

THE SEARCH FOR THEATRE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE  
An Actor's Journey

by

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## ABSTRACT

Throughout history people have sought to prompt social change through theatrical experiences. The theatre has moved the masses in ways that have frightened governments and religious establishments into closing down theatres and banning theatrical material. History proves that theatre which causes change exists and works, but it also proves there is no one definition or formula for this type of theatre. Depending on the culture, time period, issue, resources and people involved Theatre for Social Change takes a variety of forms. However, theatre affecting change does tend to maintain two common threads: the creation of a new work and the pursuit of the uncertain elements which will ensure the work affects change in its audience.

With no more than two common threads, where does a young actor, recognizing a social problem and desiring change prompted through a theatrical experience begin his or her journey? How does one create Theatre for Social Change? How does one know the theatrical work has successfully caused change within an audience? If there is no certain definition, no one way to pursue it, what direction should one follow?

Following Peter Brook's example as set in his 1966 production of *US*, I will create my own original work in the form of a one-person show and use it as the canvas to apply Brook's ideas and techniques. I hope to find that in order for an audience to change they must first be willing to participate in a performance, even if it is a performance demanding a harsh confrontation with an ignored social problem. Through this thesis I aim to prove that through an actor's personal journey with a social issue, the actor leads the way for the audience to be willing to participate and take the journey themselves resulting in change.

My written thesis will include the findings of my research and preparation, a detailed rehearsal and performance journal, the original script of my performance work *Knowing Fires* and a reflection on the completed process including audience feedback. All of these elements will hopefully lead to a conclusive and useful approach to creating Theatre for Social Change.

For Joshua.

Thank you.

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This process was only possible with the support and guidance of an important few...

Joshua you have believed in me when no one else did, including myself. You have lovingly encouraged and pushed me every step of the way. I could not have finished without you. There is no one else with whom I want to do this life. Thank you for living big with me -even when it's difficult.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

*“I find it hard to separate the experience of working on US from the product. It was, in the end, a painful and somewhat disillusioning experience. Paradoxically, it’s also an experience I’ve never regretted. To work with Brook is to learn a great deal, even if afterwards you have to reject some of what you’ve learned.” Albert Hunt (Hunt, Reeves 112)*

When I began this journey I wasn’t sure where I was going or if I could accomplish my purpose – affecting social change in an audience through a theatrical event. I knew others had done it, specifically as I looked to Peter Brook as my example, but I wasn’t convinced I could do the same. The vague and timid approach seen in my abstract is a good example of my uncertain direction and lack of confidence at the start.

I knew I wanted to create Theatre for Social Change – theatre purposed to wake up new perspectives and cause ripples of positive change within audiences, but only as I pushed forward in my process did my vision and courage become clear. Originally I sought to motivate the Christian evangelical church to love and service at home through a transparent window into the lives and hearts of missionaries serving abroad. In the end I would accomplish more than I ever hoped. As audience members shared their new perspectives, gasped at their new opinions of missionaries and explored their new inspirations I realized I could do it, I could affect change in an audience. Not only could I affect change in an audience, I had affected change.

I present the remainder of this introduction as a new prospectus. I have left the original abstract in its place because it represents where I began. An exploration of this thesis journey benefits by its remaining in the paper, but the following is a more articulate and accurate example of what my abstract should have stated.

Throughout history people have sought to prompt social change through theatrical experiences. The theatre has moved the masses in ways that have frightened governments and



religious establishments into closing theatres and banning theatrical material. History proves theatre that causes change exists and works, but it also proves there is no one definition or formula for this type of theatre. Depending on the culture, time period, issue, resources and people involved, Theatre for Social Change takes a variety of forms. However, theatre affecting change does tend to maintain two common threads: the creation of a new work and the pursuit of the elements which will ensure the work affects change in its audience.

Due to the lack of formal commonalities, where then does a young actor, recognizing a social problem and desiring change prompted through a theatrical experience, begin his or her journey? Specifically, how does one create Theatre for Social Change? How does one know the theatrical experience he or she has created has successfully caused change in the audience? If there is no certain definition, no one course to pursue, what direction should one follow?

Examples of the forms taken by Theatre for Social Change are endless. There are theatrical experiences that follow naturalistic tendencies, but are classified as Theatre for Social Change because they present a message or question regarding a social issue. On the other end of the spectrum, there are theatrical pieces affecting change that seem to follow no rules and distinctly mark themselves as “avant-garde.” Some types of Theatre for Social Change rely heavily on music, but others possess no music at all. Other versions tell true stories through a single actor, but still other forms depend on large casts of actors, dancers and acrobats creating a fictional story. With so many varieties of Theatre for Social Change I realized I must narrow my scope. I made the decision to focus on one person’s method of Theatre for Social Change and chose to follow Peter Brook’s example as set in his 1966 production of *US*. Peter Brook’s approach to audience interaction immediately captured my attention. He believed the audience

must come to the theatre willing to participate in the experience; thereby becoming a part of the performance. The participation may be different depending on the theatrical event and may be an emotional involvement or a literal physical involvement, but this is merely a summary of his ideas as I will explore them further in chapter two.

The idea made sense; without an agreement from the audience to do more than watch, change will not take place. Brook entered the *US* process unhappy with current attitudes relating to the theatre and the Vietnam War. He was also unsure of where his journey would lead him. The process may have been messy and the gathered theatre practitioners may have seemed to lose their way at times, but the end product in 1966 elicited reactions. *US* did not profoundly affect everyone who witnessed it, but it did make some people take a new look at an important issue. I related to Brook's ideas, they made sense to me and I respected the bravery of his process. In an attempt to follow Brook's example and seek Theatre for Social Change, I created my own original work in the form of a one-person show and used it as my canvas to apply Brook's ideas and techniques.

I intended to find audiences willing to emotionally and intellectually participate in performances, even if the performances demanded a harsh confrontation of an ignored social problem. I agreed with Brook's view that the actor must lead the way for the audience by facing his or her own personal journey with the social issue. Only then should one expect audiences to be willing to participate and take the journey themselves.

Throughout the writing and rehearsal process I wondered if I could adequately follow Peter Brook's example as set through *US*. I learned I must discover my own process in my search to create Theatre for Social Change. I had to use what was available to me – internally and

externally. Despite my lack of resources and experience, I was able to discover a form of Theatre for Social Change, *my* form of Theatre for Social Change. It may not look like Peter Brook's theatre, but the fundamental ideas and goals of the *US* process provided the important foundation for my journey.

My written thesis includes an exploration of Peter Brook's approach to Theatre for Social Change based on his 1966 production of *US* and the application of his approach to what became my personal search for Theatre for Social Change. Chapter four presents my original script *Knowing Fires* which resulted from the rehearsal process documented in chapter five. The names within the script have been changed out of respect for the people whom the characters loosely represent. Finally, a reflection on the process is included exploring audience feedback to the performances.

By the culmination of my process, I began to understand Albert Hunt's quote regarding his experience with Peter Brook. As Hunt said, I have also learned a great deal even though some of the things I learned I will not keep. For me this has been an experience I will never regret.

## CHAPTER TWO: THEATRE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Peter Brook's new work *US* was presented in 1966 at the Aldwych Theatre in London's West End. The work was created by Brook and a group of actors determined to face an important question, "if I say I care about the Vietnam War, what am I doing about it?" (Williams 73). The work was entitled *US* to express "US": the United States of America and "us" as a culture (Kustow 159). Brook wanted to find a way to connect the Johnsonian politics that escalated and maintained the war with the energies that might end it (162). While most people were going to the theatre to be entertained, Brook presented audiences with the opportunity to change themselves and potentially the world.

Brook, motivated by a growing dissatisfaction with the theatre's artificiality, conducted a public reading of *The Investigation* at the Royal Shakespeare Company. The text was taken from the testimonies of both the victims and the accused at the Nazi War Crimes trials. After the reading, Brook realized that these factual accounts of atrocities committed during the war only bored audiences. As with media reporting, the public was so numb to hearing crimes that eventually the crimes became almost acceptable. Brook believed that one of the prime responsibilities of the theatre is to communicate and connect with the audience (Williams 73). Brook was searching for a new form of theater, which called upon the audience to recognize and react to important social issues. What he found was a very old form of theater that has consistently evolved and reshaped its boundaries to collide head-on with the major social problems of history. However, to simply label it as "Theater for Social Change" does not hit the mark, because it assumes there is a mark to be hit. This experimental art form shifts in subtle ways and the difficulty only increases when extensive socio-cultural differences and geographic

considerations are factored in; these are, however, important in judging the success or failure of whatever it is the work is attempting to accomplish. Brook wanted to force the audience to concede that the necessary information was already available, in every newsstand, radio, and magazine, and that the audience had turned a blind eye. Brook hoped to illicit the kind of realization that drew blood, so to speak; a visceral reaction.

Within the loose category of Theatre for Social Change a wide variety of theatre types and intentions exist. There are theatre practitioners who have no intention towards Theatre for Social Change, but they succeed in creating a theatrical piece that moves audiences to change and reflection. Then there are those who seek to create Theatre for Social Change and never achieve a reaction within their audiences or actors. There are works that follow naturalistic tendencies, but can be classified as Theatre for Social Change because they present a message or question regarding a social issue. At the other end of the spectrum, there are theatrical pieces affecting change that seem to follow no rules and distinctly mark themselves as “avant-garde.” Some types of Theatre for Social Change rely heavily on music, but others possess no music at all. Other versions tell true stories through a single actor, but still other forms depend on large casts of actors, dancers and acrobats creating a fictional story. Theatre intended for social change varies wildly depending on the culture, the resources available, the place in history, the people involved and the issue at stake. The variety of forms results from the variety of needs. What affects an audience in the Caribbean may have no impact whatsoever on an audience in the Middle East or in upper middle class America. Therefore, for each culture, event and person an individual path must be forged.

Throughout history many social struggles have recognized the power of art as a tool in a larger battle. Specifically regarding colonial oppression, it has seemed the longer and more difficult the fight the more art and theatre are likely to be applied (Boon, Plastow 36). The Eritrean guerrilla warfare and struggle for freedom from Ethiopian colonial rule lasted for more than thirty years and in 1975 the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) started endorsing "cultural events" which took on the format of a variety show (37). In accordance with the EPLF's cultural beliefs all nine ethnic groups making up the Eritrea were represented within the events and for safety reasons, performances were always at night. Guided by an announcer, the performances involved cultural troupes numbering about thirty people and the troupe members often had multiple roles as singers, dancers, actors and musicians (37).

The events began with eight to ten songs in order to bring the crowd together and encourage a spirit of resistance (Boon, Plastow 37). The show ran for three to four hours and primarily consisted of song and dance - music was the most important element (37). Music was the cultural reference to which the people related to the most; therefore it was used to entertain, but also to encourage support for the social struggle. Drama had been introduced during the Italian colonization so while the audience was familiar with plays they wanted the music to begin the events (37). The plays applied to the events evolved through time and ranged from short crude sketches to naturalistic pieces (38).

No formal research was conducted to test the effectiveness of these cultural events, however, the considerable effort poured into the productions and the consistent use of these events spoke to the necessity they held (Boon, Plastow 38). Whenever a new offensive was being

planned, cultural events were also conducted. These events were meant to remind a war torn people what they were fighting for (38).

In 1967 modern Arabic theatre became distinguished by a growing focus on Arab affairs. As a result the theatre began moving towards elements of epic theatre with special emphasis on the element of estrangement because it allowed for audience interaction and incitement (Hamdan 58). Examples include *Haflat Samar min Ajl Khasmsa Huzairan* (Party in honor of the fifth of June) by Sa'dallah Wannus. In this play a struggle takes place between the company of actors on stage and the hidden actors among audience. At its climax a role reversal takes place among the actors and the spectators take to the stage (58). The theatre of Al-Shawk was founded in 1969 and came to be associated with this “art of incitement” (59). It developed a form of political cabaret drawn from popular Arab theatrical traditions with focus on the confrontation of issues, the exposure of error and “taking part in the change for the better” (59). The productions were based on short dramatic scenes which occurred rapidly yet were separate from one another (59). The success of this theatre was attributed to the participation and confrontation of the audience with issues. Other theatres in the likeness of the theatre of Al-Shawk eventually included the Egyptian Al-Qahwa theatre and the Lebanese Al-Hawkawati. The new Arab theatre was being defined by the involvement of the audience and the contrast between art and life in hopes of affecting public change (60).

In his book, *American Avant-garde Theatre: A History*, Arnold Aronson says, “It is often forgotten that initially the avant-garde was meant to transform society. A true avant-garde theatre must seek an essential change in audience perception that, in turn, will have a profound impact on the relationship of the spectator to the world” (6). It is the putting forth of the stark

juxtaposition between the acknowledged reality and the actual reality which moves an audience to change. The audience will absorb the experience and thereby participate in the theatrical event. Participation from an audience member is valuable whether it is simply a new perspective or a drastic change that results in social action.

Antonin Artaud viewed the theatre as a vehicle to stimulate the audience. According to him, the theatre should provide a complete experience which stirs the audience emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually. In order to achieve this end, Artaud purposed to expand the spectator's reality by arousing the creative forces within man's consciousness. He believed this level of creative consciousness had far greater power than rational consciousness in determining a human's actions. The theatrical experience should reach beyond the lies society accepts on the surface and expose the deeper values and actions of which people are capable. The play became a tool for Artaud to spark the audience's creative consciousness (Docherty 78). The ripples of Artaud's beliefs have spread far beyond his life and times. Avant-garde theatre practitioners after him have shared the goal of instinctive reactions capable of transforming the spectators' perception of the world and themselves. They have worked in the hope of broadening the consciousness of the audience and revealing the true world that lies beyond comfortable rationale (91).

Like Artaud, Peter Brook believed that a strong presence of actors *and* a strong presence of spectators could produce a circle of unique connection where barriers of understanding could be broken and the ignored reality made real (The Shifting Point 41). Peter Brook wanted to explore what happened after a performance was finished and what the audience retained as a result of the theatrical experience. He recognized that fun can be forgotten and even good arguments can lose



their meaning. Brook came to believe that when emotion and argument are harnessed to a willingness from the audience to see more clearly into itself, “then something in the mind burns” and the message sears onto the memory a lasting image of the play’s central message (Empty Space 136).

In 1966 Peter Brook began with a group of diverse actors, theatre practitioners and no script. During 15 weeks of intense rehearsal, the group focused on “contact with the audience through shared references” by studying newspaper articles, interviews, official reports, happenings, Vietnamese folk stories and American myths present in comic strips and popular songs (Williams 74). The group sought to create a personal connection for themselves with the baffling array of material about popular life in the West and the horrors of life in Vietnam. They built improvisations around the gathered material which ranged from a balancing act on a bench that could only be ended when the actor was willing to sacrifice one of his or her senses in order to stop the war to the company of actors creating a Vietnamese village within the rehearsal space (Hunt, Reeves 100, 104). The improvisations brought about their own mountain of material which was compiled by Denis Cannan and Charles Wood (Williams 74).

Jerzy Grotowski was brought in to work with the actors through two strenuous weeks of “psycho-physical” work (Kustow 163). Brook refused to explain what the work with Grotowski was exactly, but he described what it accomplished in the actors: “The shock of confronting himself in the face of simple irrefutable challenges. The shock of catching sight of his own evasions, tricks, and clichés. The shock of sensing something of his own vast and untapped resources. The shock of being forced to question why he is an actor at all. The shock of being forced to recognize that such questions do exist and – despite a long English tradition of avoiding

seriousness in theatrical art – the time comes when they must be faced. And of finding that he wants to face them (163).”

Brook determined the final outcome of the script and used unexpected tonal transitions and harsh confrontations of style to create the impact of a continually changing and unsettled reality (Williams 74). Through the changing contrast, the company portrayed a moral contradiction. For example, a scene of American GIs talking about the morality of torture in an official interview abruptly switched to an image of three soldiers beating a Viet Cong prisoner. Almost instantly the writhing victim and his cries altered into the romp of a pelvis-thrusting rock-singer howling through a song about the delights of napalm to a screaming group of fans (74).

It was decided the focus of the second act would be the self-sacrifice by fire in protest against the war (Kustow 165). The group had learned about the suicides which started with Buddhists in Hue and spread to America with the death of Norman Morrison. Morrison’s story disturbed Brook so the second act became the story of a young Englishman determined to burn himself in protest and a young Englishwoman who tests his motives by trying to discourage his plan (165). For the play’s end, Brook decided to take a prompt from the group’s work on *American Happenings*. The final inspiration was a piece by John Cage—a noiseless composition set to butterflies’ wings. Brook asked an actor in a white suit and black gloves, to walk past the motionless actors on the stage. Stopping, the actor opened a small box, inserted his hand, and released a butterfly. As the butterfly flew up into the roof of the theatre, the actor released a second butterfly. Finally reaching into his pocket for a cigarette lighter, the actor took out a third

butterfly and set fire to it. Then the actors on stage remained motionless until the audience decided to leave (167).

Throughout the rehearsal process, Brook was successful at reaching deeper levels within his actors, but was he able to accomplish the same in his audiences? During one performance a middle-aged woman ascended the stage and ripped the lighter out of the actor's hand (Kustow 167). She was confused to find the butterfly made of paper, but faced the audience and said, "You see, we can do something!" (167). Another famous reaction to the show came from Kenneth Tynan. At the end of the performance as the actors stood, Tynan called out, "Are you waiting for us or are we waiting for you?" (168). Even in this question Brook's point was made. What or who are we waiting on? Brook was delighted. Make-believe did have the power to make people take action (Williams 75). Those who left the theatre confused were at least aware of something new. They were asking questions. They were affected and Brook's hope was that the inward realization blossomed into change. *US* stood as proof of what theatre about immediate issues could become (Kustow 168). In order to confront a horrific reality spectators must be presented with more than a news report. Rather they must be affected to their core through familiar references and impulses that can make people rise to their feet. Brook had managed to find a human and personal focus in an inhuman war (168). What infuriated critics was Brook's desire to go beyond merely presenting 'a position' on the war (168). Just when an audience member thought his or her current convictions or feelings were validated the play disrupted that position (168). *US* would not allow the audience to maintain accepted conventions or proceed with comfortable thought patterns.

Brook insisted the responsibility of the theatre was to illuminate and then to allow spectators to change themselves, but there must be a personal recognition and connection to the illumination within the actor in order for it to be the catalyst to change. Brook used three words in the French language to solidify his description of what is needed to bring this illumination into reality: *repetition, representation, assistance* (Empty Space 138). For Brook the performance in front of the audience became the representation or the “making present” (Kustow 155). The “making present” was the personal journey and confrontation of the actor first experienced in the rehearsal process then brought to the stage fresh each night. Brook chose one of many French words for the audience, *assistance*. The actor must go through the entire process of repetition and representation, but for a complete experience the audience must come to actively assist (155). According to Brook, only with the willing assistance of the audience can repetition transform into representation. “Then the word representation no longer separates actor and audience, show and public: it envelops them: what is present for one is present for the other” (Empty Space 140).

According to Brook, the actor is meant to go through something very challenging so that the audience, in a short period of time, can gain in concentrated form what the actor has collected over an extended period of time (Shifting Point 61). Through their improvisations and research, the actors developed a surprisingly personal relationship with Vietnam. Thus the actor became the “filter,” translating the confusion of material, returning again and again to Vietnam, and relating it to what he or she could actually experience within him or herself (61). Then each night during the performance the actors relived this *with* the audience (61). The audience would not be confronted alone. The actors would be confronted along with them, night after night, doing their

(the actors) part by experiencing the same journey in which they expected the audience to engage. In an interview that would be gathered into Croyden's book *Conversations with Peter Brook*, Brook gave the illustration of a man climbing a mountain and attached by ropes is the audience below him (30). They are slightly behind him, but they are moving with him in every step of the path he is forging.

As the actors stood silent at the end of *US*, they were facing the question for everyone, "where do we stand at this moment in relation to what is going on in ourselves and the world around us?" (Shifting Point 62). The end of the show was not a rebuke from the actors to the audience (62). At that moment the actors were just as concerned with their relationship to the war as they were concerned about the audience's relationship to the war. *US* made no claims and resulted from a series of attempts to explore a specific problem. The creative team behind *US* was interested in theatre of confrontation and sought to present the intolerable contradiction between the normal life they were living and the simultaneous horrors of Vietnam (62). Brook said, "Is there any tragedy more inevitable and more terrifying? We wanted the actors to explore every aspect of this contradiction, so that instead of accusing or condoling an audience, they could be what an actor is supposed to be, the audience's representative, who is trained and prepared to go farther than the spectator, down a path the spectator knows to be his own" (62).

Change in an audience has hope of taking root through a complete theatrical experience because people can compartmentalize an idea, but they cannot compartmentalize a new experience (Aronson 7). The theatrical event becomes a theatrical experience when the actors and audience come together willing to be confronted with a new truth about themselves and their relationship with the world. The actors and team behind the theatrical experience must find their

own connection to the subject at hand through their rehearsal process, but they must also allow themselves to be confronted by it again and again with the audience during the performance. The path must be forged and the audience must be willing to follow the path of recognition and discovery.

*US* received some negative reviews. As expected, not everyone got it, but some people, like the brave middle-aged woman who rushed to the stage, did. She is evidence that a unique circle of connection can be achieved if the audience participates. But what if the audience does not participate? Are the work and its benefits negated? Brook would say no. The company has done its part and worked as if the audience is ready to experience the journey to new ground and understanding. The experience will not be wasted because the rehearsal development and experimentation will have changed those involved in the process. Although the actors might miss the culminating joy of making the journey *with* the audience, they will have experienced a journey of growth and discovery nonetheless. It should be every playwright, director, designer, and actor's desire to experience the unique connection that brings change within the audience. However, the work of the theatrical group should not hinge on what the audience is willing to grasp. The theatre must continue to push forward, knowing that some spectators, and perhaps eventually all, will follow in the path that has been forged.

### CHAPTER THREE: PETER BROOK AND ME

As I began my personal journey seeking theatre that causes change, I looked to Peter Brook as a beacon in this hard-to-define art. Through his production of *US*, Peter Brook sought to explore what happens when a performance is finished and what remains with the audience. Brook came to believe that when emotion and argument are harnessed to a willingness from the audience to see more clearly into itself, “then something in the mind burns” and the message becomes a part of the audiences’ memory (Empty Space 136). Brook’s goal of audience interaction not only made sense to me, but it was a reoccurring theme I recognized in other forms of Theatre for Social Change. Brook took the idea of audience interaction one crucial step further by defining the need for the actor’s own personal confrontation. The audience should not be expected to make a journey the actors have not already personally traveled.

Like Brook and so many others seeking social change through art, I began with an issue important to me. Peter Brook believed a disturbing contradiction existed between the lives of comfortable and willingly ignorant people living in western cultures versus the devastation experienced by innocent civilians living in Vietnam during the war. At a dinner table in America, the new reports of bombings and dying children could be easily turned off and ignored. Attention could be focused on baseball games and summer picnics, but no one living in Vietnam could escape the daily horrors of war.

As a protestant, evangelical Christian I recognized a contradiction between the lives of comfortable and willingly ignorant Christians living in western cultures versus the sacrifices of missionaries living abroad. In past centuries when missionaries moved overseas they did not expect to return home. In fact, they carried coffins as a standard part of their cargo—many died

of disease or violence within the first years after arrival, but they kept going abroad to serve others (Rankin 7). Today missionaries still go into countries where war, famine and plague are raging and constant threats. They leave everything behind to live in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Sudan, Nigeria and Colombia. They go knowing they will be in danger, but they keep going (6).

Why have they gone to places where their lives are endangered? Why forfeit comfort, safety and health -- even family members? For them the answer is simple. As Jerry Rankin, former President of the International Mission Board describes it, “they don’t take risks out of foolish disregard for their own lives or simply to convince others to change their religious affiliation” (10). They go because “the love of Christ compels them” (2 Cor 5:14). To hear these missionaries talk, they can’t not go. Their words echo the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah when he said, “If I say, ‘I will not mention Him, or speak any more in His Name,’ there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in and I cannot.” (Jer 20:9). At the heart of Christianity is a missionary commission that is the same for those who live abroad as those living in their original culture. So the question must be asked, why do the lives of most Christians in America appear so different from the lives of missionaries living abroad?

I sought to create a theatrical experience that would confront a Western evangelical church audience with the dichotomous reality of their lives and the lives of missionaries. Like Brook I was entering my process without a script. I grew up surrounded by compelling and even shocking stories from the mission field. The stories remained with me into adulthood so I decided to begin my journey at the source; I started talking to missionaries. Video conferences and e-mails were shared in an attempt to hear missionaries in their own words. I followed



Brook's example and amassed a large collection of information and research based on their individual stories and lives. I conducted further research by reading material available about the missionaries as well as the cultures and political environments in which they live.

According to Brook, the actor must become the "filter" translating the baffling confusion of material for the audience (Shifting Point 61). To be an effective translator the actor must first experience his or her own personal relationship with the issue at hand. Only then can the actor hope to truly confront the issue in their own life. Once the confrontation takes hold in the actor's experience the actor is prepared to lead the audience on the same path. Brook led his actors in improvisations determined to create a personal relationship with Vietnam and its current atrocities. In order to experience my personal relationship and confrontation with the lives of missionaries I conducted my own set of improvisations. I began by piecing their words into monologues. Throughout the rehearsal process the text of the monologues developed through improvisation based on my expanding knowledge and understanding of each missionary.

I experimented with stream of conscious speaking on behalf of the missionaries as well as personal substitutions. I began with their words and a train of thought true to their story, but I would let it develop and expand based on my response to their emotions as well as my knowledge gained through research. By the end of the "practice monologue" I was speaking for myself as if I was the one living out the struggle and not someone else. I exchanged names and personal information within their developing monologues with personal information from my own life. For example, when one missionary spoke of the death of her husband I replaced his name with the name of my husband. As a result the missionaries' lives and sacrifices developed a personal connection with my life and experiences.

I sought to experience a vocal and physical connection to these missionaries as well as an emotional connection so I began experimenting with vocal and physical improvisations. I applied Kristin Linklater's resonance pyramid from her book *Freeing the Natural Voice* as a part of the vocal exploration. Linklater seeks to bring words back to their physical, sensory and emotional sources within the body by exploring different effects brought through different sounds focused in various parts of the body (Linklater 328). I began the pyramid low in my body and slowly worked my way up to the head resonances. I experimented speaking in each resonance space with the missionaries' words eventually finding the resonance that connected best with each person. Sometimes it was beneficial to intentionally rehearse a character outside what I had found to be their natural resonance in order to break habits and make new discoveries.

As I attempted to relate to the missionaries physically I loosely applied historical archetypes to each of them. One of the women reminded me of the mother earth archetype. I found her deeply connected to the earth with a low center of gravity and a wide stance from bearing children. With the youngest character I found it helpful to think in terms of the natural elements as she often had the energy of fire while at times some of the other missionaries rushed like water. I found the Shakespeare and Company exercise "Milling and Seething" the most helpful. Moving through a designated area one must continuously move through the center of the room going through space evenly seeking to create balance as if it were a platform balancing on a tip. Traditionally one begins by exploring personal physical awareness, partner awareness, images, ages and tasks. The physical connection with the missionaries grew through the exercise given the physical freedom to explore them in different scenarios and through continuous movement.

As each monologue developed I experienced periods of emotional exhaustion because I could no longer experience these missionaries objectively. I was temporarily taking on their lives and struggles and in doing so I could not ignore the question, “would I be willing to do the same?” The material I was exploring required harsh honesty from myself and this was often uncomfortable. As I continued rehearsals I began to experience a challenge to my personal faith especially in its practice. I was constantly confronted with the contradiction between my lack of personal sacrifice for others and the sacrifice of these missionaries. They have left home, family, comfort, careers and childhood dreams in order to help other people and honor their God. I live in comfort in America with food, clothes, home, and healthcare. I’m surrounded by friends and family and worship corporately in safety. Even my work environment is tolerant and supportive of my beliefs and practices. With nothing in my way, what am I doing to help others? Do I forfeit my selfish desires and preferences in order to serve? If I knew what sacrifice would be required of me going into a circumstance, would I still enter into it? If I claim to live by the same faith as these missionaries, why does my life look so different from theirs? These were difficult questions for me to face on a daily basis. Facing the answers to these questions required a harsh level of personal honesty.

Within my process the “making present” was the next challenge. How could I clearly convey on stage the confrontation I continuously experienced during rehearsal? In an interview Brook gave the illustration of a man climbing a mountain attached by ropes to the audience below him (Croyden 29). The audience is slightly behind him, but they are moving with him in every step of the path he is forging. As the sole actor in my original thesis work *Knowing Fires* it was my responsibility to lead the audience along this path of uncomfortable realities. I decided to

provide myself with a voice, a chorus, to speak for my personal journey through these stories. This chorus character would experience the stories along with the audience, but would have the freedom to ask out loud the questions the audience should be asking. The character “Abby” became this chorus who begins the show with one mindset, but finishes the show with a different perspective.

Abby’s final monologue is intentionally loosely written because it will be newly improvised during each performance. If I, as the actor and filter, have accomplished the responsibility of allowing myself to be confronted throughout the show I will have an honest response in those final moments as Abby. When the actors stood silent at the end of *US*, they were facing the question for everyone, “where do we stand at this moment in relation to what is going on in ourselves and the world around us?” (Shifting Point 62). At this moment in the show the actors were truly concerned with their relationship to the war as well as the audiences’. They were confronting what was most frightening within themselves (62). Within my original work, Abby realizes if these very human missionaries can follow Christ and experience sacrifice so can she. As these missionaries follow Christ despite their human similarities and limitations they prove Abby has no excuse. With this realization Abby must make a choice. Will she begin living her life differently, selflessly and almost certainly, uncomfortably? Or will she remain complacent in her faith and service? As Abby highlights the questions and contradictions of her reality she is asking the audience to make the same self-evaluation. She can not answer all the questions nor does she try – she leaves it up to the audience to do their own thinking.

Part of “making present” required providing these missionaries with a context on stage. Through the company’s research Brook encountered the stories of Buddhists in Hue who set

themselves on fire in order to protest the war (Kustow 165). Brook was especially bothered by the story of Norman Morrison an American Quaker who also sacrificed himself in an act of protest against the war (165). Brook came to consider burning the central image of *US* (Hunt, Reeves 103). I was surprised to find the imagery of fire a constant throughout my research as well. When the missionaries spoke their passion was often referenced as a fire as well as their trials. These missionaries have known fires, whether in the bullets that ripped through their flesh or in the burning grief of watching a child suffer. They are continuously propelled by the passionate fire in their hearts that burns relentlessly for Christ and the nations. They have left their light all over the world as they have illuminated the dark places by giving hope and help to those around them. When you talk to them, you cannot deny that these missionaries are themselves fires, spreading light at tremendous rates and never seeming to realize it. To provide a physical metaphor for their light I decided to include candles within the set, enabling each missionary to light her own candle as she speaks.

The missionaries now had a common physical thread, but in order to center each character, I decided to provide specific environments. The creation of the set began with seemingly unrelated pieces of furniture covered in candles. Within the furniture were the missionaries “spaces” where their activities and monologues took place. A designer suggested natural wood be used for the elements of each environment. The designer’s inspiration came from Renaissance-like pieces echoing images of cathedrals and their ancient woodcarvings. The bare wood and different wood colors would also provide a direct connection to the earth and nature. It brought unity to the set and brought together the high and the low, much like the contrast created in the stories. The use of flame produced by the candles left an unmistakable

image of burning. The wood and fire create references to martyrs at the stake, the burning passion of the heart and the fires of trials. This juxtaposition of the temporal flesh and the eternal spirit, the high and the low, cohabitating and celebrating one another evokes one of the oldest and most beautiful doctrines of the ancient church: the Trinity. Just like the set design these missionaries are deeply connected to their surroundings and yet fully separate.

Brook insisted the responsibility of the theatre was to illuminate and then to allow spectators to change themselves. He used three words in the French language to solidify his description of what is needed to bring this illumination into reality: *repetition*, *representation*, *assistance* (Empty Space 138). The third and final element of Brook's trinity is in the hands of the audience. There is no foreseeable prediction of the audience's willingness to participate in the confrontation I will present. I can only do my part, but will I know if I've done my part successfully if the audience does not respond favorably? It is very difficult to quantify the success of a theatrical piece seeking change in an audience. Change in an audience member may be subtle, internal, or take time to come to fruition. In an attempt to estimate change or at least the beginnings of change, my audiences will be surveyed after watching my original thesis production *Knowing Fires*. The audiences already possess a shared reference with the missionaries in the show because they are congregations of the same faith and doctrine, but this indicates no promise they will be participatory audiences. As I embark on the public performances of the piece I have developed I do not know what to expect. I'm sure there are missing elements I am unaware of at this point in the process and problems that will occur once the piece is in front of an audience, but I have learned there is no formula for this art. There is no perfect plan. Like Brook, I do not expect the show to convert the audience (Hunt, Reeves 97).

However, I hope for a seed of change which once planted might bear fruit. I agree with Brook's belief that if "only one or two people are given the beginnings of change," my work will have been valuable (97).

## **CHAPTER FOUR: THE SCRIPT**



# Knowing Fires

Stories of Sacrifice

Written by Brit Cooper Robinson

*Black out – lit candles fill the stage – an old recording of children singing “This Little Light of Mine” plays. An unlit candle sits within each of the missionary “locations” on stage. These candles will be lit during their individual stories. Abby sits down center with her unlit candle. She is trying to strike a match.*

**Abby:** I was buying groceries the other day, at the same grocery store I shop at every week, being rung up by the same cashier, and without even looking up, we exchanged the typical...hi, how are you, good, thanks. But as I was leaving the store I realized I didn't ask her how her day was really expecting an answer. I didn't honestly care how she was doing or if she was even having a good day. I realized that if she had answered me honestly I would have been surprised and probably annoyed because she was slowing down my shopping.

Driving home from the store I was stopped at a light and I started to look around. A homeless man sitting on the corner, a woman in the car next to me, a teenager crossing the street. I started to wonder how many people I come across throughout my day that I never really notice, that I never really consider? I don't know what their home life is like? Whether they're happy or healthy or fed.

The next day at church I sat listening to a woman talk about her experiences abroad on the mission field. She talked about her passion for the nations and this fire God had put in her heart. She talked about the miracles she had seen, the lives changed, the wells built, and the hungry fed.

And I thought to myself, why is it so different here? Why don't we have conversations around our dinner tables and our Sunday school classes about the same things this missionary is speaking of? Why aren't these miracles happening in our lives?

When I think of missionaries I think of a great light...a movement, crossing oceans and continents, working and sacrificing so that others might see the hope of the gospel. Missionaries seem to leap at the chance to go to extremes for the sake of the gospel, while I've been content to just buy my groceries and keep my head down. Why can missionaries carry out this fire and passion abroad, but its so easy for me to avoid it at home?

What if there isn't an ocean or a continent meant for me, but instead my hometown, my community, my country? Does that still make me a part of this great light? *(She turns to face the candles on stage)* this light covering the landscape.

*(Her candle remains unlit)*

**Tish:** *(in her kitchen at home, baking)* Well, I remember looking out of our apartment window one morning while I was drying my hair. I looked down into the street and I could see these two elderly women walking arm in arm and the scene was so... quaint – an old cobblestone street lined with antique buildings, bright blue skies, the French Alps in the distance and a flower box in every window – I mean it probably should have been a postcard or I don't know a scene from an old movie or something. But then I looked back into the mirror because I was practicing my French. I had to tell a child at my daughter's school to stop bullying her. The best I could do that day was, "Ne touché pas ma fille," "Do not touch my daughter." And I looked back out that window at those women and I realized that I hated them! I hated them! And I hated that bully! I could just punch him! They felt like the enemy because I couldn't talk to them and neither could my daughter. These were the people I had come to love and serve and I hated them. And it didn't matter how pretty the town looked out my window.

Later I went for a walk, just to clear my head. I left my daughter with my husband at the apartment. After I left, she decided to join me, but she didn't make it very far before she was lost. She spoke less of the language than I did so the best she could do was tell two strangers she couldn't find her mommy. Thankfully, those strangers took her by the hand and walked her all the way home. I found out later it was the two women I had seen from my window. My daughter never would have found her way home without their help.

It's going to be hard. It just is. Especially on your kids. They're going to go through things, well, they're going to go through things that if it were up to you -just wouldn't happen. And it's going to feel out of your control and sometimes its even going to feel like your fault. But you learn that your kids are God's first and yours second and sometimes its okay to not see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Well, now we're back in Florida, back...home, I guess. And now there's a whole new list of challenges. I think we've realized that we're not really from anywhere so fitting in is always going to be a little bit of a challenge. You know that's a mistake I think a lot of people make. It's not going to be your passport that will make you a missionary.

**Gina:** (*unpacking at the beginning of a sleepover party*) Well yeah I miss Ella! I mean, she was my best friend here in Thailand ...and do you know who I had to hear it from? Of all people I had to hear it from Mrs. Smock! While she was passing out worksheets in 4<sup>th</sup> period like its no big deal! She leans over to me and says Gina, I'm worried about you, how are you doing? Fine Mrs. Smock. What are you talking about? Oh I was worried about you because I hear Ella is really sick and she is going back to the states for rehab! For anorexia! What?! I'm her best friend in the whole world, but I don't know about it?

Well, no I didn't know she was going, but yes, I guess I knew things were different! I mean, mainly I knew she was moody and irritable and rude! And yes looking back I guess she was running a lot more and eating a lot less.

You know that same day I found out was the day of the school dance! I should have been so excited! I had a new dress and my mom helped with my hair, but all I could think about was Ella. And how was she feeling? And was she scared? And how long was she gonna be gone? And what should I say? And why didn't she tell me? I did see her at the dance and all she could talk about was this ring her parents had given her. But all I could think was how it looked two sizes too big on her tiny finger! But I hugged her and told her she looked beautiful.

We tried to have one last sleep over before she left, you know just so we could spend some time together, but she couldn't even make it through the night. She was so weak her parents had to take her home. I just shut myself in my room and I just started crying. This hurt! And I didn't know what to do! I didn't know what I could do to help or make it better! I started praying, but then I realized I might not get what I wanted. She might not get better! She might not come back! And then what am I supposed to do?

I know, I know and I hate it, hate it! Because this is the sort of thing that makes people say missionaries shouldn't have kids or that the kids can't handle it. And I hate it when people get hung up on the term "missionary kid". We're just kids, just like their kids, just like the ones they used to be. It's all the same! And yes its hard and no we don't get a lot of say in what our parents do and where we live and the stuff we have to go through but we know better....even if it takes us a while to figure it out.

**Ashley:** *(on her hands and knees scrubbing the floor)* Well, I have found Japan to be a

very peaceful society with very little crime. Young children walk blocks and blocks to school alone and no one is worried for their safety and people rarely lock their doors. And the streets are spotless! Every morning like clockwork women sweep porches & walkways in front of their homes. Household trash is recycled into seven different categories. At Starbucks there are 5 different receptacles for trash -- one for your plastic straw, one for paper cups, one for plastic cups, one for left-over liquid and one for left-over food items. No, I'm not kidding. This morning I watched our building manager vacuum the flowerbed in front of our apartment. I know, right! Composure is very important. And so are appearances. So no wearing your sweats and flip-flops to the grocery store. I have a hard time with the composure part. I'm the worst kind of klutz and tend to do things in a hurry.

Like last week, well, here the preferred means of transportation are bicycles. My bike has a baby seat on the back for our one-year-old and a basket to carry groceries. The challenge for me is only buying what I can fit in my bicycle basket. Well, I didn't do so well last week and bought too many groceries. So I'm in the parking lot among the rows and rows of bikes struggling to arrange my groceries in a way that won't throw off my balance, my son toddling around the bikes and then I loose a bag and everything comes tumbling down. The groceries are everywhere and now I'm on my hands and knees in the parking lot, among the rows and rows of bikes, chasing after groceries while Luke toddles around. And these beautiful, well-dressed Japanese women walk coolly past me eyeing my groceries strewn across the pavement. I can just imagine what they're thinking. Six months ago, this would have completely mortified me. But I'm getting better at it. Some days I can laugh it off, admit that I am not perfect even though

everyone around me seems to be. Other days, well, other days, I want to find a shovel and start digging my way back to America.

It's lonely sometimes. This emphasis on composure and perfection keeps people from getting close or really making friends. Guards are always up and opinions aren't shared and you never talk about anything personal. So even after a fifth or sixth encounter with a lady I might start to consider a friend the conversation stays surface level. We only talk about the weather or what we're going to cook for dinner. That's it.

It's easy to think the Japanese have it all together, everything and everyone looks so perfect. But reports say there is one suicide here every 15 minutes, every 15 minutes. So perfection on the outside, but there must be pain on the inside. It's made me wonder if they, as people in their own culture, even their own hometowns, feel as lonely as I do as a foreigner?

**Bonnie:** *(begins playing board game, acknowledges faint sound of lightening and lights her candle. She is sitting on two chairs she turns into a grocery cart to enact her story)* Being sick in China is no big deal, really it's just part of life. Kinda like the weather! Today it's rainy. Today I'm sick. I mean you deal with it, yes, but then you move on. And each sick is different, like a cold sharp rain or a warm drippy rain – it's all rain, it just feels different.

So when I woke up one morning and felt like a dull spoon was periodically twisting around inside my stomach and I wanted to die, I didn't think much of it. I must have eaten something not quite right so I'll rest for the day, near the bathroom and soon it'll be over.

And I was right! The next day was much better and I even ran a few miles after class. But later that twisted spoon feeling was back, only twice as bad and now accompanied by an exhaustion I had never felt before. And for the first time I wished I was home, I did, but still it

was going to be okay! The next day would be better!

And it was! So when my roommate called about groceries I thought, I can do this. So I grabbed a cab and met her at a huge two-story shopping center. We start fighting the massive crowds, when all of a sudden I'm not feeling so well. I believe my exact words were, "Kelly, I'm going to pass out. I think I should go sit down." So she says to me, "Get in the grocery cart." So I did. (*climbs into grocery cart she has arranged out of chairs*) Now this is when she knows I'm sick and yet she proceeds to shop.

Now, white girls shopping in China is a sight in and of itself. Everyone is always curious about what you're buying, how much you're buying and who you're buying it from. So you get used to people staring, but a white girl, pushing a cart with another white girl INSIDE of the cart AND piling groceries on top of that girl--that is a sight not seen before! And admittedly a sight worthy of a good stare. And stare they did, all the way through the two stories of the shopping center, my limp head propped up against the back of the cart, covered in cereal and bags of fruit. (*climbs out of the 'grocery cart'*)

But I finally went to the doctor the next day and he diagnosed me with some sort of parasite, sent me home with massive amounts of Cipro to kill it. Thinking back, I believe perhaps the purple tofu I had eaten a few days prior, which actually I later found out was in fact congealed duck blood, could have been the source of my painful little friend. But you know what, it doesn't matter! I look back on that episode (my first of three parasites) as the time that I single handedly convinced many Chinese that, well, we Americans are really a little strange. And you know what, it's fine, we may be strange, but we are definitely grateful for the FDA!



**Hope:** (*Hope uses a medical cane in her space as she walks, she also sits in a chair, her left hand is wrapped in gauze*) Our team's humanitarian experience made us ready for the work in Iraq. My husband Caleb had traveled in northern and eastern Sudan to assess water in the villages and I had worked for two years in Israel. Stephen and Elizabeth Evans had been stationed in Honduras for 25 years and specialized in water systems. And Lydia Williams had been one of the first missionaries into Iraq.

So, no, the field wasn't new to any of us. We understood the danger we faced every day. Any of us could be hit by a bus back in the states, but that's not where we were supposed to be. We were supposed to be in northern Iraq. And so on that day, on March 15, 2004 that's where we were.

At the end of a typical workday among a Displaced People's Camp we made our way back to the protected Kurdish zone and yes, we were leaving later than we had planned and no, travel after dark isn't recommended. So we decided to go through Mosul because it was the most direct route. There was still a little light left so we thought there was nothing out of the ordinary to be concerned about. Things looked normal enough, businesses were open and crowds walking along. But as we approached town we saw our worst nightmare: traffic. There were three lanes of traffic and all of it stopped. It's an unnerving feeling because you know that if someone starts shooting there is no where to go. Before I could fully assess our surroundings, I felt something sting my ear.

Instinctively I reached for it, but then, I blacked out. I revived fast enough to hear my husband Caleb shouting for everyone to get down. After that no one spoke. There was just the deafening sound of the automatic rifles. Six men with AK-47s and at least one Uzi submachine

gun surrounded our vehicle. And they just kept firing. I felt the constant bite of pain everywhere bullets and shrapnel ricocheted off the walls and floor of the truck. There was nowhere to go. I started to smell gunpowder and blood.

I blacked out again, but when I came to again everything was over. The throbbing, pounding explosive noises had stopped and were replaced with a horrible silence. I was the only one awake, no one in the truck was moving. The busy street we had originally turned onto was now completely empty. I saw Mrs. Evans, she was on my right. I could feel her body slumped against mine. Her breathing had stopped. On my left, Lydia was bent over, but she was still breathing. Her breath was labored and weak, but she was breathing. I wanted to check her pulse, but my arms wouldn't move. Then I saw my hand. It was drenched in blood, the bones were visible and some of my fingers were missing.

At that moment, Caleb sat straight up in the driver's seat. He asked if I was hit and I said, Yes, I'm hit bad, Caleb and I need a hospital, are you okay, are you hit? But he said, "No." I didn't understand it. I could see Mr. Evans in the passenger's seat and he looked as though he had died as well. How could my husband not be hit? But he wasn't acting hurt.

Caleb got out of the truck and as he turned around I saw the horror in his face at what he saw. But before he did anything else, he stopped, came over to me and looked me straight in the eye with such a look of compassion – I'll never forget it. It was as though he never saw my hand or my bloodied face.

He turned back into the street and starting screaming for help in Arabic. Men began to come forward, but I could see the color draining from Caleb's face. I still couldn't see any blood on him. So in that moment I chose to believe what he had said, he wasn't hit.

It was then that I noticed Lydia's breathing next to me become slower and more labored, until it stopped altogether and I actually felt her die. I tried to pray, but I didn't know what to pray. I understood I needed to go to the hospital, but I couldn't leave our friends. And then they started to move Mrs. Evans's body out of the way...

I was wearing a plain, long, loose skirt, as is Iraqi custom and when the men set me down my skirt was only up to my calf. But one of them pulled my skirt hem down to cover my ankles. I remember crying at this gesture. It's an act of love, to preserve modesty, an act reserved for wives or sisters or mothers. That man didn't know me, but he showed me love. I needed that. I needed to see the good in people.

I was relieved to eventually be at the American CSH unit, but I still didn't know about Caleb. I remember as they wheeled him in he yelled across the hospital "I love you!" I did my best to yell back "I love you too!" "We're gonna make it through this baby!" he said. "Okay."

The doctors started working on me, "how's my husband?" I asked. The doctor left me to check on Caleb and when he came back he said, "He'll survive." In that moment I finally felt relief. Caleb would be okay. I asked if it was okay for me to sleep and I was told yes. I remember looking up at the camouflage-draped ceiling and closing my eyes, but I woke up in Dallas Texas – eight days later.

I was actually transferred to Germany first and then back to Texas. They were operating on me as I was being admitted to the hospital. As my mom looked over the admittance form, she began sobbing when she got to the block that said, "marital status." My mom was the first one to officially designate me a widow. While I was in my coma Caleb had died. I was a twenty-six year-old widow and didn't even know it.

One night as I was lying in my hospital bed I heard men's voices singing. It sounded like an old-time gospel choir. It was so beautiful and somehow it relaxed me. I even woke my mom up, I wanted to make sure she heard it, but she said she didn't hear anything. But I heard it and heard it so often that I learned the words and would sing along. I heard it for the rest of my stay in the hospital, but I was the only one; no one else ever heard it. You know in Zephaniah it says, "The Lord your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing." I think it was one of God's gifts to His suffering child. He gave me a new song. In a really sad and scary time, He opened my ears to hear a new song.

It's been a year now without Caleb. I've lived through the anniversaries, holidays and birthdays... I won't sugarcoat it for you. It's been excruciating. And I am constantly aware of his absence. I'll mourn for the rest of my life, but I do not grieve my husband or my three friends without hope because the source of my hope has proven to remain the same.\*

*\*Hope's monologue contains paraphrased selections based on Carrie McDonnell's story as told in her book Facing Terror.*

**Aspen:** (*Lights her candle before she begins speaking. She is wearing a long, brightly colored skirt*) A little boy came by the house today with his mom. His arm was in a sling and when they took the sling off to show me his arm it looked broken. It was very swollen around the wrist and there was a lump on his arm that made me think it was broken in that spot. He couldn't stand the pain when it wasn't in the sling so we put it back in. His hand hung sideways and he couldn't move his fingers. He guarded his arm - didn't want it touch or moved.

I went upstairs and got the kids and we all went downstairs to pray. I prayed in Spanish then English to Spanish again to speaking in tongues. His mama was on her knees crying out to

God. She prayed in Spanish and Nahuatl.

I asked him how it felt. He started to wiggle his fingers. He twisted his wrist. He took it out of the sling and then he stretched it out straight! I looked at that mama and she looked at me. I asked, "He couldn't do that before, could he?" She said, "No." We watched that bump disappeared! And the swelling started to go down! We were amazed! We began to cry and we jumped up and danced and we worshiped. We had just seen miracle!

And then I got them some cookies and some Jamaican flavored Tang. And I tried to encourage the boy that God loves him so much, that He has a plan and a purpose for him, that He loves him here and now and that He can use him just how he is. That he doesn't have to be smarter or braver or older or in a different place. He just has to be...right where he is.

*(Audrey holds out her candle to Abby whose back is turned to the audience, she is facing the sea of lit candles)*

**Abby:** A great light, crossing continents and oceans, covering the landscape ...fighting, sacrificing, dying so that others might see the light of the gospel, *(turns to face the audience)* but they're just like me. They're just like me.

So who is reaching out to the cashier behind the counter?

Who is feeding the homeless man on the street?

Where is our sacrifice, our light, our difference?

*(She makes a silent decision, looks back to her unlit candle, strikes a match, lights the candle, looks back at the missionary candles and smiles as she looks to audience. She leaves the stage with her lit candle)*

## CHAPTER FIVE: PERFORMANCE JOURNAL

June 25, 2009

As I begin this rehearsal process I'm asking myself questions. What methods am I consciously seeking to apply and what am I trying to accomplish through this process? I have been inspired by the ideas presented by Artaud and Brook, but most specifically I'm seeking to follow the example Brook set throughout the writing and rehearsal process of his show *US*. I will follow Brook's inspiration, but because so much of what he sought was making the material and the cause personal I feel the freedom to make the rehearsal process personal as well. The quick explanation of Brook's *US* process, as I have come to understand it, is improvisation based on research and improvisation seeking a personal connection with something initially external or unrelated. The improvisations enabled the characters as well as the script to develop simultaneously and to inform each other. I lack the resources Brook possessed, but I can work with improvisations of other kinds. The physical and the vocal are linked so I will be experimenting with vocal exercises as well physical exploration for each character.

Brook put great emphasis on improvisations focusing on the Vietnam War and making the information within the material personal for the actors. This will be the greatest point of focus for me. The missionaries represented in my thesis show are real people I have gotten to know through conversations and e-mails. I have research and knowledge about these women's circumstances, but most important to me are their words. What do these words mean to them? What do these words mean to me? Without a true exploration of these questions I can never expect the audience to ask themselves the same.

Ultimately I am seeking to connect myself with these missionaries so that I can provide an honest and personal confrontation within myself during the rehearsal process and during the performance. The confrontation I seek will be personal for me and my life choices in the hopes that the audience will follow me on the journey, allowing them to be personally confronted and changed. I must remain open and allow the material to change me, the questions to probe me and the discomfort to move me.

Let's see what happens...

June 27, 2009

I can't believe this is about to be my entry. I never could have expected this. Turns out Bonnie is the perfect person for me to explore within this show. In Bonnie's monologue she tells a *humorous* story about her first parasite while living in China. I'll be honest I never thought much of this monologue – considered it necessary comic relief, but not much more. Well, needless to say, I have learned my lesson the hard way.

I've been nanny-ing this summer, keeping two precious young girls who, living in Florida, spend most of their days in the swimming pool. Apparently the pool water isn't as clean as we assumed (and apparently this is much more common than most people realize) because I managed to contract an intestinal parasite from their pool water. Now, I'm a tough girl, or at least I'd like to think so. In recent years I have had both my jaws reconstructed and my mouth wired shut for seven weeks. Only seven months later I was in a car accident which broke my back. In other words, I've learned to take pain. But this parasite – this thing temporarily living inside me, chewing at me- caused me more pain than I ever would have expected. I will spare you the disgusting details, but what surprised me the most was the swelling of my entire mid-section, the

unbearable pressure and the PAIN! I have not experienced pain like that since my back was broken.

On the worst day (and I should note - the day after I took the medication meant to kill the little bugger) I laid in bed in the fetal position and finally began weeping for the pain. The crying seemed to help in a way, as if it were releasing the pain. Later I was struck with the image of Bonnie doing the same thing – she may not have- but I realized the weight of an experience like this in another country, practically alone, unsure of the medical assistance you might have received. My first thought was gratitude for my illness being in America and not abroad. Although a legitimate thought, my next realization came just as quick, Bonnie didn't let it stop her. When Bonnie left America to live abroad she knew parasites (among other things) were possibilities, but it didn't stop her from going. And even the homesickness she mentions feeling when she was sick was not a deterrent...she stayed – through three parasites to be exact.

Next I began to wonder at her ability to tell this story with so much humor. Maybe eventually I will see my experience with a parasite funny, but right now it still doesn't seem funny. Bonnie is a comedic and energetic personality anyway, but her heart hurt (even if only for a moment) during this experience and I'm sure many others. I think she's able to tell the story with humor because with distance and a more objective perspective it is funny, but I remembered with a better sensitivity that there were moments when the lingering pain could be seen in her – only as a brief flash, but they were there. They were not moments of regret or bitterness, but acknowledgement of the difficulty of the trial. I was missing that in my encounters with her monologue so far. I've decided to take more time with the beat surrounding the confession of her homesickness. I wasn't homesick during my time with the parasite, but it brought feelings of



hopelessness and vulnerability. I feel the whole monologue is more informed now. I now know what such an experience entails--like the brief mention of the medication she took. It is no small thing.

July 6, 2009.

I have been forced to make the practical decision to create the physical and vocal life of these women not based on the real people: unfortunately the women and myself are lacking the resources to properly interact with each other – at least at this point. So I haven't been able to watch them fully and for any extended period in order to gain a sense of their specific tendencies, patterns, and habits. Another reality that could create a problem of variety is that these women – although serving in vastly different places – are all essentially southern girls. So in truth their dialects are very similar. So it is my plan to start with one or two basic realities about them and build (exaggerate) from there.

I began with each woman in relation to Linklater's resonance ladder. When I learned this ladder I learned each rung with a physical expression as well. I found that Tish is definitely from the heart MAA-AAH. She is so open and honest. Gina is higher in the eyes and cheekbones: KI, PE-EY. She is quick and bright, but vulnerable. For some reason Bonnie felt right around the mouth with FUH. It can be fun and almost flippant, but for some reason it still feels heavy. I found my hand following the sound from my lips to the floor each time. Hope seems to be the chest center GOh GOh. I think for her injuries it makes sense as well. I feel she is less connected to her lower self. It's too painful for her resonance to be from a lower place. She lacks the young innocence and energy I have found in the facial resonances. I'm not sure about Aspen just yet. I

will keep exploring as she seems to fit different places at different times more often than her peers.

Aspen: When I think of Aspen I think of a “mother earth” archetype but I also think of exceeding joy! So she is grounded, her center of gravity is low, but her energy is bouncing off the walls. She is a wonderful contradiction – full of motherly age and wisdom with the heart and joy of a child. Her energy is almost erratic at times, but at times she is full of silent wonder. Her radiant energy is always bubbling underneath.

I’m realizing while I rehearse that a significant tool for me is knowing my own habits. It’s the only way I can begin to drop them and pick up their habits that I construct in my imagination.

With Aspen today I began with the sentence “We all went downstairs to pray” and I kept myself low and on my knees as if in prayer, but not church prayer, not appropriate polite prayer, but in desperate communication. I repeated it over and over again and thought about what prayer means to Aspen – specifically in relation to her children. Out of these thoughts spilled a dialogue full of her children – the children she has prayed over since their conception, the children she loves with her life, the children she has seen suffer horribly at times because of her obedience to follow Christ into a difficult part of the world. Out of that dialogue came thoughts and words about her daughter Hannah who suffered an infection that left her unable to walk. I shed tears at the image of Aspen being forced to make Hannah try to walk, both of them crying. I also cried at the realization that Aspen prayed for that little boy with the broken arm just like she had prayed for her children. Realizing the joy of the boy’s miraculous healing is intensified by all the labored prayer that was answered with a ‘no’ all those times before. Realizing that within

Aspen's joy there is perhaps a tinge of sadness. Although she is grateful to see this boy healed she is faced with the reality that her children have not always been healed as easily. But Aspen also knows – like I knew laying on a trauma room table with a broken back, uncertain of the future – that God is the same, His grace is still sufficient, His goodness still constant, His power still great. Another contradiction, God is equally good in tragedy and triumph.

July 7, 2009

Gina: She is the youngest in the show. It's easy for me to remember those teenage years and feelings – sometimes made all the more frustrating because you're trying to follow Christ in the midst of teenage immaturity, confusion, and hormones. I was torn between the emotional roller coaster of hormones and a changing body, the immaturity I wish I would grow out of faster and the knowledge of who I was in Christ. And as I think about it now – another contradiction – those years were better than they could have been because of the comfort and unconditional love I knew I had in Christ. And Gina knew it too, then at the age of fifteen and now in her early twenties.

I began with Gina's sentence, "As I prayed I realized I might not get what I wanted." At a young age Gina came across one of the great questions of Christianity. She came across it knowing the answer...we are still called to pray. Not only are we called to pray; we are called to trust Christ regardless of our doubts and the outcome. As I repeated the sentence, I couldn't help but think of all the times I personally met this frustration myself. The fits of tears and sometimes anger came to mind quickly. There is a clear image in my mind from high school – running to my room, quickly closing the door to my room, sliding down the door crying into a clump on the floor. Gina never expressed to me that that was exactly how it happened for her, but that is how I

picture it. I don't think it will be in the script but Gina talked about a story she read at the time about a Christian who was put in prison for his faith and then willingly stayed in prison after being offered his freedom so he could minister to the other inmates. She told me that story made her realize she had a choice too. She could walk away from Ella because it would be easier, but that didn't mean it was right.

Today as I ran Gina's actual monologue, I realized she was becoming very whiney. I think there is a place for that here, but it shouldn't overwhelm everything else. She's angry and she is hurt, but she is also certain about what she says in the last paragraph.

For her physical life, I only know of Gina what I have seen in Skype conversations – so I only vaguely know her from the shoulders up. She still has a young and popping energy, but it is thoughtful and sometimes even careful. I think possibly some of that care has come with age and since I'm playing her at a younger age that care will be dropped. I have been experimenting with a flicking energy that seems to suit her, especially in the moments of heightened emotions within this monologue.

July 8, 2009

I experimented with Gina's vocal range today. I continued with the repetition and stream of conscious speaking, but I initiated it from my upper resonances. I would go in and out of saying her text and making the Linklater sounds of the upper pyramid. I remember from class those upper resonances made me feel younger, more vulnerable, and even on the verge of tears at times. Within the context of Gina's monologue it definitely had the same effect. I think the Linklater pyramid is probably a good warm up for this show in particular because I'm moving

through those different resonances at different moments within the different characters. There is also such a vast range of emotions that travel that physical journey.

July 9, 2009

I find I'm struggling with this performance journal. One of the major points of bringing together Peter Brook's ideas from his *US* process is making the research personal – applying the social change to myself. Therefore my rehearsal process needs to be extremely intimate and personal – which I feel it is becoming. However, I find myself struggling to be completely honest and detailed about it in this journal because there is always the lingering knowledge that eventually these entries will be available to the public.

As much of a problem as it is and as much I need to seek out a solution – it illustrates an actor's predicament in this type of theatre with or without a performance journal. The vulnerability I'm having such a hard time facing in my journal is essentially the same vulnerability I will need to experience on stage for this rehearsal method and for this show to be effective. I think I'm just now realizing the depth of the task that is ahead of me.

July 18, 2009

Well there is clearly a gap in rehearsal time. It hasn't happened without good intentions however. The consistent problem I'm facing is the temptation to stop rehearsal because I'm distracted by the need for rewrites. Of course the script needs rewrites, it probably always will, but I must move forward. Thankfully I will be in my hometown soon to present small selections of the play. This will force me to settle on at least temporary drafts for some of the monologues and move forward with decisions.

I did return to Gina today. The more I work with her the more her energy becomes centered in her hands – she is definitely flicking. I'm still seeking a balance between her anger and the tendency for it to become pure whining. I've been specific about what beats can allow for it and which ones cannot. I think the key is remembering how real this is for her and how high the stakes are. I have had to go back to my personal experiences at that age – remembering in detail how important friendships were at that age. Looking back at my teenage journals has been helpful. It has helped me express Gina more genuinely I think.

July 19, 2009

I am meant to perform just Gina's monologue tonight at a church service. I just finished a rehearsal with the technical staff and was told I was talking too fast. After I got past my annoyance at a note from the technical staff I realized this experience may be different enough for this congregation. I need to make sure they keep up with me. I related this need to performing Shakespeare. A character may be in a rush, may be upset, or in love but Shakespeare's words are difficult for modern audiences to follow. Even though the energy is high the words cannot be blown over or rushed. The words must be deliberate and the breath and body used to up keep the energy. I'm in no way seeking to make a comparison of my words and those of Shakespeare's, but Gina is bursting onto this congregation's stage with no context and I need the audience with me instantly, not thirty seconds into the monologue after they've figured it out. It was a good note and I hope to execute it tonight during the performance.

Performance: It turned out to be a decent performance I think. It was a great way to try out a small piece of the show. I think I was able to apply the practical note from earlier. My breath stayed open and my energy radiant, but I was able to slow down and articulate more

clearly. An added bonus to relying on my breath was of course a freeing up of my emotions. The tears really flowed as I started talking about Ella. I also felt a greater physical freedom with her as a result of the breath. My engaged breath was aided by my entrance. I made the choice to enter through these huge double doors speaking as I entered. I had to walk rather quickly from the doors to my light. The physical exertion needed to open the doors and get to my light helped me engage my breath straight from the beginning. The heavy doors being in my way added to my sense of frustration and somehow made me also feel more defensive – this fed right into the initial question she is answering. One of the main things I’ve learned in recent years is to use whatever comes up. It’s been a hard lesson to learn for me since I prefer to be in control. Tonight when my pleated, knee length, school uniform skirt became bunched up at the bottom I didn’t ignore it, but instead I used it. I made the choice to knock it back into place. The physical motion made me angrier.

The real Gina, her mom, sister, and younger brother were all in the congregation tonight. Afterwards I was speaking with them and Gina’s mom and sister started asking me about the writing process. Their eyes grew wide as I told them I had only interacted with Gina on Skype (from the shoulders up). Gina’s sister said, “But you looked just like Gina. You moved and sounded just like her.” Gina’s mom then said that her son was unaware Gina had ever talked to me or that what he was watching was based on her. During the monologue he leaned over to his mom asked, “Is this real? Because it looks real.” I guess that’s a pretty good litmus test. I think the personal work in rehearsal made the person Gina so real for me that the performance came across as such to the audience. For that realness to translate even to her younger brother is pretty amazing to me.

20 July 2009

I've been afforded the opportunity to continue work-shopping some of the monologues for an audience. I'm in my hometown this week and have been given the bulk of a Wednesday night service to perform some of the monologues in partnership with the regular prayer service. It was never something I thought of before, but it's an example of the versatility of the show. The monologues can easily be separated and incorporated into different kinds of church services. For this service the plan is to run each monologue individually followed by a prayer time informed by the topics within the monologue.

I'll be honest not all the monologues I'm using on Wednesday are really ready. In fact most of them have barely had rehearsal time, but I can't pass this opportunity to try them out. It's a workshop and it will be good to see an audience's response to the material as most of these stories haven't been heard before.

My dad told me today he had always pictured Bonnie telling her story while sitting in a shopping cart. As soon as he said it the image of the elderly parents sitting in garbage cans in Endgame occurred to me. I don't know that it's a choice I'll be able to keep for Bonnie, but as everything is so abstract and individual right now I think it will be fun to try. So he has borrowed a grocery cart for me! I worked with it today and it definitely fits Bonnie's humor within the story.

Her humor is making more sense to me now. Recently I caught myself retelling a story about my broken back to someone with the same sarcastic humor. As soon as I finished the story I thought to myself, "It really wasn't funny when it happened....but it's easier to retell it as a joke than a tragedy." I think that is part of Bonnie's story as well. You do it as much for yourself as



for the person listening to the story. You weren't okay, but you are now and you have to reassure your listener that you are alright now.

Recently I have been writing and experimenting with a character named Abby. If she becomes a part of the show, I think she will represent my journey through these stories as well as the audience's journey (hopefully). She started popping up in my mind as I continued the stream of conscious improvisations. She asks the questions I have had to face for myself as I have explored these women and their sacrifices. She is so new and so unsorted at this point I never considered including her in this week's workshop, but I mentioned her to my dad. I just sort of roughly summarized her to him. He asked me what she would say in her monologue and I just said something off the top of my head. He loved it and said he felt the other stories needed her. She held them all together he thought. Alright then, we'll try Abby this Wednesday. I'm not totally sure what she'll say, but I think it is appropriate she not be planned. I think if I ask my honest questions in the beginning and allow an honest reaction at the end she will be what she needs to be. That seems almost simple when put into one sentence, but I know it will require a lot out of me to accomplish it.

What time I have spent in rehearsal so far has been focusing on the individual monologues. I've thought very little so far on set, costumes, or an overall concept. The imagery of fire has kept coming up again and again throughout this process. When the missionaries spoke, their passion was often referenced as a fire as well as their trials. These women have known fires, whether in the bullets that ripped through their flesh or in the burning grief of watching a child suffer. They are continuously propelled by the passionate fire in their hearts that burns relentlessly for Christ and the nations. They have left their light all over the world as they

have illuminated the dark places by giving hope and help to those around them. When you talk to them, you cannot deny that these women are themselves fires, but they are unaware of it. They spread light at tremendous rates and don't even seem to realize it.

I've decided to include candles within the monologues, enabling each woman to light her own candle as she speaks. Hebrews 12:1 says, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run the race that is set before us...." As I imagine the stage eventually filled with candles lit by these women, I see that cloud of witnesses. I have often thought I am not alone on stage when I perform these stories. I have always felt that these women are with me. The candles will be physical representation of their presence and of their fire.

21 July 2009

Tish – God bless her, what to do with Tish? The real Tish is grounded, motherly, energetic, athletic, bright, emotional and honest. I remember while speaking with her even though we had just met she cried in front of me at least three times. For a second, I remember feeling embarrassed, but quickly realized she was giving me a gift. That honest emotion isn't easily given by most people any more, but Tish offered it up freely. After the short conversation I had with her husband I learned that she is like that with everyone.

I tried taking a sentence and building around it today like I've done with the others, but she became so angry. I think there is a place for anger in Tish's story, but she's not an angry person. I felt so closed off physically working with her and that is completely wrong for her. She will probably be in this state Wednesday night, but I will continue exploring this. Sometimes I wonder where things like this come from. Is it my reaction to her situation? Am I angry for her?

Or during our conversations do I somehow pick up on something in the women they don't necessary say or spell out. Or maybe it's my own anger at the thought of myself being in the same situation? I'm not sure yet.

And yet I'm also reminded I need to be cautious. These women are heroes in my opinion. They have done great things, but I need to make sure I'm not romanticizing them. They would hate that and it creates the direct opposition to my hope for this show. These are real women with doubts, fears, weaknesses, and issues just like everyone else.

22 July 2009

I decided last week to include what there is of Hope's story in this workshop. The story is still too long and I'm still very much in an improvisational stage with her. So really there is no telling what it will be tomorrow. One constant is my physical weakness when I play her. At one point or another during her monologue I always feel sick – nauseous or light headed.

I have always felt the strongest connection with her story. I think because I have suffered from irrational fears of losing my husband ever since our car accident. The first six months we were married I cried every morning when he left for work because I was scared something would happen to him. I remember waking up in the trauma room at the hospital after the accident and feeling like my mind was in a swirl of black. I couldn't make out many facts and things returned to me slowly. But I especially remember the moment when I remembered Joshua and when I realized he was okay. I hadn't lost him. I hadn't lost him. Even now as I write I'm at a loss to explain it properly. I suppose there are other things about that car accident, my injuries and my recovery that also help me understand Hope's situation. It's laughable to compare the two, but there are things she describes that make sense to me. Things like that swirling black confusion,

coming in and out of consciousness, knowing something is wrong, the helplessness of knowledge that you can't do anything to help, to save, to protect and or even to fully understand at first. I understand being completely dependent on your parents for everything – going to the bathroom, eating, reaching the pencil that is only two inches beyond your reach. Seeing the age, worry, and exhaustion creep in around their sad eyes and knowing you are the cause of it. I'm crying writing about it even now. I guess knowing the depth of my experience which pales in comparison to hers makes me feel at least some of the weight of hers – knowing it is so much more immeasurably worse. Worse and yet more glorious at the same time. In the same way I know the grief and pain and questions I went through I also know the hope and presence of Christ I experienced throughout. Hope is as much a testament to her pain as she is to the healing and hope of her Savior.

23 July 2009

I made a mistake and I knew it was a mistake before I did it. I ran all the pieces before the show. I knew it would wear me out, but I did it anyway. I was worried because I had had so little rehearsal time. I'm not proud of it because I wish I had trusted my improvisational work more. It was still there to some extent, but if I hadn't been so tired the workshop itself would have been better and I would have had the energy to be more open in the moment. Despite the mistake of running everything the day of the workshop, I think this workshop was a lesson in stamina. It takes a lot to talk and work like that for almost 50 minutes straight. And tonight I even got breaks in between the monologues because of the prayer times! It's practical and obvious, but I think I need to be doing more simple cardio exercise to help my stamina. I knew I wasn't in my normal

shape because the parasite left me weak and unable to exercise, but I honestly hadn't thought of it in relation to the show.

I'm relieved to report the candle lighting for each character was a success. I was worried about the matches working properly, but they did. However, I need more specificity regarding why each woman lights her candle. I also realized I was extinguishing the matches in the exact same way for each character. In accordance with each character I was making specific physical choices in the lighting of the candles, but not in the extinguishing of the matches. I think it was happening because I just wanted the flame out as fast as possible.

The transitions into and out of the prayer times went very well. It seemed to flow very naturally. The messages of the monologues were tied into the prayer time without "preaching." Rather the monologues served as prompters still leaving room for the imagination and the work of the Holy Spirit. I wondered how the audience (congregation) would respond to this back and forth and to the idea of theatrical pieces leading the prayer time. This is definitely new for this group, but there was much positive feedback and several people specifically mentioned that their prayer time was heightened by what they experienced during the monologues.

**Abby:** She turned out to be a slight exaggeration of myself, my questions, my irritation, and discontent with the way things are here versus the way things are abroad with missionaries. I was most interested in the audiences' response to Abby. I didn't know if her brief presence would make sense to them. Was she separate, but yet connected enough to the missionaries? So far audience feedback has answered yes to those questions.

I struggled with her at the end of the show. Her beginning monologue ended up being reasonably scripted. She mainly just asked questions, but when I got to the end I found myself

struggling for words or an honest response. I'm not sure exactly what happened and think I will need more time to reflect on it. My first thought is that I didn't do my job. I didn't allow the questions I'm asking the audience to really confront me. I allowed myself to become too focused on practicality and production to truly and personally engage emotionally. It's hard for me because I like to know the plan. Silence is hard on stage, especially when you don't know what's coming next and everyone is waiting on you. I think I felt that possibility and experienced a small internal panic that killed any chance of an honest and in the moment response.

**Tish:** Tish went a little better than I expected. I made the decision to stop worrying about "being too angry" and focused instead on her perspective within her situation. Yes, there was anger, but I think it was finally in better proportion. Her anger is in such a stark contrast to her compassion that it feeds a large part of her frustration. She's annoyed with herself as much as with the things she can't control.

On a practical note: I asked for water in the coffee cup I was holding as Tish, but didn't receive it. I was way too flippant with the cup. In the future it has to have liquid in it or I need to give more attention to acting like it has something in it. I would have spilled it all over the place if it had actually had liquid in it.

**Gina:** Well, the first word that comes to mind is, "whomp." Gina felt out of control tonight and not in a good way. She was frantic with words and emotions rushing and unable to keep up with each other. I think a lot of her words were lost as a result. I also (as I have done before in rehearsal) replaced Ella's name with Gina. I was able to consciously maintain the mistake throughout the monologue, but that just added to my external thought process while I was playing her.

**Bonnie:** She was big and open and animated tonight! I think the release was intensified because Gina felt so tight and awful. When I ran her before the show I was talking too fast with her as well, but not during the show. I think I finally found her rhythm. She is funny and engaging, but she's not worried about losing the attention of the people listening to her. No need to rush. She also felt satisfying because the shopping cart provided her with intentional blocking which is not something I have worked on with anyone else. She gained a lot of audience laughter which was rewarding as well.

**Aspen:** I really hadn't worked with Aspen in a while. I did run her monologue through in the rehearsal right before the show. I was worried about Aspen because she is last and right after Hope. I knew I would be physically exhausted by that point. When I came off stage after Hope's monologue I was still shaking and crying. It took me through Aspen's first beat before I was really connected to her. She has so much energy, excitement and joy. She took on this upward, but grounded physicality tonight. Isn't that weird to say together? My lower body was grounded and almost solid. I felt connected to the earth, but from the waist up I was drawn as if to heaven. Upward and upward. I hadn't consciously planned or thought that through, but it makes so much sense for Aspen. Even though I was tired by the time I got to Aspen she became a great release.

I'm realizing how important this process is becoming for me as an actor. I chose to focus on Brook and his creation of *US* because I agreed with his view of audience participation and was excited about his use of factual material to create a script. I never thought about how the improvisational approach to the material related to my natural tendencies as an actor. I'm an actor who hates improvisations, hates not knowing the end result and hates not being completely in control. Not having ever detail worked out is teaching me to trust myself and my previous

work with these characters. I know this will serve me in other situations as an actor.

I decided on a simple African (I know, wrong country, but it was available to me) wrap dress for Aspen. Its really just a large piece of brightly colored fabric I tie around my waste. Aspen had told me she always wears long bright skirts. The wrap works better for a quick transition. It looks better than stepping in and out of a regular skirt.

**Hope:** I became seriously light headed again during Hope tonight. So much so I felt the need to put my head down between my knees for a moment and compensated for it by reaching for the cane I used for her at the beginning of the monologue. I'm sure it looked ridiculous and confusing. I've got to figure out how to change this sick feeling with her. I'm scared if I somehow back off with her I will lose my strong connection with her.

She felt all over the place because I have not spent concentrated time with her in rehearsal. I improvised a lot of her lines, but did manage to intentionally cut the long paragraph with her list of injuries. The monologue still needs to be shortened.

1 August 2009

I'm back to Hope today. As hard as it is for me to perform or even rehearse this story because of its emotional impact, her story has helped me in my faith. She has lived through hell, literally, worst case scenario for staying on earth. She would be the first to tell you she would have been better off dead. But she still gets out of bed every morning. She worships. She serves. She rejoices....she lives. God has not left Hope and he won't leave me – even if it is His will that I lose Joshua like Hope lost Caleb.

I was out in public recently and heard a loud noise and remembered Hope talking about hitting the ground when she was in a grocery store when there was a loud noise. It sounded like



gun fire and scared her. I felt a knot in my stomach at the thought. It was again a powerful realization at how far her recovery has and will continue to extend into her everyday life.

I still feel overcome with emotion when I rehearse her story. Sometimes breaking down before I even finish the monologue. I'm still not sure where the middle ground is, but I plan to keep returning to it until I figure it out. I've stopped doing the stream of conscious improvisations or the personal substitutions. Clearly I don't need them for this piece to be personal anymore.

3 August 2009

I have a better understanding of what specific physical choices I want to make with Hope now. It was a difficult exploration for me. I don't know that there is a practical way for me to truly relate to her injuries, but I know the injuries I have experienced. So I tried taking myself back there. First I laid flat on the hardwood floor staring up at the ceiling. I felt the flat and hard surface under my bony back and remembered lying face up on the trauma room table. It was a cold and bare surface. I carefully wiggled my feet as I remembered wiggling them again and again that day just to remind myself that I wasn't paralyzed. I still had control over my feet. There were still attached to me. I visualized my spinal cord still connected along my body and released a sigh of relief.

After a time I slowly moved myself to sitting up against a pillow. This was the next position I spent the most time in during recovery. I remembered trying to reach for a pencil which was within an inch of my fingers, but too far to grasp because I could not move more than my arms by myself. I remembered what hard work it was to move even in the slightest.

Next I put on my back brace. I still have it and refuse to throw it away. It was custom made for me so I'm the only person it will fit. Wow. I haven't worn it in three years and my eyes immediately filled with tears as I heard its final click into place. I immediately recognized the sense of support it provided. It used to comfort me, but now it felt like a restraint. As I stood from the edge of the bed I was physically reminded of the balanced way it forced me to rise. I remember how careful I had to be. Everything was hard! As I slowly walked, I found my stance spreading in order to provide myself with a broader base. I'm sure Hope had to do the same thing at some point. I noticed my center of gravity in my chest which made me feel more off balanced, but I remembered how this was necessary because of my low injury. The injured part of my body couldn't be trusted at the time. Other members of my body were overworking to make up the difference.

I cannot avoid the question. If God called me into a situation where I knew I would face this injury again...would I do it? Hope knew the horror that became her reality was a possibility when she went into service overseas. Would I do the same?

As Hope I'm going to wrap my left hand and fingers because she lost most of her fingers on that hand. The gauze will be a restraining reminder of my back brace. I will also use a cane and begin the monologue standing before eventually sitting. A table will be placed next to the chair with a cup of water and tissues, frankly in case I need it. Hope lost almost everything below her left knee therefore I've decided to give her a limp. I've been experimenting with it today. I'm better at it after I've been walking with it for a little while. I will need to keep practicing as she'll only walk a few steps (probably) total. It needs to be there immediately. All of her ribs were broken so I'm pondering how to hold and use my torso. I'm thinking back to how my torso felt

and moved after my back was broken. From what I've learned about broken ribs, some things are similar. From the outside it looks stiff and it is very painful, but there is a weird disconnected or loose feeling on the inside. It's hard to explain on paper, but I think I get it.

I noticed my breathing felt shallow under the brace and wished I could remember exactly what my breath felt like under my injury. I can't remember now. It seems it would have been in my chest and shallow because it hurt too much to move anything more. I remember pushing the little morphine button in my hospital bed. I was aware of how much my body was connected. My arms were unharmed in the accident, but the physical action required to push that tiny button made my whole body hurt.

I think Hope's overall movements should be slow and specific. When it is painful and laborious just to pick up a tissue, your movements are never random or without purpose. You remain still unless it is necessary to move. Medications used in recovery can also slow you down. I'm finding it a challenge to enact this slower pace with her because my natural reaction to discomfort (when I'm not hurt) is to speed up and I usually become jittery. It is an obstacle I might be able to use. I'm not sure yet.

Hope is extremely strong and brave. She's able to talk about what happened to her – even sometimes in great detail. I've realized that even though telling her story is an emotional and taxing experience, it is not impossible for her to share her tragedy. Thinking back to my injury, I remembered having to talk about what happened a lot even in immediate days and weeks following the accident. I had to recount what I could remember to our lawyer, but even beyond that people are curious and they ask questions. I remember the best way to talk about it was to detach a little and provide a somewhat mechanical report. Sometimes in the story the emotion

was unavoidable and I would start to cry in front of my listeners, but could also quickly laps back into my report or even suddenly find myself laughing at an absurd instance within the story. I think the same elements are in Hope's story and will provide variety for the audience as well as a coping mechanism for myself.

5 August 2009

Let me introduce you to Ashley. I made my first real attempt at rehearsing her monologue today. It's funny. After talking and e-mailing I feel very well acquainted with these women and their stories, but then I begin rehearsing them – repeating phrases of theirs, allowing them to turn into my own words and reactions, temporarily replacing the details of their stories with mine, experimenting with physicality's and vocal resonances – and it's like I'm meeting them for the first time.

I'm finding Ashley to be the shy one of the group. I'll be honest I don't think that is entirely true of Ashley in real life. However, I feel there is part of her that has become shy in the circumstances she has found herself in now living in Japan. Living there has made her somewhat self-conscious and it's showing itself in her with reservation and shyness.

I've decided she will begin on her hands and knee cleaning with a wash rag. Thinking of these women in their environments now is making a big difference in rehearsal and providing a lot of inspiration for their physical characteristics. Her reserve and care will be seen in her cleaning. The cleaning will also provide an obstacle. There are moments when she regains confidence in her story telling, becomes excited and forgets her cleaning, but then remembers her new cultural duty to clean and goes back to her reserved conversation and cleaning.

Ashley told me a lot about their time in Japan and the issues they've faced, but the overwhelming and consistent fact was loneliness. I know for me this is something I have rarely thought of missionaries dealing with, but it is actually very common when moving to a new culture, especially one like Japan. I think it's important the audience understand this fact, but I think I can help them see it more specifically through her physical life. I think there is almost a mild paranoia and definite hesitancy in her body and it is heightened by the contrast between the moments when she overcomes it, opens up physically and vocally.

6 August 2009

I heard from Aspen who apparently had two good friends at the workshop in my hometown. They called to tell her afterwards that they immediately knew I was portraying Aspen. They told her I moved and sounded just like her. Comments like this keep amazing me because I'm not seeking to be an exact physical and vocal representation of these women. I want to capture the essence of them, but I think the most important part of this show are their stories and what their stories mean - the emotions and personal truths connected to them. I guess in some greater way maybe all the physical and vocal lives of these women are attached to their stories in a way that becomes natural?

7 August 2009

I'm tired today and for some reason that seemed to help my work with Tish. She became more grounded and that felt right for her. I revisited her physical work with this weight. I don't think Tish is tired, but I think it helped me make discoveries about her that are true – such as the grounding.

I still haven't settled on who these women are talking to and I think it is starting to hurt the process and performance. Initially I thought they were talking to the audience. I like the idea of direct address and breaking the fourth wall. It is something Artaud and Brook both did to drive home points to the audience, but in this situation it feels horribly general for such personal characters.

As I worked through each monologue today I experimented with the women talking to me, Brit. It turned out to be another way to personalize the monologues, but I think in the long run it's not the right choice. I do feel settled on each woman beginning her story because she has been asked a specific question, but who is asking the question?

Gina was a struggle today because I was tired. It felt like work to make her popping, flicking energy genuine. However, I think I'm finding a better pitch for her voice now. I took parts of her monologue back into the improvisational ramblings and varied my voice into different pitches until I found one I liked. I think she is sounding younger without sounding like she is whining all the time.

8 August 2009

Working with Bonnie today I realized how important realizations are for her. An easy trap is allowing her clever banter to become over-rehearsed and it becomes a report. She is quick witted and clever, but it is more interesting if her quips occur to her as she's speaking.

I've wonder again today if I'm doing this journal a disservice. This rehearsal process is weird and new to me. At least at this point I've been working on my own (which is good and bad – not sure I recommend it yet) and I take a lot for granted about these characters because I wrote them. From the very first day I proposed to speak with these women, I had an image and concept

for each of them. I'm afraid I've grown so used to these ideas I fail to write them down. Of course the more I work with them and especially once they are all side by side within the performance I must become more specific, but I think their general characteristics are already in me.

I made a discovery with Ashley today. She is telling secrets! "And the streets are spotless." She is acting as a window into a culture she is fascinated and overwhelmed by.

Vocally I played with her whole monologue as a secret. I spoke as if she could not let anyone overhear her. The longer I worked with the idea of telling secrets, the more delicate she was becoming in her movements and gestures. I was whispering a lot, but then realized she doesn't have to be gentle to tell a secret, especially when it's a secret she's excited about! She claims to be a klutz so I started playing around with the idea of 'bursts.' Bursts of movement and sound from her. I took random sections of her text and played with this idea. A lot of it won't be kept, but there are specific moments where it definitely works!

9 August 2009

When I spoke with these women, they would often have abrupt beat changes – sometimes completely changing topic mid-stream. As a result many people would read the script and tell me these parts didn't make sense and should be cut. I always disagreed. That is how they talk! That is how most of us really talk! Now that the monologues are on their feet I must be absolutely sure to motivate these beat changes. Otherwise, yes, they will not make sense. Their internal monologues are now rising to the surface.

I would like to return to something I wrote about a few days ago. I said I wouldn't recommend working on a show like this by yourself – meaning I wish I could work with a

consistent director. I believe working with the outside perspective of a director is necessary and good and thankfully I will have that advantage very soon. However, I think there has been great value in rehearsing this show on my own as long as I have. The goal of this process has been to confront this material personally. I must let myself experience the questions and contradictions between the way I live and the way these women live before I can ask the audience to do the same thing. I needed to spend a significant amount of time alone with these monologues in order for that to happen (or even begin to happen). You are always more honest with yourself when no one is watching.

10 August 2009

I've done a lot to experiment with emotional and personal triggers within these monologues and they have all helped to deepen my personal connection and confrontation with these women and the questions they put forth. However, I must become more specific about their physical lives as well. I think up until this point I've just been lucky, but it is time to be intentional. So today I began introducing new physical triggers to the characters to see what developed.

While working with Tish I intentionally and with exaggeration dropped my hips and pushed them forward. My voice immediately lowered and I had the feeling of being pregnant (or what I imagine being pregnant feels like). Physically Tish suddenly felt like a mom! I walked through the space like this for a long time. I began to contemplate pregnancy and images of women (and Tish) physically carrying their children within them, but the weight of carrying their children once they are outside the womb. I've held plenty of babies in my life despite not being a mom myself. I know what it feels like to grow a cramp in a weighed down wrist after holding a



toddler too long. I continued through the space and I found my center of gravity lowering and lowering itself as I thought about the emotional weight of bearing a child. I remembered my mom saying (more than once), “you are a parent until the day you die.” I remembered my parents over my bedside at the age of 22. I was completely immobilized by my broken back. They fed me, clothed me, and changed my diapers even at that age. The weight of being a parent! Allowing your heart to walk around outside of you. I still can only guess at the feeling, but I’m closer than I was this morning. I won’t keep the extreme exaggeration of what I practiced physically today, but it gives me a muscle memory and a place to work from with Tish.

For me, Hope already had physical stimulus provided through the cane she uses and the tape I have added to wrap her missing and wounded fingers. I have found backing off of her physical limitations actually helps me find a manageable balance for her. I let go of the focus on her trunk and broken ribs and found I could go through her story without always feeling light headed or sick. Perhaps when I was focusing on my mid-section I was creating tension I was unaware of and that was causing the sick feelings. I have focused more on slowing down her movements and this has almost had a calming affect. Today I tried talking and moving as if she were in water. Strangely there was heaviness to my movement, but also a peace and sense of calm in the stillness.

I returned to the lighting of their candles today. I thought I had motivated the lighting for each character, but as I almost forgot to light several candles and I am proved wrong. So I am sitting down to write it out specifically...

Tish – after “our commission is the same” for her it is a recommitment to the mission in America.

Gina – after “what we do matters” she wants to add her fire to the light of her parents.

Ashley – lights her candle before she ever speaks at the beginning of the monologue. Her lighting is almost a part of her cleaning. It is a daily normality.

Bonnie – “confirmed in the eyes of many Chinese” she was on display that day just like her candle. She was willing to be a witness even in an embarrassing situation.

Hope – after “He opened my ears to a new song” The new song or the strength from the Lord has kept her candle lit.

Aspen – lights her candle before she even speaks. This is Aspen’s personality, bursting, sparking, can’t hold back, ready and willing to make Him known.

11 August 2009

Hope’s last line is about the consistent powerful truth of the gospel. Today as I transitioned out of Hope, I stayed as her while she intentionally put down the cane and unwrapped her hand. I looked at my unwrapped hand and it suddenly felt as if it had been healed. I stretch my fingers and looked at them with a smile. I don’t know where this came from! I wasn’t planning it! This happy rehearsal accident speaks volumes about how Hope has lived her life since 2004. It is staying in the show! I believe “this happy rehearsal accident” is probably not so much of an accident as it felt initially. This is exactly the kind of thing I hoped would find its way into the personal and improvisational work.

12 August 2009

I’m still struggling with this, but I have made a few decisions about who is talking to whom. Gina is talking to another girl her age and a best friend who she can be brutally honest

with. For some reason today it helped me reach this faster by doing Gina's monologue as if I were talking on the phone. The phone won't stay but the sense it created will.

I think Tish is talking to another mom about to go abroad on the mission field. The mom is younger than Tish and has asked Tish about taking her kids abroad. I started applying this while sitting at the kitchen table and drinking coffee.

12 & 13 August 2009 Rehearsal with Be Boyd

Be encouraged me to exaggerate the characters for now – even going so far as to allow them to become caricatures. As a result I found Ashley to be the meekest of them all, slightly shy, but wide-eyed and innocent. I also found that she laughs at herself.

Be's next note was to go back through the script and make as much present tense as possible. Keep it in the moment whenever possible! I found this easier with certain characters and next to impossible with some. Gina was easy to make present, but Hope was not.

Be recognized that Gina, Ashley and Bonnie are at the moment the most intriguing because they seem the most human and by human I think we both agreed she meant honest and without preaching.

In rehearsal today we established the greater need for environment for each character. More specifics!

Abby's environment is now the church and she will now start from the front pew. Tish is in her home, preparing for a dinner party with another mom who is going on the mission field. Tish is pouring coffee and setting the table.

Gina is at a sleep over with her best friend – a friend who can call her out.

Ashley is in her Japan apartment cleaning. She moves a rug and scrubs the floor. She is speaking to an International Mission Board representative who has come to interview her and check in on she and her husband. She thinks she is meant to report on the culture she's encountering, but ends up letting out personal information about her struggles there.

Bonnie is the comedian! She's funny and over the top and she knows it. She is no longer in a grocery cart, but at a college friend's house, hanging out and playing board games. She will use chairs to demonstrate the grocery cart.

Hope is at her parents' house in Texas. She may be home, but she is still recovering. She is being interviewed by a member of the press. In the beginning she is defending herself and the team as well as their choices and the mission they knew was at hand. However, she continues the story in such uncomfortable detail because she wants to make the reporter understand how much she's needed God and how much He has been there.

Aspen is at home in Mexico and is so excited to tell her husband the story of what happened that afternoon while he was out that she has dropped everything she was doing.

Today I discovered Tish's realizations are very important for her. Some of the things she says are new realizations for her as they come out of her mouth. She must struggle more.

Remembering back to our conversations I find this to be very true for her in this moment.

**\*\*BIG DISCOVERY OF THE DAY\*\***

All this time I had the women lighting their candles because they knew what their candles represented, but it was awkward and hard to motivate – especially once I decided they weren't talking to the audience, but to specific people. The women are now simply lighting candles within their environment. It is so much more natural! And it beautifully speaks to each of their

personalities. None of them are aware of their own light and significance to the world around them. They consider themselves normal people just like everyone else. They simply live day to day doing what the Lord leads them to do, but just like the people in these women's lives the audience sees their light.

As they light their candles in the show, it is a simple act, which they view as practical and everyday, but from the audiences' perspective it is evident that their lights are a part of a greater and more significant light. Their lit candles become a part of the greater cloud of witnesses. The only person slightly more aware of what her candle represents is Hope because she has suffered most - so that others might suffer less.

Just like every Christian, Abby has a light, but she doesn't know how to light it. At the beginning of the play we see her with her unlit candle as she is held back by complacency and doubt. As she watches these women, she realizes it is the same God who illuminates their candles and strengthens them to obey. Finally Abby is able to light her candle and leave the church with purpose. And, hopefully, the audience and I will follow out the doors after her.

13 August 2009 with Be

Hope: Her big moment of horror and clarity in the car is the moment she sees her hand and realizes she can't move her arms. In that moment the blur stops for a second and a practical reality forces its way into her consciousness.

She must struggle more to remember things. Some of the story will come back easily, but other parts will not.

The first paragraph about Caleb is the moment she snaps back to reality and stops reliving the memory. She's able to focus on the reporter again and the need to get the details

right. I'm reliving it again during the paragraph about the miraculous song in the hospital. I'm there in the room again. Oh how I wish I could not relate to this feeling! Thankfully this moment in Hope's story is a happy memory, but I can easily experience moments of such clarity in my memories. How very present *my* hospital room can be even at present.

After trying a few things we decided the moment she lights her candle is after her second to last sentence. She stares at the lit flame for a moment allowing the audience to even think the monologue might be finished, but then she lands the final line.

Hope's chair is her safety net. She will now stand longer than she had before. The chair provides a block between the reporter and Hope when necessary. She won't move too far away from the chair because it provides her a way out. I can understand sitting down as an escape from my injuries. Moving away from a chair can feel like moving into unknown territory. You wear out too easily, especially when retelling the events that led to the injury.

Be told me to stop worrying about holding back the tears during Hope because if they run over into Aspen they can serve Aspen's wonder and excitement. One physicality serves another. I love it!

Finally, I realized it is best if the cane is used in front of me when walking. The injured left hand only acts to provide balance and doesn't require pressure. This remains true to her leg injuries as well.

14 August 2009

The only way I feel I can sort out Tish is to make her intentionally more like the real life Tish. Motherly, warm, caring, but honest about her pain, her doubts, and her struggles. Wow that sounds obvious. She is being honest about how hard it is to bring your children on the mission

field. You know you're supposed to be there, but watching your kids suffer makes you hate it and sometimes question it. She's also trying to encourage this other mom to whom she is speaking. It is hard for Tish because she is struggling through the pain she still feels from her very recent experience.

Hope was rough today. I think I've gone too far in the opposite direction now. It is become too easy to just report or recount the events without it fully affecting me. I have begun re-reading her autobiography in the hopes that it will refresh her experience and perspective for me.

13 August 2009

I was recently approached by a designer who was interested in *Knowing Fires*. She is a friend of a friend who had heard about it. I e-mailed her a copy of the script as it stands now and she said she had some ideas so we met today. I don't really have the time or money to facilitate all of her ideas at this point, but she presented some concepts that were really intriguing and accurate. I haven't thought much about set design until very recently. I like Peter Brook's (usually very impractical) ideas about letting the material breath and grow and change throughout the rehearsal process without imposing a concept and design on it right from the beginning. I have been fortunate to be able to do that with *Knowing Fires*. After this meeting and some discussions with my director ideas are beginning to take shape and become a part of the fabric of the show.

In rehearsal, we established the need for environment for each woman. I think this is necessary and helpful both to me as the actor and for the audience who are being abruptly introduced to these women. The designer I spoke with today took that idea further and suggested

the elements of each environment be made primarily out of natural wood. This would further the abstract feeling I want and in some ways need for each woman, but also provide them a commonality in their spaces. The designer said her inspiration for the wood pieces came out of a desire to see Renaissance like pieces that echo the sense of a church which is in fact where the performances will most often be presented. She liked the wood pieces because their carvings and shapes could be high church, but the bare wood and different wood colors would also provide a connection to the earth and nature. It is connected to the high and the low, much like the contrast created in the stories. I agreed with her interpretation, but I was further excited about the wood because of the fire images already present in the play! Seeing wood and fire together makes me think of burning (at the stake, in the passion of the heart, through trials) and of temporal and fragile things! These are all things the women represent to me! The temporal flesh, but the eternal spirit. The high and the low. The weak, but the strong! Deeply connected to their surroundings and yet separated. So excited!! ...and yet...

For the upcoming performance I must go with what I can find and borrow. I'm very fortunate to be surrounded by a tremendous support group from our church who consistently live out New Testament living (Act 4:34-35). Through them I have already gathered all the necessary pieces for my set. They have also worked tirelessly to promote the event and emotionally support me in my preparations. They've given time to script readings, designing fliers, programs, filming, and editing and somewhere in the middle also helped my husband and me move into our new apartment.

15 August 2009



In keeping with the idea of environment, several characters are now engaged in activities during their monologues. As I started incorporating them into the monologues, I first exaggerated them. For example, during Ashley's monologue I literally cleaned my kitchen, sometimes even scrubbing the floor on my hands and knees. It was a great experience because old habits were forced off and I discovered new moments of realization for her. The sense of paranoia and needing to be perfect also felt fresh and real. I had to scrub every spot away. I could not have anyone seeing anything less than perfect. It is exhausting and sad.

As I moved into Tish's monologue, I continued cleaning and I was delighted to find her practical side. She is a mom and a hostess (among other things) and as such she almost always has some practical task she must accomplish in addition to an emotional task. On any given day the emotional task may be comforting a child with a scraped knee, but it is likely dinner still has to be put on the table. Knowing Tish she will never let the emotional need go unmet and it will take priority, but the practical is always looming near by. Tish must prepare for a dinner party, the guests are on their way, but she really wants to help this new mother to whom she is speaking. I found that this contrast between the emotional and the practical heightens her struggle within the story. Sometimes the practical is a good outlet for her and can provide a distraction, but at other moments it is too much in the way.

My realization with Gina today came within her last paragraph. She is saying it as much as a defense as she is saying it to encourage and remind herself of its truth.

I exaggerated Bonnie today and made her super over the top. It was more than I can keep; however, it provided some interesting discovery. I really had fun telling her story for the first time and I think that's exactly what she is doing when she tells that story...having fun!

Be had encouraged me not to gloss over the list of Hope's team members or their previous humanitarian experience. Re-reading Hope's book helped me avoid this. I now remember how big of a deal it was that Caleb had worked in Sudan. The defensive way she starts now makes sense again. It is providing Hope some spunk which I know she has. Yes, rereading the book was just what I needed. I had forgotten about the agony her family went through while Hope was in the hospital. She kept asking for Caleb, but wasn't conscious enough or strong enough for the news. Her family kept putting off the news, dreading what they had to tell her and not knowing if she would keep fighting for her own life once she learned her best friend was gone.

I can relate to this in a small way. I know the gratitude and guilt you feel looking back at a difficult recovery knowing what your parents and family have gone through in order to get you well. You are going through your own heartbreak, but you also grieve for their pain – the pain you are unwillingly causing them. At the same moment you are overwhelmed with gratitude for their love and strength.

August 17, 2009

Well, that mostly sucked. In my defense it was the first full run through with all the set and costume pieces and most of the transitional music. The set consists of random pieces of furniture covered in lit candles. Some of the furniture is a part of the women's activities that they must therefore interact with. All of which I know will be great assets – after I get used to them.

Thankfully I could recognize several of Be's notes (Gina's friend being able to call her out, Hope struggling to remember certain facts, Ashley's shy trust) have taken root and make so much sense. So much so I can't seem to remember the characters without these traits.

The music has so much potential! I'm lucky to be married to a talented musician and composer who has done an incredible job interpreting my badly explained musical (emotional environment) vision. Tonight was bumpy, but I think we know what adjustments we need and have time to make them.

Bonnie: Verbally she is going up and down, up and down. She prides herself in her story telling and proud story tellers do not down glide their sentences. They keep you going, hanging on for the next moment of the plot. Bonnie needs to do the same.

August 18, 2009

Note to self: do not waste an entire run through (in the space!) by not having a substantial warm up! It is no excuse, but again the trouble of being the writer, set designer, prop master, costume mistress, etc., etc., creates distraction upon distraction. I allowed myself to be consumed with all these other details and then jumped into the acting completely unfocused or prepared. I had a limited amount of time in the space and was literally discussing/deciding/arguing with those present right up until the moment the run through began. There was a moment 1/4 of the way through Hope's monologue when I realized I was finally dropped into the moment. Hope is the second to last person in the show! What a waste! My focus was in so many other places it was as if all my work with these women was thrown out the window.

I realize as I write that my problem lies in my perspective. I must remember my early work with these women. Their voices, their movement, their environments are all expressions of the inner women I have found. In the last week, with the pressure of the next performance, I allowed myself to view all these elements as separate from the women. But it is not! It is all a part of them, it is part of the warm up, it is a part of me!

However, (a small however), two friends were present as audience members and I was conscious of one of them crying throughout Hope's monologue. This is a friend who knows this monologue well and has read it often. It was encouraging to remember these stories possess power all by themselves and that hopefully my personalization work stays with me more than I think even when I'm distracted.

August 19, 2009

Today wasn't much better. Although I did make time for a warm up (which helped tremendously) there were too many cooks in the kitchen. There were more people present at the rehearsal today than yesterday – family in town for the show, friends who have helped with props, set pieces, filming, and publicity. Different from yesterday the people present today gave their opinions...a lot of their opinions. I value their opinions, but today is too late and many of these people have been out of the rehearsal loop too long to offer applicable opinions at this point. Once the run was finished, I asked no one give me notes, but they did anyway. I know they meant to help, but mainly it led to my greater frustration and distraction.

The props are now complete, but without time to work with them before the run-through, they caused some bumps. I will make time this evening to work out each woman's specific interaction with their environments. Ashley suffered the most from this today. The interruption the rug caused was bulky and I lost her delicate mannerisms.

Tish is still my greatest struggle. I can't find her. She's become the most different from her actual person and I'm not sure why that has happened, but it is two days from the workshop and I need to commit to what I have for right now, even if it is wrong.

The music is helping tremendously! I find the transitions much easier for me and hopefully for the audience. It is been amazing to hear the music come to life with the characters. They sound the way I've been hearing these women for the past seven months. The only problem spot now is Hope. Her music is close but not quite there. Her emotional state is so important the music playing underneath her words will require a precise balance. The music should enhance her monologue not take away from it. I think it will take more time, but that is why we have workshops.

August 20, 2009

FINALLY! A really great run-through! Not only does the physical and vocal warm up provide me with time to center and focus, but it really gives my body and voice the stamina it needs to get through the show. Today I had renewed energy going into the run-through and I was really able to focus on character and objective rather than external business such as lighting and props. Today everything finally fit.

The extra time I spent with props was of great help. Activities and environment felt natural and apart of the women's normal rhythms. The props were no longer extra events disrupting action.

Today was also my first rehearsal with the microphone. Several people had mentioned through the last rehearsals that the women were all sounding the same. Although I have not heavily concerned myself with differing dialects I wasn't sure why they were sounding identical until today. I think out of a natural compulsion to project and to be heard I was unconsciously lowering my pitch and pushing slightly. The mic fixed the problem and I fell easily back into my

vocal choices. Obviously this is a problem I need to address as I will not always have a mike, but for now I will not worry about it.

I've struggled over the months about the women's vocal qualities. The truth is they are all primarily from the southeast and do not sound that different from each other. I don't want a dialect for a dialect's sake – even though some people keep suggesting this. Their personalities have influenced the slight differences I have found vocally. For example, Ashley's sweet cautiousness keeps her voice light and delicate like her movements. Again I find myself questioning....but this process is about finding these women personally.

I ran through Tish with her full environment as a part of my warm up today and she feels better. Funny, but for some reasons I thought of Julia Child and started dropping in her larger than life warmth, humor, and honesty and Tish started to make sense in my body again. The openness that I felt as Tish finally felt right. It felt like sitting on her couch across from her listening to her share her heart....hmm...as the giver and receiver. I am both as I tell these stories now.

August 22, 2009

Tish: I had the Julia Child experience with her, and then at the performance Tish was present and brought me a box of homemade cookies. She wrote me a very sweet note in which she mentioned baking in France as a means of coping. I decided instantly that in the future she will no longer be preparing for a dinner party during her monologue, but she will be in her kitchen baking.

Tish was less nervous and pent up tonight. Her activities felt practical and necessary. She glided through her activities and maintained her sense of openness. During the warm up I

revisited the vocal pyramid and matching physical expressions. I spent a long time in the MAA-AH resonance with Tish. With her openness came a new level of vulnerability I haven't experienced with her lately.

Part way through Gina's monologue I realized how much fun I was having. The realization doesn't really relate to Gina, but it was important for me after the stress of the last week. I found myself sitting with my knees pulled into my chest at one point and discovered her need to really find comfort. The sleeping bag wouldn't open and it became a good source of frustration to channel for her.

Ashley was faster tonight, but articulate. I stopped worrying about maintaining delicate movements with her and was able to focus on what she needed in the telling of her story. I have to admit I enjoyed hearing the audience laugh at her. It gave me relief I was able to use for her as she gains confidence in telling her story.

Bonnie was finally in her element with an audience! She needs them to tell her story best and the laughter egged her on. It was easy to enjoy telling the story tonight. She felt larger physically as a result and I think that's good.

Throughout Hope's monologue I was powerfully reminded of my personalization work with her. It almost overwhelmed me at times, but in those moments I did what she does – focus on the need to keep going and on the importance of what must be told. I think some of her beat changes came too quickly or easily. I think they happen because she insists on them in order to keep going, but still I doubt they would come so fast.

Aspen was the most beautiful for me tonight. As she began to speak I was personally so overwhelmed with the accomplishment of the workshop and the culmination of these stories and

knowing for myself that despite the stress and frustration and self doubt and distractions and problems it was through the Lord this workshop was accomplished tonight. I felt it was a small miracle, at least a personal one for myself. A miracle, just like Aspen is so excited to tell her husband about. I felt personally the same excitement, victory, and humility Aspen feels as she tells the story of her monologue. I was saying her words, but inwardly I was thanking God for His mercy and presence in my miracle.

Abby felt weak in her first monologue. I'm still not confident with the writing and its compromising my performance. However, for her last monologue I was able to let all the stories rest on me. I was able to wait for an honest and in the moment response. My eyes were still wet from Aspen and all I could find for Abby to say is... "they are just like me. they are just like me." She made her decision, lit her candle and left the room.

### **April 18, 2010**

It is eight months later, almost to the day, since I last visited this script. I've been in my third year of graduate school which consists of an internship with a demanding schedule. I'm sure I could have stolen a few minutes here and there during the last eight months to work on the show, but I intentionally did not. I wanted some space and the opportunity to revisit the script with fresh eyes.

I've spent the last few days simply going over the script. I have avoided making rewrites, but rather have read and re-read the words out loud. It has been nice to find habitual choices dropped and new meanings suddenly appear, but I have to confess I feel a little lost at the this point in the journey. I have managed to write a great deal more of my thesis throughout the last eight months and gaining a slightly distanced perspective on the process has changed my mind



about some things. Or maybe that's not it, but I guess a better way to say it, I've found myself in a different place eight months later than I thought I would be. I think that's okay. If anything has become abundantly clear through this process it is that Theatre for Social Change is about path blazing and creating something new. And there is no formula for this stuff! One must find their own formula because the circumstances, resources and issues are almost always different. I'm okay with landing in a different place than I expected, but I'm not entirely sure how to proceed with this awareness in mind.

So where did I expect to be and where do I see myself in this process now? I expected the knowledge I gained from Brook's techniques and ideas to take me further, but I'm finding at this point I need more tangible and practical methods. The improvisations, personalization, vocal and physical work were all very helpful in the beginning – and I mean that, very helpful. In fact I think it was essential to my foundational work, but now I'm finding in order to keep it going, to continue being specific and to maintain a high quality performance I need more tangible exercises and approaches.

I have also (not surprisingly) continued to find major flaws with my writing. Going back through my research of Brook's process and other role models such as Anna Deavere Smith, I realized (or remembered, I'm not sure which) that they had playwrights! They were heavily involved in the writing and development process, but ultimately when it came to pen and paper they had a professional playwright involved! I can't believe I went this far in the process without thinking the same way. I'm very happy to report this problem has recently been solved and a published playwright will soon be involved with the writing and re-writing process. With our busy schedules and the changes the script requires we need more time than I have now in order

to make real changes. So the new script will not be ready for the next workshop. I've found this frustrating because I find myself not wanting to work on the current script knowing it is on the cusp of being much better. However, in a small way, I'm grateful to spend a little more time with this first draft.

So where does this leave me? What will happen if I apply a previously unrelated or discussed method to an unfinished draft of the script? Am I abandoning or broadening my process? I don't know. I feel all I can do is push forward and hope to figure it out in the days to come.

April 19, 2010

Today I sought to find these characters physically again. I hope to create greater differences between the women this time. This will be a challenge since I've learned just how similarly they are written.

I had a nice big space to rehearse in today so I 'balanced the room' with each character. I have loved returning to this exercise because it allows space and time for movement patterns to change and adapt. I moved through the space, always returning to center. I allowed internal and external influences to change what I was doing. I only occasionally referenced a full length (but small) mirror at times. I didn't want to be too focused on what I looked like from the outside. I wanted any physical changes to come from honest motivations of character not because I forced them from an outside perspective. I took a long time with each character moving through the space. I would begin simply walking as myself, but speaking their words and allowing changes to occur as I thought of new questions or ideas. Sometimes a physical trigger would prompt me like a crack in the floor.

Tish became very grounded and confident with a wide stance. She moved purposefully, but slower than my normal pace. I felt open, my belly loose, like everything was on the table. These physical discoveries made her moments of opposites stronger because the weight was suddenly contrasted with lightness.

As soon as I transitioned into Gina my legs came together and everything tightened. I felt the need to protect myself physically. My pace quickened and I was breathing so quickly! I felt almost dizzy when I finished.

Ashley also felt closed off. Unlike Gina she was careful, very delicate, but not a natural care, a paranoid and enforced careful with a great desire to avoid offense. I found it hard to stay still. The transition from Gina was difficult. I started walking on my tiptoes and trying to tight-rope walk on the lines in the floor. This helped tremendously as I was physically being forced to stay in line. It required work and care.

Bonnie became grounded like Tish, but I found a spring in Bonnie's step. My hands and arms flopped a bit as I walked. I kept repeating her line, "its no big deal" at different volumes. As I played with elongating the vowels I found myself physically sliding into the words.

Hope moved slowly. I thought of the old saying that so often applies to recoveries, "one step forward, two steps back." I started to actually walk that way, taking one step forward and two back. I couldn't help feeling frustrated. I stood at one side of the room and set a physical goal to achieve (just like when I was in physical therapy) and remembered how long it takes to get anywhere. By the end I was exhausted.

April 21, 2010

I have felt emboldened by a new-play festival I recently attended. I watched playwrights take full advantage of workshops and readings by making drastic cuts and changes in their new scripts in order to explore new possibilities. I realized its okay to try new things and commit to them temporarily. Just because I don't implement a choice now doesn't mean it can't come back later.

For this workshop I have made the decision to remove Abby. As she is written now she is forcing a message on the audience, but I want them to have the freedom to find my message (or their own message) themselves. I don't feel I can re-write Abby adequately in the little time left in rehearsals so I'm simply leaving her out. Doesn't mean she won't return, but for now she is gone.

I'm also changing the characters' relationship with their candles. They will no longer light their candles during the performance, but they will be lit before the performance begins. The workshop will begin with a blackout, lit candles and an old recording of children singing "this little light of mine." The show will end in the same manner. I like the simplicity of this approach. There is a suggestion, but it's not too strong. It may not work at all, but I'm going to find out.

April 24, 2010

I only worked with Hope today. Needless to say I'm tired now. When I started I felt completely detached from her story, cold and stoic. I wondered if she ever feels that way telling the story now that it's been six years. My detached feeling didn't last long. I'm unable to plan Hope any more. Different parts of the story affect me differently each time. I think this is good.

I caught myself sighing a lot and remembered a note from an acting professor this year,

“no sighs and no thigs.” Energy is lost on sighing and slapping your thighs. In the case of sighing the word needs to come on the release of air, not after. The breath is the moment, but if you release the air on the sigh it is wasted. I tried to correct this with Hope and actually found I had more energy telling her story.

Michael Shurtleff’s *Audition Guidepost*’s came to mind today because we have been exploring them with great success in my theatre careers class. I thought of the guidepost of humor specifically. Where is Hope making a joke or letting the audience know she’s okay or that they can relax? I explored a few possibilities today and found a few spots that work – not many though. I think that might point to problems with the writing.

Today I started thinking about the listener hearing Hope’s story for the first time. They don’t know that Caleb doesn’t make it even though Hope does. There are specific moments in the monologue (especially when Hope talks about the doctor’s promise that Caleb will survive) when Hope can re-live the relief and hope she felt at that moment instead of the sorrow she feels now knowing the outcome. This will allow the audience to live through the relief and provide an even greater weight when the final result is revealed.

April 25, 2010

I am having major motivation problems today. For the first time since revisiting the show, I managed to run the entire show, but could not bring myself to run it a second time. I’m tired, but that’s no excuse. It was a decent run, almost surprisingly so and I felt the women were at least some what different from each other – both physically and vocally (I warmed up with the Linklater pyramid again, applying the different resonances to each women). I know there can be greater differences, but until the writing changes I don’t know how much more success I can

gain with the differences. I could force changes on the characters, but it wouldn't be natural as they're written and I think it would sound and look unnecessary. I feel like I've squeezed all I can out of this first draft and today I'm definitely ready to move on to the next draft and to better writing. Knowing that a better draft, guided and written by a professional playwright is around the corner makes me want to work on the show even less right now. Lack. Of. Motivation. Day.

April 26, 2010

In order to have a better rehearsal I tried to be very specific and focus on practical elements as much as possible. I began by going through the *Audition* Guideposts, but specifically applying some of them to each monologue. I found this extremely helpful. The guideposts that helped the most were "Relationship" (what is it? how do you feel about the person you're speaking to?), "What Are You Fighting For" (conflict), and "The Moment Before." The women's relationship to the person they are speaking with is important especially because the audience is given no evidence of who that person is. I remembered who they were talking to based on my decisions last summer, but it was new to think specifically about how they feel about that person. What a character is fighting for is always important, but I think with these women I had started to take it for granted. Being specific with the answer to that question for each of them was very helpful. I was reminded of why they are talking and what they want within the moment.

Working through guidepost number ten "Find the Event" was harder and I think this is a writing problem. "The Moment Before" was helpful because it is also something the audience never sees. I was reminded of an earlier idea I had about each woman being asked a question which propels them into their dialogue. I realize the need for caution at this point. The easy

answer to what the women are fighting for and what the moment before is a need for self defense. They can't all be defending their actions.

I also found guidepost number seven "Communication" (when do you know you've been heard?) helpful today. Recognizing when my partner is listening, agreeing or disagreeing was another way to remain connected to them.

Guidepost number eleven is "Place" and I plan to spend time with that tomorrow. It is another area left to the audience's imagination and needs to be very specific for me. Based on an e-mail discussion with the show's new playwright I think guidepost number thirteen "Mystery and Secret" (what isn't the character telling?) is an area to explore. I'm excited about tomorrow!

April 27, 2010

I noticed today my breathing during Hope's monologue was very shallow and high in my chest. I tried to lower my breathing as I was going, but couldn't notice a big difference.

I found the "Secret: and "Place" Guideposts easy to apply to each woman. Ashley was especially easy as she has always felt a little like she was telling secrets.

Aspen felt too much like me today. I want to return to the open, grounded, but ever moving upward physicality I have found for her before. I widened my stance even more in hopes of finding it again.

I also found new places for the women to experience discoveries! I realized as the women speak I have greatly neglected finding new information and I'm sure it was causing the pieces to become boring and static. Using discoveries made the monologues feel new again.

April 28, 2010

Today was a great rehearsal day! I met my stamina problem by camping out at the theatre

for seven hours. I would take breaks when I needed for food, rest or just a pause from the material. The overall long duration of rehearsal kept me focused on the work longer than normal. I was benefited from the breaks mentally as they provided an opportunity to reflect amid the process. I'm beginning to believe time to reflect within rehearsal is almost as important as the time actually spent on stage working.

I had a breakthrough in my choices with Hope. During the paragraph where she talks about Lydia's death and Mrs. Evans' body being moved, I allowed myself to come apart emotionally. This will be the only moment where the audience sees Hope break down emotionally. I'm sitting down at that point in the monologue. Now I'm really letting the tears come. As soon as the paragraph finishes at its new pitch, I stand up and move a few steps away from the chair as if the memory is so vivid she must physically move away from it.

I did very specific paper work today applying each *Audition* Guidepost to each monologue. It took up a lot of paper, but I discovered some great things! I feel like I'm finding these women in a new way, but they are the same women I discovered through my personal work last summer!

Probably the most interesting change has come from the "Ecstasy and Agony" Guidepost. I realized most of the monologues only consist of agony. Agony is hard to bear for myself and I'm sure for the audience as well. However, I was able to insert moments of ecstasy in some of the monologues and it has greatly enriched them. Tish's monologue begins with the description of the village and I have always played it so negatively because she knows where her story is going. Remembering my original conversations with Tish prove that despite the hardships they faced overseas Tish LOVED that village! She thought it was beautiful, rich and peaceful. Now



the description of the village is Tish's moment of ecstasy! It gives her further depth and variety and magnifies the drop she experiences when she describes turning back to her mirror to practice her French.

The Guideposts have helped me remember these women in more specific contexts. I have found myself remembering more details from our conversations which have made the women seem so real again. The personalization work last summer was helpful. However, eventually it led me to a very selfish place where these monologues were all about me and how I related to them, but the monologues aren't about me! The monologues are about the women who first spoke them! I'm just the vessel.

April 29, 2010

Well, today was interesting. My director is out of the country so I asked three actor/directors to watch and respond to a run through. I was especially looking forward to their input because they have never seen or read the show. I knew I needed outside eyes because rehearsals were feeling easy and that concerned me. Finding these missionaries last summer was such a challenge, but this time it is feeling natural. I don't feel like I'm trying very hard or having to think about choices very much while I'm performing. I'm not sure if that is simply because I have spent so much time with these women or if I'm becoming general and sloppy in my choices. I wanted outside eyes to help me make the distinction. I was grateful they came because I knew they would be honest with me.

Everything was going fine until about half way through Hope's monologue. When I stood up I suddenly became very dizzy and light headed. I determined to push through it and continue, but then my eyes blacked out and I knew I had to stop or run the risk of passing out. I apologized

as I stopped the performance and laid down on the stage. It took several minutes for me to feel better, but the four of us continued talking while I was lying down.

They asked me specific questions about my physical choices for Hope and if any of them could be altered in order to help me make it through the monologue. I didn't know of any intentional choices that could have brought on the dizzy spell, but I thought possibly I stood up too fast after crying and breathing so hard during the previous paragraph. We discussed something I have wondered about before which is the possibility of Hope sharing the story as a factual report. I know from my own traumatic experience that telling the story of my accident could only be accomplished for a time if I detached myself from it and talked about it as if it happened to someone else or in a fairytale to which I couldn't relate. I have avoided making this choice because I was afraid the monologue would lose its power, but they all agreed it would not. The bottom line is I need to do the work. I have to be able to finish the monologue and the show so I will try the report choice for the workshop on Monday. As has been said before, it may not work and I'll need to change it for another performance, but for now it is what I will do. Nearly passing out wasn't fun, but I'm glad it happened now so that the issue could be addressed before the workshop.

This experience today has really made me question my early work and my efforts to imitate Brook's work on *US*. Was the personalization too much? Did it make the experiences of these women too close for the necessary practicality of doing the work? Or maybe it was only detrimental within the personal reference of my car accident because I'm not ready to deal with it so deeply? I'm not sure what the answer is at this point.

My three observers had very positive things to say regarding the show. They said they

were drawn into the stories and found the women believable, moving and specific. This was a relief for me to hear! I suppose this means I haven't become lazy, but rather close to these characters in a way that has remained in me all these months. So here I think the personalization work was beneficial.

One of the observers specifically mentioned she was impressed with the wide number of positive choices I made within each monologue and how those positive choices enabled her to see the women as strong survivors rather than victims. This was a great compliment and I don't think she could have said that without my Guidepost work from the last week.

All three observers agreed that I should take more time during the transitions between characters. They said they needed that time to process what they had experienced and ready themselves to move onto the next story. I felt like they gave me permission! I have always felt I needed to rush to the next character, but now I know they need the time as much as I do!

I'm exhausted now and on the advice of one of the people watching today, I plan to take tomorrow off from rehearsal. The work is there and ready, but I need to give my body a day to catch up.

May 1, 2010

Today is one year since the show's first reading! It has changed so much since then and as tiring and frustrating as the process has been at times I'm proud of what it has started to become.

Today's rehearsal was focused on tech for the show. I have use of theatrical lights and a lighting designer for the first time! I am so excited about the difference it is making! It looks like a real show now! We are implementing the use of a lit scrim that changes color with each

monologue. My favorite effect is when the scrim grows red during Hope's monologue and she is left in a black silhouette against the red at the end of her monologue.

May 2, 2010

Today's rehearsal became another technical rehearsal. Today the sound was added to the lighting choices. Rather than music introducing each woman we are using sounds that gently establish their environment. I'm quite happy with this choice because it sustains my choice to minimize set pieces and props. The stage is small and the space intimate. I don't want a lot of things in between these women and the audience.

I performed Hope at full capacity today and was happy to find I didn't feel sick or light headed. I made the choice not to stand after the emotional paragraph and implemented the sense of 'report' more frequently throughout the monologue. I also noticed my stomach consistently tightening as I was talking. I tried to monitor myself and each time I felt it tightening I released my stomach muscles and made sure to lower my breath within my body. It seemed to help today. I don't know if it will be enough tomorrow, but its all I know to do for right now.

## CHAPTER SIX: REFLECTION

Throughout my thesis process I have been searching to create a theatrical performance that causes change. I have read different accounts, definitions, attempts, strategies and experiences, but as a young artist what would Theatre for Social Change mean for me on the most practical level? Throughout the writing and rehearsal process I wondered if I could adequately follow Peter Brook's example as set through his 1966 production of *US*. I didn't have the money, resources or experience to match his process identically. Would the lack of these elements harm my final product? Brook provided an abundant example to follow, but ultimately I learned I had to discover my own process in my search to create Theatre for Social Change. I had to use what was available to me – internally and externally. By creating my own path I honored Brook's process. He wanted his actors to find a personal relationship with the Vietnam War and such a relationship could only be found through an individual journey. By finding my personal path, I developed an intimate relationship with the missionaries' stories I recorded, reassembled and ultimately recreated. Despite my lack of resources and experience I was able to find a form of Theatre for Social Change, *my* form of Theatre for Social Change. It may not look like Peter Brook's theatre, but I believe he was the right place to start. The fundamental ideas and goals of the *US* process provided the foundation for my journey.

The latest workshop of my original thesis work *Knowing Fires* was an eye-opening experience. The workshop was, for the most part, a satisfying culmination of my thesis process. According to the positive feedback I received from the audience, the hard work and uncomfortable weeks of personal confrontation appeared to benefit the stories. Several audience members described the show as "honest." I believe this opinion comes from my willingness, as

the actor, to honestly confront the issues presented in the show. As a person and as an actor, I allowed myself to come before the audience vulnerable, while also asking the audience to drop their defenses. There had been difficult truths for me to face during rehearsals, but because I had been willing to experience the confrontation most of the audience agreed to face it with me during the show.

I was grateful for the positive audience feedback, but I was personally satisfied with this workshop as well. I felt my acting choices were specific and intentional, but also deeply rooted in my personal connection to these missionaries and their experiences. The recent rehearsal work focusing on Michael Shurtleff's *Audition* Guideposts provided me with active choices and specific nuances which kept the audience interested in every detail. The Guideposts acted as a road map in what had become a somewhat abstract rehearsal process. An audience member commented that it was the small specifics, like Ashley's paranoid adjustment of her candle, which kept the missionaries rooted in reality for him. The specifics did the same for me as the actor.

Specific acting choices served this workshop performance, but I was also aware that the early personal and improvisational work did the same. During Hope's monologue I was brought to tears through a new personal connection which inspired me for the first time on stage. The realization and its application to my real life moved me in that moment, but the moment was possible because I was so deeply rooted in Hope's truth and experience. I was able to make a new personal realization without losing Hope or her story. On stage our two experiences were intertwined so exactly that I cannot adequately describe when one began or the other ended.

Moments such as this could not have happened without the earlier and sometimes more abstract work in rehearsals.

Brook used three words in the French language to solidify his description of what is needed to bring an actor-audience connection into reality: *repetition, representation, assistance* (Empty Space 138). The actor must go through the entire process of repetition and representation, but in order for a complete experience the audience must come to actively assist (Kustow 155). According to Brook, only with the assistance of focus and desire from the audience will the actor's repetition of rehearsal transform into the representation of performance. "Then the word representation no longer separates actor and audience, show and public: it envelops them: what is present for one is present for the other" (Empty Space 140). Based on audience feedback I was encouraged to learn that most audience members experienced what Brook calls "assistance." Some came unaware of the content of the show, while some even came with hesitation believing they would disagree with the subject matter presented, but the responses of audience members affected by the piece prove they came to the theatre willing or as one audience member put it "open." An audience member admitted through her comment card that without a willing attitude she would have missed the full impact of the show. I'm still not sure if these audience members truly came to the theatre ready to participate or if it was my vulnerability and the emotional honesty of the characters which prompted the audience's willingness to participate. I believe it is best if the answer can include both.

A common feeling voiced from audience members was the lack of completion and I could not agree more. This project is not finished and I plan to continue building the show by adding new missionaries and expanding the subject matter covered within the monologues. I plan

to interview more missionaries from a wider variety of backgrounds and experiences. I want to include monologues that explore stories of culture shock, conversations, failed missions and other topics common to the missionary experience which the show currently lacks. As I move forward I will continue with the personalization work and improvisations. However, I will not be as hard on myself about maintaining them. In the future I will allow myself greater flexibility with the tools I have used to develop this piece. I have learned it is acceptable to break with an original plan in order to apply what is needed at that moment. The personalization work was uncomfortable and I recognize a slight feeling of dread within myself at the thought of entering into that work afresh with new material. However, I have seen too well the effectiveness of this work if balanced with practical acting techniques of objective, obstacle, tactic and environment. Its worth cannot be ignored.

As I proceed I will continue seeking honesty from myself and from the text. In Hamlet's famous advice to the players he says that the very "purpose of playing...both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature...and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure" (III.ii.5-20). Through Hamlet, Shakespeare is distinguishing theatre as a reflection of the "very age and body of time." Theatre's reflective presence can be seen throughout history "both at the first and now." When Hamlet says, the actors are the "abstract and brief chronicles of the time" he is serious, but a true reflection requires honesty. Throughout this process I have come to wholeheartedly agree with Brook that an honest reflection must include the actor. It is not enough to turn the mirror on the audience. Theatre for Social Change requires the actor first face his or her own reflection. The actor risks accusing the audience without first turning the mirror inward. Instead, collective change—for the actor and the



spectator—is sought and that includes the actor who, “is supposed to be, the audience’s representative, who is trained and prepared to go farther than the spectator, down a path the spectator knows to be his own” (Shifting Point 62).

It was exciting to see the different messages audience members took away from the piece. The primary issue at hand for myself was the contradiction between comfortable western lives and those of missionaries living abroad, but in the final workshop I intentionally removed segments of text in order to allow the pointed message room to breath. I did not want the piece to become “preachy” and I wanted to allow the audience greater freedom to find their own message. Could this piece speak to other issues that need addressing? From audience members willing to “assist” I found the answer to be “yes.” Comment cards from the last workshop indicated several different messages which resonated within audience members. I consider this my greatest achievement. This has not been about forcing a message, but inspiring the audience to think and act for themselves.

I followed Brook’s example and did not expect every audience member in attendance to come willing and ready to participate. In fact, I expected most people to be unwilling to fully engage on both emotional and intellectual levels. I think with larger audiences and more performances I would have found this to be true, but in the instances of my workshops the majority of audience members were extremely receptive. However, there were a small number of spectators who found specific criticisms of the work. The show is still a work in progress and I have been happy to find myself willing to receive criticisms in order to continue growing the work, but certain criticism (especially from church audiences) caught my attention for reasons beyond advancing the work.

The comment cards were anonymous and I gained no further information from the persons who provided their opinions, but it could be argued that the two primary complaints were rooted in an unwillingness to be honest about oneself or other people within the Christian faith. And without honesty change cannot begin. The two chief complaints within church audiences were that the stories were not “holy” enough and that the show did not provide a clear message. To some church members it was considered inappropriate to show missionaries struggling in their faith and practice. One opinion stated it was better to show the missionaries at their best and not struggling with doubt in their calling or dislike for the people they were serving. The aversion to an open-ended message was also voiced. One audience member wanted to know what he should think, feel and do about the message clearly presented in the performance. In other words, he wanted to be told what to do.

The first complaint, against a transparent showing of the missionaries, defeats one of my primary purposes for creating this work. One of the reasons comfortable western Christians do not take risks in order to serve others is the belief that missionaries are some how super-human and capable of more than the average person. In actuality missionaries are average people setting a biblical example. Through this show, I sought to provide the audience with a window into the struggles missionaries face in order to do great things. The second complaint, voicing the dislike of an open-ended message and the need for specific direction towards action, is of the most interest to me especially because it comes from a church member. Throughout this process, it has been a priority to create a theatrical piece that can be used in churches and I have been interested to see how church members would receive the work. Even though this opinion was only expressed once throughout my workshops I cannot help but wonder how common it is among

church-goers. Church members are accustomed to hearing weekly sermons which most often have a clear message, prescribing an exact course of action. How many church members have become content to simply accept what is heard from the pulpit and have relinquished the right to discern? The person presenting the weekly message should be of godly character and sound doctrine, but if not, does the congregation fail to seek the truth for themselves? If this is the case, the Christian church might be in a dangerous position.

The comment cards and talk backs were insightful, but ultimately I'm left to speculate about the impact of the show on audience members. Even the audience members themselves may not yet know what the show means to them or what change it may eventually cause within them. I'm better equipped to speak to my personal change, but there are still changes within me immeasurable on paper and yet unfinished. I have been deeply humbled through this experience. Daily I was faced with my shortcomings as a person and as an actor, but through my connection to the missionaries I was also daily provided with examples of shortcomings turned into great strengths. I have gained courage through trying and failing, and trying again. At times I worried my faith would weaken in the face of questions, but I have found it strengthened in the willingness to explore confrontation.

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