNIE.)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

(tries to turn away from Younger Annie; glances at her)

Have you ever been lost in the dark? It seems like the harder you struggle to find your way out, the more lost you become. But every once in a while you catch a glimpse of light. Sometimes it's so brief

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

that you think it's your imagination - but something about those brief shafts of light - if they are real, then you just might be able to find your way out.

## SCENE 7

(CHANGEOVER: CHORUS is awkward. Stilted, but fast.)

PHYLLIS

Sometimes it's good to have a meal or two frozen -

JILL

Could be convenient -

DOCTOR

...for busy days....

JARED

Yeah, Paula and I freeze spaghetti sauce -

MANKATO

With nine kids my parents were always freezing something - an extra roast, a meatloaf....

(Beat.)

BOBBIE

What makes somebody like that?

(PHYLLIS turns away. DOCTOR comforts her.)

JILL

There has to be a reason he....

DOCTOR

(interrupting)

There is no single answer -

BOBBIE

There are so many questions -

DOCTOR

And no easy answers.

JILL

Maybe something happened....

JARED

Maybe there's something we don't....

MANKATO

(interrupting)

Hey! Bottom line - no matter what, *he* is the one responsible for his actions. Him.

(CHORUS moves to their seats. TOM and ANNIE sit at a diner table. TOM holds ANNIE's hands, caressing them.)

TOM

Your hands are dry.

ANNIE

I can put on lotion.

(she tries to reach her purse, he still holds her hands)

I have some in my purse.

TOM

Do it later. I like holding your hands now.

ANNIE

You just said....

TOM

(sweetly)

Annie, why do you always have to argue with everything I say? I swear, sometimes I think nothing I do is good enough for you.

(ANNIE doesn't respond.)

TOM

Speechless.

(teases)

How often does that happen?

(smiles)

God, you have beautiful eyes. And your smile - your teeth are just crooked enough to be cute.

(kisses her hands)

I'm a lucky man.

(ANNIE tries to pull her hands away.)

TOM

Why are you trying to get away from me?

ANNIE

I'm not. I need some aspirin.

TOM

You don't need aspirin.

ANNIE

My - um, my back hurts -

(he squeezes her hands tightly)

Sort of -

(tighter; she winces and squirms)

A little -

(TOM lets go.)

TOM

I don't know how you expect to be strong enough to ever bear children.

(ANNIE digs in her purse to find aspirin - takes them.)

ANNIE

I'm sure if I ever have a baby, I'll be fine.

TOM

When we have kids, you are not taking drugs - I will not have my child brought into this world in a doped up state. No.

ANNIE

It's ridiculous to have this conversation now.

TOM

You really are a control freak, aren't you?

ANNIE

What?

(BOBBIE, as server, approaches.)

BOBBIE

You folks know what you want?

TOM

We'll both have your meatloaf dinner.

(BOBBIE leaves.)

ANNIE

I thought you didn't want meatloaf.

TOM

Did I say that? I don't think so. I like meatloaf.

(They sit quietly; the CHORUS enters the restaurant as customers.)

MANKATO

Did you ever have a pet?

(Affirmative replies from CHORUS.)

JARED

When I was growing up I had the greatest dog in the world.

BOBBIE

You couldn't have, because *I* did.

JILL

I have a cat.

PHYLLIS

I'm really not a pet person. I mean I like animals, but I've never enjoyed owning one all that much.

BOBBIE

Cricket was my dog's name.

DOCTOR

You named your dog after an insect?

BOBBIE

My sister said I was nuts, but he was little and black and when he was a tiny puppy he made these creaking sounds. Like a cricket.

JARED

My dog's was named Paul.

CHORUS

Paul?

JARED

Named him after my best friend. We got puppies about the same time. He named his dog Jared. Worked out great...we'd call each other and our dogs at the same time...we figured it saved us time...you know, time better spent building forts and playing ball.

MANKATO

I had a dog. He was my best friend. I named him Buck...my dad always liked "Call of the Wild." We were inseparable.

DOCTOR

A boy and his dog.

BOBBIE

A story as old as time.

MANKATO

I didn't think anything would come between us. He was always there...listened to my troubles when no one else would....

JARED

Sounds like Paul.

PHYLLIS

Your friend or your dog?

JARED

Both, actually.

MANKATO

Buck was great. I didn't think that much about it when he started nipping at me - puppies do that. Then he snapped at me when he was eating.

PHYLLIS

I wouldn't have a dog that would do that.

JILL

That's why I have a cat....

MANKATO

But this was *Buck* - and I read someplace that you shouldn't bother dogs when they're eating.

DOCTOR

And you loved him. He was your dog.

JARED

Yeah. You can't just change the way you feel.

MANKATO

And we still had great times...he loved running around in the woods with me - we had great adventures.

BOBBIE

A boy and his dog -

JARED

A boy and his best friend.

JILL

What happened?

(Pause.)

MANKATO

He attacked me one day.

PHYLLIS

Oh, my! And you raised him from a puppy.



MANKATO

Yeah.

(he pushes up his sleeve)

He got me pretty good on my chest - my arm. I still have scars.

JILL

My god -

MANKATO

My parents made me get rid of him. It just about killed me to say good-bye to him. I felt like I was deserting him. No one loved him like I did.

(BOBBIE takes dinners to ANNIE and TOM. The CHORUS watches the scene.)

BOBBIE

Two meatloaf dinners.

TOM

Looks great, thanks.

BOBBIE

(putting ketchup squeeze bottle on the table)

Anything else you folks need?

TOM

We're fine.

(BOBBIE leaves. CHORUS watches. ANNIE doesn't respond; stares at the plate.)

TOM

Hey, most wives love it when their husband takes them out to dinner.

(TOM puts ketchup on his plate.)

ANNIE

You're right. This is nice. I like the food here - especially their chicken salad -

TOM

I thought you were hell-bent on meatloaf, Toots.

(he starts putting ketchup on her plate)

You need to learn how to make yourself clearer.

(TOM squirts ketchup on the front of ANNIE's blouse;

ANNIE jumps, grimaces, shakes her head fighting tears)

Jeez, Annie - what did you do?

(OLDER ANNIE reacts. CHORUS is in varying degrees of denial and ignoring what they just witnessed.)

ANNIE

I didn't –

(ANNIE sits quietly.)

TOM

(wiping at her blouse; he's sweet to her)

You need to look where that thing's aimed, Toots. Will that come out?  
You love that blouse.

ANNIE

I feel like an idiot –

(BOBBIE brings napkins and a wet towel to ANNIE.)

TOM

(to Bobbie, joking)

I guess I can dress her up, but I can't take her out.

BOBBIE

(to ANNIE)

Are you okay?

(ANNIE nods, wipes.)

TOM

She's fine. Guess we should've given her a bib, huh?

ANNIE

I don't need a bib.

TOM

Hey, Toots, I'm just trying to make the best of a bad situation.

(ANNIE can't look at him. She can't look at anyone.  
BOBBIE gathers the soiled napkins and towel, stands tall and looks squarely at TOM.)

BOBBIE

Mister, you are a horse's ass.

(ANNIE can't look at TOM. She suppresses a smile.)

OLDER ANNIE

(smiles; whispers)

A horse's ass –

(LIGHTS fade, changing as....)

## SCENE 8

(OLDER ANNIE holds up sea glass.)

OLDER ANNIE

I have a collection of it. Of sea glass. Beach glass. It starts out as simple broken glass - shattered bottles that have littered the beaches. Over time the waves, the sand - it smooths the edges - the glass changes

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

from transparent to opaque. They're beautiful. Of course you couldn't put it all back together as a bottle - it's changed. Leave it to nature to be able to create something new and lovely from broken bottles.

(pause)

We haven't been to the beach in a while. I get - uncomfortable. I miss it.

## SCENE 9

(TOM and ANNIE are in the apartment. TOM puts a cold pack on ANNIE's back. OLDER ANNIE carefully glues Gran's vase.)

TOM

I was aiming for the wall, you know? Guess I'm a bad aim.

(pause)

TOM (continued)

I wish I didn't have to go in tonight - we've had a tail on this guy and it looks like - I don't want to bore you with this. I gotta go.

(kisses her)

But tomorrow - special day - just the two of us.

(ANNIE can't look at him.)

TOM (continued)

See you, Toots.

(TOM starts to leave.)

ANNIE

Tom - be careful.

TOM

(grinning)

Always, Toots. Always.

(TOM exits. ANNIE is downstage, facing away from OLDER ANNIE.)

ANNIE

He loves me.

OLDER ANNIE

He is a horse's ass.

(ANNIE smiles.)

ANNIE

I can't just give up - can I?

OLDER ANNIE

If at first you don't succeed....

(OLDER ANNIE has gluing problems.)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

Shit.

(CHORUS members, except JARED, enter; gather around ANNIE. She doesn't look at them.)

ANNIE

If I could just get it right -

BOBBIE

Get *what* right?

ANNIE

I feel so stupid sometimes.

PHYLLIS

He loves you.

ANNIE

He needs me.

DOCTOR

He needs help.

ANNIE

It didn't start out like this.

MANKATO

It never does.

PHYLLIS

You're a lovely couple.

ANNIE

I can't just give up –

DOCTOR

You were building something -

OLDER ANNIE

He's a horse's ass.

(ANNIE smiles; shakes it off.)

ANNIE

You don't give up on something just because it's not perfect.

(ANNIE curls up on the sofa; she pulls a blanket over her shoulders.)

PHYLLIS

He's not a bad man....

JILL

I'll take care of you, Annie.

ANNIE

(tired; defiant)

I don't need to be taken care of.

MANKATO

You're not alone.

ANNIE

He's supposed to be one of the good guys.

(ANNIE hunches in her blanket. Beat. LIGHTS change. TOM lumbers onto the stage as a beast/bear. OLDER ANNIE tries reaching her arm out of the circle of light. Draws it back in. YOUNGER ANNIE appears in the apartment, a blanket draped around her shoulders the same as ANNIE has. JARED rushes into the apartment carrying a picnic basket. He looks around, goes to YOUNGER ANNIE. For this NIGHTMARE scene, YOUNGER ANNIE is ANNIE for CHORUS, but ANNIE speaks ANNIE lines.)

JARED

(solemn)

He was one of a kind, Annie. I'm proud to have called him partner. He didn't linger - rescued those kids, then caught a shot to the head.

BOBBIE

At least it was sudden.

MANKATO

No suffering.

PHYLLIS

He always loved children.

DOCTOR

Take care of yourself, Annie -

JILL

(to Younger Annie)

Oh, honey, I'm so sorry.

ANNIE

Tom's not dead!

(everyone ignores her; she looks at TOM, who grins)

Look....

CHORUS

Gone.

(YOUNGER ANNIE points to TOM.)

JILL

That's the bear, Annie.

MANKATO

Poor thing, she's not seeing straight.

BOBBIE

He's a real beast, Annie - stay away.

ANNIE

Phyllis, don't you recognize him? He's your son?

PHYLLIS

(ignoring ANNIE)

He was a good man.

ANNIE

Tom?

CHORUS

Gone....

(YOUNGER ANNIE looks frantically at TOM, who growls and shows his strength.)

DOCTOR

Maybe she needs something to calm her down.

JARED

But then she might not make it off the boat.

ANNIE

The boat?

PHYLLIS

Don't rock the boat, dear.

JARED

He wanted his ashes scattered in the water.

ANNIE

I never wanted him dead – I only wanted him to stop!

JILL

(to Younger Annie)

You can't have it both ways.

PHYLLIS

(to JARED looking at the basket)

May I hold him?

JARED

It's time to scatter them.

MANKATO

Yes – scatter.

(MANKATO begins dancing past the bear.)

JILL

But we're not sure what to do about the bear.

(JILL joins the dance.)

BOBBIE

(starting to dance)

Did anyone tell her about the eggshells?!

(PHYLLIS begins taking giant eggs out of the basket and placing them in front of YOUNGER ANNIE.)

PHYLLIS

You must walk on eggshells around the bear, Dear.

(YOUNGER ANNIE steps precariously through the eggs; TOM roars ferociously and forces YOUNGER ANNIE to dance HIS way.)

JILL

He knows what you're thinking.

MANKATO

He's a very smart bear.

(ANNIE rushes to pick up the eggs as TOM continues to force YOUNGER ANNIE to dance.)

OLDER ANNIE

No!

(ANNIE shoves the eggs back in the basket.)



JARED

Then we all have to dance.

CHORUS

Dance, Annie - dance.

MANKATO

You have to dance the right way so you can get by the bear.

(One by one the CHORUS members disappear, dancing past the bear.)

JILL

You have to dance right for the bear –

(TOM bear-growls. YOUNGER ANNIE sees the bear. TOM/bear starts to dance, moving toward YOUNGER ANNIE. She is opposite him – when he moves he expects her to move. She struggles to get the dance right. When she does, he changes the steps.)

JARED

Can you dance as well as the bear?

DOCTOR

Dance, Annie, dance -

PHYLLIS & BOBBIE

Dance right - dance right - dance right!

(YOUNGER ANNIE looks around, frantic as the bear approaches. ANNIE approaches YOUNGER ANNIE. She puts her arms around her. They hesitate, try to dance.)

OLDER ANNIE

It'll never be good enough.

(The bear laughs at OLDER ANNIE; she glares back; immediately into....)

## SCENE 10

(OLDER ANNIE stands in her circle, as she struggles to find her footing – tries humor....)

OLDER ANNIE

You know, I spent years reading accounts of bear attacks in Reader's Digest, scouring reports of the best ways to prevent bear attacks, the best ways to survive them....

(Humor isn't working. She is angry.)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

I want it back! I want back that feeling of me - of.... Why did I let it go on so long? I don't know if I can –

(MUSIC comes up lightly. YOUNGER ANNIE approaches. OLDER ANNIE smiles hesitantly, watching YOUNGER ANNIE dance a little around the outside of the circle.)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

You are tenacious.

BOBBIE

(as Gran)

Annie, when you grow up if you ever get a boat I think you should call her the *Tenacity*.

(OLDER ANNIE pauses, smiles at GRAN. She shares a smile with YOUNGER ANNIE.)

OLDER ANNIE

You looked up 'tenacity' in the dictionary.

(YOUNGER ANNIE smiles and nods.)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

And you've loved that word ever since....

(YOUNGER ANNIE holds her hands up to have OLDER ANNIE mirror her movements. OLDER ANNIE does, with YOUNGER ANNIE leading. The

movements become dance-like. YOUNGER ANNIE moves her hands slightly into OLDER ANNIE's space.)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

Maybe Gran was right.

(OLDER ANNIE follows YOUNGER ANNIE's movements. YOUNGER ANNIE dances freely. OLDER ANNIE, still in her circle, tries a few steps. As she borders on dancing, she reaches out of her pit with her toe. She laughs. Her courage increases as LIGHTS change; OLDER ANNIE slightly dances as TOM whispers....)

## SCENE 11

TOM

Annie? Wake up Sleeping Beauty.

(LIGHTS increase. Hearing TOM, YOUNGER ANNIE jumps toward OLDER ANNIE. TOM kneels next to the sofa where ANNIE sleeps. Balloons cover the floor. TOM rumbles a low, playful, sensuous growl. ANNIE moans, stirs, cries slightly, calling TOM's name.)

TOM

Come on, Toots...rise and shine.

(ANNIE cries out and wakes up with a start.)

TOM (continued)

Annie?

ANNIE

(crying from nightmare)

Tom - you...I -

(Annie looks around where everyone was)

I thought...it was...it....

ANNIE

(fast and upset; tries to laugh)

There were these giant eggshells and  
Your mom had your ashes in a  
Picnic basket and people were  
Dancing and there was this bear...  
And Jared was there...he said you....

TOM

(tenderly)

Hey...hey...it's okay. It was a  
nightmare.

(pause)

Shh, now....

ANNIE  
(checks out that he feels real)  
But...you're all right.

TOM  
(soothing)  
Always, Toots. Always.

(He pulls her to her feet.)

TOM (continued)  
That's my girl.  
(he kisses her)  
Happy birthday, pretty lady.

(ANNIE looks around, sees the balloons, is delighted.)

OLDER ANNIE  
Oh, god, not this one!

TOM  
Did you think I'd forget?

OLDER ANNIE  
Why can't I forget?

ANNIE  
This is unbelievable -

TOM  
She speaks.  
(he kisses her hand)  
And her words are music. I love you. Love me?

ANNIE  
When did you...?

TOM  
You always knew I was full of hot air, right? No, you don't have to answer that.  
(snaps his fingers music begins, something like "My Girl" by the Temptations; he pulls her up and they dance among the balloons.)  
This day is for you.

(As they dance, they end up at the beach, picnic basket at their feet.)

OLDER ANNIE

(with the dead calm of self-loathing; she struggles with tears)

All my life I have lived with the memory of the one moment when I was unable to act - a moment I failed to do the right thing for an innocent person....

(She ignores TOM and ANNIE.)

TOM

Someday we'll take our kids to all our special places - then we'll take our grandkids - and their....

ANNIE

First things first, okay...?

TOM

I hope our kids have your eyes and my nose - but - we can't predict the future.

ANNIE

Gran had a friend who could.

TOM

Is this another fairy story?

ANNIE

No, no, no. She was a fortune teller. A real one. On my birthday one year Gran had her tell my fortune.

(YOUNGER ANNIE approaches BOBBIE as the fortune-teller. OLDER ANNIE watches this exchange.)

TOM

If she could predict the future maybe we should talk to her about some investment opportunities.

ANNIE

She made me a little nervous.

TOM

Did she predict me?

(OLDER ANNIE shudders.)

BOBBIE

(to Younger Annie)

Oh, this one! You like to dance, eh? Your Gran teach you how to dance with the fairies?

(BOBBIE hums a tune, dancing in a circle and laughing. She motions to YOUNGER ANNIE who dances.)

TOM

She sounds nuts.

ANNIE

But she knew things.

(BOBBIE takes YOUNGER ANNIE's hands.)

BOBBIE

(to Younger Annie)

I see you in the flowers - and the water. Ah, you grow into a fine young woman, eh?

TOM

Probably a con artist.

BOBBIE

(gasps - pulls hands away from Younger Annie)

Agh! Beware, child!

ANNIE & BOBBIE

Beware of the bear –

TOM

So this "bear thing" with you comes from some wacky fortune teller scaring you when you were a kid?

(as Papa Bear; growls)

Who's been sleeping in my bed?!

(ANNIE laughs. A beach ball rolls into the periphery of the playing area. MANKATO retrieves it; looks at ANNIE. OLDER ANNIE sees him.)

OLDER ANNIE

No, no - please leave.

(MANKATO exits with the beach ball. YOUNGER ANNIE dances, in the water.)

TOM

What am I, nuts? You sleeping in my bed is a good thing!

(A deep growl response from TOM. They are loving.  
YOUNGER ANNIE dances happy fairy dances.)

BOBBIE

I see you -

(she becomes quiet and serious)

I see you dancing -

(Bobbie looks beyond Younger Annie at Annie)

I see you dancing for the bear -

(YOUNGER ANNIE's dancing changes. BOBBIE looks  
at ANNIE, who turns away from her.)

TOM

You okay, Toots?

ANNIE

I'm fine.

TOM

So - who's the guy?

(YOUNGER ANNIE misses a beat.)

ANNIE

(looking around)

What guy?

TOM

Do not look. The one who's been following us. Watching you.

ANNIE

Why would anybody...?

TOM

You tell me, Toots.

(The ball again comes close to TOM and ANNIE.  
MANKATO retrieves it and stops.)

MANKATO

Hello, Annie Annie. I thought it was you.  
(smiles at Tom)

MANKATO (continued)

Hi. I'm Mankato Smith. Great day for a picnic.

(TOM faces MANKATO. YOUNGER ANNIE's dancing becomes more desperate.)

TOM

Did you need something?

MANKATO

Just wanted to say "hello."

TOM

To me - or my wife?

ANNIE

Tom....

OLDER ANNIE

I should've been able to stop it.

MANKATO

Actually, to....

(TOM hits him. Again. A couple CHORUS members notice. JARED hangs back, watches.)

ANNIE

Tom, no!

(YOUNGER ANNIE dances in a frenzied attempt to block out the action.)

TOM

Stay the fuck away from my wife!

(Another hit or kick. PHYLLIS turns away, horrified.)

ANNIE

Stop - Tom, please - no!

TOM

(to Annie while he's still going at Mankato)

See what you make me do?!

ANNIE

I didn't make you.



TOM

He's lucky I'm not gonna fuckin kill him!

(Kick. Hit. He's on top of him. OLDER ANNIE is unable to watch, frantic to ignore it.)

ANNIE

Tom, stop it. He doesn't deserve it.

OLDER ANNIE

(to audience and herself)

He didn't deserve it....

(TOM is still at MANKATO. JARED slowly moves in. CHORUS talks to OLDER ANNIE from the periphery.)

JILL

*You* didn't deserve it.

BOBBIE

He's a horse's ass.

(He's back at MANKATO. PHYLLIS cries silently to herself.)

OLDER ANNIE

(pacing in her space)

I wish I could stop all this - rearrange them and make it all turn out differently - but I can't. I cannot change the past. It will always be a part of me.

(CHORUS moves toward them. TOM pulls out his badge; paces around MANKATO.)

TOM

(to Chorus)

This man is dangerous. He was stalking my wife.

OLDER ANNIE

(realization)

What he did to him...it's like what he did to me -

BOBBIE

Has anyone called the police?

TOM

I am the police.

(TOM grabs the front of MANKATO's shirt, growling in his face.)

TOM (continued)

You're lucky I'm not gonna haul your ass in -

JARED

(to Tom)

Hey, man, it's over now. C'mon.

(DOCTOR bends to MANKATO.)

TOM

C'mon, Toots - let's go.

OLDER ANNIE

(quiet and firm)

Don't call me that.

ANNIE

Don't call me that.

TOM

What?

(ANNIE stands looking at TOM. CHORUS drifts away except JARED.)

TOM

One of these days, Toots....

ANNIE

(calm)

One of these days you'll wake up and I'll be gone.

OLDER ANNIE

(proud strength)

...and I was gone.

TOM

You did this, Toots. You made this happen!

JARED

Hey, man, c'mon - she didn't make you.

(OLDER ANNIE looks at JARED, who looks away. TOM whips around and is on ANNIE, backing her to the edge of OLDER ANNIE's circle. He grabs ANNIE's face, squeezing her cheeks. YOUNGER ANNIE cowers behind OLDER ANNIE who begins to respond to TOM's attack.)

OLDER ANNIE

No.

TOM

(to Annie)

You want some of what he got?

(to Older Annie)

Do ya?!

(OLDER ANNIE reaches out – defiantly grabs TOM's wrist of the hand holding ANNIE's face.)

ANNIE

(pleading)

No –

OLDER ANNIE

(strong; in control)

No.

(Beat. TOM glares at OLDER ANNIE.)

OLDER ANNIE

What you did to him it's like what you did to me! He didn't deserve it - she didn't deserve it.

(beat)

I didn't deserve it.

(TOM lets go of ANNIE's face. OLDER ANNIE releases TOM's wrist.)

TOM

You can't get rid of me that easily.

(OLDER ANNIE moves out of her circle toward TOM. ANNIE and YOUNGER ANNIE join together.)

OLDER ANNIE

You're part of my past. You will always be there.

(OLDER ANNIE slowly begins dancing, moving among CHORUS members, releasing them.)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

So many pieces of my life - people who live in my memory –

(OLDER ANNIE makes sad eye contact with  
PHYLLIS.)

PHYLLIS

I don't know what to say.

(PHYLLIS fades to periphery. OLDER ANNIE smiles at  
DOCTOR.)

DOCTOR

(fading to periphery)

I wish I could do more -

BOBBIE

(fading)

No regrets –

MANKATO

It wasn't your fault –

(MANKATO fades to periphery.)

JILL

You're not alone....

(OLDER ANNIE nods. JILL fades to periphery. OLDER  
ANNIE stops in front of JARED.)

JARED

He was my partner. I had to trust him.

(Older Annie nods.)

I...I'm sorry.

OLDER ANNIE

You're all part of who I am –

(JARED fades to periphery. ANNIE and YOUNGER  
ANNIE stay away from TOM. OLDER ANNIE  
becomes tentative in her dance steps. She moves toward  
TOM.)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

All of you -

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

(to Tom)

*All of you.*

(Dances stronger – herds TOM toward the circle. He moves away. OLDER ANNIE smiles. She gets him in the circle. He can't move out. She dances.)

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

I want you to say you're sorry. I know you're not going to say it, but...I don't think it matters any more.

(She dances. TOM moves out of the circle toward her.)

TOM

I told you it's not that easy -

OLDER ANNIE (continued)

(moves him back; stops)

Maybe you didn't hear what I said. You're part of the reason I'm who I am....

(beat)

And I like who I am.

(Again TOM moves partly out of the circle and grabs ANNIE's arm, dragging her into the circle; ready to use her as they get away.)

TOM

(mostly to Annie)

C'mon, Toots –

(OLDER ANNIE stops TOM from taking ANNIE away. She pulls ANNIE close to her.)

OLDER ANNIE

(to Annie)

It's taken me a very long time to even begin to like you again.

(She takes OLDER ANNIE's hand; moves out of circle; joins YOUNGER ANNIE.)

YOUNGER ANNIE

It isn't me.

ANNIE

It isn't me.

OLDER ANNIE

It was never me.

(YOUNGER ANNIE and ANNIE watch OLDER ANNIE find her dance. She invites them to join her. The three ANNIE's join together as LIGHTS FADE.)

**END OF PLAY**

## CHAPTER SIX: THE CONTINUING JOURNEY

Where has my autoethnographic journey led me? What do I take away from my journey and what can I offer those who might read about my paths and my explorations? By examining my personal and artistic journeys, I come not to a definitive conclusion, but to a continuation. My continuing journey includes ideas and questions, methods and possibilities about journeys, dualisms, collaboration, ethics, comfort zones, the toolbox, IPV and trauma, writing, and finally, connections and confluences.

### JOURNEYS

In Chapter One I asked the questions regarding what influences my artistic journey had on my personal journey and what influences my personal journey had on my artistic journey. I have discovered that my journeys cannot be separated. While I can identify some steps along my path as more artistic or personal, the reality is that they are the same journey -- not parts of a whole but a whole. Each is the same journey. And a different journey. And somewhere mingled within my personal and artistic journeys is the scholarly. Is it that I cannot separate them? Or that I

will not separate them? I believe that to separate my journeys would impose a false dualism of my self.

## **DUALISMS**

I have discovered that to resist strict dualisms offers a broader understanding of the concept of 'the whole.' We can see the forest *and* the trees. In Chapter One I argued that as an autoethnographer I needed to be simultaneously subjective and objective. I believe as autoethnographers we need to be objectively subjective and subjectively objective. Chew on that a while.

Through the course of exploring my journeys, I have realized that: structure can be at once linear and non-linear, spiral and parallel. The writing process can be at once performed and written. I can at once be personal and artistic and scholarly; I can at once be healed and healing; I can at once be the self and the other, I can at once be scholarly and seemingly unscholarly - hence, the "chew on that a while." And you thought I was sounding inappropriate for a dissertation! Resist dualisms.

## **COLLABORATION**

Collaboration can be a key to success. In theatre, it is essential. Carol Wright Krause states that: "A play is



best served by cooperative collaboration" (1). Dr. Burgoyne's directing style for *Survival Dance* encouraged collaboration prior to, as well as throughout the rehearsal process. As a playwright, I understand that the development process is not about the playwright or the production, it is about the play. In our process with *Survival Dance*, however, we were not only in development, we were also in rehearsal for a production. For much of the rehearsal process, while I was rewriting the script, Dr. Burgoyne allowed the idea that the process was also about the playwright. She understood that I was part of the script. Her willingness to collaborate in that way allowed me to revise and rewrite as necessary for the script. By encouraging the dual development process of both the play and the playwright, Dr. Burgoyne allowed me to create a more solid text for the play as we moved toward production.

Through my research for my dissertation, I discovered that the collaborative efforts of Dr. Heather Carver's graduate seminars were equally important to me. In the seminars Dr. Carver created an atmosphere of trust within and among her graduate students. In such an atmosphere, students were willing to take risks in their work. Although we had very specific goals for our 'products' - our research papers and performances - the creative process

itself was also a goal. Dr. Carver's classes were places in which we were encouraged to experiment, to embrace the 'new,' and to try on different ideas to see what fit. We had 'permission' to take big risks in the seminars because we understood from the beginning that our performance wasn't right or wrong, it was part of the process of finding and giving voice. In Dr. Carver's seminars, I saw how the collaboration in theatre is not only between the theatre artists, but also between theatre artists and the audience. I drew upon that discovery in rewrites of *Survival Dance* - I continue to draw upon that idea in other works.

## **ETHICS**

I still have questions about my process. In "Can There Be A Feminist Ethnography?" Judith Stacey states that:

Ethnographic method also appears to provide much greater respect for and power to one's research 'subjects' who . . . can and should become full collaborators in feminist research. (22)

As a full collaborator in my research of my self, I empower myself through my storytelling. Stacey continues to wonder, however, "whether the appearance of greater respect for and equality with research subjects in the ethnographic approach masks a deeper, more dangerous form of

exploitation" (22). Is it possible for me to exploit myself? Does autoethnography hold the potential to encourage scholars to exploit themselves for professional gain? Where our professional and personal lives intersect, what precautions should scholars take when considering autoethnography? What considerations should be made before we decide to offer a public critical analysis of our personal experiences? I believe that the above questions are ideas that are worth examining as disciplines continue to explore the possibilities of autoethnography.

#### **COMFORT ZONES**

Push the envelope - move outside your comfort zone - shake it up - go for it - take a chance. Throughout my research for and the writing of this dissertation I was constantly reminded how essential it is to continue exploring and pushing my comfort zone. Although I don't like to perform for a live audience any more, I found that through performance I have developed skills that help me in my playwriting. After I wrote and developed *Survival Dance*, I worked on another play in which I used performances to develop monologues and dialogue. Prior to my personal narrative performances in Dr. Carver's class that I eventually adapted into Older Annie's monologues, I used to

read my scripts-in-progress out loud. But I would read the dialogue aloud sitting at my computer. After my experiences with personal narrative performance in Dr. Carver's classes, however, I am more likely to get up, move around, visualize the set as I'm moving 'through' it, and say the words I have written. I will try out other words, move them around, and perform the words different ways and in different orders. For me, performance has become another tool in my writer's toolbox.

Another thought on comfort zones: I have also discovered how important it is to take chances. Sometimes that which we think we know, we don't. A subject in which we believed we had some expertise, we may not know as well as we thought. Although the terrain seems familiar, somehow it has changed. It is like the garden soil at the old farmhouse. My son was used to running through the garden - it was soft, but solid dirt. When his shoe stuck in the mud, he couldn't understand what changed, but suddenly it had. As I've been writing this dissertation I have realized that I can't figure out everything that happens in life. Sometimes things happen that don't make any sense. Like a violent attack that we try to avoid - we can't figure out the reasons. The key, though, is to not let those changes stop me. Maybe I should coin a phrase: *Mud happens*. But mud

is simply mud. It might slow me down or my shoe might get stuck, but if I don't try to get to the other side of the garden because I *might* get stuck - well, I could continue getting all philosophical, but my point is that throughout the writing of this dissertation, I reminded myself how stuck I was in one area of my life, and how thrilling it was to reach out. I took emotional risks throughout my journeys. And they felt good. I need to take chances and continue pushing my boundaries in my explorations as an individual, an artist, and a scholar.

How can we encourage ourselves to move outside our comfort zones? How can we encourage others to push the envelope in their writing? Like the graduate seminars of Dr. Carver, I believe creating an environment that is at once nurturing and challenging, safe and adventurous will encourage new challenges. We need to create such an environment not only in our classrooms, but also where we work. We must also create such an environment within our selves and our lives.

I am reminded of the words of Dr. Steve Archer, my first playwriting teacher during my undergraduate years. Each time I would approach him with questions about whether or not an idea would work in a play: Can I do this? Will it work on stage? His reply was always the same. He would use

his gravelliest of gravelly voices, look at me, and say, "I don't know, Kogut . . . write it and see."

## **THE TOOLBOX**

It seems as if I have always understood that writers need to continually add to their experiences, their methods, and their knowledge if they are going to keep their writing interesting and fresh. Actually, we should do that in all areas of our lives. But that idea is covered in a different artificially created topic in this chapter. For now, I will discuss the need to continue exploring various tools to pack into your writer's toolbox.<sup>62</sup> Throughout this dissertation, I have been constantly reminded of one specific tool I have added to my toolbox: the discipline of Performance Studies offers ways in which to explore the self thoroughly through performance. Performance Studies scholars actively promote a pedagogy that is a "holistic approach to education . . . [that] promote[s] cultural health within its students and teachers; it takes into account not only the mind, body, and spirit but cultural constructs and contexts" (Stucky and Wimmer 7). The discipline insists that performance is a fundamental aspect of our lives rather than something separate from our lives

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<sup>62</sup> A tip of my hat to Stephen King for the idea of a writer's toolbox. It's a valuable lesson. For more about a writer's toolbox, see King's book *On Writing*.

to be enjoyed when we attend theatre. I am not promoting an either/or argument. I am simply stating that adding knowledge and experience based in theories and methods from Performance Studies is an excellent tool for playwrights. As I have moved through this dissertation, I realize how important this tool was to both my development process of *Survival Dance* and other writing projects.

#### **IPV AND TRAUMA RECOVERY**

I have learned a great deal about IPV and trauma recovery through the process of this dissertation. It is information that I can use as self-knowledge, cultural knowledge, and as research for my writing.

In IPV a woman has been exposed to a campaign of degradation and abuse that gradually robs her of her self, her belief in her self, and often much of her ability to act for her self. I am still amazed at how, in the middle of such a campaign, so many women retain a core self upon which they rebuild.

During my research and writing of this dissertation I broadened my understanding of abuse, both my own experiences as well as the nature of IPV. I also broadened my understanding of trauma recovery. By connecting the dots

within my own recovery process, I have opened up possibilities for rewriting *Survival Dance*.

## WRITING

Throughout my research and writing I have made discoveries about my script as well as ways in which I approach my writing process and ways in which I teach writing. Although I do not plan major rewrites of *Survival Dance* based on work I have done in this dissertation, there are some aspects of the script I will examine for potential tweaking. In general, I will explore the structure of the script.

I want to explore the possibility of several story structures occurring simultaneously within the play. Do both linear and non-linear structures occur throughout the play? Annie and Older Annie each seem to have their own linear structure embedded within the story. Older Annie's occurs within a shorter time frame, while Annie's extends through the course of the relationship. And each of their stories loops back through the other. Additionally, I will review the spiral nature of Older Annie's journey, as well as the parallel structures of the stories of all three Annies.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> For more on spiral and parallel structures, see Seger, *Advanced Screenwriting*.



I will also look at the play structure by revisiting the literature on IPV and trauma recovery. By re-exploring the phases of IPV discussed by Campbell, I will see how I might apply her theories to *Survival Dance*. When I wrote the original script, I was aware only of Walker's Cycle of Violence theory combined with the fact that I didn't always see the same cycle in my experience within a violent relationship. By using Campbell's four phases of binding, enduring, disengaging, and recovery as a model, along with the fact that the four phases are not necessarily linear (51), I will be able to review my script and hopefully discover places that I can 'tweak' to make the script tighter. Additionally, having a greater understanding of trauma recovery, I will return to the script to explore ways in which to make Older Annie climactic moment make more sense dramatically.

Through research for this dissertation, I revisited my early development work for the script. By looking at some of the exercises with the additional information from the IPV and trauma recovery literature, I have made several important discoveries. In my character interview with Annie, I see now how I was forcing words on her. She would not have said certain lines that I made her say. Her question "But love's not enough, do you think?" and her

statements that she was "sort of afraid" and "sometimes I get scared. . . ." were lines I now realize Annie would not have spoken at the time I 'interviewed' her. She was not in a stage in her relationship that she could have opened up in the way I forced her to open up to me. As the writer, I was forcing words on a character who was a battered woman. Was my behavior the same as her husband's? Was I taking the power and control from her? (Herman 159). To non-writers the way characters claim a life of their own might seem strange. For me, a character becomes real - not in an 'I've lost touch with reality and think they are actually human' way, but in the way that once I create characters and know them, I must allow them to tell their stories their own way. With Annie - at the point where I wrote the interviews, I was forcing her to say things I knew she needed to confront rather than allowing her the autonomy to express herself the way she needed to. Herman discusses "The basic principle of empowerment" and includes that it is imperative that "the choice to confront the horrors of the past rests with the survivor" (175). I was forcing a character to do something she couldn't do - she was still in her terrifying relationship. I had Annie out of order: she couldn't do the work of recovery until she had escaped. As the writer who had experienced abuse, where was the

younger *me* in my process? Was I trying to force my own recovery onto the character? Once I added Older Annie, I had a character who was at a stage in her recovery in which she could confront what had happened. I did not explore this analysis while I was writing and rewriting. Another development exercise was the monologue I created for Annie as seen in Chapter Three. In this monologue I allowed Annie to find her own voice. At the beginning she was directed to speak by a Voice, however she quickly found the freedom in her own voice to talk about her dream cabin. She didn't name the violence. She said "Like when Tom starts . . . when he. . . ." And then she continues on about planting daffodil bulbs outside her imaginary cabin: "almost three hundred bulbs before he was finished. . . ." In this monologue I had respected Annie's "gaps" (see Lawless 2001: 57-63) in her story.

I have always understood the importance of research in writing. Making the above discoveries about my development process is important to me and I will continue to explore ways in which to keep moving back and forth between the research about the subject matter and the script on which I am working.

## **CONNECTIONS AND CONFLUENCES**

I have artificially divided this chapter. The reality is that each of these sections is connected to the others. They flow into each other. Example: My discoveries regarding resisting dualisms applies to my writing as well as my life - collaboration in coursework and play development is as valid as the idea of collaborating with the self; pushing the comfort zone is part of life, art, and scholarship. I suppose I could identify some times in my life that became a confluence. The abusive relationship? It flowed into my life stream and although I ended the relationship and the abuse stopped - it continued to flow within me.

Am I resisting another dualism?

## **AND FINALLY**

When I speak with medical students now, I don't fall apart. The rawness of my emotions isn't there. My journeys of personal healing, of art, and of analyzing them both, have brought me back to my self. The raw emotions live on, though. As I have healed through many avenues, Older Annie, Annie, and Younger Annie remain locked at the moment I gave them. The next time someone picks up the play and breathes life into the characters, the Annies will once again be

terrified and ashamed. They will struggle to catch a glimmer of hope and they will have to discover themselves all over again. And, if I've done my job, the audience will feel the Annies' terror, their shame, and their hope. And the audience will discover themselves all over again. Isn't that why we do this?

*MOMENT: Falling Dreams*

*I have dreams that I'm falling. I can't control my fall and so I plunge.*

*Farther.*

*Faster.*

*I'm afraid.*

*I struggle to call out but my screams are swallowed by my terror and I awaken, my pillow moist with tears.*

*Another falling dream.*

*The plunging speed through the air . . . farther and faster and yet I feel a smile.*

*It's instinctive now.*

*When I fall, I take control. I can change the fall. I have that power.*

*And so I fly.*

*I soar. . . .*

# # #

APPENDIX: IRB APPROVAL

Recruitment Letter

Informed Consent

Interview Script

RECRUITMENT LETTER

[Date]

Dear \_\_\_\_\_.

I am initiating research on the development and production of the play *Survival Dance*. Because of your experience as either a theatre artist involved with this play or an audience member who saw a production of this work or a developmental narrative performance, I would welcome the opportunity to interview you regarding your experiences. My goal in this research is to determine ways in which the writing process includes various forms of collaboration with theatre artists and audience respondents.

Please contact me regarding your ability to participate in this study. Approximate time commitment will be a total of 15 to 45 minutes depending upon your level of involvement with the work.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Kate Berneking Kogut

[kbk0b2@mizzou.edu](mailto:kbk0b2@mizzou.edu)

**INFORMED CONSENT**  
**Study of *Survival Dance***

Kate Berneking Kogut (interviewer) is conducting this research in order to explore various aspects of the development of new dramatic works. This study is limited to the theatre artists involved in the first production of the play *Survival Dance*, as well as audience members of that production and audience members of developmental narrative performances. There were nineteen theatre artists involved in the first production. Responses from a sampling of audience members from the play and developmental narrative performances will include 10 - 20 interviews.

- **Participation Information:**
  - The research will include one 15 to 45 minute interview, depending upon level of involvement.
  - The interview will take place in a mutually agreed upon location that is convenient for the participant as well as a space that offers confidentiality for the interviewee.
  - Interviewees no longer living in the immediate area will be interviewed by phone
  - Due to the nature of ethnographic interviews, follow-up may be necessary in some instances. Any follow-up interviews will be conducted in person, phone, or e-mail and will last 15 minutes.
  - Participation in this study is completely voluntary. I may refuse to address any question or comment at any time. I may also choose to withdraw from the study at any time.
  
- **Risk:** The risk of participating in this research is no more than that encountered in daily life.
  
- **Benefits:**
  - **For Society:**
    - An increased understanding of the process of the development of new theatrical works, including various techniques and creative collaborations used in the writing process.
  - **For Individuals:**
    - An increased understanding of the ways in which he or she, as a theatre artist or audience member, might have an impact on the development of a new dramatic work.



- **Confidentiality:** Confidentiality of interviewees will be respected. If, at any time, the interviewee suggests that certain thoughts or ideas *not* be kept confidential, he or she may make this request of the interviewer. In such cases all efforts will be made to give full credit to the ideas expressed while still maintaining the confidentiality of other interviewees.
- **Data** from this research will be stored for a minimum of three years.
- **Interviews** will be tape-recorded. The recordings will be coded for confidentiality.
- **Results** of this study will be examined in a research paper with potential for future publication.
- **Contact information for the researcher:**
  - Kate Berneking Kogut
  - [kbk0b2@mizzou.edu](mailto:kbk0b2@mizzou.edu)
- **IRB contact information:**
  - <http://www.research.missouri.edu/cib/index.htm>
  - 483 McReynolds Hall, University of Missouri - Columbia; 573-882-9585
- I understand the above information and consent to participate in the study. I understand that I will retain one copy of this form for my records. (In the case of a phone interview, a verbal consent may be offered in lieu of this written form.)

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Print name

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Signature

## INTERVIEW SCRIPT

### Survival Dance Study

FOR INTERVIEWS WITH THEATRE ARTISTS: Questions and Open-ended Statements

- 1) Define your role in the production of *Survival Dance*.
- 2) Describe your experience with *Survival Dance*.

Follow-up questions to #2 will include (as and/or when appropriate):

- 1) Why did you become involved with *Survival Dance*?
- 2) Discuss challenges you encountered in the production.
- 3) What are the most important things you gained from your work with *Survival Dance*?

FOR INTERVIEWS WITH AUDIENCE MEMBERS: Questions and Open-ended Statements

- 1) How would you describe your role in *Survival Dance*?
- 2) Describe expectations prior to seeing the play (and/or narrative performance).

Follow-up questions to #2 will include (as and/or when appropriate):

- 1) Describe your reactions to the play (and/or narrative performance).
- 2) What are the most important things you gained from seeing *Survival Dance*? (And/or narrative performance.)

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## VITA

Kate Berneking Kogut, AKA Kathy Berneking, was born in St. Louis, Missouri. She grew up riding bikes, climbing trees, playing games, and reading mysteries in her North St. Louis County home. Oh, yes, she attended school, too. She married and started a family and moved to Mid-Missouri in the late 1970s. Discovering her theatrical roots at the University of Missouri - Columbia, her first play, *Hot Wash, Cold Rinse*, was produced in the student-run theatre in the basement of Gentry Hall in 1986. She earned her B.A. in Theatre in 1988, her M.A. in Theatre in 2002, and her Ph.D. in May 2007 . . . all from the University of Missouri - Columbia.

She is excited about her new academic home in the Department of English and Creative Writing at Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri where she currently teaches dramatic writing.

Kate is married to John R. Kogut and they have a son, Tanner J. Kogut, and a daughter, Casey A. Kogut.