

cover (a play about trafficking)

THE POWER OF CREATING PERFORMATIVE  
AUTO/ETHNOGRAPHIES IN A THEATRE COMMUNITY

A Dissertation presented to  
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Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy in Theatre

By

JOY ANN POWELL

M. Heather Carver, Ph.D.,

Supervisor

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The undersigned, appointed by the  
Dean of the Graduate School,  
have examined the Dissertation entitled

cover (a play about trafficking)  
Creating Performative Auto/ethnographies  
in a Theatre Community

Presented by Joy Ann Powell

A candidate for the degree of  
Ph.D. in Theatre  
And hereby certify that, in their opinion,  
it is worthy of acceptance.

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Dr. M. Heather Carver

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Dr. Elaine J. Lawless

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Dr. Catherine Gleason

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Dr. Kevin Brown

## DEDICATION

To my parents, Mark and Charlotte Powell  
who have always loved me for who I am and  
gave up their dreams so I could find mine

To the women and girls of  
The Covering House and  
*cover(a play about trafficking)*

You are loved  
You are visible  
Your stories matter

*May your stories ring out  
from the rafters  
and the hilltops  
and the mile-high buildings*

*For if one voice is expendable  
Then all of them are,  
And our stories will fade  
Into the great silence of empire*

*From cover (a play about trafficking)*



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Joy Ann Powell

Dr. M. Heather Carver, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

The greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist. This idea that the devil (or depravity) is sly enough to make us believe it doesn't exist comes rushing forward up to this moment. I connect this idea to the epidemic of domestic trafficking and sexual exploitation of minors and the misconception that it is not happening in the United States. In this dissertation through an auto/ethnography lens of the work of The Covering House (TCH), I explore the issue of domestic trafficking in St. Louis, Missouri. This play is based upon the narratives gathered from TCH staff and volunteers including my own experiences. I also explore the unique framework of creating a theatre community in the middle of a performed auto/ethnography. I chronicle the community created with the actors and the production team, as well as the audience and the staff and clients at TCH. Identity is who we are and who we are becoming. Performance is calling upon that identity in a public setting to tell a story through our bodies, minds and voices to an audience.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Discovering The Issue

I didn't know it was happening here. I knew it happened, I knew. I mean, I had seen *Taken*, but I didn't know it was happening 3 miles from my house. That's the frightening thing about this issue. It's right there, in plain view, it is the unseen in the world of the visible. I'm talking about the issue of domestic sex trafficking of minors in my city, St. Louis, Missouri.

"The greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist". This quote was first coined by the French poet Charles Baudelaire and later made famous by the character Verbal (played by Kevin Spacey) in the film *The Usual Suspects*. This long-standing idea that the devil (or for the purposes of this work: depravity) is sly enough to make us believe it doesn't exist, comes rushing forward through time right up to this moment. This metaphor has never been more appropriate than in light of the epidemic of domestic trafficking and sexual exploitation of minors. Couple this idea with the grave misconception that it is not happening here, in the United States (and for our purposes, St. Louis, MO) and we have an epic social injustice issue staring us in the face.

Although comprehensive research to document the number of children engaged in prostitution in the United States is

lacking, an estimated 293,000 American youths are currently at risk of becoming victims of commercial sexual exploitation. (Estes 140)

This statistic on domestic trafficking is overwhelming. Connect these statistics with the fact that the average age of a trafficking survivor is 13 and the scope of this issue is unfathomable. We certainly cannot get our mind around it on our own. One of the most frustrating aspects of domestic human trafficking is that our citizens do not believe it is happening. We like to think that trafficking occurs in some third-world country in some slum located in a large city with millions of people. Truly, trafficking does happen there, but it also occurs in rural settings and in quiet neighborhoods. It can and does happen right in our own backyards.

In this dissertation through an auto/ethnography lens of the work of The Covering House (TCH), I explore the issue of domestic trafficking in St. Louis, Missouri. This play, performed by a cast of actors, is based upon the narratives gathered from TCH staff and volunteers including my own experience of serving as their chaplain. I also explore the unique framework of creating a theatre community in the middle of a performed auto/ethnography. I unpack the DNA of the community created with the actors and the production team, as well as the audience and the staff and clients at TCH.

### **Research Question:**

What can be learned from an auto/ethnography shared from a performative lens through the framework of theatre and the community it creates? I chronicle my journey of the performance of this auto ethnography. I share about the process of writing, producing and directing the piece and the effect that this process will have on my students and me.

### **Justification**

St. Louis has become a prime area for sex trafficking, primarily because of the growing online marketplace for the sex trade as well as easy access to interstate highways and its position as a hub for large-scale conventions and sporting activities. The Department of Justice has identified St. Louis among the top 20 human trafficking jurisdictions in the country.

(Brinker)

In light of this, what can be done? In his blog post "The Misconceptions of Human Trafficking", Cameron Conaway, Executive Director of The Good Men Project, puts it like this:

One of the biggest misconceptions of modern day slavery/human trafficking is that it only goes on in other countries, as well as the belief that ordinary people cannot do anything about it. People are not



surprised that it goes on in places like Southeast Asia and India, but they are shocked to find out that it is very prevalent here in the United States . . . The misconception that this problem only exists in other countries comes from a lack of reporting of this in the media and in society in general. A way to fight this would be for more people-churches, colleges, universities, the media and private citizens-to all work to raise awareness. (Conaway).

How is this horrible epidemic hidden from view? I consider myself a person with my finger on the pulse of important issues, especially when it comes to women and children. This is true because of my community and social work volunteer efforts with these populations in various locations abroad as well as in this country. I am very committed to being an advocate for women and children. Therefore, it stands to reason that if I didn't have a clue this was happening, there is a very large segment of the population that is blind to it as well. My research is justified because of my interest in social justice, its valuable intersection with theatre and performative ethnography, raising awareness about this issue, and reaching my goal of creating a safe space for silence voices to resonate."

As I look for concrete ways to transform our world, creating a more just and ethical approach to the issues our

society faces, I am captured by the idea that 'story' is the one thing that every person has in common. We all have a narrative that is uniquely our own. The element that makes the community of a theatre production powerful is that all of the narratives of the performers are present in the production as they tell the story of the play. This double narrative that is always present in solo biographical performance is also an important facet of a community of artists performing auto/thnographies.

The above blog post is a call to arms. I am armed with my talents, intuition, intellect and influence. I feel a deep sense of calling to use my: passion for creating as much awareness as possible about this cause, love of theatre and strong sense of justice on this project. I will not let myself off the hook by abandoning my inner practitioner. This is why adapting an auto/ethnography for performance in a traditional theatre community setting is the most worthwhile approach for me to do this work.

### **Auto/Ethnography Defined**

You may ask: What is auto/ethnography? Scholars Ellis and Bochner describe it this way:

Auto/ethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order

to understand cultural experience (ethno) (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005).

This leads to a deeper look at this idea through the lens of performance ethnography. This is an emerging area of research. In this dissertation I will share the mechanisms utilized in this process to make social change happen. Performance ethnography encapsulates these ideas: doing the work of raising awareness, gathering the material of the play and producing/performing the play. "Performance ethnography has become a critical mode of representing ethnographic materials . . . embodying cultural knowledge through performance not only depicts cultural practice but might also lead to social change, as actors and audience reconceptualize their social circumstances" (Marshall and Rossman 29).

All of these ideas point to the truth that there is something valuable and important that occurs when the element of performance is added to these specific types of narratives. According to the article "When Qualitative Research Meets Theater The Complexities of Performed Ethnography and Research-Informed Theater Project Design" in *Qualitative Inquiry*, the richness found in this form manifest in these three sources: (a) the ethnographic research from which a play script is created, (b) the reading or performance of the play, and (c) the conversations that take place after the reading or performance"

(Marshall and Rossman 29).

These elements are present in the work and script of cover. The added layer of meaning comes from the work positioned as a performed auto/ethnography by a theatre community. There is extensive research on the performed auto/ethnography by a solo artist; however, framing this work in a tradition theatrical setting is unique.

My goal in sharing with you my personal experience of working with TCH is to help you better understand the inner workings of their mission and its importance. The auto/ethnographer is a cultural a translator. They hold an inside position in the world they are researching. However, they also have the scholarly and artistic tools to be able to translate that knowledge for their audience. This translation is a crucial part of auto/ethnography. The entire work is based on the trust given to the auto/ethnographer by the participants. Ellis and Bochner go on to say: "using the self as both subject and object, its inquiry proceeds through "multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (739). When any subject becomes personal to us, we can communicate that subject to another person with an insider's knowledge, thus giving a more authentic portrayal of the topic.

[Scholars] wanted to concentrate on ways of producing meaningful, accessible, and evocative research

grounded in personal experience, research that would sensitize readers to issues of identity politics, to experiences shrouded in silence, and to forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathize with people who are different from us. (Ellis & Bochner 2000)

The auto/ethnographer and the participants must be willing to tell their individual stories so that the story of the community can be heard. If we, the people who deeply understand the power of narrative, do not translate and get the narratives out to those that need to hear it and create a conduit of information for those that need their voices, then who will?

### **Doing Auto/Ethnography: Methodology**

As my Ph.D. student journey has progressed, I am shaking off the old forms of thinking and letting new ones take their place. One of the biggest paradigm shifts for me has been giving myself permission to be "inside" or "a part" of my work. This has manifested itself most recently in my scholarly writing. This has become a more and more dynamic strategy in the world of academic writing. This approach appreciates that, in research, there is no such thing as objectivity. In some ways, the scholar

will always be a part of the work that they endeavor to accomplish. Through this journey I discovered Muncey and Nash's ideas. Nash surfaces his ideas through his book, *Me-Search And Re-Search: A Guide For Writing Scholarly Personal Narrative Manuscripts*:

More non-scholars, as well as academicians, are asserting their responsibility to look critically at their socio-historical contexts. More important, writers are free today to position themselves at the center of their inquiries. This adds creative vitality and personal relevance to social knowledge. (Nash 18)

Nash goes on to further explain the overall goal of the SPN:

While it [SPN] is personal, it is also social. While it is practical, it is also theoretical. While it is reflective, it is also public. While it is local, it is also political. While it narrates, it also proposes. While it is self-revealing, it also evokes self-examination from readers. Whatever its unique shape and style of communicating to readers, **an SPN's central purpose is to make an impact on both writer and reader, on both the individual and the community.**

(Nash 19-20)

I too seek to make an impact on my community - the

community of artists with whom I work, as well as the broader community that I serve and of which I am a part. I seek to change the fabric of who we are by making sure that the community understands that if we negate the worth of any member of the community we negate our own.

Now that the importance of the auto/ethnographer's position in the process is clear, let me turn our attention to Muncey's method of writing about the work of auto/ethnography. I utilized her writing process in this dissertation, chronicled in her article *Doing Ethnography*.

The representation of an individual's story that contains one of society's taboos appears to require legitimation of not only the text but also the method by which it is conveyed. This is particularly important if memory and its distortions appear to be critical features of the process. Using the four approaches described in this article, namely the snapshot, metaphor, the journey and artifacts, in combination, the author seeks to demonstrate the disjunctions that characterize people's lives. (Muncey 69)

It is the act of putting ourselves into the work that gives us the ability to have empathy rather than pity for the cause(s) we champion. Nash's article continues,

Your writing, at some point, will always give your personal story away, even when you attempt to cloud it with the thick idiom of "academese" and objectivity.

(Nash 24)

These articles, and others like them, give me great courage to utilize this approach in my writing. In high school and during my undergraduate years I was taught that scholarly writing did not include the voice of the author. Since I have returned to academia as a student I am thrilled that the personal narrative has been included in the world of scholarly writing. The use of third person can serve to create a facade of objectivity, which only perpetuates the dominant "separateness" intrinsic in this voice. When that distance is removed the narratives come to life and therefore a deeper connection with the audience is created. This approach coupled with my experience as a theatre scholar and practitioner, make this method the most effective form of delivering my research and ideas.

How do I remain unmoved when the staff of The Covering House pours out their heart to me? How can I remain a passive observer when I work with the girls at TCH and see their creativity and hope? I have reached the conclusion that I cannot. And more importantly, I will not. I refuse to stand idly by in my academic ivory tower bubble and spout off about the



injustices that I see, but leave my accountability (and the audience's accountability) out of the picture. For far too long we have rested on our scholarly laurels. We have hidden behind the false sense of security that objectivity lends us. If the dominant ideas of higher education insist on the scholar being uncluttered, removed and unaffected by the work of which they are a part, then this antiquated notion also absolves them of the sins of apathy and elitist superiority.

### **The Risks of Auto/Ethnography**

Auto/Ethnography can be a risky business. There is no way that we, as scholars/artists and ethnographers, can run away from the risk intrinsic to this work. Sometimes we must lean into the risk and know that when we take the leap into the world of ethnography, that if we are focused on the best practices, the process will catch us. However, this is easier said than done. In her documentary on HBO working with the YoungArts initiative Anna Deveare Smith puts it this way, "Are we willing to take the broad jump towards the other? . . . Trying to jump across the chasm to get to the other person". (Deveare-Smith)

Anytime we are dealing with the human family there is a risk. People are risky, life is messy and as ethnographers we cannot anticipate how a person or group of people will interpret and internalize the questions we ask or decipher the reasons for

answers we seek. We must ask questions since that is the pathway for stories to surface, but how and when we ask the questions is what makes all the difference.

However, there are some risks involved in this work including: infatuation with the participant's story, appropriating their story for our own purposes and detaching from their story because it is different from our own. I will use the work of Dwight Conquergood and his Dialogical Model of Ethnography as a guide.

Infatuation with the stories of the participants in ethnography can appear harmless. This infatuation stance says, "I love everything about you, and really we are pretty much the same, right?" There are so many reasons this line of thinking is problematic. First of all, while there is a universal nature to the human experience, we are not and were never intended be the same. We are different! We are all equally valuable but our ways of growing up and moving through life experience are vast and varied. It is the difference that makes the stories we carry so valuable.

The infatuated stance is where the observer is placed "above" the other person. It is a place of privilege and control because it refuses to let the participant truly be who they are. The stance says, "You are more like me than different from me so that makes you okay." This restriction robs the participant of

who they are and are meant to be. It looks at their history and their present as a means of becoming the dominant or at least turning to the dominant way of thinking and being. It leaves no room for true diversity and that, is most certainly, a risk.

Another risk is one where the ethnographer feels "entitled" to the stories and customs of the participants as their "custodian". This stance takes the idea that if they observe it then, as an ethnographer, whatever is shared is open for their use. While all of these stances are damaging, this one is truly painful to contemplate. When we as ethnographers are granted entry into the world of the participant it is a sacred place we inhabit. They let us in, on the premise that we can be trusted. They let us in on the presumption that we are not there to mock and/or steal but to understand, interpret and enter into their wonderful world. This risk takes us back to the reason for ethnography. We are there to understand the human condition and to the stories that no one is telling. As Conquergood asserts, "This stance is the worst kind of rape and theft" (Conquergood, 6). His words are acidic; however, they are true. We only incorporate stories into our work that we have been given permission to tell. We must employ "The Golden Rule" on this and treat those with whom we work how we would want to be treated. Sometimes the lines are not so clearly drawn. This is risky business. We are not entitled to the stories just because we are

ethnographers. We must ask and receive permission to tell stories, regardless of our feelings or wants or the participant's usefulness to our work. As any good professor cares for the needs of their students above their own, the same should be true for ethnographers. Any ethnographer worth their salt puts the participants well being and worth above that of the work.

Even with all of these risks, there is a way to do this work and do it well. In the center of the Conquergood model is the idea of taking a dialogical stance. This idea is not a one-sided exchange - it is the idea of a dialogue, a conversation where each person shares and invests in the one sitting across the table.

In an effort to create a space where dialogical auto/ethnography can flourish, I will use Tessa Muncey's auto/ethnographic method of snapshots, artifacts, metaphor, and journey to share with the process of creating *cover (a play about trafficking)* (Muncey 70).

Identity is who we are and who we are becoming. Performance is calling upon that identity in a public setting to tell a story through our bodies, minds and voices to an audience.

### **Devising & Positioning**

My devised work based upon the stories, interviews and

personal experiences being a volunteer with TCH began in 2012. This includes a study of what transpired since my first meeting with TCH staff members and continues up through the production of the play and the reactions to it. I interviewed five staff members, one volunteer and one of the trafficking survivors that worked with TCH to help develop their therapy model. Her story gives a glimpse into a survivor's mindset and proves there is life after trafficking. The play consists of interviews, scenes, monologues, songs, poems and videos. One of my former students and one of my current students composed and performed the music connected to the ideas and themes of the play. The play entitled *cover (a play about trafficking)* premiered at Missouri Baptist University September 4-7, 2014. Since the play's opening I have continued to write about the process and the reactions from the audience, the performers and the TCH staff and volunteers. I have also included my own reactions and discoveries. I have discovered that positioning myself as an "insider" is not a hindrance, but gives me a great advantage. This advantage means I am free to let the stories entrusted to me have an effect on me. As I have continued to peel back the layers of my academic work, I am forever fascinated that the structures which I presumed were absolute are results of growing up in a predominantly white, male, able, average-sized patriarchal society. These layers have emerged on multiple levels and in

various aspects of my life, but none so clearly as my work in academia and more specifically my work as a female professor in a private, Christian university setting.

Positionality is crucial in this work. For example, if I barged into the offices of The Covering House and demanded that they tell me their stories that would be an abomination! There would be no reason they should trust me. However, I have been working with and volunteering with them since 2012 so I have earned the right to hear their stories. They have learned that I am trustworthy. They know that what they do matters a great deal to me and the goal of the work that I do is to enhance their work. I have earned the position of insider/participant/observer. If I had not taken the time to earn this place the work would be very superficial and I wouldn't have the opportunity to dig deeper and to have a new way to understand the issue of trafficking and those that help restore trafficking survivors.

## **CHAPTER SUMMARIES**

Here is a brief overview of the structure of this dissertation. This first chapter entitled: "Dis**cover**ing The Issue" is the introduction to the dissertation. I discuss the theories and unpack methods of auto/ethnography as well as give a deeper justification for the project. I provide more layers to the

research question extending it as a way to help the reader understand the fundamental goals of this project: is to lend awareness that creates movement or action. That is the primary goal of this entire project and dissertation. The question is not: "What can we do?" the question is: "How can we keep from doing something?" The second chapter is entitled: "Un**cover**ing the Path". This chapter gives an overview of the major theoretical and practical influences of the scholars' work that has informed this dissertation. There are so many who are doing this kind of work and creating spaces where these voices can resonate. I am journeying through these ideas being lead by a long line of scholars and artists who have preceded me. In Chapter 2 I will share how their work influences me. In Chapter 3 is a full script of *cover (a play about trafficking)*. This is the heart of my dissertation and shares the narratives of TCH. Chapter 4 is entitled: "Re**cover**ing the Stories". This gives an in depth account of the work of devising the play, from inception to completion through the work of auto/ethnography based upon Muncey's writing model. This will include my first meetings with TCH staff and volunteers, the process of interviewing, my writing process, and the casting and rehearsal process, the run of the show. I will also include my perceptions, experiences and work to translate the process of my research and stitching together the play in my auto/ethnography.

In conclusion, Chapter 5 is entitled: "Cover Me: The Now and the Next". Here I will discuss the after affects of my research, interviews and the performance of the play. I will give my conclusions to the project and what I envision will happen next. It will discuss how the ethnography and the script will have a life after the initial production. It will include personal self-reflection of what I have learned through this work and how the skills I have honed can take my passion for theatre and social justice into the classroom and through the rest of my career.



## CHAPTER TWO:

### Uncover~~ing~~ the Path

I love research. I can get set on a topic and dig and dig and dig and it feels as though no time has passed, but I will look at the clock on my MacBook and see I've lost 2 hours looking up some performer or significant moment in history. Since this is an exploration, I sometimes envision research as an expedition into new territory, an adventure to discover new places. As I look to uncover the path of this work I have realized two things: one, that there *is* a path to be uncovered and two, that someone else has been down a path, or one close to it, so I know that my journey won't be in vain. This chapter is about those that have gone down the path ahead of me or near the path I am trying to forge. Through all the research I have conducted as part of *cover*, a handful of consistent trends have emerged that shaped the lens of my adaptation, writing and directing. These are: the power of community to create social change, the power and process of releasing silenced voices and the courage and accountability present in the community surrounding a theatrical production.

Performing in the theatre or spending an evening as a spectator creates a sense of community that can ripple into wider social spheres. Theatre education prepares citizens

to function effectively and joyfully in cultural life.

(Dolan 1)

This quote by theatre scholar, Jill Dolan, reminds us, all over again, the power of this amazing art form. This quote was included in an Association of Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) document entitled, "Theatre Studies in Higher Education: Learning for a Lifetime". The quote and the title of this work is a great reminder of two things: we are all of us, always learning and theatre have the power to teach in ways that are diverse and magical.

One of the most important mechanisms in the world of theatre is the community it creates. This community is forged as soon as a cast list is distributed or a production team has their first meeting. Once this community is created it never goes away. I have met the most important and influential people in my life (except for my parents and family) because of theatre. Theatre has taught me so many important lessons about life and the layers present in the human condition. I know it has the power to change lives because it has changed mine. In light of this research and personal experience it stands to reason that I would choose to place this work in a theatrical context.

Auto/ethnography is the manner in which we gather the stories that we will embody and perform. It is often quite a delicate

process to discover this voice, to discover this language in which we navigate our world and our work. The essay "Shaping the World with Our Hands" by Laila Farah from the book *Voices Made Flesh* talks about her experiences in the process of looking for her voice. She shares,

"In theorizing my life-world, I found myself struggling to find a language that would speak to my experiences. I wonder how much of my tongue I have had to cut out to include everything that must be and simultaneously cannot be in this narrative" (Farah, 283).

Farah strikes at the heart of how difficult it is to discover our own voice. As a woman, an artist, a scholar and an activist it has been a challenge for me to find the best way to approach writing and talking about the work that is important to me. To find the method to help us tune our academic sensibilities to that of our passion is no small task. I have discovered there is strength in working in collaboration with others. In this spirit of community we find others that have the same convictions and artistic sensibilities that we do.

It is no surprise that art and revolution have always walked the same road because both are based upon the power of the individual and collective stories of the human condition. Identity is who we are and who we are becoming. Performance is calling upon that identity in a public setting to tell a story

through our bodies, minds and voices to an audience.

It stands to reason that I would use a theatrical framework as a mode of telling the story of The Covering House. First of all, as a theatre artist it makes sense for me to choose my creative tools to do this work. Theatre involves collaborative effort of human beings, which is how social change throughout history has been accomplished. This leads to experiencing the power of story through a group of people.

One way to look at this is through the work chronicled in the book *Story Bridge: From Alienation to Community Action*. It chronicles the depth of the community building work done by Community Performance International. This organization has lead countless workshops for the past 20 years in an effort to help build communities and strengthen their bonds through the process of individuals sharing their stories with one another. Over the past few years they have taken this process one step further with adding an extra level to enact social change.

Each chapter chronicles an important step of the process interlaced with case studies to prove their validity. The real-life examples show overwhelming positive evidence for their theory of social change through storytelling and performance. According to Community Performance International, their mission is:

To grow strong communities by collecting their most

powerful assets - their stories - and examining those stories through values training and community performance . . . We are committed to empowering individuals, cultivating communicative agency, building relationships across diverse citizenry, and producing high performance groups . . . The story bridge helps a community (organization, corporation) move from being a collection of alienated individuals to a cohesive force for committed action. Through this group process, people move from a focus on "I" to a focus on "we" . . . Attachment, relationship, and commitment grow between people who cross the bridge together to a new vision of their place. (CPI)

The nuts and bolts of their process are based upon their model: STORY - PERFORMANCE - RELATIONSHIP - CONVERSATION - COMMITTED ACTION.

I worked diligently to embody the principles in StoryBridge in my ethnographic work. While most interview sessions were one on one there were some sessions that included a group dialogue. This brings home the value of sharing story in a group setting. The group interview I conducted a session with three of the TCH staff members. In going over the transcript, it is obvious that things shared by one of them helped trigger ideas and responses from the others and vice versa. As I tell my students, "Bravery is contagious." This idea resonated as staff members who were

going to hold back would see their colleagues share and that would give them the strength they needed to share, too. Since theatre creates community it stands to reason that the process of creating theatre can accomplish this as well.

There are many theatre artists and writers who have forged a path for me to follow. One of them is Eve Ensler. In September of 2011 I adapted a piece from Eve Ensler's book, *I Am An Emotional Creature: The Secret Life of Girls Around the World*, entitled "I Have 35 Minutes Before He Comes Looking For Me". Two of my students performed it in our university's weekly chapel service/convocation. The poem was so poignant and gritty. My actors really took to the material. I split the character into two parts that we performed by two female students. One character was the "present-day" girl in the poem (after being trafficked) and the other character was the "before" version of the girl (before being trafficked). We see the "before" girl turn into the "after" girl through the performance. I didn't even know what adaptation was at that point. I just knew that it would be stronger with two performers and that the subject matter was deep and needed to be translated for an audience. This was during the time I was applying to graduate school. As I write this, I am amazed to discover I was preparing for this work that would eventually be my life's passion. I didn't have the proper name for it at the time, but it was already at work

inside of my creative consciousness.

In 2013, I had the chance to see a fully staged version of Ensler's book: entitled *Emotional Creature* playing at the Signature Theatre in New York City. It was amazing to see the poem I had adapted as part of the larger work, instead of standing on its own. It made what I had only thought of as a possibility in my head feel like it could become a tangible reality.

In some ways *Emotional Creature* reminded me of Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf*. Both of these plays focus on the stories and experiences of women through poetry, monologues and music. After seeing both of these works performed they had a huge affect on me. They helped create the map that would lead me down the path to discover the format for cover.

The next mile marker on this map came when my research led me to the documentary *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*. This is the work of Pulitzer Prize-winning journalists Sheryl WuDunn and her husband Nicholas D. Kristof, both columnists for *The New York Times*. The documentary is based upon the book they co-authored that delved into oppression of women worldwide. The documentary took their work a step further as they recruited four famous Hollywood actors and took them to four of the countries with violence

against women that the journalists discovered in their research. The hope was that the fame of the actors would give visibility and awareness to the issue. It worked! Having actors involved in give their time and energy to learning the narratives of the women and girls who are being oppressed brought an enhanced level of visibility to these important stories. Because of this, *Half the Sky* created a new level of awareness about violence against women and girls and was a huge contributor to me finding my way on this journey.

The next stop on this path is the work of Audrey Lorde and a section from her work, *Sister Outsider*:

Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference -- those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older -- know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And



this fact is only threatening to those women who still  
define the master's house as their only source of support.

(Lorde)

She uses poetry as a means of protest and to tap into the silenced narratives inside herself and others. She gives African-American women, and 'othered' people groups, the chance to forge new roads and discover new paths to justice and equality. It is clear that the old ways of doing things are only for a privileged few.

In line with Lorde's ideas on community, (as she asserts with this section of the above extended quote:

" . . . And how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish". (Lorde)

I strive for the ethnography work I do to be reflexive and community building as well. I want the participants to feel as though they have a stake in the process. I want them to know what they share really matters and that the audience that will eventually see and absorb their story, too.

I have also walked some miles with Barbara Meyerhoff's work. She has such an interesting position in her work as chronicled through the book *Number Our Days*. In this she does an auto/ethnography of a community center in Venice Beach, CA of elderly Jewish men and women. Most of them are forgotten or

ignored by their families of origin; therefore, the people at the community center have created their own family. Meyerhoff identifies as a Jewish woman. At one point, during a film version of her work, she reveals that she knows that in a certain way she is telling the story of her future. She, too, will one day be an elderly Jewish woman searching for hope and purpose. The dichotomy of her position as outsider and insider is always present. Some of the individuals with whom she interacts give her a tough time about not being married or a mother, revealing even more of Meyerhoff's personal narrative. This occurs while she is working to gather their narratives and is an excellent example of reflexive ethnography! While she is giving the members of the community center her time, attention and companionship, they are giving her their wisdom (according to the point of view of the elderly folks) about life and her future.

*Troubling Violence: A Performance Project* is a co-authored work created by Dr. M. Heather Carver and Dr. Elaine Lawless. This is based upon the ethnographic interviews conducted by Lawless at a shelter for women who have survived relationship violence. Lawless recorded countless hours of survivor stories for over two years resulting in her book, *Women Escaping Violence*. Then Carver and Lawless connected and, through their collaboration and the MU Theatre Department, the *Troubling*

Violence Performance Troupe was born. This troupe performed the narratives from Lawless' work as well as gathering their own. The troupe members have the option to share their personal stories. This book transformed my life and my work and opened a door that can never be closed. Like Narnia's wardrobe, they opened an entire world of what theatre and performances studies can accomplish. What is so present in *Troubling Violence: A Performance Project* is the deep effect the work that is being done is having on the scholars that are doing the work. Carver and Lawless do not let themselves off the hook. They keep no comfortable aesthetic distance. They let the stories of women seep into their work and home life. By that, I mean they do not segregate the stories they are absorbing or the one they are creating away from their identities as women, mothers, daughters, mentors, wives and scholars. Several women I know have often talked about their inability to compartmentalize their lives. What happens at home affects work and vice versa. For example, if my faculty work life is stressful, does that give me the right to ignore the student in front of me or miss teaching a class of students that want to learn or traveling to present a paper at a conference? I say no! While not exhaustive, all of those identities comprise me. It all counts as me. Each aspect of who I am and who I am becoming affects all the other aspects. If stories have the power that we (as theatre folk)

proclaim that they do, then wouldn't it stand to reason that our story has that same power? Over and over Carver and Lawless continue to expose the truth about violence against women, which translates to violence against the community in general. Each of us is part of this community. We must also realize that what we "do" not just what we "say" really matters, has lasting consequences and makes ripples in the dynamic of life that never cease. Were it not for Lawless and Carver there is no way I could attempt to do the work I'm doing. They, and others like them, are paving the path for the scholar to look and sound and be different than their male counterparts. They are making the stories of the voiceless known and they are making them matter. In that amazing process they are giving us permission for our stories to matter as well.

Carver/Lawless' love for and humor towards one another is a palpable thing. I had the chance last semester to hear them read part of their book and it was so beautiful to watch. You could feel their history: time spent over coffee and phone calls, in rehearsals and work done at a resort in Lake of the Ozarks. Their work, voices and words took on a life of its own and their collaboration came alive in that moment. In this book they write as separate identities that are working together. It is obvious to the reader that they are not claiming to be the same person. They have different personalities, different histories and

different approaches to their work. However, they have a common goal: to tell stories that matter and will change the world. They give voices to those who are marginalized and othered. Their work is incredibly instructive to me. As I approach the work of auto/ethnography it gives me freedom to pursue the stories that matter without editing who I am or my own story out of the process. The illusion of objectivity is a trap. We cannot, and I would assert, we should not, leave ourselves out of the work we do. This is the very reason why it is meaningful to us and to the audience. They don't want to come and see a performance or read an auto/ethnography that is distant and stale. They want to have authentic people share authentic stories with them. This point is made clearer and clearer by Carver and Lawless as they let us, the audience, into their stories and the process of their scholarly work. While their book is about performing narratives of those that have survived violence in the home, but it is so much more than that! It is about women in the academy and women in the world and the glorious, messy, wonderful, difficult mixture these ideas and positions create. While most people and colleagues won't understand what I do, through their connection, they give me hope that I will meet fellow sojourners who understand, challenge and support me as I continue to make my way through the world as an artist/scholar. Revealing our lives to the

audience as we tell and perform the stories of other people also tells a story. We are doing the work of revealing our hearts as we seek to reveal the hearts of the survivors.

At the intersection of Carver, Lawless, Behar is the work of qualitative researcher Bréne Brown. Brown's primary work centers around women and shame but through her process of unearthing information surrounding these topics, a significant amount of other ideas have surfaced as well. One of my dear friends at TCH introduced me to Brown's work by sharing this quote with me:

"Qualitative researchers are story catchers and stories are the data of the soul" (Brown, Twitter post). WOW! This is the place where all paths in this work lead: understanding and cultivating the power of story. I hope to catch the stories that are entrusted to me and translate them in a way that makes sense to others and gives these rich and precious narratives the visibility they need and deserve. Storycatcher may just be printed on my new business cards. I cannot think of a more important title to seek to fulfill.

Brown has also done extensive work with the idea of vulnerability. We live in a vulnerable world. And one of the ways we deal with it is we numb vulnerability" (Brown, TED Talk Dec 2010). Her TED talk continues with this quote,

They [the participants she designated as people who practice a sense of feeling worthy] fully embraced vulnerability. They

believed that what made them vulnerable made them beautiful. They didn't talk about vulnerability being comfortable, nor did they really talk about it being excruciating -- as I had heard it earlier in the shame interviewing. They just talked about it being necessary (Brown TED Talk Dec. 2010).

This idea of vulnerability connects back to Behar because of her book entitled, *The Vulnerable Observer*. Behar shares, "when you write vulnerably, others respond vulnerably" (Behar 16). If I seek to change the world by changing the perceptions of others through the translation of stories, I MUST let those same stories change me.

These examples have all informed the turns I have taken to form my path to and through this work. They all embody the work they do. Lawless/Carver are somewhat different because the "Troubling Violence Performance Troupe", whose work is the basis for their book, gathers stories with the expectation that they will be performed. While Meyerhoff and Behar's work could easily be adapted for performance, this is not their original intent.

Meyerhoff is unique because her writing has the feeling of 'the now and the not yet'. By this I mean she is a Jewish woman who will one day be old enough to attend the events as a participant and member of the community center that she studied. Lawless/Carver and Behar keep little to no distance from their work where Meyerhoff maintains a clearer boundary from her

participants.

Brown is so transparent about the shock with which she discovered the idea of vulnerability, that her openness has spoken to me a on a very deep level. As a female in the academy, I have worked very, very hard not to be vulnerable. Weakness is not tolerated, but we all know that somewhere, inside we are all weak. Acknowledging these broken places not only tell the truth of our stories but make us so much more sensitive to the broken places in others.

I identify most with the work of Lawless/Carver. How they gathered their stories has been incredibly instructive for me as I have (and am) finding my auto/ethnography process. It is through their seminars that I have found my voice as a writer which, in turn, has helped me let loose the voices of my participants and my students. One of the biggest lessons their work has taught me is the idea of accountability. If we detach and stand on the sidelines, making our participant come to us instead of going to them or meeting them half way we perpetuate the idea that the auto/ethnographer sits in a place of superiority. We are held to very high ethical standard. What we do matters. This detachment also sends the message that we are not responsible for what we discover when someone shares with us. It is "their" problem, not ours. It is easy to hide behind the word "objectivity" in our academic towers of complacency. If



we take this comfortable distance away we are accountable for what we discover. If we are accountable, then we must take action to become part of the solution and not sit in silence waiting for someone else to make a difference. When we position ourselves inside our auto/ethnographic work we stand shoulder to shoulder with the voices that have been silenced and draw a line in the proverbial sand. We have the agency to help stop the oppression. When we enact our identity, performance skills and ethnography/autoethnography skills we have the chance to honestly and truly change the world: one narrative, one performance, one story at a time.

This quote bears repeating: "Ethnography should break your heart. The rest just isn't worth doing." Behar keeps me grounded! She reminds us that we don't have to be 'shiny, happy people' all the time. Pain and suffering are very real aspects of what it means to be a part of the human family. Often we hide from our pain and the pain of others. It is always messy and uncertain and can be ugly to face. The pain of others usually reminds us of what we have buried. However, we must face this fact if we are to tell real stories. If we walk around detached and unaffected by the plight of those around us, we can never fully grasp the value of their story. Doing this sweeps our own humanity under the rug. Behar is not in the business of doing this, which has challenged me to hold to the same standard.

The way the staff members and volunteers approach their work is very similar the approach of the auto/ethnographer.

" . . . Not only is the observer vulnerable, but so too, yet more profoundly, are those whom we observe" (Behar 24).

We are responsible and we must bridge the gap between our stories and those that participate in our scholarship and creative endeavors. As we continue our journey, we turn our attention to the actual script. The next chapter includes the full script of the play; *cover (a play about trafficking)*.

### CHAPTER THREE

**cover** (a play about trafficking)

In this chapter I will share with you the script for the play. This is what was performed with the original cast at the world premiere on Thursday, September 4, 2014 in the Recital Hall on the campus of Missouri Baptist University. While the black words on white paper do not do it justice, it will give a huge glimpse into the life and narratives of those that have survived trafficking and those who are helping that process as well as working to end this epidemic.

**cover (a play about trafficking)**  
**by Joy Powell**  
**Revision #22: 12.28.14**

**Cast List**

GIRL 1	Rachel Yarbrough
GIRL 2	Maria Pena
GIRL 3	Myasia Kisart
GIRL 4	Tazera Edwards
GIRL 5	Sariah Henning
DIRECTOR	Leigha Stockton
WOMAN 1	Brittani O'Connell
WOMAN 2/Juvenile Court Official	Tia Spencer
STAFF 1/Case Manager/ Nurse Practitioner	Holland Doherty
STAFF 2	Jamie G'sell
STAFF 3/Text Message Sender/Bailiff	Andrea Mossman
VOLUNTEER	Melissa Harlow
MUSICIAN 1	Jessica Balassi
MUSICIAN 2	Emily Kay Rice
MUSICIAN 3	Lauren Schwaar

**Cast**

STAFF 1 - 20-30 something, woman who is fiercely committed to her work but understand and feel the ups and downs of social work and non-profits.

STAFF 2 - 20-30 something, woman who is fiercely committed to her work but understand and feel the ups and downs of social work and non-profits.

STAFF 3 - 20-30 something, woman who is fiercely committed to her work but understand and feel the ups and downs of social work and non-profits.

VOLUNTEER - 20-30 something, expectant mother and volunteer with The Covering House.

THE LAW - Represents the Juvenile Court System of St. Louis.

GIRL 1 - 8th grader, full of sass. She is just glad to be out of her house.

GIRL 2- High school senior. Very bubbly and loves the arts. A performer. Not a ham or overbearing, but very exuberant.

GIRL 3- 7th grader, a little brash, but has a great heart. Very curious and puts up a tough front.

GIRL 4- 12 year old runaway. Very tough and suspicious of authority.

GIRL 5- High School junior, sarcastic and laid back. Matter-of-fact and kind. Teenage version of WOMAN 1

DIRECTOR - The Founder/ Executive DIRECTOR of The Covering House. Female. Very committed to the cause and a genuinely warm and caring person. A very magnetic personality.

WOMAN 1 - Adult trafficking survivor, gets to the point. Spunky but shy. Very 'tells it like it is'

WOMAN 2 - Upper class female. Wants to be helpful but is more about the "appearance" of being a do-gooder than actually doing any good. Pretentious and snobby.

**Curtain Speech (delivered by Playwright/DIRECTOR/Producer)**

Thank you for being here. It has taken so much time to get here and yet it seems that the time has flown by, without warning. I think you know this is a big deal. It's a big deal for my friends at The Covering House and a big deal for MBU Theatre. You are experiencing something that no one has ever seen before. You are a part of something much bigger than you and the people sitting in your row. You are about to experience story in a way that we've never presented it on our campus. This project and labor of love started December 19, 2012. I met the incomparable Director of The Covering House and my life would be forever changed. If she had not said yes, then we wouldn't be here. Yes, to what? Yes to this play and yes to telling the story of The Covering House in a theatrical setting. The trust she and the staff and volunteers have placed in me is precious and I hope that as you watch you understand that trust extends to you. This play sews together, like a quilt, stories, songs, interviews, poems, scenes and monologues that are glimpses into the work and humanity of The Covering House. I conducted hours of interviews with the staff and volunteers of The Covering House as well as individuals with whom they partner. The play is based on that work as well as my own experience as a volunteer and their chaplain as well as my extensive research on the topic.

Now, you will experience some things that will be shocking to you. You might be overwhelmed by the depravity of some of the stories. You might be amazed at the resilience of the soul as you see the determination and strength of the survivors and the people in the trenches with them. It may trigger deep feelings of all kinds for you. There are people here with whom you can talk. People who will help you process your reactions. After the show we will have a brief post-show discussion with the cast, production team and members of The Covering House staff. We would love to know your thoughts, reactions and questions. It's so easy for people to ignore this plague. It's so easy for people to say, "That's not happening here." And that's really the focus of this work, is to say "Yes, it is." And we will not allow the girls to be ignored.

You will now be brought into the fray of those that know about this issue. The question is not: How can I help? The question is: How can I keep from helping?

## **ACT I**

*All cast members enter from all areas and take their chairs. The cast turns their attention to the screen and Video #1 plays.*

### **Video #1: Introduction**

*Blackout*

*GIRL 1, GIRL 2, GIRL 3, GIRL 4, GIRL 5 stand and cross downstage center.*

### **Scene 1: Faces of Trafficking - Part I**

#### **GIRL 1:**

Yeah, so he told me that he loved me. He started buying me expensive gifts, he even bought me these eye lashes. He was a lot older than me. Then he started wanting me to sleep with other men in exchange for the gifts.

#### **GIRL 2:**

I wanted to be a singer, a real singer so bad. He said that he could help make that happen for me. He started shooting videos of me singing. He asked if we could be a couple. One day when we were filming a song he kept the camera going and got footage of me kissing him. Then he asked me to take my shirt off. Then he started selling pictures and videos of me on the internet.

#### **GIRL 3:**

My boyfriend was so sweet. We were together for about 3 months and then he started inviting his friends over for our dates. I didn't think it was a big deal, but then he wanted me to make out with him in front of them. After awhile he started selling them sex favors with me so that he could pay off his debts.

#### **GIRL 4:**

I'm 12. I'm a runaway. Just found out I have 2 STDs. I can't stop running away. I know where to hide. The streets feel safer than home. I can go hide and they will never find me. But my pimp always does.

**GIRL 5:**

I couldn't take it at home anymore. Dad was sick and mom was always taking care of him so she didn't notice that I left. I needed to make some money so I started stripping. That's when the pimp found me and told me that I could make a lot more money with him.

*Staff #2 and #3 set table for conference scene. DIRECTOR and WOMAN 1 pull chairs behind table. Rest of cast angles chairs upstage to become audience.*



## **Domestic Sex Trafficking Panel**

### **DIRECTOR:**

Thank you so much for your presence here tonight and your interest in the work that is being done in St. Louis to stop domestic sex trafficking and restore the survivors of this atrocity.

I'm the DIRECTOR of The Covering House. And I'd like to share how The Covering House started.

Five years ago I was watching TV and a news program was doing a segment on trafficking of children. About half way through they started talking about trafficking children in the United States. I had no idea that this was an issue in the United States. But it was something that pierced my heart, I have 2 daughters, and I thought if this is going on I want to know more about it and find out what I can do to help.

I thought I'm going to take some time and figure this out. I took a year and did nothing but go to conferences and talk to people around the country and in the St. Louis metro area about the issue of sex trafficking children. What I learned is that the issue is significant and that the resources were few when it comes to helping girls, or any children for that matter. Trafficking is a huge issue, so where do you begin? I just realized as I read and talked to people that there were very few beds for kids once they got rescued, from this situation and that the FBI estimates that there's approximately 300,000 children at risk of being trafficked in our country.

These are our own kids, these aren't foreign nationals, kids that are brought from overseas, these are our own domestic children. And so I thought the first thing I want to do is to figure out a way to provide a home and services once these children are rescued.

St. Louis is in the Top 20 cities for sex trafficking in the United States.

*DIRECTOR cues tech person to begin power point*

To be clear sex trafficking is defined as the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion.

Here are some statistics that will help you get a clear picture of the depth of this issue:

Minors are sold an average of 10-15 times a day, 7 days a week, totaling between 9,360 and 14,040 sex acts a year.

Pimps commonly sell minors for \$30-\$80 an hour on America's streets.

13 is the average age of entry into porn and prostitution.

The sale of child pornography has become a \$3 billion dollar a year industry. These statistics are very difficult to hear but we cannot turn our attention away from this epidemic.

Those of us with agency need to use our influence to help those who cannot help themselves. Thank You.

*Light applause from the audience, cast resets their chairs*

**WOMAN 1:**

I am a survivor. I just barely managed to escape my situation. It's been about 12 years and I am making it, one day at a time . . . I hope I can put a face to this issue. While the numbers that have been shared are true, trafficking survivors are more than numbers: they are people, just like me.

As a survivor, my biggest frustration is that this has been going on *forever*. The statistics on the average age of entry being 12-14 years old go back 20 years. Pimping and exploitation, where pimps are picking girls up, grooming them, shipping somewhere else, has been going on longer than my lifetime. What's frustrating is that *now* people are shocked.

This movement really portrays this idea of a 'perfect victim'. The idea of kids being kidnapped and locked in a basement happens, but that's not the norm of the

industry.

The norm is the girls walking on the street that have been turning tricks since they were 15 years old, probably fights with cops, probably has a record. Was with a pimp and then maybe ran away and then now is with another pimp. So we don't see them as victims, we see them as renegades now. Some people think because they're on their own they can't be a victim because they are choosing to stay in that lifestyle. They're choosing to be prostitutes. That's just not the case.

There are a lot of good social workers and there are some bad social workers.

This is a hot topic. It's a good PR piece, and when it really comes down to putting in the footwork and doing the dirty work with the clients, some people don't have a lot of compassion for the victims they're working with.

Did you know that a pimp can pimp out a girl, a minor, for four or five years and he gets 5 or 6 years in jail, and someone who sells drugs can get 25 to life? It's annoying. They're being prosecuted at such a small fraction of actual incidents that it's like, why bother? Let's just help keep girls out of it in the first place, or serve girls that have been through it. Thank You

(scattered applause from the group)

**DIRECTOR:**

I'm sorry to bother you but could I talk with you for a minute

**WOMAN 1:**

Sure. (guarded)

**DIRECTOR:**

Thank you for your bravery in sharing what you did. I would love to chat with you about working together. I really appreciate your being here. Can we have coffee sometime?

**WOMAN 1:**

Yeah, sure.

*(WOMAN 1 nods and walks away to exit)*

**DIRECTOR:**

Here's my card. Could I have yours? I'd like to follow-up with you. I have a ton of questions.

**WOMAN 1:**

Sure, nice to meet you, too.

*WOMAN 1 and DIRECTOR exchange cards. WOMAN 2 butts in. WOMAN 1 begins gathering her belongings and exits the scene.*

**WOMAN 2:**

*(approaches the DIRECTOR)*

Hi, thank you so much for what you're doing. It must be hard but so rewarding. I was wondering how I could get involved. Do you have an office where I could VOLUNTEER?

**DIRECTOR:**

Thank you! Yes, we have an office and we have a residential facility. The office is in Midtown and the residential facility about an hour away and it sits on 47 acres. We could set up a time to meet with you at our main office in the city and see where your talents would best be utilized.

**WOMAN 2:**

Oh

**DIRECTOR:**

Oh?

**WOMAN 2:**

Well, I thought your facilities would be closer to here, in West County. My husband doesn't feel comfortable with me going to the city by myself or that far away.

**DIRECTOR:**

Oh

**WOMAN 2:**

Also, what kind of girls do you help?

**DIRECTOR:**

(blank stare)  
What do you mean what kind of girls?

**WOMAN 2:**  
You know, what kind? Are they mostly black?

**DIRECTOR:**  
Actually, in a room of 100 girls, of all ethnicities, you wouldn't be able to pick out the ones who have been trafficked from the ones who haven't.

**WOMAN 2:**  
Oh, I see.

**DIRECTOR:**  
We help ANY girl under the age of 18. *(silent stare)*

*WOMAN 2 walks away, feeling defeated the  
DIRECTOR begins packing up her brochures and  
belongings. WOMAN 1 and WOMAN 2 reset their  
chairs*

*DIRECTOR speaks to the audience*

Wow. Just wow.  
Why do I do this? (really asking)  
Why do I do this? (gearing up to give an answer)

#### **SONG - PROVIDER**

*The other day I was sitting at home and I was doing my bible study and I just had to shut the book because, um I was feeling, um, overwhelmed, I was feeling anxious, I just and it was one of those days, one of the many, many days that we had nothing but snow and I'm looking out the window and, and I'm just sitting there and I remember praying, ok God, I sure hope I heard you right 5 years ago because now we have a home, we're going to be seeing girls we're gonna have to care for and now there's a staff of 20 that's depending on this for their livelihood and I was really, really feeling, feeling the weight from it. And I just sat there and I remember saying if you could just speak to me that would be so cool and I even said it doesn't have to be audibly because I might pee my pants but honestly God, if you could just, you know, uh, speak to me about this and just confirm in me, and felt*

*Him say, not audibly, the scripture that came to mind was: I know the number of the hairs on your head. Out of Matthew, that are counted, I know the number of hairs on your head. And then Him saying to me I'm Jehovah Jirah. I'm the provider. And that felt good, I've got to say that feels great, and I'm not kidding you, this is so cool of God. Because about 10 minutes later I get a text from, um one of the gals, who works with us. I get this text:*

*"Are not 2 sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to ground apart from your father that even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not . . . therefore you are more valued than many sparrows.*

*And then she says*

**STAFF 3 (spoken)**

*Praying for you as you're writing this grant. I felt that God wanted me to tell you that He is your Provider and these girls' Provider. Work hard and diligently but find peace in that truth.*

*sung*

*"Are not 2 sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to ground apart from your father that even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not . . . therefore you are more valued than many sparrows.*

*song ends*

Another reason I do this work is the amazing staff of The Covering House. They are so passionate and they work hard and they're great people. And this is just not right, the injustice of it all. These are children!

There have been times I've felt so tired and I think to myself, as tired as I am, I'm not nearly as tired as that 13 year old who's servicing 20 men a night.

I am nowhere near that tired.

*Staff #1, #2 and #3 cross downstage and deliver next scene from in front of the stage.*

## **What the Hell**

### **STAFF 3:**

300,000 domestic kids sold here  
Or so we think  
Or so we hope we know  
No one can really tell  
The true width, depth of this wicked maelstrom

### **STAFF 2:**

Parents selling what they got,  
Their babies  
To feed the habits that adulthood  
Has landed  
on top of them

### **STAFF 1:**

What the hell  
has happened  
I mean, seriously  
What the hell has happened??

### **STAFF 3:**

Rights of babies?  
Humanity's next steppers

### **STAFF 2:**

100 beds open  
in the great wide world of this Grand States United  
for the children that can't run

### **STAFF 1:**

That can't disappear  
on their terms  
fast enough

The young ones who are aching  
and arching toward

Nothing

Nothing is better than this

## **Weekly Group**

*GIRL 1 and GIRL 2 pull their chairs up to make a semi circle in the middle. The rest of the girls bring their chairs to the circle right before their line.*

**GIRL 1:**

Hi.

**GIRL 2:**

Hi.

**STAFF 3:**

*running late*

Hi ladies

*(said with as much smile as she can muster)*

*Leader steps out, all freeze*

**STAFF 3:**

Don't feel it today Just don't feel it. And they should have my very best, but I'm not sure it's in me today. I don't really want to think about it. I don't really like want to feel passionate about it. The only thing that's keeping me here right now is that it's the right thing to do, like I don't quit things, I would not leave this place in the lurch, having to fill another position. There's just nothing really right now.

Like I know, I know,

I know the right things

And I deep down probably feel them somewhere

They are just really deep right now

I just don't really feel like searching for them

*STAFF 3 steps back in, and takes a breath, rest unfreeze*

As you know weekly group is a gathering where we come together and you share what's happening with you. We learn about events that trigger emotions and healthy ways to deal with those triggers. Anyone want to start us off?

**GIRL 1:**

You got any food today? Pizza, like last time? That was good. Better than at home. My mom watches me like a hawk.



I only get vegetables there. I don't like vegetables

**STAFF 3:**

Maybe later, ok?

*GIRL 1 nods "ok", a little disgruntled*

*GIRL 2 who has been drawing in her notebook looks up. Bright-eyed and wanting to please the Leader, she speaks*

**GIRL 2:**

I have something to share today!

**STAFF 3:**

Great! Go ahead.

*GIRL 1 steps out, all freeze*

**GIRL 1:**

What. Really?

I'm so sick of this.

I'm so sick of not being able to eat what I wanna

When I wanna

I know I'm not all that

I know

I *know*

But whatever

I was good enough for him, right?

Whatever

This white lady seems ok, but

I dunno I wanna, I dunno I wanna, I dunno

Wish I did

*GIRL 1 steps back into the scene, rest unfreeze*

**GIRL 2:**

I get to sing a solo at my school choir concert.

*GIRL 3 smiles, GIRL 1 lifts her head and nods a little. Everyone is generally nice about it without showing too much enthusiasm. They clap quietly.*

**STAFF 3:**

Great. Maybe we can all go to your concert.

(looks around for support from the others in the group)

What else is going on this week?

**GIRL 3:**

I got an A on my math test. I've been studying all summer to catch up and I finally did it!

**STAFF 3:**

That is great news! See, your hard work paid off. Good for you! Who else? And it doesn't have to be happy things. Whatever you want to share is fine. This is a safe place.

*Staff #3 leads the clap. GIRL 4 shakes her head "no".*

**GIRL 5:**

Well, I'm not sure what to say. I have been sober for 2 months and going to AA meetings. It has been really tough but I'm learning to cope.

**STAFF 3:**

Thank you for telling us that. That is a huge accomplishment. I'm really glad you're here.

**GIRL 5:**

Thanks

**BLACKOUT**

*Staff #1, #2 and #3 reset chairs; GIRL 1  
goes right into the next piece*

**W4M**

*(video during this poem)  
all cross downstage and all take on persona  
of their line except for VOLUNTEER AND STAFF  
1*

**GIRL 1:**

Do you really know what's on craig's list?

**GIRL 5:**

Backpage.com is a landscape full of things for sale

**GIRL 4:**

You can buy a couch, you can buy a bike, you can buy a  
kid

**WOMAN 2:**

"Visiting - Fresh to the Scene"

**WOMAN 1:**

"Lyndsey loves older men"

**DIRECTOR:**

"Just turned 18 two months ago"

**STAFF 2:**

"A newby in a new year, exotic appeal with great assets"

**GIRL 5:**

"Ask about my 100 roses special tonight only.  
You won't be disappointed"

**STAFF 3:**

"Up late? Can't sleep??? Let's trade bedtime stories"

**STAFF 2:**

"New to town - America's sweetheart in South County"

**GIRL 2:**

"Your dreamgirl - european beauty in Belleville"

**GIRL 3:**

"Willing & Waiting 4 U in Wentzville"

**VOLUNTEER:**

Tatt-ing Daddy's girl

Branding Daddy's Lil . . .

**STAFF 1:**

Bodies are commodities

The world one big appetite

That needs to be fed

**Coffee and Talking Part I -  
Introductions**

*DIRECTOR is already at a table drinking coffee and writing in a notebook. WOMAN 1 in line for coffee, enters the seating area and scans the place, sees the DIRECTOR and makes her way to the table. She tentatively sits down.*

**DIRECTOR:**

Hi! Thanks for meeting with me. How are you?

**WOMAN 1:**

*she sits*

I'm ok. (pause) How are you?

**DIRECTOR:**

I'm well. Glad to have the time to talk.

**WOMAN 1:**

Really? It seems a little odd: meeting with a total stranger.

**DIRECTOR:**

You aren't a stranger. No stranger than me! (*she laughs at her own joke*) I'm sure lots of people contact you, but I was so impressed by what you said at that event and I was compelled to seek you out.

**WOMAN 1:**

Impressed? (gives a little chuckle) No pressure, huh?

**DIRECTOR:**

Let's just get to know one another. Two people who care about the same issues hanging out. No pressure.

**WOMAN 1:**

Okay, I can handle that. So tell me about The Covering House.

**DIRECTOR:**

Well, we are in the planning stages right now. The goal is to be a locally based nonprofit that helps restore

girls who have been trafficked and exploited. Even though St. Louis is in the Top 20 cities for domestic trafficking there is very little being done for the girls once they are rescued. Several of them are put in juvenile detention, sometimes the maximum-security level 4+ just to ensure that they won't run away. But that placement is not getting them the help they need.

You and your story have been on my mind since the panel last week. I really think that your experience and expertise are just what we need to make sure we do this and do it right. Now, I've talked a lot, tell me more about you.

**WOMAN 1:**

Well, I've been free from the life for about 12 years. After rehab I went back to school, finished my undergrad and decided I wanted to help girls like me so I came to St. Louis to get my Masters in Social Work from Wash U.

**DIRECTOR:**

Impressive! I'm sure you get that a lot!

**WOMAN 1:**

Oh, no. *shakes head*

**DIRECTOR:**

I do hope that someday you'll share your story with me.

**WOMAN 1:**

Um, okay. (switching gears) So you're offering me a job?

**DIRECTOR:**

Well, more of like an internship. I would like to find a way for you to come on board and help us with our approach to therapy for the girls. Business as usual won't cut it.

**WOMAN 1:**

Before we go any further you have to know something about me. I don't like Christians.

**DIRECTOR:**

Okay.

**WOMAN 1:**

Wait, aren't you a Christian or something?

**DIRECTOR:**

Or something (laughs at her own joke) I'm kidding. To be clear our organization is not faith based. We are faith influenced and I am personally a Christian, but I understand where you're coming from. I mean there are lots of Christians that I don't like. So you still wanna work with us? (completely fine with this admission)

*WOMAN 1 agrees*

**WOMAN 1:**

Yeah, that'd be great.

**BLACKOUT**

## **THE LAW**

I worked in social work, before I came to the courts. I remember in the 1990s the whole crack epidemic. I was working in what was called Walnut Park, which is close to Northwest High School now. I worked with a social work agency that had the mantra: "do all that you can for people, and then when you think you've done enough: do more". We had to do case management, 24/7, I mean like we were we were on call. I remember being in grad school at the time and heading to class at 6 in the evening, getting done at 9 o'clock at night and then going back to the projects to look for girls that were missing.

In the last 2 or 3 years we've started to see a lot of kids who are in foster care who are runaways. With this trend I keep thinking, what's going on? Not only what happened to make them run but also what are they doing when they're on the street, where are they going? And the girls that run are gone for extended periods of time. I keep asking the question: What about these young girls?

Here is a real example: a classic case . . .

About 2 or 3 years ago we encountered a young girl who was a chronic run away. She would tell you, "I'm not gonna stay when you take me back to foster care". She'd been caught at a hotel in Kinloch/Wellston area with older men, was brought back to foster care, then she ran to Illinois, caught her in Illinois, she was brought back to Missouri, she ran back to Illinois, STDs, substance abuse: 12 years old.

In her case we were working with some police officers who were assigned to manage this population. It worked well because they were passionate about helping. They were on call all hours of the day and night. It got so bad the officers would tell us, "You know what, we can't keep her off the street but all we need is for her to check in with us everyday and let one of us know she's okay. And we, the juvenile court officers were saying, "Let's partner with you, maybe we can help you" And we did! We got the girl and then the feds involved. Because she kept running we couldn't keep her in a placement here, so the feds sent her to Children of the Night in LA. Children of



the Night is a 100 bed residential facility for survivors of sex trafficking. Then we thought, "Holy Cow, if she runs now she'll be on the streets of LA!" And she ran.

I remember us having a number of different conferences calls with the U.S. Attorney's office. One time they called us and said they found her, and of course she was with an older man. But we got her back here in Missouri and immediately our office and our police department were in collaboration with them and the Feds. We had to think a little differently about how we would handle her care. This time when bringing her in, we thought: "Where does she go? We were concerned about putting her in Level 4+ residential facility. This is for juveniles who are a flight risk. But 4+ lacks some of the services that the girls need to deal with their trauma. It keeps them off the streets and keeps them safe. However, there is no kind of secure juvenile court placement for trafficking survivors. We see a lot of gaps. We see a lot of people trying, but we see a lot of gaps.

**FLASH**

**MUSICIAN 1:**

Flash

Flash

The cursor on the screen flashes.

On

Off

On

Off

On

Off

The cursor is a constant  
In a section of the world  
that is  
always careening  
always lurching  
forward

To the next  
the next, what?

the next Girl  
the next Moment  
the next Click

Grunt of climax  
Handful of hair  
Black bars over bodies and eyes  
Wrists burned with scars of tugging  
Legal age claims and deft angles meant to teasingly  
entice

*Starting here each girl stands on her section*

**GIRL 4:**

Highway 44 and Hampton  
Downtown  
Fenton

**GIRL 1:**

Come find me  
North City  
South City

**GIRL 3:**

"No really, I want it"  
That's what the John hears in his head  
Chesterfield

**STAFF 2:**

No exemptions  
Not enough risk to the consumer  
And another draining  
A sucking  
A need for flexing the arm of entitlement  
And the groin of empire is satisfied

**Plastic Chair**

*crosses onto floor just down of the stage*

**STAFF 1:**

Once again I am on my way to juvenile detention. There is a new girl in detention that might be a good fit for The Covering House. So I am here to meet her. I slowly pass my bags through the x-ray machine. The deputy juvenile officer is paged over the intercom and I'm then escorted through the waiting room. I wait for the to signal telling me I can walk through.

I'm not sure who is on the other side, but I anxiously wait.

Once I'm ushered through the door, I see her sitting, waiting for me in a box-like, cinder block room on a flimsy, plastic, red chair. She's hunched over the table. We're both apprehensive and we recognize it in one another.

The introductions are made and the door closes behind me. We're two strangers, yet the expectation is that she'll share intimate details with me of her life as a run away. She looks up at me and I instantly like her. She's tough but with a baby face. And, her hair sticks up in all directions held out of her face with a small headband. We attempt small talk, but quickly realize we both prefer to just be straight with one another.

Within minutes, we are laughing. And then she discloses something about her past. About her trauma. Then we laugh again. The cycle goes on and on, she discloses, then jokes, and then back again.

I am suddenly aware that the young woman sitting across the table from me was caught between being a completely innocent kid one moment and that innocence being completely stolen the next. I listen to stories that are hard to hear, but recognize the importance of her getting to tell them. I watch as, bit by bit, she is getting her voice back, and although it is hard to hear it is beautiful to watch. Our time is up, but as I wait to hear the click of the door, I leave knowing I will get to see

her again; and knowing that I am going to grow as much she will.

**Rescue Shmescue**

*crosses to center and sits on table*

**STAFF 2:**

Whenever I tell people about the work we do, there's a lot of concerned looks on their faces and "Oh, good for you's. And "Oh, that must be such hard work". Then they always follow up with "It must be so rewarding too". And they're right, but I think a lot of times people look at trafficking with a rescue mentality, and that's it. We rescue, we save, we do this, we do that. The focus is often times on the rescuer instead of... and I don't like the word 'rescue' because it sounds like such a final thing. It's something *\*we\** do for them. And this "us and them" mentality, separates from the girls. And that's a misconception: the victims of human trafficking are not *separate* from us. They're people *just* like us. The rescue mentality is so condescending.

Because they have issues and we don't? Ha! (laugh)... . It's almost like re-victimizing the survivors because it's still making this distinction that they are damaged and we are whole. So that one bugs me a lot, cause we're all damaged.

The idea of kids being rescued or women being rescued has become so glorified. And it makes me angry because it kind of puts us as a savior. I feel like the survivors are doing everything they can, they're kicking and screaming they're doing whatever to make it through while they are waiting for us to show up, not because we've come to rescue them, but we've just *finally* decided to show up.

Their recovery doesn't have much to do with us. Legally we have to be there because you have to have an adult, you need guidance and stuff but really, they're the ones that do the work, not us. If they're with us for a year we are just giving them the tools to be able to leave and continue that process without us.

How many people along your lifespan have given you tools that you've pulled out later? It's not one person or event that shaped everything, it's many people and experiences that have given you the tools that you need

for your life. We hope that this experience with the Covering House is just one part of their story and they continue to meet helpers or anyone who's gonna hand them a tool for the future. And that, again, that doesn't make survivors of trafficking that much different from all of us, because we're all healing so whomever we're meeting is handing us a tool in that journey.

**Coffee & Talking Part II**  
**Getting Into the Life**

*DIRECTOR and WOMAN 1 are talking and drinking coffee.*

**DIRECTOR:**

So you ready to tell me your story?

**WOMAN 1:**

I grew up in a working class family. Just me and my brother and my mom and my dad and two dogs, well cats and dogs. I think that before I even got into the trade I was already on a path. 'I could never measure up', was kind of my mind frame, even from a young age. By the time I hit junior high, I had already had an eating disorder. I started drinking when I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

Some of it's being an adolescent, some of it's not really having a structure or coping skills... That's how, junior high was. It was chaotic. I don't know if I drank to cope, or if I was just an alcoholic and that's what we do. By the time I was..... 15 years old I had been assaulted by an older man. He was in his 30s. Then there was another incident where it was teenage boys, oh the good ole days... I don't think *they* were out to do anything bad, I just wasn't equipped to handle the situation, and I froze. It was traumatic for me, no matter what the intent was.

On the outside our family looked, pretty fine, but on the inside . . . there was physical and emotional and verbal abuse.

By the time I barely graduated high school I was probably a full blown alcoholic. My dad was diagnosed with cancer. So, that sent me into a tailspin and I fought with my mom constantly.

Within a couple months of living on my own, I got in fights with my roommate, I got kicked out of my apartment, I got fired from both my jobs and I got kicked out of school. I had already been in the psych ward once before because I attempted suicide 3 or 4 times through high school. So, psychologically you know, I was pretty

vulnerable.

I had no place to live so I slept in my car. I had a gym membership, left over from my old apartment, so I would stay up all night at Denny's and then go to the gym. Take a shower, and every once in a while I would sneak back into my parents' house while they were at work so I could take a shower and get dressed.

**DIRECTOR:**

So they knew where you were?

**WOMAN 1:**

I was in the same city, but they didn't know where I was. I wasn't speaking to them.

**DIRECTOR:**

So what did you do next?

**WOMAN 1:**

I had a friend who was a stripper, who I knew from high school. She was working at Jiggles.(laughter)

It is called Jiggles. I can't make that up. So, I called her up and was like "Honey, I'm sleeping in my car." And she was like, "Oh, no! Come work!" So I auditioned there. Didn't get in. I got denied from Jiggles. (Laughter)

**DIRECTOR:**

You were denied from Jiggles? (both laugh)

Then I went to this place called TJ's. And it was this teeny little hole in the wall bar where they just stuck a pole in the corner (giggle, sigh)...TJ's....

Anyway, I interviewed there. And I started working. It was fast cash. I had no intention of doing it forever. I wanted to get some money so I could get an apartment, and get out.

At the beginning, I was just trucking through life. I was living with a stripper, and she introduced me to her friends who were all drug dealers. Within a few months I was smoking meth and working at other clubs, and living in a drug dealer's house. It just snowballed so quickly, and I remember not even realizing how fast it was happening.



I was with the *in crowd*, I was part of the fancy party crowd who owned the clubs. There is a glamorous side to it a little bit. You know, you have all this money, and you're partying all the time. On one hand you had this image of this party girl who was like *fabulous!* But then, literally at the same time I'm going in and out of the hospital and doing drugs and attempting suicide, and so obviously I wasn't happy.

**DIRECTOR:**

How many times did you try to get out?

**WOMAN 1:**

I tried a couple of times. I would go work at a restaurant. Then I would get high for 5 or 10 days and then crash and then miss my work, and not have a job. I mean I was my own worst enemy during all of that. I was dealing with life the only way I knew how. But it clearly wasn't working, (chuckles). You think you're making the right decisions, you think you're being smart about it. And the deeper I got into it, the more I felt the shame and the guilt and the judgment of the people outside of the life.

I really didn't know how to interact in normal life anymore. I really didn't. I would go to the grocery store and run into people and I felt like I had this big huge sign on my forehead that says, "Crack Addict Whore." You know. And then eventually you withdraw from that. You go where you're comfortable, which is around the people that are doing the same things you're doing. And you start buying into those ideas.

Anyway, during that time I was hostessing at the strip club. And that's when I met the bottom girl and the pimp.

**DIRECTOR:**

What's a bottom girl?

**WOMAN 1:**

The bottom girl helps the pimp recruit and train the girls to work for him.

**DIRECTOR:**

Got it.

**WOMAN 1:**

Here she comes, you know, walking into the club in her fancy clothes. She immediately came up to me and was like "Hey, how's it going?" I was telling her about the club, and I was like, "you must be in the business." 'Cause, we can spot each other. And she said, "oh, kind of."

She goes on about how she works for a production company in California, and she strips on the side, but she makes a ton of money, and blah blah blah. And, so we just got to talking. I've always been an open book. Even then. Which got me into trouble cause they very easily figured out how to get me going. I hung out with her for a couple days. Within, 72 hours I met the pimp. He was her boyfriend. He ran the production company. And he came in with his truck with all this promotional stuff for these rap groups. I thought "he's full of it, like everybody thinks they're a rapper." But the guys in the club all knew who he was. So that really legitimized him.

And here's where it gets sticky. Did I know I was gonna go down there and strip? Yes. I knew that I would have to strip for a while. It didn't occur to me that it would be more I went to to do what the bottom girl did, instead of going down there for the pimp. I remember asking her, "I don't have to sleep with anybody, right?" And she was like, "Oh no! God, Like, why would you do that?" And I was like "Oh, Ok!" That's all I needed. And it happened very quickly. Within three days, we loaded all my stuff from my apartment, packed it up in his truck, and we were gone to California.

**DIRECTOR:**

So what did you do when you got there?

**WOMAN 1:**

We went into the clubs and interviewed to see where we can get hired, And then... it slowly progressed. They said, "Ok girls, here's how much you gotta bring home." You learned by trial and error. I was in the club and she said, "You gotta bring home a thousand dollars, and here's what you gotta do to make it."

**Faces of Trafficking - Part II**  
*same position and stance as part I*

**GIRL 1:**

I finally realized he didn't love me. I felt worse and worse about myself the more I was with him. I had to get out. So I told my mom.

**GIRL 2:**

I finally realized that he was using me. I was terrified because I was so far away from home but I told my dad and he came and got me. I still want to be a singer.

**GIRL 3:**

I guess he was done because he broke up with me. I'm trying to forget about him. I'm really behind in school, but I'm determined to get caught up.

**GIRL 4:**

Even though I hate being in juvenile detention at least I got a place to sleep and food to eat. I don't need help, but I'm glad to not have to run for now.

**GIRL 5:**

The drugs just got to be too much. I finally escaped and went home. I mean it took me several tries but I finally made the call and got into rehab. This is the first step to making a life.

**SONG: FLYING**

**Music & Lyrics by Jessica Balassi**

*I had a dream I could fly and be free  
If I ran and I jumped, I could find it  
While the man on the ground would try grabbing for me  
I stay just out of reach when I'm flying*

*Nothing seems like better  
When there is no end to the pain  
Nothing seems like better  
When the dreams all start to fade*

*She never knew why she hated her name  
Why God couldn't hear her crying  
Why was she made if her worth was a slave  
If she ran then she'd never be flying*

*It's not til she gets in the silence  
Then the nothing starts to invade  
It's  
Then the images beat in her brain*

*She's a secret in the dark  
He doesn't want her to talk  
She's just lying there empty*

*She used to dream she could fly and be free  
At 13 she never did try it*

**Traffick-tion**

*random walking in circles of cast,  
simulating a high school hallway*

**GIRL 4:**

Fick  
Fick  
Fick-tion  
Traffick-tion

**GIRL 3:**

What it seems like to me  
Fiction  
Stuff from the worst horror stories  
The worst boogie-men-under-the-bed stories

**GIRL 5:**

And traffic  
Running thorough  
Running through  
Over me  
Into me

**GIRL 1:**

Running over  
Never stopping  
Crushing in  
Pushing on

**GIRL 2:**

Delving into the next  
Marker of miles  
The next ride  
The next crashing  
Realization and  
Wild apparition

**GIRL 4:**

Trials and tribulation  
Trib  
Trib  
Tribulation  
Trauma and manipulation

**GIRL 1:**

Fiction  
Traffick-tion  
Feels like fiction  
Friction

**GIRL 2:**

Ignition forward and back  
forward and back  
Running into  
Traffick-ing circles

**GIRL 3:**

Circles and circles  
Meeting myself  
coming and going

**GIRL 5:**

Meeting strangers  
coming and going  
And coming  
And going

And going  
And coming

**GIRL 4:**

Running and running  
Shunning and shunning  
my own-self-ness

**ALL GIRLS:**

We are wandering

**INTERMISSION**

## **ACT II**

*Staff and rest of cast but Girls and (Staff 3)  
as Bailiff enter*

### **Shackle Shuffle**

*THE LAW enters*

*Then Staff #3 as Bailiff enters leading the  
girls to mime being shackled*

### **THE LAW:**

Juvenile Court. Today is her hearing. Since I have been working in the world of the court system, the idea is that you're supposed to get use to the "shackle shuffle." As kids are brought from the detention center into the courtroom, dressed in scrubs or a similar jumpsuit, their legs and hands are shackled together causing them to shuffle their feet in order to move. Like I said, you're supposed to get use to it, but I never have.

My mind can reason that it is a consequence of their crime and choices; it's to keep them and others safe. But, there is still a minor hiccup in my spirit every time I see it.

Maybe I cringe because this person in front of me is no longer a case on a page, but a living, breathing, and usually extremely likable kid with their own story to tell. Although I may not agree with their choices, I now understand them, or can at least follow the irrational thought process that led to those choices.

This week, I found myself in the courtroom waiting area, not just waiting for our name to come up on the docket, but also waiting to see her shuffling toward us. This one was going to be especially hard. I distracted myself by noticing the drab carpet worn from the many years of youth shuffling their feet across it, and the chairs wedged in uncomfortable positions

*Bailiff unhooks Girl #3*

to make the necessary space for the case workers and families that would also be waiting for their names to be

called.

The hiccup came, and it was stronger than I anticipated. Her face was sad, but she mustered a small smile just big enough to show her child-like dimple for a second. I'm not sure why these moments continue to affect me, after all, I've seen it enough. Regardless of why, the sadness of seeing her in shackles was there.

We waited patiently listening to the clinking of the heavy metal doors open and close and made small talk. We laughed as she would give a description of each passerby, at one point saying, "Mm-m-m, the things you see in the juvenile justice system."

The light-heartedness changed as soon as the court was ready for us.

Walking into the courtroom is always a free for all, with each party having to attempt to find the proper seating. The DJO points one direction, the bailiff another and all you're secretly praying that the judge won't ask you a question.

She is quickly directed to remember to stand up when the judge enters the room, even if it's awkward with the shackles. Once the judge enters the room, the formalities begin. A list of all her wrongs are read and the judge asks for her plea and her understanding. She pleasant and politely responds with, "yes, your honor," after each question. Her anxiety shows when her "yes, your honors" start coming at a quicker pace and at unnecessary times. We hold our breath for the judge's response, and that's when it happens. A small smile creeps onto his face and that's when I know, he sees it too: the undeniable likability of this young girl sitting in front of us. She must have seen it too, because she relaxed, and then we all relaxed.

Encouragement replaced anxiety and plans began to take shape. We left the court and I no longer noticed the drab carpet or bland walls. I no longer cared that the chairs were placed just a little too close together. Instead, I saw this girl in front of me with a glimmer of hope. As we sat in the waiting room, talking about her safety plan and what she will do when she feels like running again, she looked at me with a serious look on her face and said, "You don't have to worry about that



(holding up her handcuffed hands).

I'm going to learn to just read a book."

**Coffee & Talking Part III - Real Victims**

*DIRECTOR and WOMAN 1 are already in mid conversation as the lights come up*

**WOMAN 1:**

I look back at my story and say, like, "I coulda done things really different." Or "Why did I make that choice?" or "Hey Ding Dong, he clearly was a pimp, what were you doin?" or "Why didn't you tell your parents?"

I feel all those things and other people look at my story and that's what *they* think. Even when I talk publicly, it's very specific. I don't get into like all convoluted issues. Because you're targeted enough as a victim.

**DIRECTOR:**

Targeted? What do you mean?

**WOMAN 1:**

You get some of the jerks that are in the world, who think their opinion is true. You get all that. My case is a perfect example of somebody on the outside looking in going, "Well, you weren't a victim, like you weren't *really* trafficked."

And I've had people say things like that to me. You know when I was getting out of that life, I was in a sober house, I was doing groups at an agency that helped women get off the streets. While I was there we got this new case manager. At the time I was living in transitional housing with another woman in the program. She was still turning tricks. And they didn't believe me. They just thought I was harassing her. I told them: "She's coming home drunk all the time, and she's still turning tricks, and she still uses her stage name." And I had the case manager flat out tell me,

**Case Manager (STAFF 1):**

"I don't know what your problem is, your stuff wasn't that bad."

**DIRECTOR:**

WHAT??!!!

**WOMAN 1:**

Basically she said,

**Case Manager (STAFF 1):**

"You just need to get over it, like these girls in here are real victims, you don't need help. You're just being a cry baby. You're just a poor little white girl that got into trouble. So get over it."

**WOMAN 1:**

And when I got out it was the same thing like, "Oh, well your story isn't bad enough. Like, your trauma isn't real."

**DIRECTOR:**

It's like you had nowhere to belong. As if your life experience didn't have anywhere to really exist.

**WOMAN 1:**

I still deal with that sometimes you know.

**DIRECTOR:**

What the heck? Have you heard your story? it's traumatic!

**WOMAN 1:**

It wasn't compared to what I saw. It wasn't to the other girls who were getting beat every single day who were with gorilla pimps, and were being sold constantly back and forth to other pimps. And being beaten by tricks. That wasn't my experience.

**DIRECTOR:**

But that doesn't mean it was ok.

**WOMAN 1:**

I know, but it's like I don't deserve to . . .  
And this is false, but in my brain, I don't deserve to be affected by trauma the way that I am. Because I shouldn't be, because what I went through, was not as bad as the stuff that I saw.

**Voice Take Over**

*stands on chair*

**GIRL 1:**

Voice is overridden  
Voice is cut out  
Voice has endured a hostile take over

*stands on table*

**GIRL 2:**

Like that nightmare you have  
When if you could just scream  
You would save everyone  
But the silence sounds  
And you are left without a weapon

*stage left of floor trio*

**GIRL 3:**

The fight for this voice is a war  
At the very core  
At the very marrow  
The very fiber  
Of what it means to be young  
and strong  
And hope-filled

*middle of floor trio*

**GIRL 4:**

There must be a regaining  
A returning choice  
A truth-ing  
A coaxing vocals back to life  
My voice must resonate off the rafters  
And the hilltops  
And the mile high buildings

*stage right of floor trio*

**GIRL 5:**

And you must be the listeners  
For if one voice is expendable

Then all of them are  
And our stories will fade  
Into the great silence of empire

**Quiet Warrior**

*sits on stage left steps*

*"Warrior" plays underneath monologue*

**STAFF 3:**

As a staff member of The Covering House I think that people underestimate the strength that I have and as I've moved further into this work and further into just being around rough places. So I think people worry unnecessarily about how I'm doing and if I'm okay because I'm quieter. Just my personality, I guess, in general, people worry.

These last three months at the Covering House have the hardest because we've pushed to get the house, it's like we're all delivering a baby or something together. In the process of all of this and finishing school and everything, God is calling me to open my hands and he brought me to this idea of battling open-handed. He is the warrior that's going before us as our Ezerkengdo. This is the word that he used when God created Eve and it is also the same word used for God as Israel's military helper. This means he created us as women to be warriors alongside one another. But he's also calling me to live open-handed. Open to receive what people say about me as truth.

We have staff affirmations at work. So all of our new staff sat around and we got to say nice things about them which is my jam, but then you have to sit in the hot seat. And the rules for the exercise are you can't say anything, you just accept the affirmations. The only thing you get to say in response is: 'thank you'. When it was my turn one of the staff said 'quiet warrior' and then it was everywhere. People just kept describing me as 'quiet warrior'. And so I'm sitting there receiving this quiet warrior stuff with open hands. And so, open-handed battle, I think all of us are walking into this and what's going to happen is going to happen and we have to keep fighting but we can't control it and there is no schedule and there is no planning so its like we're all battling open-handed. All of us are battling. Especially the girls who are fighting to survive.

**SONG - WARRIOR**

Music & Lyrics by Emily Kay Rice

*Shapes turn on walls  
Figures I can't recognize  
My mind flees down the hall  
A catacomb to feed your appetite*

*It'll all be over soon (be a warrior)*

*When the sun goes down hell take me home  
Far unlike a home i've ever known  
Id rather be on the streets alone  
streets that bite the hands they know  
streets that bite the hands they know*

*It'll all be over soon (be a warrior)*

*You will strip my worth from me  
Because in the end nothing comes for free  
And in the end the price is me  
In the streets that bite the hands they feed  
In the streets that bite the hands they feed*

*It'll all be over soon (be a warrior)*

*shield me from the shadows  
in the rafters overhead  
Im looking at him with crippled eyes on the bed  
Suffocating led by hungry hands, he has his plans,  
Don't feel it, don't feel it, I'm crying,  
I'm screaming from mountains and hilltops and bridges*

*BE A WARRIOR*

*They say that theres a man up there and they call him  
love  
I don't know if ill ever be enough  
Every other man I've ever met,  
Has looked at me and placed his bets,  
they look at me and pay their best,*

*I need a warrior*

**Buzz**

**STAFF 2:**

Hi! How goes it today?

**GIRL 2:**

Okay (neutral)

**STAFF 2:**

So our group meeting isn't happening tonight but I can hang out if you want.

**GIRL 2:**

Okay! (excited)

**STAFF 2:**

So what's going on with you this week?

**GIRL 2:**

Not much

**STAFF 2:**

Okay, so what about school?

**GIRL 2:**

Good, grades are fine. It's easy

**STAFF 2:**

Well, it may be easy for you but it isn't easy for everyone. You're just super smart.

**GIRL 2:**

I'm just weird. I like classes and studying. I think I'm the only one.

**STAFF 2:**

That doesn't make you weird, silly! It makes super, super smart.

**GIRL 2:**

(giggling)

*At that point STAFF 2's cell phone vibrates on the desk. GIRL 2 stops giggling*

*immediately when she hears the buzz and looks at the phone in terror.*

*It buzzes again, GIRL 2 is still staring at it.*

*STAFF 2 realizes it is triggering an emotion for her.*

*STAFF 2 freezes, GIRL 2 steps out and jumps when she hears it again. Phone buzzing sound effect continues throughout monologue. These cues are below*

\*buzz (sound effect)

I'm gonna be sick  
I'm gonna be sick  
That sound brings it all back  
The empty words and kisses  
The transactions  
And touch screen moments

\*buzz (sound effect)

**STAFF 2:**

Are you okay? What's the matter?

**GIRL 2:**

Nothing, I'm fine. *(under her breath)* I'm fine.

**STAFF 2:**

Are you sure. What happened? Did I say something to upset you?

**GIRL 2:**

No, I'm sorry. Um, I, uh, I just don't feel well. I haven't eaten and my stomach is getting really upset. Maybe I should have some food or something?

**STAFF 2:**

Sure, we can get some food, no problem. What sounds good? How about pizza?

**GIRL 2:**

Okay

*STAFF 2 looks up the delivery info on her phone and starts to dial. She freezes. GIRL 2 steps out*

**GIRL 2:**

\*buzz (sound effect)

\*buzz (sound effect)

That sound

THAT sound

Oh god

I'm gonna be sick

I'm gonna be sick

Help

\*buzz (sound effect)

That sound is the buzz my phone would make when he would message me

That sound is the buzz of the unknown

That sound is the buzz of terror

and hands all around and limbs locking me in

That sounds is the buzz of pretending

I like what he's doing

That sound is the buzz of fake smiles and bruises

\*buzz (sound effect)

That sound

THAT sound

**STAFF 2:**

I'm concerned for you. Anything I can do to make you feel better? I'm a good listener.

**GIRL 2:**

Well, um.

**STAFF 2:**

You are safe.

**GIRL 2:**

Well, the buzz sound your phone just made is the same one mine would make when he would message me that he wanted



me to meet him so he could . . . Hearing that sound again just really freaked me out. I'm sorry I reacted that way.

**STAFF 2:**

It's okay. We all have triggers, right? I know that we talk a lot about triggers in weekly group but it feels different when it's actually happening to us.

**GIRL 2:**

Yes, VERY different.

**STAFF 2:**

Is there anything else you would like to say? No matter what you say or how you feel: you are safe.

*GIRL 2 looks at the staff member with a loaded expression, she has something to share but is gathering the courage to speak.*

**STAFF 2:**

You can share or not, it is up to you.

*GIRL 2 and STAFF 2 embrace.*

## VOLUNTEER

I'm nervous! Fine Arts Camp starts with the girls this week and I am volunteering to teach the sessions and for some reason I'm so nervous!!! What if I set off a trigger or push them out of their comfort zone too much?

On top of that, This.

(motions to belly)

This is so weird. I've worked for so long volunteering with non-profits and caring for someone else's kids and now I'm having one of my own, I mean, it's just weird. And I'm having a girl. I'm having a baby girl. Woo hoo! The kids are funny about my belly and how it's getting bigger. As a mentor I always have a blast with the girls. I love seeing them come into their own and learn that they can trust themselves.

What a completely loaded concept. Now that I will be a parent I am taken with the fact that all kinds of parents have trusted me with their kids. How do they do that? I know that I will do the same but right now, with her growing inside me, I worry. I have a friend that loves stupid quotes and she said to me: "to decide to have children is to forever have your heart go walking around outside your body." Listen, I'm not about to stitch in on a pillow, but I'm starting to get it! I worry about who to trust and who and what to shield her from. And then I think about all those mothers and fathers whose kids are missing or have runaway. They don't know where their daughters are. They don't know how to find them. I cannot imagine how they feel. Their heart is walking around outside their body and my heart goes out to them.

*pause*

My husband and I are thrilled and terrified. I'm not sure we're ready but I know that she will feel loved and that we will work, everyday for her to know her own worth.

Listen, I am not a crier but lately I have been such a big wuss! I was watching this film about the beginning of the AIDS epidemic and how horribly the men who were getting sick were being treated. They were being ignored. They were fighting the fight and losing it, but no one

was listening. The government and the powerful people had no care or concern for them. It felt like the work of stopping human trafficking.

When it was over I just sat on my couch and I cried. I mean, is *this* the world where my daughter will live? How will I help her navigate it when I can't even make sense of it? Sometimes I feel so helpless. I feel selfish for even thinking of bringing Baby Cora into this world.

But then I think about The Covering House. And maybe there can be a generation that gets it, you know? I mean really gets what is at stake and how to keep ALL our precious little ones out of harms way.

I love how work they do is not just to restore, but to prevent.

**Coffee & Talking Part IV**  
**Getting Out of the Life**

*DIRECTOR and WOMAN 1 are talking and drinking coffee*

**WOMAN 1:**

I remember when I ran from him the first time. He was gonna take me to the airport. I called my parents collect, and I said, "Call this pager, say that dad's super sick, and to get me on a plane." My pimp's not stupid. He knew that my mom worked for the department of justice. He knew when parents are looking for people, that he's in trouble. And he's a business man. His was more about bringing in the maximum profit. So if he's got to ditch a girl to not get caught and bring down his empire, he will. But I didn't know that. I was in Portland for 2 weeks, with my parents, and I didn't say a word. And he knew I wouldn't.

I didn't know what he was capable of. Pimps don't need to show you what they're capable of, they need to make you think they are capable of anything. Because the fear of what might happen is a hell of a lot stronger than showing what will happen.

I get off the plane with no money, and my parents pick me up and I don't say a word. And they said,

"Are you ok?"

And I said, "I'm fine."

And they said, "Do you want to talk about it?"

And I said, "Nope."

And they said, "Ok." And we went home.

**DIRECTOR:**

And that's all they said?

**WOMAN 1:**

That was all they said. My dad was really sick and a week later he went into hospice. He there for a couple months. So that really became the focus. My dad passed away in December... and he shows up.

**DIRECTOR:**

Who shows up? You pimp shows up at your parents?

**WOMAN 1:**

Yep. In Portland. He calls me up.  
"Honey, I heard about your dad."  
And of course I'm like,  
"How the hell did you hear about my dad?"  
He's like, "We need to talk. I have your stuff. Bring  
your truck, we'll give you your stuff."

**DIRECTOR:**

Wow.

**WOMAN 1:**

Then I met up with him, and he said "Honey, what  
happened, like why did you leave? Blah, blah, blah."

"Well, honey, here's the deal. you stay here, you go to  
school, but help me get this escort agency started. See  
you're an entrepreneur."

God, I remember this clear as day. "You know, you're the  
smart one. You were never gonna be a track girl. You were  
gonna be in and out real quick. So we get this opened  
then you're running things and you ain't gotta work no  
more."

"I don't wanna do it anymore."

**DIRECTOR:**

And your grief was now a factor.

**WOMAN 1:**

Yeah, dad was dead. I had a bad relationship with my mom.  
I had no one else. I worked in the clubs there and I  
would send him money.

**DIRECTOR:**

So, you're in Portland, and he's in LA, and you're  
sending him money?

**WOMAN 1:**

Yep

**DIRECTOR:**

Okay. Then what?

**WOMAN 1:**

He was gonna fly me to Vegas for my birthday, my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, instead went to San Francisco. He put me up in his house. I don't know what possessed me but I went through everything in his house to try to find *something*. I think the shades couldn't be drawn anymore. It was very clear what was happening, and I knew it was gonna bad. I knew if I didn't get out, this was gonna be my life. The whole time I was trying to figure out how to get away, but I still couldn't figure it out. I had enough freedom that I could run if I wanted to, but where was I gonna go?

**DIRECTOR:**

Right.

**WOMAN 1:**

I was up to easily \$6 to \$700 dollars of drugs a day. In light of that I wasn't sending him enough money. He called me and said, "We're coming down to get you." That was the night I called my nurse practitioner! I was doing some lines of coke in the club. I pulled out my card and my nurse practitioner's business card came out. She had taken care of me as a kid, we're family, so I had her cell number. I *couldn't* put my makeup on cause I *couldn't* look in the mirror...

*(Long pause)*

I don't tell these details very often. (Sniffing)  
So I called her...and she answered.

**WOMAN 1:**

"I can't, I can't do it. I can't do it anymore."

**Nurse Practitioner (STAFF 1):**

"Honey, what's goin on?"

**WOMAN 1:**

*stands*

"Drugs are bad and I gotta get out."

**Nurse Practitioner (STAFF 1):**

"I'll call your mom in the morning and we'll get you into treatment."

**WOMAN 1:**

And what do I do, being the good drug addict that I am, I freaked out. I dodged everyone. I was hiding from him, I was hiding from my mom. My phone kept blowing up from the nurse practitioner. And I wasn't answering, because I was like, "Do I really want to do this?"

After a week he called again and said, "We're comin to get you." And then I called the nurse practitioner back,

**WOMAN 1:**

"OK! Get me in!"

**Nurse Practitioner (STAFF 1):**

"Well, Honey, we filled your spot. We can't get you in til Thursday."

**WOMAN 1:**

Two days later I went into treatment.

So I didn't tell anybody about the trafficking. I was a stripper. That's it. That's it. That's all I told them. For a long time I didn't say anything to any of them about the rest of it. The therapist there, the techs are really awesome. They knew there was more to my story. So my life is split into 2 categories "before" California and "after" California. The good news is that there is an "after." Through the love and support of many people along the way, my after has been constant recovery. That's a long story, but that's kinda what happened.

*DIRECTOR approaches WOMAN 1 and they hug*  
**Hurt People, Hurt People**

**STAFF 1:**

It's really easy to hate perpetrators and I've had to deal with that over the past few years. Some of the people I know are good people and I've come to know that they've been perpetrators in their past. It's an interesting thing to ponder. Because for most people the chain of abuse always starts beforehand. And abuse is so many different things.

One time four of us staff members went to look at a house that was a potential residential facility, and we were driving in kind of a bad area. I noticed on the corners of all these home were these creepy looking men. And it

just was so sad to me because along with these men were often young boys and I remember looking at them and realizing this environment is their influence.

Some of these pimps are victims of their environment, they grew up under the influence of someone that looks at sex in a way that is meaningless and looks at the female body and thinks "control". These ideas are ingrained in them. So its hard not to look at them and miss the brokenness that's there. On the flip side, no 12 year old wakes up and wants to be a prostitute. There's something that led her to that path, I don't think a perpetrator grew up thinking, 'I want to be a pimp'. And so, it's sad. To me, the only way to describe it is total depravity. We must understand the concept that "hurt people, hurt people".

This dichotomy makes you angry, and that's good. We should be angry. But God... I don't speak for God in the Covering House and we're not faith-based, but there is something in us that speaks to the victimization in the other side. And that's not something I expected when I came to the Covering House. I ended up having this compassion for the perpetrator that I didn't expect and I think that is grace. It would be so easy to judge, because trafficking permeates so much of our lives, our friendships, our families, the way we use sex in relationships, our own sexuality, our own personhood. And how easy it is to gather up all that resentment and hatefulness and bitterness against the perpetrators. But instead, how do we find a way to help them? Because that's real prevention.

#### **Summer Arts Camp**

*GIRL 1, and GIRL 3 enter. They look nervous and shy. They sit at the table and wait.*

**GIRL 1:**

What are we supposed to do?

**GIRL 3:**

I dunno.

*GIRL 1 just shrugs, GIRL 2 enters and sits. She is obviously happy to be there.*

**GIRL 2:**



Hi everyone! I'm excited about this camp. I had to beg my mom and dad to let me come.

**GIRL 1:**

I begged to stay home but I had to be here anyway, my case worker made me.

**GIRL 3:**

It's better'n sitting at home.

**GIRL 2:**

I think it will be fun! I love art!

**GIRL 3:**

Girl, you crazy. You love everything!

**GIRL 2:**

I know. (withdrawals a little)

**GIRL 3:**

I was just playin'.

**GIRL 1:**

Ok.

*GIRL 1 smiles. GIRL 4 and 5 enter.*

**VOLUNTEER**

*enters with bag of supplies*

Hey ladies! Glad you could join us today. I know its hot but at least the sun is shining, for now. As you know this week at camp we are focusing on all different creative arts. We're gonna work on photography and music and lots of other things but today we will look at the power of words through poetry.

*VOLUNTEER steps out, all freeze*

God, I hope this works.

God, I hope it doesn't rain.

I mean, I hope I make sense.

I hope they think I'm cool. How dumb is that?

I am worried about what they think.

But if I don't chill out they are going to think I'm a freak!

If I don't stop breathing so hard the baby might pop out!

I want nothing more than to reach them  
I want them to feel normal and have fun.  
And feel like they belong.

*VOLUNTEER steps back in the scene, all unfreeze*

**VOLUNTEER:**

So do you think the words that we use are important?

*All are silent*

**VOLUNTEER:**

Okay . . . ummm - Do you think the words people say to you are more important than the words you say to other people?

*All are silent*

*beat*

**VOLUNTEER:**

Do you care about the words that people say to you?

*GIRL 1 nods*

**GIRL 3:**

Maybe.

**VOLUNTEER:**

Maybe. Okay. would you like to share?

*All silent*

**GIRL 3:**

I don't care what people think and I don't take nothin' from nobody.

**VOLUNTEER:**

So let's say, people give you attitude, how do they do it? Anyone can answer.

**GIRL 3:**

They say things or give me looks.

**VOLUNTEER:**

What do they say?

**GIRL 3:**

Stuff

**VOLUNTEER:**

What kind of stuff?

**GIRL 4:**

Sometimes they say mean things. Things that make me feel weird.

**VOLUNTEER:**

First of all, I'm sorry they say those things. Second, maybe that is a good lesson for us, ya know? Me included, to remember that words can hurt and how they can make people feel good. So can we all agree that words matter to us?

*All nod silently*

**GIRL 2:**

Just because they say those things, it doesn't make them true.

*(GIRL 2 and GIRL 3 exchange small, smiles)*

**VOLUNTEER:**

Yep, you're right. Now what about the words you say to yourself?

**GIRL 5:**

Huh?

**VOLUNTEER:**

You know, like if you get down on yourself or say things in your head like 'I'm not good enough' or whatever. Like for example I sometimes say, 'I'm not good enough to lead this group or audition for this play' or 'I really hate my fat pregnancy face today.' or whatever. Do those matter to you?

**GIRL 3:**

I guess so

**GIRL 4:**

I think it might matter. I mean, the stuff we say to each other can be nice or mean and that means something, I think. I've never really thought about what I say inside my own head to myself.

**VOLUNTEER:**

Do you typically say nice or mean things inside your head?

*All are silent*

**VOLUNTEER:**

Does anyone else have something to share?

**GIRL 3:**

I don't want to talk about this anymore.

**VOLUNTEER:**

Ok, you don't have to. No worries.

*GIRL 3 nods*

**GIRL 2:**

Uh, I sometimes say mean things inside my head. *pause*  
Like I'm weird or a freak or I'm sad about everything and that it was my fault.

**VOLUNTEER:**

We all feel that way sometimes, I mean, I feel that way. But you have to remember, that doesn't make it true. Yeah?

*(nudges GIRL 2)*

**GIRL 2:**

Yeah

*(gives a smile)*

**VOLUNTEER:**

Cool. Thank you for sharing your ideas. That's important, you know? Your ideas and how you feel. It really is important.

*switching gears*

"Ok, so we are going to do a project with words. You guys are all going to pick out any words you want from these magazines and cut them out and use these words as a jumping off point to form phrases. And then use those

phrases to form poems. Cool?"

*VOLUNTEER steps out of the scene, all freeze,  
she takes a breath*

Did that just happen?  
I think they were with me  
I will be glad and grateful for this moment.  
I *will* be glad and grateful for this moment.  
I hope she's ok. I hope I didn't push.  
Wow. I think I got thru.  
They sure did to me.  
I wonder what they say to themselves that no one else  
hears.  
What is spinning around in those adolescent brains?

*audible exhale then smiles. Steps back into  
scene*

**VOLUNTEER:**

Okay, so now that we've had some time to work on this  
project would anyone like to share what they put  
together?

*The group falls silent*

**VOLUNTEER:**

Anyone?

**GIRL 2:**

Okay! I will!

Beauty and music  
I love to be where  
The two meet  
And forever dream

**VOLUNTEER:**

That was awesome! Thanks for being the first one to  
share. That's not easy! Anyone else?

**GIRL 1:**

Okay, okay. Chill. I will try.

Pizza is my friend  
I love pizza  
And it loves me  
The End!

*Everyone giggles*

**VOLUNTEER:**

That was great! You're sassy, I like you! See we can use words in a lot of ways some funny, some beautiful. No way is more important than the other. Who's next?

**GIRL 5:**

I'll go.  
It's dark and dank  
But I see the light  
As I look through  
Thunder and lightning  
Meeting in the sky  
Sun shines  
Rainbow blooms

**VOLUNTEER:**

"Wow! That was beautiful! Do you usually write poetry? Because you should." What about you? (gestures to GIRL 3)

**GIRL 3:**

Do I have to?

**ALL GIRLS:**

YES!

**GIRL 3:**

Okay . . .

Fast and furious  
I bounce the ball  
On the crazy court  
I got mad skills  
I'm in the air  
Feel like Jordan  
Ready to fly

**VOLUNTEER:**

Yeah! Diary of baller! Love it! Alright, kiddo, you're up.

**GIRL 4:**

Okay, I guess you saved the best for last (she giggles)

**VOLUNTEER:**

I guess we'll have to see! Go ahead. Get it girl!

**GIRL 4:**

I love ice cream  
And swimming pools  
Late night movies  
And no school  
BBQ and playing ball  
I love my summer  
I love my city  
I love my world

**BLACKOUT**

**I'm Standing Here**

**WOMAN 1:**

I used to worry so much about what people thought of me  
but  
Now I know I'm unique  
I can actually love the fact  
I'm unique and  
expect people to respect that

**GIRL 5:**

I am learning to love the fact that  
I am me  
I am here  
I exist  
No one can pretend that  
I don't count  
Don't matter

**WOMAN 1:**

I will not be silent

**GIRL 5:**

I will not be silent

**WOMAN 1:**

I will not be moved

**GIRL 5:**

I will not be moved

**WOMAN 1:**

I will not be shoved aside

**GIRL 5:**

I will not be shoved aside

**WOMAN 1:**

To make room for anyone else

**GIRL 5:**

To make room for anyone else

**Both:**

I will not be moved

**GIRL 5:**

So I'm standing here  
And I'm not going anywhere  
I am more than my trauma  
I am more than what was done to me  
I am more than my addictions

**Both:**

I am still here

**WOMAN 1:**

Because if one voice is expendable  
Then all of them are

**GIRL 5:**

And I can't let that happen



## **Any, Anything**

### **DIRECTOR:**

I think trafficking is becoming so overwhelming, I think it's always been there. It think it's because we're not initiating, we're not initiating engagement with our youth. Sometimes we're engaging them but we usually wait and let them initiate it. We don't always go out and do that. So when I read articles or see movies and you hear pimps saying 'I see whatever hole a kid is missing and put myself in that hole'. That's the part that bothers me because I feel like there are so many people who could be doing that in a healthy way and we're missing that opportunity. If we had people who were initiating that, my job would probably still be there, I don't want to be that naive, it would still be there but it wouldn't be so overwhelming.

There's a lot of people writing about this issue, doing

TV shows about it or doing movies about it, but it's always this very exaggerated form of trafficking, like the movie Taken. Or you pick up a novel and it's about people being smuggled into the United States. It doesn't mean it's wrong, but it's just a very exaggerated version. And It doesn't tell the version of the girls that we're seeing. Awareness should always create movement, otherwise it just stagnates and it's just sitting there, it doesn't really do anything.

You know, It can happen to anyone. We want to paint a perfect victim and the only perfect victim is an insecure victim. And every teenager is insecure at some point. so that's, I think, the big thing. We want to put it in a box and put it somewhere else, it's somebody else's "there" not "here". Literally can be in your own backyard. Any town, any city, any socio-economic level . . . any, anything.

**SONG - COVER ME**  
**Music & Lyrics by Jessica Balassi**  
**& Emily Kay Rice**

*Decide I'm worth the fight to be free.  
My soul worth more in keeping with my body  
My Spirit cries for love to be much more  
than what we've seen.  
More than a thing.*

*A light poured out from that window.  
And grace poured out from your smile.  
My heart cried safety's in that window.  
Oh I'll find.*

*Yes heaven is a home that's safe.  
A break from all these crashing waves.  
I'm human in the deepest part.  
And search for more than what we are.*

*Cover Me*

*A light poured out from that window.  
And grace poured out from your smile.  
My heart cried safety's in that window.  
Oh I'll find.*

*Cover Me*

*Cover Me. Awake to see.  
A covering. My soul will find. Rest inside.  
A covering. Awake and sing  
The covering. My soul will find rest inside.*

*A light poured out from my window.  
As grace poured out from your smile.  
My heart cried safety's in that window.  
Oh I find. Rest inside.*

*My father in his heaven sees  
He doesn't hide his face from me  
The maker's child will feel his grace.  
We'll awake.  
Awaken changed.*

### **The Faces of Trafficking - Part III**

#### **GIRL 1:**

You see me as a victim, but I'm excited to look through a telescope for the first time. Someday, I want to go to space.

#### **GIRL 2:**

You see me as a kid, but I speak another language and I'm going to travel the world.

#### **GIRL 3:**

I'm more than just the part of the story you hear. I'm an athlete and I play the viola.

#### **GIRL 4:**

When you see me in the future, I'm going to be wearing clothes I made myself.

**GIRL 5:**

Someday, I'm going to help other girls like me.

**THE END**

Now that you have read the script, in the next chapter I will share how the story was stitched to together by explaining some of the significant landmarks of creating *cover*.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### Recovering the Stories

It is no small endeavor to write a play and then decide how to write about writing that play. This adventure has had so many twists, turns, stops, starts, reverses, new paths and retracing steps. I am grateful to have this dissertation to help make sense of this important and complicated process. In this chapter I seek to be transparent about recovering and sharing the stories of The Covering House.

As I begin this chapter let me explain the title. Why use the word recovering? The Collins Essential English Dictionary defines recovery as the following:

- restoration to a former or better condition
- the regaining of something lost

This definition makes clear that recovering involves a process of restoration. That is an essential part of this work: recovering stories. My mission aligns with TCH's mission: to be a place of restoration for the trafficking survivors. The mission of restoration is embedded in the DNA of everything they do and seek to accomplish. I seek to take this idea of restoration one-step further to include the restoration of their narratives. This restoration process also includes a sense of regaining something that has been lost. When a girl is

trafficked she loses her voice. She loses her power and having a say over her body and her time. My work seeks to restore the stories that have been lost and through this process restore the survivor. What is at stake when we challenge the status quo by restoring the narratives that have been lost and forgotten?

According to Tierney, to "confront dominant forms of representation and power in an attempt to reclaim . . . representational spaces that have marginalized those of us at the borders." (66) *How* we do the work of ethnography is just as crucial the fact this kind of work is being accomplished. What else is left to us, the outsiders, but the typical manner of gathering stories? We must ask ourselves, is this kind of approach open to everyone? If not, then those of us on the margins, (who do not fit the stereotypes), have to discover new avenues for scholarly endeavors. We must find these new avenues not only for our own wellbeing, but for the generations of 'others' that will follow.

To convey an option for breaking down these systemic barriers, I turn to Audrey Lorde and a section from her book, *Sister Outsider*:

Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women; know that survival is not an academic skill . . . It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled,

and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. **For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.** And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support. (Lorde)

This systemic oppression is very alive in the academy. The master's tools set by the dominant as the standard: a white, male, able-bodied, average-sized blanket of expectation on everyone. It is the litmus test by which everyone is judged. Those do not fit into mold, are often left by the wayside or forced to conform to this 'ideal'. This is an impossibility making the "other" feel silenced and invisible. I have found myself on the outside of the norm on many occasions. This process has been a way to find new ways of meaning making in my academic and artistic context.

If we consider that the dominant voice of the research world is not representing our experience, then we have to find ways of redressing the balance. One only has

to consider the whole discourse about adherence to medical regimens and the inherent problems in getting individuals to comply with professional advice to know that something happens when individuals interpret that advice using their own specific set of assumptions, or when the individual's set of assumptions overrides the opinion of an expert. (Muncey 64-68)

Now that my context is clear, I will use Tessa Muncey's auto/ethnographic writing method of snapshots, artifacts, metaphor, and journey to share with the journey of creating *cover*.

The snapshot is a moment frozen in time. It is both literally a picture of something and a symbolic representation of such moments. The first useful auto ethnographic technique I propose is the snapshot. (Muncey 71)



Figure #1



This photo is one of the most important moments of the play. It is during the finale of the show while the cast and musicians sing the song "Cover Me". The song begins with the girls in a seated position across the front of the stage. As each of the teen women stand up they offer a hand to help the next girl stand until all of them are in a line downstage. Then, one by one, the adult women step up to stand between each young woman. This process continues until the entire cast is standing in a straight line across the front of the stage. We see the adults in the play 'standing in the gaps' between the young women. This symbolizes not only the work of TCH, but also the community created around the work and process of the staging the play. This idea is brought home with the lines conveyed in the monologue "Any, Anything". Here is a section of that piece:

. . . we're not initiating engagement with our youth. Sometimes we're engaging them but we usually wait and let them initiate it. We don't always go out and do that. So when I read articles or see movies and you hear pimps saying 'I see whatever hole a kid is missing and put myself in that void'. That's the part that bothers me because I feel like there are so many people who could be doing that in a healthy way and we're missing that opportunity.

(Powell)

The call to action present in this monologue embodies the foundation of TCH's mission. It also connects back to the reason I do this work. I want to be a beacon, a light, and a haven for the girls of TCH and beyond. The work of the play is accepting this call to action.

Not only do we need to fill in the gaps left in the lives of girls but we need to tell stories so that the gaps in the meta narrative are filled in, too. Muncey asserts: "There is a huge gap between the experience of living a normal life at this moment on the planet and the public narratives being offered to give a sense to that life" (Muncey 3).

One of the trigger's for this idea comes from Berger who claims "this gap people may get lost and go mad, and attempt to fill the gaps with stories that mirror what is going on around them, rather than the official versions that they cannot connect with" (Berger 176). This speaks to the chasm between the stereotypical narratives that are known and the ones that are authentic, messy and true-to-life. I often call this idea the 'things left out of the brochure' or the 'things in fine print'. When auto/ethnography seeks to fill in the gaps, it seeks to tell the entire truth not just the sophisticated or 'pretty' parts of a story. For example, in the play the monologue Rescue Shmescue said by Staff Member 2, she divulges:

And that's a misconception: the victims of human trafficking are not *separate* from us. They're people *just* like us. The rescue mentality is so condescending. Because they have issues and we don't? Ha! (laugh) . . . It's almost like re-victimizing the survivors because it's still making this distinction that they are damaged and we are whole. So that one bugs me a lot, cause we're all damaged. (Powell)



Figure #2



Figure #3

In Figure #2 above is Melissa Harlow, who was in the original cast in the role of the Volunteer. She is pregnant in this photo, which was taken during the world premiere in September 2014. In Figure #3 she is holding her daughter, Cora Jay Cissell, who was born on November 23, 2014 during our New York City performance of the show on March 14, 2015. While heading home from my first visit to TCH's residential facility I was talking on the phone with Melissa (March 27, 2014) and during that conversation she shared that she was pregnant. Having already decided she would be in the show as our guest artist, we talked about how this would affect the play. I made the decision to create the Volunteer's monologue. That piece is a combination of Melissa's journey of being a pregnant mom as well as my desire to share with the audience the important work that TCH does with their preventative work. It also speaks to the fact that our babies literally hang in the balance of this issue. We explored specifically how a mother looks at this issue as well as the simple idea of putting a pregnant body on stage and how valuable and seemingly rare that is. While working on taking the show to New York Melissa and I came up with the idea of including Cora in the show. We adjusted a few of the lines monologue so that it would make sense since the birth of her child. This helped keep the mother and child connection but

brought home the importance of women's lives, at every stage, are important and valuable.

## Artifact

Artifacts seek to tell the auto/ethnographic story by filling in the gaps left by the snapshots.



Figure #4

Autoethnography is a research approach that privileges the individual. It is an artistically constructed piece of prose, poetry, music or piece of artwork that attempts to portray an individual experience in a way that evokes the imagination of the reader, viewer or listener. (Muncey 2)

While this is typically true, for the purposes of *cover*, I framed the artistic construction out of a community of theatre

artists instead of focusing on the solo performer. We attempted to invoke the imagination of the listener through the artistic work of the play by telling the stories of the individuals in the context a theatrical ensemble. Though I took this approach, my team and I worked diligently to hold onto the tenets and value of solo performance. This artifact, the original cast list gives a picture of the inception of that process. The original cast consisted of 12 women: 5 high school students, 2 MBU Theatre alumni, 4 current MBU students and 1 professional actor/guest artist. This quote also embodies the assistant director, assistant producer and self care expert.

Muncey shares this idea:

(T)here is the therapeutic or emancipatory element associated with participating in research. In order to reconstruct a narrative or 'lived experience', the researcher provides the participant with a cathartic experience during the collecting of the data (Muncey xii).

Imagine meeting the person who lived these experiences see you perform "their lives". This leads to the next part of the making the work safe for students. I sought to guide them to the discovery that they have just as much to give back to the audience and the participants as they have been given by being a part of this important work. This was revealed in technicolor

when cast and The Covering House staff and volunteers met for dinner one night before rehearsal. The dinner conversation was lively: full of laughter and good food. After dessert the TCH folks stayed to watch the dress rehearsal. I'm not sure if I've ever been so nervous or seen my cast so anxious. As the run of the show moved forward I found myself watch the TCH group as much as the performers and musicians. I could tell they were very engaged in the performance and at one moment the adult survivor had to leave the room. By the end of the performance everyone in the room was visibly emotional. We all sat and talked and the TCH group shared their support and encouragement. They were all very excited about the play and felt as though we had done their stories and the stories of the girls, justice. This was a crucial moment in the life of the work because it helped the performers know they were on the right track. Once the TCH people gave the work their seal of approval, the actors could relax and focus on continuing to breath life into the characters. This took an immense amount of stress off the performers. It also helped the TCH group that they had left their narratives in good hands. While they had seen several earlier versions of the script, it was a completely different experience for them to see their lives and the lives of the girls with whom they work played out in front of them. This is known as reciprocal ethnography. Elaine Lawless unpacks the

tenets of this idea in her article, "I Was Afraid Someone Like You . . . an Outsider . . . Would Misunderstand": Negotiating Interpretive Differences between Ethnographers and Subjects (or participants)" She says,

I have given up the notion of scholar voice as privileged voice, the scholar's position as more legitimate because it is the more educated or more credible one. I have felt it important for me to write about how this . . . circle [of participants]. . . affects my own thinking as I am forced to see their world through their eyes rather than only through my own and to invite them to see their world through mine.

This lens we have discovered (as described by Lawless) through this work has forever changed our cast and our audiences.

Through the entire process of cover the production team worked very hard to make sure everyone realized that as we freed the voices of the survivors of trafficking, we were freeing our own. As the author, my voice was not more important than anything that the participants shared or any struggle the actors endured. The team and the cast kept cultivating an idea intrinsic to the script: we must create a space where every voice has a safe place to resonate.

We were very intentional about sending the message that ALL voices matter. In fact, because we used the line from the show,



"This is a safe place" so much it became an inside joke for us. But the humor did not diminish its truth.

1. How did you get involved in the work of The Covering House?
2. How has TCH changed since you first started working with them?
3. What is the most difficult story you have absorbed since you began your work here?
4. What is the one aspect about trafficking you wish more people knew?
5. Why do you stay involved in the work of TCH?
6. How has the process of procuring the residential facility affected your tasks at TCH?
7. Do you think telling the story of TCH in a theatrical can help or hurt the work? Please explain.
8. What preparation have you made to ready yourself for your job at TCH?
9. What is the most discouraging aspect of your work?
10. What dreams do you have for the future of TCH?

Figure #5

In Figure #5 is the list of questions I used for each interview I did for the ethnography. I did not ask every question in every interview. I discovered it was extremely important to very sensitive toward each participant during the interview moment and firing off 10 questions in a 30-minute interview session is very overwhelming for the participant. It was my experience that only 3 or 4 questions was sufficient to engage the participant in sharing their stories. Each question

is clear, simple and open-ended. This leaves the control in the hand of the participant, letting them guide the course of the conversation. This puts the participant at ease because it sends the message that they will not be forced to reveal anything that is out of their comfort zone. The interviews are the heart of this process. It is vital that the participant has anonymity and feels protected by the ethnographer.



**Campus Institutional Review Board**  
University of Missouri-Columbia

485 McReynolds Hall  
Columbia, MO 65211-1150  
PHONE: (573) 882-9585  
FAX: (573) 884-0663

April 4, 2014

Principal Investigator: Powell, Joy  
Department: University of Missouri-Columbia

Your Application to project entitled *Uncovered: The Work of The Covering House* was reviewed and approved by the MU Campus Institutional Review Board according to terms and conditions described below:

IRB Project Number	1211394
Initial Application Approval Date	April 4, 2014
IRB Expiration Date	April 4, 2015
Level of Review	Exempt
Project Status	Active - Open to Enrollment
Regulation	45 CFR 46.101b(2)
Risk Level	Minimal Risk

Figure #6

This next artifact is my IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval form. Through the work of Elaine Lawless' ethnography seminar in the spring semester of 2014, I was able to apply and earn IRB approval for my research of TCH. This is an important reminder that while IRB is a taxing and stressful process, it is

very important. We must always remember that we are accountable for the research we enact and the participants that work with us.

What would it do to you to embody these characters everyday for 6 weeks or longer? What might it trigger about your own life's issues and difficult moments? These are the questions as educators we MUST ask ourselves so that we can help our students navigate the risk and inspiration found in autobiographical performance.

Since I am the producer, writer and director of cover I was ultimately responsible for all aspects of the production. Knowing my focus would be on the project as a whole, I realized I alone could not ensure the cast was processing this difficult material in a healthy way. I then asked one of my former colleagues, Dr. Pam Stanfield, to work on the show. She was a retired professor from the education division of MBU and also worked as a high school principal for a large part of her career. She was exactly the right person to come along and partner with us. Besides doing community outreach and publicity, her job was to make sure the production team; musicians and actors were practicing self-care. We made sure that the actors knew they could come to any of the staff, but that Dr. Stanfield was there specifically to make sure they were going through the rehearsal process in a healthy way. She would send emails to

certain people if they had a particularly difficult rehearsal. This meant I could focus on putting the show together. Please don't think I ignored the cast, but she would keep me informed of anyone that was struggling and we could plan to meet with them before or after rehearsal to help them along.



<p>Oh, and when the love spills over And music fills the night And when you can't contain your joy inside</p> <p>Then dance for Jesus, dance for Jesus Dance for Jesus and live And with your final heartbeat Kiss the world goodbye Then go in peace, and laugh on glory's side</p> <p>And fly to Jesus, fly to Jesus Fly to Jesus and live Fly to Jesus, Fly to Jesus Fly to Jesus and live</p> <div data-bbox="228 1037 479 1417"> <p><i>Humans are fragile creatures made up of broken hearts and broken promises.</i></p> </div>	 <p><b>Covenant of Concerns</b></p> <p><b>Closing Community Prayer</b></p> <p><b>The Lord's Prayer</b> Our Father, Who art in heaven Hallowed be Thy name Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us Lead us not into temptation But deliver us from evil For Thine is the kingdom And the power and the glory, Forever and ever Amen</p>	<p><b>The Covering House Team Community Group</b></p>  <p><b>Thursday, 9-5-13</b></p>
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Figure #7

One of the most important practices to surface from creating cover is the idea of self-care and performers of auto-ethnography. This first concept became a priority in my work as the chaplain of TCH. Through part of 2013 and 2014 I met

regularly with the full time staff and available volunteers. In the social services world the idea of self-care is very prevalent. It is a buzzword that is used over and over again. Ironically, those that work in social services are often as neglectful of themselves as those that work in academia and performances studies! The above artifact is a facilitation guide I used in one of my sessions with the staff and volunteers. As you can see I used music, bible verses, quotes, photos and poems to connect the group to the topic that week. We were discussing the feeling of brokenness.

The Director of Operations for TCH, Lindsey Ellis, shared this quote with me from her work life experience: "you can't do this work without doing this work." She goes on to explain: "as we're privileged to walk through someone's trauma with them we have to be practicing self-care, and be aware of our own issues, concerns, and how we're processing their stories so we don't hold on to them" (Ellis).

"Actors and all artists in our crazy world need to know how to care for ourselves because it is often a hostile environment. Don't let anything that's not yours stay in your body after you're finished working." This quote by Adele Cabot in her blog post: "Self-Care for Actors, brings home this point. We must release the characters we are playing before we leave the performance or rehearsal space before we can move through our

lives. Holding onto the emotional energies embedded in these narratives is not healthy for the performer. I don't mean we can never think about the characters or the work outside of rehearsal. I'm speaking to the idea of continuing to stay in the moment long after rehearsal has ended. One way we helped remedy this was we would begin rehearsal with checking in with each other before we would begin the rehearsal. I would also have my director antennae up for any kind of actor tension or anxiety in the moment. We would take lots of breaks and would build up our emotional stamina to the full runs and performances of the show. At the first read through I gave everyone a journal. This would help them process their roles beyond the spoken processing we enacted at each rehearsal.

Figure #8



The artifact of the cover poster really gives an accurate picture of the process and its meaning. It has a heart, a purple

heart. This is important because it is the signature color of TCH. The heart also signifies the heart that went into *cover*'s creation and performance. This poster also shows hands joined together, this is a metaphor for the connection formed between the staff and the girls as they go through treatment at TCH well as the connection embodied by the performers as they figuratively and literally joined hands to bring the narratives to life. The fact that one hand is larger than the other is intentional. This part of the visual is a constant reminder that the survivors of this issue are children. It would be so easy to sweep that fact to the side so that the depravity could some how be made more palatable, but the poster is unflinching in the truth it surfaces.

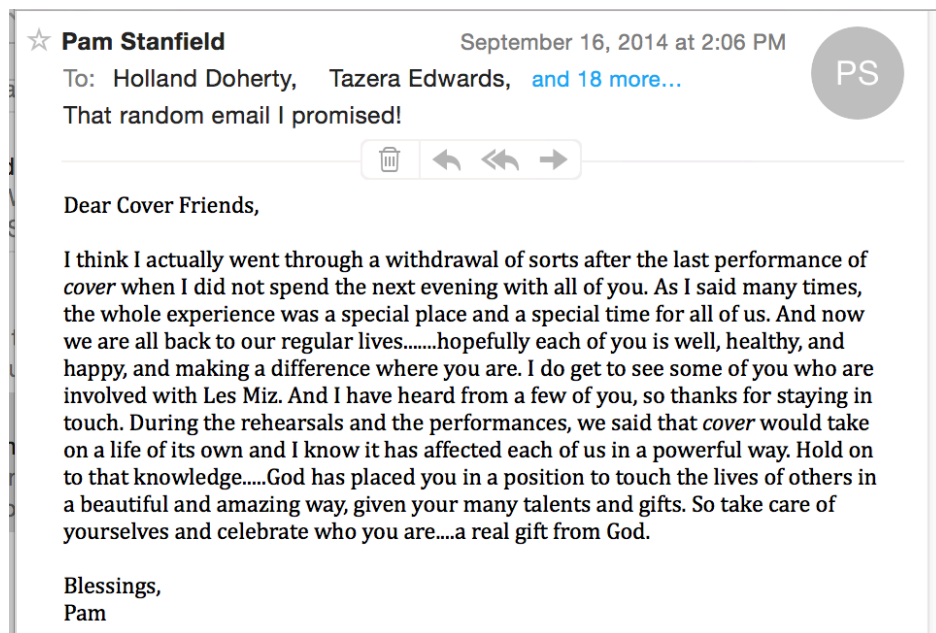


Figure #9

The above email is from Pam Stanfield, the person in charge of self-care for the entire process. It was sent about 9 days after the first production of *cover* closed. At this point we are already in the throes of rehearsing the next show in our season: *Les Misérables*! This speaks to the deeply connected community created through this work. Once a theatre community is created, it never ends. The shared experience that comes from working as an ensemble of artists, never goes away, it stays with each person involved forever.

I did not know that I would need to adhere to the rules I gave to my actors about self-care. I have never felt so overwhelmed. I was shocked. The intense and passionate responses that the audience members had to the play were overpowering. Even now, when I listen to the recordings of the post-show discussions, I am overwhelmed. I was so afraid that people would not get what we were trying to accomplish. I was terrified that I had taken the play and those involved in it out on a limb and that the limb might break. There were moments of terror, usually when I was writing and editing that I thought to myself, "Am I crazy? Will anyone ever understand this? What difference can I make?" I never dreamed that the response would be so overpowering that it would take me lots of time to manage it. During the post-show talk back audience members kept saying over and over and over, "What's next? What's next? What's next? What will you do now?"



Where will you go from here?" And my mind is focused on simply making it through the weekend of performances. I've directed/produced many other shows. Some of which have deep intrinsic meaning to me. I have been tired after shows close, but I have never experienced the level of depletion I felt after cover ended. I was excited to talk about the work with people and have the audience give immediate feedback. Often I will see friends, family and colleagues in the lobby after a show and they will give kind congratulations. This was completely different. This was another planet of response. People would openly weep. Several in the social service field shared that they learned things and discovered aspects of this issue that they had never known or understood. They talked about how grateful they were that the play existed and showed deep love and gratitude to the cast for their performances and vulnerability. But the most important response did not come from the audience. That occurred the night we had the TCH staff and volunteers see a preview of the show. As per usual I wanted to make the preview performance an event. I wanted to make the TCH staff feel as comfortable as possible. We catered a dinner and the TCH folks and the cast and production team from the play got together and had dinner. I was very general when introducing the TCH people. If they wanted to self-reveal that was up to them. I felt the need to keep the boundaries of confidentiality intact.

This also helped steady the performers. By that point, they had already invested so much that they were deeply concerned about getting a thumbs up from the TCH group.

The young women in the cast were able to talk with the people that had shared their stories and the TCH folks were able to get to know the artists that would portray them. I was an amazing sight to see! I had a moment where I just stood there and watched their interaction. I was breath taking! It made me feel so accomplished to be apart of creating the joining of this group. After most people were done we headed into the theatre and the their performers took their places. I sat far enough back in the house that I could watch the TCH people without them knowing I was watching them. The performers knew that this run of the show had so much riding on it. At one point the woman, on whom the character WOMAN 1 is based, had to leave the theatre because she was overwhelmed with emotion. She returned a bit later and stayed for the rest of it. After the performance was over the TCH people were speechless! They were amazed at what they saw. They were so encouraging to us that, in that moment, my fears were relieved. I knew that we had something really special on our hands. It stood to reason that if the people that entrusted us with their stories were moved by the work then it resonated with truth. That was all the approval I needed. After that night we all took a big exhale and the TCH folks' approval

gave a second wind during the process of tech week rehearsals.

After we closed the show I was so tired. I mean, I was weary-to-the-bone; worst-than-jet-lag-from-Africa tired. I was emotionally depleted. I was spent. I was tired of answering questions. I was exhausted. No amount of caffeine or sleep could put me back together again. And I was really sad. I was so grieved to let *cover* close. I loved, to the marrow of my bones, the entire cast and team and I was sad for our little worlds to end. It is amazing to me the connection that still exists with this group. We actually had a Christmas party and had a wonderful time reuniting for the New York City performance. That community continues to grow and the value of the experience continues to transform me.



Figure #10

The week after *cover* closed we started rehearsals for *Les Misérables*. Am I crazy, or what? It took about 2 weeks for me to try to switch gears and we were well into the end of October before I felt as though I was fully engrossed in the world of the Jean Valjean and the other characters. Fortunately, I had been preparing for *Les Misérables* for a year so I could do my best to attempt to hit the ground running. I had a stellar team for both shows so they helped fill in my gaps and guide me around my blind spots. Also Pam was a godsend. She was also working on *Les Misérables*, as well as most of the cast, so at least we had the time spent at rehearsal as a method of staying connected. But the magical feel of *cover* ended with the last moment of the last post-show discussion. While it's not over, it will never feel like it did the premiere weekend.

I don't know how we did *Les Misérables*. First of all, once you look at sexual violence toward women's bodies it doesn't stay in its own mental compartment. It seeps over into other places, stretching the lenses with which you look at the world. So the *cover* cast members and team could not look at *Les Misérables* in the same light either. It had always been heart breaking to see Fantine be lured into a life of prostitution. However, having seen *WOMAN 1's* narrative unfold through the course of *cover*, this new lens gave the story so many more layers of reality. The actor playing Fantine was a part of the

cover cast where she played the part of the Director of TCH. Here is how Stanfield explained her experience of being involved with *cover* and *Les Misérables* and watching some of the same performers in both productions,

Watching the girls perform in *cover* was gut wrenching. The story was real. The lives they were "living" in their roles were real ones. The cast was committed to portraying the story of these girls in a raw and powerful way. Given that happened in September and two short months later they were performing in *Les Miz*, I found it especially hard to watch Leigha as Fantine (portraying a prostitute), in direct contrast to her role as Director of The Covering House with a passion for protecting the girls in the sex trafficking trade. Because of Leigha's maturity and professionalism, she was able to perform both roles with convincing realism, but I prayed regularly for her as she stepped into that role of Fantine, knowing how difficult it could be for her."

As Stanfield explains the feelings that surfaced of watching the performer play these two very different parts, I also went through some difficulties of not only switching gears from one show to the other, but coming to terms with the fact that for me from now and until forever there will be everything

before cover and then everything after. The experience of cover shattered me. This shattering was so valuable, but at that time it did not feel like it. The "shattering" I experienced opened me up to the true and complete depth of value inherent in this work. In her 2009 TED Talk "Embrace Your Inner Girl" here is how Eve Ensler describes her experience of being 'shattered' and how this started her on a path to create change:

When I spent my first weeks at Panzi hospital I sat with women who sat and lined up every day to tell me their stories. Their stories were so horrific, and so mind-blowing and so on the other side of human existence, that to be perfectly honest with you, I was shattered. And I will tell you that what happened is through that shattering, listening to the stories of eight-year-old girls who had their insides eviscerated, who had guns and bayonets and things shoved inside them so they had holes . . .

My mind was so shattered.

But what happened for me is that that shattering actually emboldened me in a way I have never been emboldened. That shattering, that opening of my girl cell, that kind of massive breakthrough of my heart allowed me to become more courageous, and braver, and

actually more clever than I had been in the past in my life. (Enslar, TED Talk).

### **Metaphor**

Although the snapshot and the artifacts have contributed some insight into my characteristics . . . I realize that this gives no vehicle for putting the story into a meaningful whole” (Muncey 78). Here Muncey shares the importance of metaphor in her ethnographic writing method. I seek to do the same with the metaphor of The Covering House’s quilt.



Figure #11

This quilt is the logo for TCH. According to their website: The Covering House was named after the image of safety and refuge under the shelter of Cover. Our logo is inspired by The Underground Railroad log cabin quilt pattern, which served as a secret message of safety during those times. Quilts bearing the

log cabin pattern were hung in windows to indicate a Safe Home for those seeking refuge. (TCH)

This symbol has deep meaning. Not only did it indicate (there are some that think this is a myth) during the time of the Underground Railroad, a place that was safe, but move forward in time up to this moment and TCH intends that it have the same meaning to contemporary sex slavery survivors.

To quote quilt historian Xenia Cord, "Quilt research and quilt history often rely heavily on the oral anecdotes and oral memories of quilters, stories that link women with common interests to a body of shared information" (Cord).

To keep unpacking the importance of this symbol here is Bordwich's take on the cultural significance of the Underground Rail from his Washington Post article: "History's Tangled Threads", (Bordewich wrote *Bound for Canaan: The Underground Railroad and the War for the Soul of America*),

. . . the Underground Railroad still has something to teach: that every individual, no matter how humble, can make a difference in the world, and that the importance of one's life lies not in money or celebrity, but in doing the right thing, even in silence or secrecy, and without reward. This truth doesn't need to be encoded in fiction in order to be heard. (Bordewich)



This quote completely embodies the work of The Covering House. It grieves me that the work that began with the Underground Railroad, while not the same, still has a place and must continue until everyone is free.

Although the snapshot and the artifacts have contributed some insight . . . I realize that this gives no vehicle for putting the story into a meaningful whole . . . I am drawn to use metaphor in an attempt to explain my truth and to seek connections between my life experience and my academic experience.

(Muncey 78)

I use the metaphor of a quilt in my curtain speech. Because the show is comprised of so many different elements, this seemed like the perfect metaphor to introduce the audience to the construction of the play.

This play sews together, like a quilt, stories, songs, interviews, poems, scenes and monologues that are glimpses into the work and humanity of The Covering House. I conducted hours of interviews with the staff and volunteers of The Covering House as well as individuals with whom they partner. The play is based on that work as well as my own experience as a volunteer and their chaplain as well as my extensive research on the topic. (Powell)

## Journey



Figure #12

You know, when I was nineteen, Grandpa took me on a roller coaster . . . up, down, up, down. Oh, what a ride! I always wanted to go again. You know, it was just so interesting to me that a ride could make me so frightened, so scared, so sick, so excited, and so thrilled all together! Some didn't like it. They went on the merry-go-round. That just goes around. Nothing.

I like the roller coaster. You get more out of it.

This famous quote from the Ron Howard film *Parenthood* expresses how the process of *cover* has felt for me. The journey of *cover* has both an internal and external life. The internal life is

connected to the idea of cultivating and braving the crazy rollercoaster known as vulnerability. Rollercoasters have peaks and valleys, they have twists and turns we cannot anticipate. If we choose to get on the rollercoaster, we are at its mercy. We cannot stop in the middle of it; no matter how uncertain or vulnerable it makes us feel. The shifts present in this ride can be thrilling or make us uncomfortable, but no one rides a rollercoaster alone.

"Fabrication of my particular patchwork life requires paying attention to physical feelings, thoughts, and emotions, which exposes . . . (Muncey 70)." "A vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, re-fract, and resist cultural interpretation" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 7).

The word vulnerable or vulnerability keeps surfacing in this research and in my experience of auto ethnography. Ruth Behar even entitled her book *The Vulnerable Observer*. The title of this book gives permission for the discoveries and realizations that are a crucial part of the work to make us susceptible to being hurt or shattered in some way. Behar gives us a more in depth way to look at this idea: "In anthropology everything depends on the emotional and intellectual baggage" the anthropologist takes on the voyage (Behar 8)."

I deduce from this quote that we all carry 'ourselves' into whatever we do. Often, I find this a challenge. In order to make

it through the 'masters house' I have gathered many of my own tools along the way. These have often created internal callouses of self-denial and hidden feelings of invisibility. One of the results of cover is that I am learning to let the rough places heal. I am learning to let go of the toughening experiences that defined those moments and I'm seeking out the hidden places of vulnerability. These calloused scars are not negative, quite the contrary, however, in some cases they have prevented me from sharing my true self with those around me. I found the same 'guard' up in the cast and those involved with the show. This toughness is a place to hide. Often, there is no freedom in hiding. What is the alternative? Qualitative researcher Bréne Brown gives some ideas for how to move forward in these spaces occupied by women and the academy, the work they do and the research they cultivate.

Journeys are about birth and rebirth, conflict and resolution, and give insight into alternative explanations and views of the world. My journeys have been both literal and metaphorical, and both contribute to the understanding of the story. Although metaphor tends to focus specifically on the experience itself, the journey represents the path of healing and enlightenment required to move beyond the experience.

(Muncey 84)

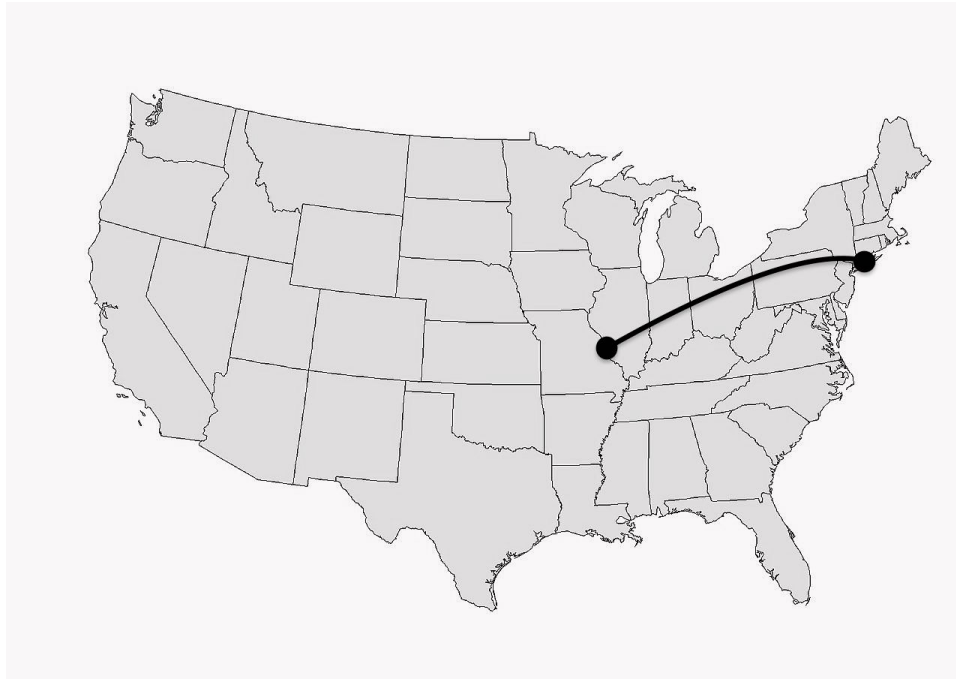


Figure #13

This figure symbolizes the part of the cover “rollercoaster” when we took the show to New York City for a performance. Melissa Harlow, our guest artist, made this part of the journey possible. She is connected to an arts organization that is considering producing a New York cast of the show (not sure of the outcome of this yet). We were able to take the entire original cast except for one person. The fact not everyone was able to go, was devastating to me, as well as the entire group. However, having one person removed from the cast forced some interesting changes. First of all, it gave me the freedom to make some much need cuts to the script. I envision that cover will ultimately be a 90-minute show. This gives ample time for the post-show discussion without exerting the audience.

Throughout the process of writing the play I was very sensitive to the fact that every audience has a threshold. With the extremely difficult subject matter, it was my responsibility as the playwright to make sure we challenged the audience without pushing them past their threshold and triggering them to go to a place of emotional numbness. If the audience became numb, they would stop listening. If they stopped listening, the entire purpose of the play would be defeated. This threshold is controlled by attention span and emotional stamina. With the world dominated by a 30minute sitcom timeframe, time was not on our side. In light of this, I was able to cut some sections of Act I. I was relieved when we did the read through of the new draft for New York that most of the cast could not tell what had been cut from the script. Overall, I cut 10 pages from the script for New York. It was very difficult to do, but in the long run it is what is best for the show.

One of my favorite pieces of feedback regarding the show was after the New York performance. A man came up to me and shared that he forgot that the actors weren't the real people who had experienced these stories. In fact, he had to double check with his wife to make sure that they were actors. He went on to express how much he appreciated us bringing the story to their community. This comment affected me on a few levels. First of all, I was reminded how amazing the artists are with whom I

work. This cast is comprised of very gifted actors. Secondly, it reminded me of the influence of these stories. No matter what community absorbs them, they are transformative and powerful. They have the ability to speak to the deepest places where people's memories and experiences reside. Thirdly, I have a VERY important responsibility to the audiences and the participants. These stories are real and must be treated with the reverence and care they deserve. I remember waking up the morning of the New York performance in full-throttle freak out mode! I was so excited! WE WERE PERFORMING MY PLAY IN NEW YORK CITY! It was the realization of a dream. I look forward to what's next for this show and these incredible stories.

## CHAPTER FIVE:

### **Cover** Me - The Power of Performed Auto/Ethnographies

"Never depend on governments or institutions to solve any major problems all social change comes from the passion of individuals." This Margaret Mead quote is used in the opening video of *cover* and has come to mean a great deal to me as I have been on this journey. It reminds me of how important it is to use my passion and skills to help further the causes of social justice. It reminds me of the responsibility I have to follow my personal convictions and be a contributing member of my community. In this chapter I will share my final thoughts about how the project of *cover* has changed me personally, professionally and artistically.

I have discovered that scholarly work, especially auto/ethnography, must embody (at least) three things to be worthwhile. First of all, it must be honest. The ethnographer must be honest with herself and her participants. I like to anticipate and plan and envision the end result of the work that I do. This journey taught me that I had to let myself be surprised and challenged and even saddened by what I discovered. For example, the rehearsal when I discovered that one of the young actors was so invested in her character that she was having nightmares that she had been kidnapped I felt as though I



had failed her by not expecting this. Reasonably, I could not have foreseen that her role would have triggered this challenging of a reaction from her. However, I had to let it wash over me, without judgment or expectation, and then I could work to process it. Then I could make sure that she felt love and support from those of us in the cast. She learned the valuable lesson of leaving the character on stage and was able to develop healthy boundaries between her and the character. Now she has that ability to take that important self-care skill into every process of which she is apart.

I also learned in conducting interviews for the script that it was important I check my motives to make sure I was not guiding the interviews to yield my pre-determined result. The minute I had an inkling I could attempt to mold and make it mine, or an acquisition of the project, I would feel my stomach tighten and I knew that was not the way this should go. This only happened a few times, but I am grateful that I learned to trust my intuition.

The second discovery I have made is that auto/ethnography must be reciprocal. The one sided/scholarly-work-is-valuable-at-any-price-to-anyone is rubbish. The narratives that are entrusted to the ethnographer are truly sacred. My work as an auto/ethnographer must benefit the participants and by association the community. If the work is only self-serving it

defeats its purpose. This idea was created by Elaine Lawless in her *Journal of American Folklore* article, "I Was Afraid Someone like You... an Outsider... Would Misunderstand: "Negotiating Interpretive Differences between Ethnographers and Subjects. "But the experience has been exhilarating. I would not have done it any other way. The results have been dramatic. The collective interpretations far surpass the individual, scholarly ones." (Lawless 312)

Not only is reciprocal ethnography ethical because it gives the participant power over their voice, but as Lawless advocates, it makes the overall result far more meaningful. The heightened meaning comes from including all voices in the conversation. One example from cover is the monologue performed by Staff Member 3. Here is the monologue:

Don't feel it today Just don't feel it.  
And they should have my very best,  
but I'm not sure it's in me today.  
I don't really want to think about it.  
I don't really like want to feel passionate about it.  
The only thing that's keeping me here right now is  
that it's the right thing to do, like I don't quit  
things, I would not leave this place in the lurch,  
having to fill another position.  
There's just nothing really right now.  
Like I know, I know,  
I know the right things  
And I deep down probably feel them somewhere  
They are just really deep right now  
I just don't really feel like searching for them

When this interview occurred I was amazed at how open this

particular staff member was about the depth of difficulty that is a real part of working in the non-profit world. Had I entered into the interview process with a preconceived notion about how the staff was "supposed" to feel, this monologue would never have surfaced.

It felt like church each time I would hit record on my voice memo and begin to ask questions and seek out the deeper ideas and experiences of each participant. So often, they would say, "I don't usually talk about things in this much detail." Or what was even more interesting was when they would have discoveries while they were sharing with me. They would surprise themselves as they opened their souls to me. That was one of the most compelling parts of this project, to see experts surprise themselves simply by voicing their personal narratives. I had the most encompassing perspective because I was there for every interview and then for every rehearsal and performance of those interviews. At the first read through of the script it was such an incredible moment to hear the words of the TCH folks coming out of the mouths of the cast. I am humbled by the investment that everyone in this process poured into the show. I am so grateful to be a part of this amazing work! I think that this occurred because I finally found a way to be vulnerable. The stories and the work of cover hit me so deeply that I had no resistance to its power. I realized that if I was asking the

group to open themselves up to this work, then I needed to be able to do the same. Somewhere in the process my vulnerability gave them permission to trust then my method and motives.

This idea leads to my third realized, it takes time and trust. I was thrilled to discover that people actually want to tell you their story. They want someone to listen to them. When I began the interview portion of the ethnography, I was nervous. By that time in the process, I knew the TCH folks well. We had spent enough time with one another that they knew my intentions were pure. While the risk on my part is much less than that on the part of the participant, there is an undeniable leap required in asking people to share their stories. Lawless describes the "leap" involved in her work of gathering women's narratives of violence:

I began to put signs up all over the shelter—in the kitchen, the smoking room, the office. My signs said, "Tell me your story." Elaine, who works in the office, wants to write a book about you and your experiences with violence. If you are willing to share your story with her, stop by the office and let her know." Then I held my breath because I did not know if a single woman would come to me and offer to share her story. But, you know, they did. They came, one after the

other, for months, willing-eager, even-to share their stories with me. (Lawless and Carver 42)

The exposition to this quote is that Elaine worked at the shelter for months before she asked the women at the shelter to share their stories with her. She took time to discern the lay of the land before launching into the ethnographic work. In her infinite wisdom, she knew this kind of work takes time. The same goes for me. It would have been so presumptuous to waltz into The Covering House one day and say, share with me your stories. It took time spent with these amazing women, it took laughter over silly jokes and bonfires and prayers and camps and late night text message conversations. It took time. They had to know my motives were pure, as pure as theirs. They had to know I was trustworthy and that I was learning to care for this cause like they did. It is fascinating that the performance of the play hit at a low point in the work of TCH. They were struggling to get their residential facility off the ground. They had been dealing with zoning and permit red tape for an entire year. After seeing the play one of the TCH staff members said to me, "Thank you so much for reminding me why I do this job." Another staff member told me, "It's so easy to get caught up in the day to day and forget that we are really working toward making a difference." There is no clearer example of reciprocal ethnography. The idea of reciprocal performance intersects with

Dwight Conquergood's 'moral map' and his belief in dialogical performance. Here, Kathy Hytten summarizes Conquergood's approach:

"He (Conquergood) calls this dialogic performance, one that brings "together different voices, worldviews, values systems, and beliefs so that they can have a conversation with one another" ("Performing," 9). The goal is not empathy or even primarily understanding, but rather to open up conversation." (Hytten 129)

It takes a community to make sure performers of auto/ethnography process their work in a healthy way. As teachers and leaders we need to make sure we are creating safe spaces for our actors and their process to live. We must give them tools to process in a group setting and on their own. We must be sensitive and intentional in the ways we construct rehearsals, making sure that the production team and performers are on the same page and handling each other with care. I didn't know that freeing the voices of the survivors of trafficking would give me the courage to release my own. The poem "I'm Standing Here" is a way for me to declare my existence through the voices of women who need to do the same. I have learned trauma comes in many distinct forms and exists in varying degrees. I have trauma. I have trauma from moving through the codes of working in varied layers of misogyny in the

world of faith-based academia. I knew it was I speaking through the voices of the women but I didn't intend it at the time. I was working to get inside the characters and to be true to the process I had to access the feelings of silence and invisibility I have endured.

I feel freer than I have in a long time. While the process of mounting the play was exhausting, terrifying and exhilarating no one can take that away from me. No one. Not the colleagues who didn't come, not the bosses or administrators that never showed, not the students who do not understand how vital this issue is. However, the two female students who approached me and wanted to talk about feminism understood the magnitude of the work. Some of audience members who were so moved they were unable to verbalize what they experience will profoundly be changed, forever, for the better. The participants are surely changed and I am changed. I am no longer afraid that what I say will fall on completely silent ears. Now I know that it will not fall off the cliff of the powers that be. No one can keep these words from being thrown up and out to the heavens. Once the words land I know they will embed themselves deeply in the belly of those that choose to let in the words of hurt, challenge and healing. I know that all of it is worth it when a member of the cast will be getting help for the sexual trauma in her past because she couldn't let her voice be overridden. "Joy, if I

don't say something then I'm letting my voice stay silent." I am rocked to the core by her bravery and faith in me and in the meaning of the show. I've always known that theatre could save the world. I know this so profoundly because it has saved mine time and time again. This saving grace has been translated and entrusted to others by the process of knitting together this cast and this production. I still feel so overwhelming grateful for the chance to have been apart of it. I am optimistic that the show will continue to have a life of its own.

When I began this journey I had absolutely no idea where it would go. I could not have known it would change my students, my church, my university, the cast, the TCH staff, volunteers and the girls. And I had no idea just how deeply it would affect me. The deep-seeded suspicion I have always known came to be the night *cover* opened. I knew in my heart of hearts that theatre could do more than entertain and that my background in performance could assist in the process. I knew that it could change audiences as they absorbed stories and create in them a desire to be a part of the change that is desperately needed in their communities. As a performer, director and producer I knew the stories with which I had been involved had each made their mark on me. In light of my experience with *cover*, this idea is forever cemented in my heart: when stories are translated through auto/ethnography in a theatrical framework the



performers, the audience and the playwright are never, ever the same.

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## VITA

Joy Powell an award winning director and producer of over 100 shows in St. Louis, MO and throughout the bi-state area. Having taught Theatre at the university level since 2003, Powell has developed a successful career as a theatre artist and scholar. She is an accomplished professional performer on the traditional musical theatre stage of the St. Louis MUNY and in more intimate venues of the city as a successful cabaret artist. Having work with Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville in their summer stock seasons since 2001, she has invested her time and talent in educational theatre as well.

Powell earned a Bachelor of Science in Musical Theatre Performance at Ball State University and an M.A. in Theatre with an emphasis in Directing from Lidenwood University.

Her research interests include Performance Studies, Women and Gender Studies, Solo Performance, Musical Theatre, Pedagogy in the Undergraduate Theatre Classroom, Performed Auto/Ethnography, Religious Studies and Theatre for Young Audiences.