

GIVING THEATRICAL *LIFE*

by

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ABSTRACT

An experience, early in my life, at the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center opened my eyes to the transformative power of Theatre - it would shape my ambitions for performance, inform the choices I made about my acting career, and impel my passions. That single moment had a profound and lasting effect on my soul, one that would ultimately point me to the purpose of “me;” but what exactly was it? What transaction occurred between the performers on stage, and myself, and others in attendance that evening?

My life as an actor has been an incredible journey of growth. Over forty-six U.S. states, and abroad, I have performed in Broadway musicals, stage plays, concerts, recordings, cabarets, as part of political campaigns and sporting events, and in universities, schools, and churches. Acting has fundamentally changed the way I see people, and challenges the way I learn, express and see myself. As my imagination, creativity, and craft has grown, I remain profoundly impacted by my experience in Tampa, and I have often wondered exactly what happened that evening? Did it have anything to do with the synesthetic elements of the performance – the lights, sounds, or scenery? Was it specifically the music, the voices, the amazing singers? Perhaps it was the daring acting and story. Did it depend on particular foreknowledge or familiarity of skill, or craft? Was it something that happened by chance, or by design? Was it because of me? Or did it, somehow, override everything I was at the time? Was it something intangible that is present at some, or all, theatrical events that enlivened the experience? This paper seeks to provide answers to

some of these questions.

My process in seeking answers will be to chronicle my own life experience as a person/artist. Having begun a script a couple of years ago, I decided to return to solo performance as a means to help me determine what made the experience I related so memorable. The attempt is to write and perform a solo performance piece that chronicles the foundation of this incredible journey of growth, while shedding light on the initial Tampa experience. My intention is to gain an understanding about something I believe contributes to “theatrical spirituality.” I believe that the unique blending of the script and the interpretation of these words through acting can impart *life*. The combined force of the power of story and the spoken word can cause something tangible, something good, meaningful and of intrinsic worth to happen in an individual or audience as a result of a performance. It is my belief that the formation, articulation and expression of that understanding represents, in part, my acting philosophy – what I do and why I do it. In a broader and more important sense, however, it also represents my understanding of who I am and why I am.

To Bert Williams

"The man with the real sense of humor is the man who can put himself in the spectator's place and laugh at his own misfortune."

To Paul Robeson

"As an artist I come to sing, but as a citizen, I will always speak for peace, and no one can silence me in this."

To Louis Armstrong

"What we play is life."

To Sammy Davis Jr.

"Real success is not on the stage, but off the stage as a human being, and how you get along with your fellow man."

For your transformative legacy, and your incomparable sacrifice and service to the art, to America, and to the world, I thank you.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

At the outset of writing, I want to establish a single term and definition that, I hope, will be helpful throughout the course of this paper. Often, in speaking of the extent to which an audience is impacted by a particular theatrical performance, words such as “touched” or “moved,” sometimes “inspired” are often used to describe an audience’s response to what they have heard, perceived, or otherwise felt. The nature of personal or group response varies, of course, but often includes tangible expressions or experiences that seem to be physical or emotional in nature, such as laughter or weeping, joy or sorrow, healing or wholeness, whether simple, shallow, complex or profound in extent. I propose to refer to all such audience experiences or expressions as receiving *life* and I shall do so because of my belief that, broadly speaking, what is communicated, or given, by actors, and is received by audience members in such instances is the very essence of life, of existence, of existential being. I shall, of course, define, articulate, and examine this thought later on in this paper but, for now, I want to establish the basic term and its obvious derivatives in all grammatical senses.

The first time I performed on stage, was during my 8th grade year, as part of New Beginnings Dance Troupe, a community group based in Lakeland, Florida. The group was led by Dr. Abigail Mobley and I performed in a musical adaptation of *The Wiz* entitled “*The Wiz According To God.*” The musical explored spiritual themes the author had derived from the narrative of *The Wiz*, themes of humanity searching for something, being on a journey somewhere, and questioning the meaning of home. Dr. Mobley’s script resolved

those questions in the person, destination, and provision of God. As amazing as that experience was for me, and as intentionally spiritual as the author intended it to be, I have no particular recollection of the audiences we performed before receiving *life*. To be clear, I am not saying that did not happen, I am only saying that I have no clear memory of it. What I do recall was that performances were entertaining, a demonstration of talent, togetherness, and a lot of hard work, and they showed me how enriching community activity can be, for performers and audiences alike. Additionally, I have no clear recollection of personally receiving *life* as a result of attending a play and musical before 8th Grade even though, while growing up, I had attended very many performances, in a variety of small to medium-sized venues.

A year later, when I was in 9th Grade, my Dad picked me up from wrestling practice one day, out of the blue – I was shocked, because my Dad had never really taken me anywhere, which immediately made the occasion a special experience. Dad, who lived elsewhere in the city to the home I lived in with my Mom and Stepfather, had purchased tickets for a musical and drove me to the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center. The title of the musical was *Mama I'm Sorry* and it was written by the playwright Michael Matthews, who some regard as the “Godfather of Black Gospel Stage Musicals.” The energy and buzz of the moment was incredible – this was a professional play, there were actors in costume, performing in a huge theatre before a massive audience. As a part of that audience I felt I was participating in something great. Then the music began - it was majestic, it was huge, it was full, as if it was coming from everywhere in the theatre. The music touched me. Then the actors started to sing – it was the most phenomenal singing I had ever seen anywhere,

and it was all happening live, on stage, in front of my eyes. Yet beyond the spectacle, the theatrical professionalism and the energy of the event itself, there was something else I perceived. At a particular moment in the narrative, the audience began to sniffle, and shudder - perceptibly and visibly crying, and I cried too, though I noticed my Dad wasn't crying. The song that prompted this response was "Mama, I'm Sorry." The lyrics told the story of a male character who had recently returned home after a time of prodigal living. The son expresses feelings of penitence to his Mother while apologizing for all the pain he had put her through. Growing up in my home, there was a lot of pain, emptiness, separation from emotion, distance between me and my family. My Father left home first, then my brother, leaving me and my Mom behind and alone together. My Mom did her best to raise me but we both struggled to express the pain we felt and I would often do things to upset her, sometimes in rebellion, sometimes trying to find love and acceptance from her. The moment in the musical somehow brought clarity, revelation and understanding to me about the experience of salvation I had often heard preached in presentations of the Christian Gospel, or had read about. Deeply in my heart, I felt drawn to my Mom, and also to Jesus Christ. I left the theatre that night determined to express my newly found feelings to my Mom and a few days on, late at night, I opened the door to my Mother and Stepfather's room when they were already asleep in bed. Tears were filling my eyes as I knelt beside their bed and began to sing to Mom the song I had seen performed in the Matthews musical: *"Mama, I'm sorry, I know I've let you down...if you forgive me, Mama, I pray to be the Son you prayed for me to be...if you forgive me, I'll make you proud..."* That was the first time I sang with intent, purpose and what I will describe as a sense of *life - life*

imparted to me theatrically, and *life* I then imparted to bring healing, restoration, and wholeness to myself, to my Mom, and to our relationship.

My experience at the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center opened my eyes to the transformative power of Theatre - it would shape my ambitions for performance, inform the choices I made about my acting career, and impel my passions. Although I was not aware of what was taking place and I had no name for it at the time, that single moment had a profound and lasting effect on my soul, one that would ultimately point me to the purpose of "me." That moment was my first experience of theatrical spirituality or *life*.

CHAPTER 2: THEATRE IS SPIRITUAL

In seeking after the truth of the root and seed of *life*, according to the philosopher Descartes, the only reliable starting point in the pursuit of truth is self-consciousness. *Cogito ergo sum*, "I think, therefore I am." My proposition is that the logic of the Christian faith I adhere to differs from this Cartesian logic in one significant respect - the starting point of inquiry for the Christian is not self-consciousness but awareness of the reality of God...Not "I think, therefore I am" but "God is, therefore we are" (Migliore, p.5). It seems right, therefore, to begin there, with a consideration of the notion "God is" – not, however, as a theologian in a macroscopic sense, but as an artist narrowing his scope of enquiring to seeking after the presence, purpose and practice of God within my personal realm of theatre, most particularly God's *life* in the sphere of my own writing, and acting experience.

In the book *Stride Towards Freedom*, The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) makes the following statement: "Man has a dual citizenry. He lives both in time and eternity. But he owes his ultimate allegiance to God...Men forget to ask: What will God think? And so they live in fear because they tend to seek social approval on the horizontal plane rather than spiritual devotion on the vertical plane" (p.11). Dr. King's words affirm my personal sense that human existence is spiritual, and the fullest expression of humanity is living in mind of a "vertical" relationship to God and eternity, not merely "horizontally" in physical time and space, in the here and now. Philosophical arguments also point to the spiritual essence of human existence, including the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) who said "the definition of spiritual should be that which is its own evidence"

(*Experience - Essays: Second Series* 1844) and those of Carl G. Jung (1875-1961) who said that spiritual, religious experience “is absolute; it cannot be disputed. You can only say you have never had such an experience, whereupon your opponent will reply: “Sorry, I have.” And there the discussion will end...No matter what the world thinks about religious experience, the one who has it possesses a great treasure, a thing that has become for him a source of *life*, meaning, and beauty, and that has given a new splendor to the world and to mankind...where is the criterion by which you could say that such a life is not legitimate, that such an experience is not valid?” (p.3 *Psychology and Religion*, 1938, *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, tr. R.F.C. Hull 1958). I will define the absolute, undisputable, religious or spiritual experience, that which is its own evidence, as *life*.

If human existence is spiritual then to what extent is Theatre also spiritual? Aristotle considered art to be a mode of imitation, different art forms being distinct from one another because of the medium, the objects, and the manner or mode of imitation. By color and form, by the voice and language, by harmony and rhythm, tune and meter, Theatre, particularly musical theatre, as a combination of many art forms, imitates human existence - whether by Tragedy or Comedy, representing “the objects of imitation... men in action...either better than in real life, or as worse, or as they are” (Aristotle, *Poetics*, pp.1-4). As an imitator of humanity, which is spiritual, Theatre becomes spiritual. I disagree with Oscar Wilde’s (1854-1900) statement of anti-mimesis in his 1889 essay *The Decay of Lying* that “life imitates art far more than art imitates life” (from Wilde’s 1891 collection of essays *Intentions*) and I maintain my disagreement with Wilde whether his definition of life is considered to mean the general sense of reality, or human existence, or were even to mean

my specific definition that sees the spiritual essence of human existence – the absolute, undisputable, spiritual experience, which is its own evidence. For me, art is mimesis. Art is not an originator or beginning in itself but is, instead, a copying or mirroring. Art does not precede reality, is not greater than reality, and is not as Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) asserts “a hammer with which to shape” reality, instead of being “a mirror held up to reality” (quoted in Michael Larsen’s *Literary Agents: What They Do, How They Do It, and How to Find and Work with the Right One for You*). Even if it is correct, as Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) asserts that “no one has ever written or painted, sculpted, modeled, built, invented except to get out of hell” (Antonin Artaud: *Van Gogh: The Man Suicided by Society*, ed. Jack Hirschman), there is still the need for an antecedent apprehension, imagination, or conception of a greater reality, that is perceived as “hell”, that ought to be escaped and, whether it is intentionally perceived or acknowledged as such, the reality of *life* is to be preferred.

How does *life* become part of Theatre? The British Theatrical Director, Sir Tyrone Guthrie (1900-1971), in his Book *A Life In The Theatre*, makes the following statement:

No one knows for certain when...inspiration begins or ends; often, as with the two disciples at Emmaus, no one knows that God has been present till after He has disappeared. Moreover, I do not think anyone can be sure of distinguishing true inspiration from that which is false or assumed. The eye rolling in a fine frenzy is not always that of the poet. But we must not on that account leap to the conclusion that eyes rolling in fine frenzy are always bogus. Because, upon one celebrated

occasion, God spoke, not in the whirlwind, but in a still, small voice, it is not a wise reason to ignore the whirlwind. Everyone, not just the artist, knows the experience of being taken in charge, carried along by a force which apparently has nothing to do with the 'usual self'; whose power is infinitely greater than anything of which the 'usual self' is normally capable. Nearly all great decisions are taken under such influence...it is impossible to be precise about what we vaguely and metaphorically term inspiration. It is, for me at any rate, impossible to deny its existence. It is when inspiration takes over that the competent and experienced craftsman becomes an artist...inspiration bloweth where it listeth. It is not a wage earned by the industrious apprentice working overtime; it is a gift; its possessors are not usually happy with it and it quite often happens that, were you or I at the head of things, we should find ourselves quite unable to award them more than five out of ten for conduct. Like any other of God's gifts it is hard to know whether those upon whom it is bestowed are being rewarded or punished. (pp.156-157)

Guthrie's use of the term 'inspiration' is, for me, a reference to *life* – it is impossible for me to deny its existence, and I know what it is to be carried along by such *life*. I believe that what was transacted to me in the Tampa Bay Performing Arts center was the *life* of God. Why and how was it transacted? In line with Guthrie's statement, I am certain such *life* is God's gift, to whoever He wills, however and wherever He wills. Does that mean the artist, who ought to have no sense of control over *life*, has no role to play in God's gift of *life*?

Guthrie's reference to the eye rolling in fine frenzy is to the character Theseus' words from Act 5, Scene 1 of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

The poets eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

As Guthrie, I consider Theseus' words go beyond their relevance in the script and to, perhaps, be the author's articulation of his own understanding of the creative process – beginning by glancing from earth to heaven, perceiving with the imagination and then crafting the intangible, perceived, imagined thing into a form that others are able to perceive. For me, the glance from heaven to earth is a glance towards God, looking to God in the certainty that He is, certain also that He gives good gifts to those who presume upon His reality and, in diligence, seek after Him. As an artist I am compelled to look heavenward to see God's purpose, and my part in that purpose. Seeing God's purpose is a necessary task because, having experienced God's gift of *life*, imparted theatrically, I recognize the vitality of playing my appropriate 'vertical' role in God's transaction of *life*, helping rather than hindering, focusing instead of dissipating, maximizing not wasting. If it is possible that what I see, as an artist, particularly as an actor, enables me to communicate

some aspect of sight to another who, for some reason, for a particular moment or a prolonged period, is unable to see for herself, or himself, then it might be that I participate in God's mission, as I read it in the Gospel of Luke (Chapter 4, Verse 18) of giving sight to the blind, as well as preaching His gospel to the poor, healing the brokenhearted, proclaiming liberty to the captives, effecting liberty for the captives, and declaring that the present moment is the perfect moment of God's grace, and favor. As an artist, first and foremost, I am obliged to see for myself because, as the German Philosopher Josef Pieper (1904-1997) asserts in his Book *Only The Lover Sings*, "man's ability to *see* is in decline" (p.31). Pieper's use of the word *see* is to "the spiritual capacity to perceive the visual reality as it truly is" (p.31). Pieper says the decline in seeing is because of things such as "modern man's restlessness and stress...his total absorption and enslavement by practical goals and purposes. Yet one reason must not be overlooked either: the average person of our time loses the ability to see because *there is too much to see*. There does exist something like "visual noise", which just like the acoustical counterpart, makes clear perception impossible" (pp.32-33). Pieper does not assert that simple abstinence from visual noise is the most effective way to increase the capacity to see. Pieper suggests, instead, that "a better and more immediately effective remedy is this: to be active oneself in artistic creation, producing shapes and forms for the eye to see" (p.35). By engaging in the process of creation of art, I endeavor to increase my personal ability "to perceive with new eyes the abundant wealth of all visible reality" (p.36). As my capacity to see increases so, I pray, also increases the extent to which I may give sight to others, playing my participatory role in

Theatre that is able to “show mankind to himself, and thereby to show to man God’s image” (Guthrie, p.349).

Is every Artist active in artistic creation, producing shapes and forms for the eye to see, doing a spiritual work by knowingly or unwittingly transacting in *life*? In Scene 1 of his play *Saint Joan*, George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) writes:

JOAN: I hear voices telling me what to do. They come from God

ROBERT: They come from your imagination

JOAN: Of course. That is how the messages of God come to us.

If artists, through their imagination, may be receiving the messages of God, how is that experience typically described? The writer, Henry Miller (1891-1980), interviewed by George Wickes, defined an artist as “a man who has antennae, who knows how to hook up to the currents which are in atmosphere, in the cosmos; he merely has the facility for hooking on, as it were...Everything that we are doing, everything that we think, exists already, and we are only intermediaries, that’s all, who make use of what is in the air...they are already in the air, they have not been given voice, that’s all. They need the man, the interpreter, to bring them forth” (The Paris Review: *Henry Miller, The Art of Fiction No.28*. Interviewed by George Wickes).

Many artists readily accept that the work of theatrical imagination ought to, or is able, as August Wilson says to “communicate ideas and extol virtues”, or “to politicize the community or...raise the consciousness of the people” (The Paris Review: *August Wilson, The Art of Theater No.14*. Interviewed by Bonnie Lyons, George Plimpton). Others, like Antonin Artaud, consider the task of theatrical imagination to be one of awakening, saying:

“we need above all a theater that wakes us up: nerves and heart” (quoted by Oliver Stone in Glen Collins’ article *For Oliver Stone, It’s Time To Move on from Vietnam - For Oliver Stone, It’s Time To Move on from Vietnam* – New York Times, January 2, 1990). Athol Fugard, however, saw the extent to which his own artistic witness was political as being “an automatic by-product of [his] being a storyteller...telling stories about other people’s lives in a situation as political as South Africa” in the midst of apartheid “bear[ing] witness to the South African situation.” But Fugard did not consider artists have an obligation to be political, saying instead that: “I don’t think any writer should presume to give orders to another. The place from which you take your orders is probably the most secret place you have. If you have a word like *God* in your vocabulary, then that is an area in which you and God deal with each other...some writers do nothing but talk about the objective moral obligations that artists must live up to...there is a desperate tendency to try to legislate artists, to try to lay down rules for their obligations to society. Just leave artists alone” (*The Paris Review: Athol Fugard, The Art of Theater No. 8*. Interviewed by Lloyd Richards). For me, the artist left alone, whether motivated in obedience to a political or moral imperative, intentionally communicating ideas and extolling virtues, deliberately seeking to wake up the nerves and heart of a community, or otherwise creating art based on wherever else the orders seem to come from, is an artist who writes, acts, or otherwise creates art because of the greater *life* reality he or she sees and, therefore, always participates in transacting *life*. To summarize here, I will turn to the words of André Gide (1869-1951) the French author and winner of the 1947 Nobel Prize in Literature, who said the following:

In nature, nothing can isolate itself or come to a stop; everything continues. Man can try it out, can propose beauty; nature immediately takes possession of it and disposes of it as she wills. And here is demonstrated the opposition of which I spoke: here man is submissive to nature. In the work of art, on the other hand, he submits nature to himself. "Man proposed and God disposes," we have been told; this is true in nature; but I shall sum up the opposition I indicate by saying that, in the work of art, on the contrary, *God proposes and man disposes*. And every self-styled producer of works of art who is not conscious of this may be anything you wish; but not an artist. Cut the sentence in two, take for credo only one of the two elements of the formula, and you will have the two great artistic heresies continually locked in battle through refusal to understand that it is from their union and compromise alone that art can be born. *God proposes*: this is naturalism, objectivism, call it what you will. *Man disposes*: this is apriorism, idealism. *God proposes and man disposes*: this is the work of art. (André Gide, *Pretexts: Reflections on Literature and Morality*, p.46).

I do not presume, however, that all *life* transaction is net positive. Can there be the net negative transaction of *life*? As much as *life* can be given, or encouraged, can *life* also be hindered or taken away, intentionally or inadvertently? I have to believe the net negative transaction to be a possibility and, therefore, as an artist, I must do my best to discern and choose to be part of net positive *life* transactions because, in the words of the author Victor Hugo (1802-1885), as an artist I have "the care of souls" which means "in the profound

darkness which still envelops so many minds, men like [me] are the torches which light the work of others” therefore I must “endeavor to increase unceasingly the quantity and the purity of [my] light” (*The Letters of Victor Hugo: From Exile, and After the Fall of The Empire, Volume 2*, pp.22-23). If I am to accept the words of Sir Laurence Olivier (1907-1989) who said “the actor is as important as the illuminator of the human heart, he is as important as the psychiatrist or the doctor, the minister” (*Actors on Acting*, p.410) then I must illuminate, counsel, heal and minister *life* with the whole of my being, looking to the author of *life* to receive the “creative mood,” the special condition, “that spiritual and physical mood during which it is easiest for inspiration to be born” and which Stanislavsky says “that creativeness on stage demands” and also for the inspiration of *life* itself, both theatrical necessities “*in the form of a heavenly gift*” (*Actors on Acting*, p.492).

I cannot completely discount the extent to which a scientific theory of music or a psychotherapeutic theory such as that of narrative therapy may be an explanation for my experience of *life* at the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center, or the experience of *life* audience members related to me after seeing my performance of the Script. I will suggest that a full consideration of either possibility is beyond the scope of this paper but I will make the following few comments as markers for possible further investigation. Firstly, there is research to show “music isn’t just good for the soul, it’s also good for helping the body heal” (Reuters Health, November 20, 2015, Lisa Rapaport). In this particular research “music was linked to about 31 percent less pain, 29 percent lower odds of using paid medication, and 34 percent less anxiety” but broadly, there is limited evidence or proved efficacy as to the scientific effect of music. Rappaport’s article was a very basic summary of

the comprehensive Annals of Surgery Article *Effects of Art on Surgical Patients; A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis* (Annals of Surgery, November 2015, Volume 262, Issue 5, pp704-713). Further research as to the effect of music on the brain was undertaken in the study reported by the Scientific Reports Article *Network Science and the Effects of Music Preference on Functional Brain Connectivity: From Beethoven to Eminem* (Scientific Reports 4, Article number: 6130 (2014)). That research discussed neurobiological and neurorehabilitation implications but, broadly, showed listening to music can alter “the connectivity between auditory brain areas and the hippocampus, a region responsible for memory, and for social emotion consolidation” (p.2). Secondly, therapy based on narrative theory seeks to “confront despair” by addressing a predominant cause of human suffering: a lack of hope, and a sense of futurelessness (Andrew D. Lester *Hope in Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Louisville: Westminster John Know Press, 1955) and a theatrical narrative that suggests a better, more hopeful, purposeful, possibility-filled next scene to a person’s own story can help shape identity as a reimagined future narrative is “energized from the projected perceptions that lie in the anticipatory consciousness of each individual” (Lester, p.6). There may, therefore, be a scientific explanation for observed or experienced phenomena such as tears, a sense of hope or joy, or catharsis, but I still defer to *life*. Can I prove that absolutely? Of course I cannot do so, but it is my assertion that *life*, as absolute, undisputable spiritual experience, that which is its own evidence, was the probable cause of the certain effect that was my Tampa experience, and also the effective related experiences of audience members who saw me perform the Script.

CHAPTER 3: MY METHODOLOGY

In searching for answers to the questions I have posed, the most “scientific” approach I can undertake is for me to strip the theatrical process down to its simplest form, in order to remove as many variables as possible from the experiment. Some of those variables are typical elements of theatre such as the script and music of the career writer and composer, the Director's vision, the carefully designed and fabricated sets and costumes, the many musicians and large the cast, and the energy of a significant audience at a sizeable venue. If I approach theatre without all those elements, making it as personal and as direct as possible, I am able to eliminate from my enquiry many of the elements of my 9th Grade experience at the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Centre – moving away all that is of the exterior, all that would draw the senses, and seeking after the purity of simplicity, much as the character Prospero’ words from Act 4, Scene 1 of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* suggest a theatrical truth:

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve

And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

What remains when the revelry and pageantry, and the solemn, great and gorgeous, yet momentary, theatrical vision is dissolved and faded? If *life* is, somehow, still transacted, when the script is something of my own creation, I perform alone before an audience in a basic community setting, with limited assistance from other cast members, and I pay attention to my personal experience and that of the audience members, particularly to the extent that they may describe their sense of the transaction of *life*, then I may be able to understand and articulate, in its purest form, my sense of what *life is*, how *life* is transacted and, more particularly, what my task as an actor then becomes.

A script I have created, *The Summer of '91*, follows in the next section of this paper. The Script was written in collaboration with two colleagues, who helped me to articulate, and craft my personal experience. The initial inspiration for the Script came from a Professor, Belinda Boyd, as part of the UCF solo performance class. Professor Boyd began the class with a question. The question she asked us was this: if we could say something that we have never said, what would we say, and who would we say it to? My mind went immediately to my Father, questions I had for him, questions I should have asked, but didn't ask. My thoughts led to a paper, and that paper led to the beginnings of an idea for a script. Professor Boyd wanted us to learn writing from an organic, truthful, very personal

place. From that place, the first few drafts of the Script I wrote were of scenes featuring my father, myself, my brother - the conflicts we had as men in our family, our problems communicating, the fears we had, the walls we had built. I sought to express all of that theatrically but early peer reviews indicated that my initial writing attempts were not working as I had hoped they would. It wasn't until I began to look beyond the actual conflicts between my father and myself, to the results of those conflicts - how they impacted our family and how my Mom and I coped with them - that I discovered a productive writing thread to follow. Following that thread led to thinking about issues of love, relationships, separation, and intimacy, and to writing early drafts of *The Summer of '91*. As I confronted, and dealt with things I had struggled with for much of my life, I was able to express those things in a meaningful, real way, with a fresh sense of creativity that grew, unraveled and deepened into what the Script has now become - still very much a work I hope to develop further, but also representing a true expression of me in its current form.

The Summer of '91 is one of three scripts I have now written. The other two scripts, *Q, Chapter 1: Verse 1* and *That's Life*, also encapsulate an aspect of the family experience, issues and emotions. I do anticipate that one path of future writing development of *The Summer of '91* may involve the consolidation of the three separate pieces into a single script. I have performed *The Summer of '91*, in whole or in part, at a variety of different venues over the course of the past two years since the creating of the Script. Since the intimate performance for the class project, I have performed the piece in various other

venues including: a city-wide Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration in my home town of Lakeland, Florida, Indiana's Bethel College, and at New York City's Triad Theatre.

CHAPTER 4: THE SCRIPT “SUMMER OF 91”

THE SUMMER OF 91

Written by

Quentin Darrington,
In collaboration with
Be Boyd and John Wayne Shafer

THE SUMMER OF 91

ACT ONE

Time - now

Scene takes place in an office. As the lights come up we see a man standing against a window. It is clear he has been standing there for quite some time. He looks nervous. He turns toward us and gives the indication that he is ready. We don't see the therapist - we only hear their voice.

VOICE

So you looked at the worksheet.

QUENTIN

I did.

VOICE

So....are you ready to start?

QUENTIN

(hesitant) Yeah.

VOICE

When I say "start" I mean really start. To dig in, to make a difference, to move forward.

Pause

QUENTIN

Yes.

VOICE

Ok. Number 1 - On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being none at all, and 5 being significant growth, where would you rate your current progress and why?

QUENTIN

Well....I am sleeping a little better, *(sarcasm)* I put down the doughnuts. I made *that* phone call ...to my brother. And, I don't know. I feel like I'm not where I used to be. I'm not where I want to be, but I'm not where I used to be.

2.

VOICE

She makes a note.

Ok. Number 2 - Say we live in a perfect world and you could openly express yourself to your

mother. What would you say to her? What do you think she would say? What would she do?

QUENTIN

Yeah. That one is...Woo. That's a big one. Well no matter what I said, she would say, "BOY IS YOU CRAZY!" (*Voice laughs*) Yup, something like that. I mean like I told you, she's never been really affectionate, you know. She'd probably sit there, and listen, and look at me, I don't know.

VOICE

Ok. Number 3 - What is the earliest recollection of when you struggled with this problem?

QUENTIN

June 16th, 1991, I remember the date because it was my best friend's birthday. In Lakeland, FL... it's where I grew up. "A rural community of sprawling green expanse surrounded by 38 named fresh water Lakes." I always wondered why they say named lakes, like if it wasn't named then it's not a lake? And also our sister city, Winter Haven, has 50 lakes, 50, and is less than half our size, but we're named Lakeland?

VOICE

(In a disapproving tone) Stalling.

QUENTIN

You don't miss a thing do you. Ok. The Summer of 91. Boy that summer...that summer changed my life. I remember looking forward to the summer **[insert why here]** And on this particular day I felt like the King of the City!

As he talks Boyz 2 Men "Motown Philly" starts to play in the background and he jams for a bit to the music.

Boyz 2 Men had just exploded on the charts with Motown Philly Man.. it was an energy that would shift the sound and direction of R&B music, Nirvana's Nevermind created its own genre that would dominate the early to mid 90's

(Opening section of the music begins to play -up to the singing - when the singing starts, Q will sing the Weird Al Yankovic version of the song, a parody of "Smells Like Teen Spirit" entitled "Smells like Nirvana")

QUENTIN

(Singing.) "What is this song all about?"

Can't figure any lyrics out How do the
words to it go?
I wish you'd tell me, I don't know"

No one knew the words to that song, but we all loved that shit.

VOICE

Next time spare me the Weird Al Yankovic
parody. (Slight pause then with a bit of force).
Keep going.

QUENTIN

Ok. Ok. 91. Oh....Operation Desert Storm. And I
was a real patriot. In fact, I was into all things
patriotic, from as early as I can remember. My
favorite holiday was
and still is Independence Day! (MORE)

QUENTIN (CONT'D)

My father was a Vietnam War vet and I wore the red, white, and blue whenever I got the chance. And my friends were all like - oh, oh, look, here comes the walking flag. Man they teased me but I didn't care. I was making my statement. Oh, and ...wait for it, wait for it....Seinfeld debuts on NBC, (gasp). The show about nothing. I hated that show. I don't know, I guess I didn't get it. (*Quotes a line for Seinfeld in a Seinfeld voice*) Have you ever been stuck in a line and you look up.....Yada, yada, yada. Oh the New York football Giants defeated the Buffalo Bills at Super Bowl 25, where? In Tampa Bay! But the best part, school was out and I was embarking on my summer of freedom.

VOICE

You said earlier that this summer changed your life. How?

QUENTIN

I didn't know it at the time. All I knew was that this was the year before....dun, dun, dunnnnn....HIGH SCHOOL. 9th grade was cool, but its NOTHING compared to being a Sophomore! Door closed on one chapter of my life - door open on another. Up til then, I'd attended traditional school, from Kindergarten through Jr. High. Now I was leaving reading, writing, and arithmetic for.... tights and a sonnet! (*He does a bow and laughs*) I was fascinated by the arts, I wanted to be an actor and was enrolling in the Lois Cowles Harrison Centre for the Visual and Performing Arts. **[Insert a short story about what or who turned me on to the arts or acting - After inserted story - return to dialogue]**

QUENTIN

I was excited about my new start but I was also sad.... so how I knew, even though I was young that I would also be leaving my friends that I'd grown up with over the years.....leaving all the people I knew and all the cats who really knew me. Somehow I felt that this was our summer to bond. (*Back to the playful mode of youth*) To kick it, chill, just laugh, and be together before we couldn't on the same sports teams anymore, before we couldn't joke around in between classes, and write each other fake hall passes to show up to class late. (*After a beat*) Not that we ever did that.

VOICE

I'm a therapist. Not a principal.

QUENTIN

(*He laughs*) On this day, it was the City of Lakeland's Annual Field Day, and me, (*Imitates them as he brings up their names*) Jameel, Pokey, and Rashaad were in the house! We wouldn't miss it for the world. Field Day was put on each year by the City of Lakeland's parks and recreation division. It was a day of celebration filled with games, music, relay races, vendors, individual and team competitions, dancing, fun for the entire community, and food, food, food, and the best part... completely free of charge. So EVERYBODY was there... mammas, baby's mammas, cousins, cousins of cousins, friends er'body. Now this particular Field Day was held on the NW side of Memorial Blvd and MLK, just slightly north of the train tracks, across the street from New Mt Zion AME, the Black side of town. (MORE)

(CONT'D)

Why is it that every doggone Dr. Martin Luther King Street I know or have ever seen is only in the Black part of town? It upsets me! As if Dr King died for blacks only. There should totally be an MLK Blvd out in the suburbs. Still waiting to see that.

VOICE

Yeah. Me too. That'll be a long wait.

QUENTIN

(He laughs again, feeling much more comfortable now) There actually was another Field Day, ...on the other side of town, for, the, people who didn't live on the NW side of Memorial Blvd and MLK, just slightly north of the train tracks, across the street from New Mt Zion AME.

VOICE

Sidetracking.

QUENTIN

Ok.Ok. The place where Field Day was held, was the iconic recreation facility called Simpson Park. I literally grew up at Simpson Park. I was there for summer camps, every year, after school activities, sitting with moms at community meetings, banquets, church extended functions..., if you were a young black kid in Lakeland, you were in some way, if not every way, a product of Simpson Park. You go there to play basketball. We didn't have a Boys and Girls Club or YMCA, so it was a place you could go to get tutoring or help with your homework, lift weights, if that's what you were in to...

(MORE)

QUENTIN (CONT'D)

the weight room is where you would find all the past high school football stars who didn't make it out of Lakeland, holding on to there wonder years, getting they swole on, and constantly yellin back and forth at each other about who team beat who back in 85',81',78'...

(Weight Room Improv)

Weight Guy 1

QUENTIN

You go to Simpson Park to see your friends, to hang out, to marvel at the popular High School seniors, or the even more popular 13th, 14th, and 15th graders, still who didn't make it out of Lakeland, who role through in their big beautiful dropped low, classic Cutlass's and Chevy's with loud speakers, bass banging slowed down Jam Pony Express! *(A FEW LYRICS FROM A POPULAR RAP SONG AT THAT TIME)* All us kids would always be wide eyed, mouths open saying, "DANG I want me wanna dem one day!" Its a place where the past meets the future, and big dreams are formed, aspirations of greatness, all right here at Simpson Park. AND, if you're there on the right weekend you might even catch a shooting or two or a stabbing... where everybody breaks out with the speed of flight in 50 different directions getting low and running for cover. POP. POP. POP. POP....

man if you've ever heard gun fire 20 feet away from you, its scary. I remember my first time, I thought I was gonna get trampled to death. I quickly learned as I grew, you gotta have at least 3 options of directions and hiding places as you run, and think fast on your feet. (MORE)

QUENTIN (CONT'D)

I became an astute triathlete in the "Fleeing of Gun fire" Competition.

Jameel, Pokey, Rashaad, and I arrived at the Park, CLEAN! We've got our freshly pressed shorts on , gleaming white Chuck's and Nike's, lined collared shirts, with the collar turned up because you now we were in "high school" and we had to look the part, ready for a day of adventure! *(HE SLOWLY TAKES ON JAMEEL'S PHYSICALITY AS HE DESCRIBES HIM)* Now Jameel, was the ladies man. I mean he NEVER missed a beat. Though it was a special occasion for the rest of us, Jameel was ALWAYS CLEAN. He had the nicest clothes, had that good hair, it looked like he got it cut everyday.

(He does and imitation of Jameel packing his hair down and showing it off)

QUENTIN

He could switch back and forth between Khakis and Polo's to the newest and best named brand urban gear like that. His mom owned a hair salon and they could afford it. He was tall with a slim, but muscular build, and he was AMAZING on the court!!! *(Imitates a few of Jameel's famous moves)* But he never played basketball for the school. He only liked to play street ball. He would always come up to me throughout the school year and be like...

JAMEEL CHARACTER.

... Hey Quent, hey Quent
 What about that one over there, hunh? hunh?
 Yeah!! Oh! What about them? What about
 them right there? You'll put that on?
 Yeah, yeah, yeah, hey, hey check this out,
 what about that one? I'ma put that on... A girl!

QUENTIN

And I would always have to remind him... Hey J,
 J, J, J, They're girls, not a new pair of Jordon's!

QUENTIN (CONT'D)

And Pokey. NEVER had a problem with the
 ladies, nope, never, not one time!! Because
 there was no chance in hell he would ever get
 one! Pokey was cool, but he had one problem -
 you ever have that one friend who had really
 bad, bad breath. Well Pokey had the world's
 worst breath. I mean breath like unwashed for
 days funk, like Lakeland cow pasture funk.
(Imitate the hair cutting session while he tells it)
 And he cut my hair every week, and he'd put his
 hand on my head, and have to move my head
 around as he edged me up, and my nose would
 be, and my mouth. And he was one of these
 people that loved to talk, like to tell long stories
 with lots of detail. I would be sitting in the seat
 and I would either *(Puts shirt over his nose)* be
 like "uh, huh, uh huh, uh huh. or I would
(Imitates holding his breath) just hold my
 breath and nod my head as he talked to me, I
 couldn't wait till he was done... I can't even
 remember how we got close or all the ways I
 negotiated around the funk, but I loved him! I
 appreciated him. While J was out chasing a girl,
 you could always count on Pokey to be there
 when you needed him. And at some point, I
 guess that became more important than the
 smell.

(MORE)

QUENTIN (CONT'D)

Now Rashaad was the jock, he was a jock brainiac! Straight A student, most likely to succeed, our class president in 9th grade, he would go on to be his high school's senior class president, and actually when he went to college became the student body president there too. And was always quoting something that sounded so intelligent like..

RASHAAD

The average elevator annually runs the distance equal to one half the length of the elevator.

QUENTIN

Or

RASHAAD

Did you know your eyes see your nose at all times, your brain just chooses to ignore it.

QUENTIN

Or

RASHAAD

An alligator can go through as many as 3000 teeth in it's lifetime.

QUENTIN

And Pokey, Jameel and I would be like..

(Eyes wide and mouth hung open)

QUENTIN (CONT'D)

The boy was amazing!! He also played football, he wrestled, ran track, played basketball, just an all around good young man, and my best friend. He was something!! (MORE)

QUENTIN (CONT'D)

Do you know that Rashaad and I have been in the same classes at the same schools from kindergarten till this day!

VOICE

Did you stay in touch with any them? **[Answer this before moving on to the next section]**

QUENTIN

We all loved to laugh together, to pick jokes on each other, eat each other's moms cooking, although my mamma's food was the best, and most of all what we liked to do, is write. We would write songs together! We believed we might be a group one day, so you know, we had to have our material together. We would sample various hooks for different albums, write raps or melodies about ourselves. As a matter of fact I remember one me, J, and Rashaad wrote together... and it goes a little somethin like this...

ADD (SONG) WHOA, WHOA, WHOA...

(CONT'D)

Why we always broke out into Total Eclipse of the Heart at the end of that rap, I'll never know. But we sung that mess from the top of our lungs, like there was no tomorrow. And here we all were together, at Simpson Park, and there really would be no tomorrow.

(He sings another chorus or verse of the song you just sang as a transition into the next section)

After we had all had checked in with each other, Rashaad had to quickly leave and go across the park to volunteer for an hour at Tent 43, The Future Business Leaders of America. I didn't mind. I still had Pokey and J to hang with.

So we were like, "We'll check you later" and Rashaad was like "Check - did you know that the first check that first official check dates as far back as the 1650's."

And right at that time... here comes Sharanda Shipmon. And we were like "yeah Cool Rashaad. You go volunteer at the Future Successful Black Dudes of America Tent or what ever it was called because we all in awe of Ms. Sharanda Shipman. So we were really like, "Oh man. Look at that" - we was falling all over each other.

Sharanda Shipman. She was always in tight clothes! Today, she had on these short, short, short cut off jean shorts, and tight! And we used to joke - "I betcha her coochie can't breathe - her coochie be like - help me, help me, need....air, need...sunlight" And booty just falling all out the bottom of them shorts. We use to call her Sharanda and Friends.

She wore a white tank top that I swear to God you could see through, and she didn't make it no better by tying it real high and tight in the back, showing her whole midsection, back, stomach, side all of that. And she walked like..

(He imitates her walk)

(MORE)

(CONT'D)

And I would always look, I couldn't help it. Once your eyes locked onto Sharanda, it was like Lot and the pillars of salt. You just couldn't look away. I looked, but I never really went for that type, it just wasn't me. I preferred a girl who had more clothes on than off. But now, Jameel. When Sharanda walked by, we lost Jameel. That just left me and Pokey.

Thank God for Sharanda Shipmon! Because if it wasn't for her, I never would've seen Tent 23. There were a group of older guys hanging out, and blocking my view from that part of the field. Tent 23 was off in the cut, and there wasn't much traffic in that corner, but when Sharanda and Friends showed up, the group of guys ran after her.

And that's when "it" happened. At that very moment, it was like slow motion. Time stopped and the heavens opened. Standing under Tent 23, only 30 yards away, was an angel. She was the most beautiful girl I had... I didn't even think it was possible for a girl to be that pretty. I froze in my tracks. All I could do was stare. The heat of the day lifted as a cool breeze blew across my head, my shoulders, arms, my legs. Everything began to glow.

I hear music... violins and shit...
stringed instruments in minor chords...
strumming a tune of the ancestors... like next
lifetime soul... like I knew you and you knew
me when music...

(SONG) BE MY ANGEL...

POKEY

.... Hey Quent, what you looking at? You looking at that girl right dere, over there under dat tent.

QUENTIN

.... Shhh Pokey.

POKEY

.... What you gon' do? You gon go talk to her? You ain't gon go talk to dat dirl? I bet you won't go talk to her cause she standing over there with her friends.

QUENTIN

Shhhhhhhhhh!

POKEY

She over dere with her friends you ain't gon talk to dat girl.

QUENTIN

Man shut up man! What you talking bout. I ain't go go over there. I don't care she with her friends..... She look good don't she?

POKEY

She fine as hell! Hey Quent, her friends leaving, you betta go on over there right now. Gone!

QUENTIN

Hold up man, hold up

POKEY

Gone over dere!!! Dey gone, you better walk over dere right. If I was you, I'd run over dere...

QUENTIN

Nigga, you can't run! Besides you just can't "walk" up to the tent. You gotta find yourself over there some kind of way. Alright, Alright. I'ma go. You stay here.

(Pause. Quentin doesn't move)

POKEY

Ok. Man. Go on over there.

QUENTIN

Ok. Yeah. I'm going over there. (*With Confidence*) Yeah.

(Quentin doesn't move)

POKEY

Man - go over there!!!

QUENTIN

By this time- Pokey was all up in my face so in order to get away from Pokey's breath - I started moving toward the tent.

I got closer and closer and all the while saying what's up, throwing up deuces to imaginary friends along the way. The closer I got, the more my heart began to race... faster and faster until all that separated me from Heaven, was a small rickety wooden table with District 9 voter registration forms. "She" shined so bright... like only her radiant, coffee caramel, sugar brown velvet, sandalwood soft skin, could. I swallowed, took a breath, and HER SMELL. No, no, no. This time it was a good smell, a great smell. DAMN! Like Sunday morning on a warm winter day, and her hair... dark, long, spiraled, full curls, softly kissing her lower back, delicately pulled back in a gentle ponytail revealing her glory. Lips so full, so free. She wore the most beautiful yellow spaghetti strapped sundress, that flowed, curled, waved, and danced so curiously about her knees. And the finishing touch, brown small sandals revealing her cute cherry red painted toes.

(MORE)

QUENTIN (CONT'D)

She must've thought I was crazy knowing good and well I wasn't old enough to vote, but here I was, pretending to read these pamphlets like I'm running for office.

I read that pamphlet forward and backward and then added a "huh" like I had just learned a really important piece of information. Twice, and then nodded my head, like I agreed with every word. And then I picked up an identical one and pretended to be completely surprised by what I had read. I had no idea what I was reading, but worse, I had NO IDEA what to say.

As I was picking up the 3rd pamphlet, she laughed, and then she spoke...

SERIA

What's with the American flag?

QUENTIN

(Dropping the pamphlet) The what?

SERIA

The pin, on your hat?

QUENTIN

(At first in a voice that is obviously squeaking through puberty) Oh, ummm.

My ummm.

(Clearing his throat and in a lower pitch) My dad. I wear it for my dad. He served during the Vietnam War.

SERIA

My dad served in Vietnam too!

QUENTIN

For real?! What branch?

SERIA

United States Air Force. He fought for 8 years. (MORE)

SERIA (CONT'D)

But then he got shot... the worse part is that he got shot by friendly fire. So they had to let him go. They gave him a purple heart! What branch did your dad fight with and how long was he over there?

QUENTIN

He was in the Navy. But he didn't fight in Vietnam.

SERIA

Oh, I thought you said he served in Vietnam?

QUENTIN

Oh he did serve in Vietnam, he was a cook!

QUENTIN

She opened her mouth and let go a laugh that sealed our moment. From that second on, we were practically inseparable. I was so attracted to her, and her to ME. We talked and laughed, and laughed, and shared about EVERYTHING! I mean we had SO much in common. I was drawn to every single word she said, even the way she said 'em, and everything she did, captivated me. I had NEVER felt like this before about anybody. I couldn't believe how cool, how easy, it was. Like something so much deeper was pulling us together... created this moment... like we really had known each other before in another lifetime. I could not get the music out of my head, and you know what? I didn't want to.

(SONG) FROM THE MINUTE SHE...

QUENTIN

MAMA!!!!!!

I ran home that evening and bust through
the door.

QUENTIN

Mama!, Mama!

MAMA

What boy?! What?!

QUENTIN

Mama, you would not believe what happened. I
met this girl, named Seria. Seria Mills. And she's
pretty and smart and nice and fun and her
mother's name is Cynthia we have so much in
common, we even like the same music and we
talked and talked and laughed and...

MAMA

Wait a minute. Slow down. What did you say her
mother's name was?

QUENTIN

Umm, Mrs. Mills. Cynthia Mills!

MAMA

Cynthia Mills...from Winter Haven!

QUENTIN

Yeah, that's right, from Winter Haven! How did
you know? Yeah, you know them? She was soo
nice. But her DAUGHTER, wait till you meet her
daughter Seria. Seria is...

MAMA

Let me tell you something. You are
NOT TO SEE that gal ever again. (MORE)

MAMA (CONT'D)

I don't care who she is or where she from, but you betta not bring her behind nowhere near my house, and I betta not catch you going over to hers either. I don't want you having nothing to do with her or her mammy...you hear me? Now you go ahead and try me. As long as you live in my house you gon do exactly what I say, and if you don't like it, you can carry yo little narrow behind right up there to Alabama to live with yo daddy. Just like yo brother. Now you test me, see if yo behind won't be on a plane tomorrow. And that's the end of that!

(SONG) WHEN MY MAMA...

VOICE

Did you ever find out why you
Mother responded that way?

QUENTIN

At the time I didn't care. I continued to date Seria a few months. I saw her every chance I got and I fell deeply in love. She was my first true love, and she was the 1st person I ever wanted and chose to give my body to. My mom and I weren't speaking. It was my Uncle who later came and told me where her anger came from. Turns out Cynthia Mills, Seria's mother, had an affair with my father around the time I was born. My father was a well known and very established community member there, a police officer - well I don't need to explain the rest.

VOICE

So your mother was simply trying to protect you.

QUENTIN

Yes - but she didn't tell me that.
She did what my mother always did.

VOICE

What do you mean?

QUENTIN

That was just one example. Every time I got close to some joy, some real happiness, some love, she always would shut me down, and every single time it hurt. I tried all my young life to be on her good side, or jut stay out of her way... but she always kept coming for me. Nothing I ever did was good enough, she was so mean. And not just mean to me, but mean to the world.

VOICE

Do you think that might have something to do why you have as you said "such a hard time with love."

QUENTIN

I thought you were going to ask me something like if I held any resentment toward my mother. I do. I reached out to her and she rejected me.

VOICE

If you had an opportunity say whatever you wanted to say to you mother what would I say to her...
in a perfect world?

QUENTIN

I'd ask her one question. "Why wouldn't you love me?... That's all I would say. So then maybe today I would know how to love, without feeling obligated to or controlled. I just want to be able to truly love someone, and for them to love me back.

VOICE

What if she doesn't answer you? What if you still get nothing back from her, how are you going to get what you want....to truly love someone and for them to love you back?

QUENTIN

Wow. I have no idea.
(MORE)

QUENTIN (CONT'D)

I've sought love and affection in so many different ways, places. And I've been abused,
defiled.....so many times.

VOICE

You keep playing the relationship with your mother over and over. You're so used to it...it's like a vicious cycle. You seek out people who will reject you, keep you at a distance.

QUENTIN

You're telling me I am doing this to myself? What do you mean? Well, how, how do I stop?

VOICE

First things first. You said earlier that this young lady -was the great love of your life?

QUENTIN

Yes - I would have given anything.. at the time before I knew - to be with her. I had never and have never felt so connected to anyone else. Maybe that also contributed to my failed relationships.

VOICE

It could very well be. It's clear that losing her also left a big hole in your heart.

QUENTIN

Yes but there was nothing I can do about it.

VOICE

Then. There was nothing you could do about it ...then. Did you ever stop to think that maybe she wasn't related to you?

QUENTIN

But my mother said.....

VOICE

Your mother said your father had an affair with her mother. (MORE)

VOICE (CONT'D)

But that doesn't necessarily mean he was her father.

QUENTIN

Oh my God. I never thought about that.

VOICE

Well... Maybe it's time to think about it.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

It is 6 months later. This time Quentin is sitting in the chair. He looks nervous - be there is a different energy. He looks ready to go this time and is holding something in his hand.

VOICE

It's been quite a while since I have seen you.
I was surprised by your call.

QUENTIN

I was excited to talk to you.

VOICE

Great. This is already much better than the way we started out the last session. What's in your hand.

QUENTIN

This is why I wanted to see you.

VOICE

Ok. Well what's it about.

QUENTIN

Uh. I'll open it. But first. I need to tell you about some things that have happened since I left you.

VOICE

Ok.

QUENTIN

After our last meeting. At first I was....numb.....yes. Numb. (MORE)

QUENTIN (CONT'D)

I just didn't want to think about anything.

VOICE

That's normal. You revisited a lot.

QUENTIN

Yeah. I hadn't talked about that time. I hadn't really talked about it in that way.... ever. I was exhausted, but I was also jazzed, buzzed.

VOICE

So what did you do?

QUENTIN

Well first...I slept. For a couple of days. I couldn't get out of bed. But then after that - that's when I got buzzed. I thought about what you said. That's the last thing you said to me. You said (imitates her voice) Well maybe it's time to think about it. And at first, I wasn't sure what you meant. So I spend a couple of days just thinking about my mother. But this time, I didn't think about what she did or how she reacted. I just thought about who she was. So I went to my uncle and I asked my uncle what it was like growing up with my mother.

Slight Pause

VOICE

Have you spoken with your mother since this happened.

CHAPTER 5: AUDIENCE FEEDBACK AND MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

On the occasions when I performed the Script, I had a chance to hear from audience members who saw the performance. Sometimes, people knew exactly what they wanted to articulate, sometimes they didn't. I was often approached by someone in tears, and I would give them time and space for their silent expression. I was always humbled and grateful to be part of their experience. Here is a selection of particular audience responses:

(1) After performing for a group of students, one young man came up to me. He had the biggest wide-eyed face, and he stared at me for quite some time, before he spoke. When he did speak, he said "thank you". I replied to him "you're so very welcome". He then took a step closer to me and said: "I just want you to know that I'm going to go do something that I've never done before". When I asked him what he proposed to do, he replied "I have no idea...but I'm going to go do it, right now". He expressed that, as I had performed, he had been so touched by God, and had been given not only *life* but freedom, and permission to do and to be more – a very similar sense to the original question asked by Professor Boyd that led to the origination of the Script.

(2) On another occasion, after a performance to a group of about 12,000, and when the applause had died down, I moved to a long receiving line of people who wanted to meet me. One young lady, whose face I can now remember so clearly, looked at me, grabbed my hand, bust into tears and said "thank you, thank you so much, for helping me to see that I'm

gonna be OK. I can't even tell you, right now, much I needed this today, and how much you being here has turned everything around". Then she hugged me, and then she left.

(3) A gentlemen in the same receiving line walked up and asked: "Can I pray for you?" No one had ever said that to me before, and I expressed my surprise at his request. So the man continued "I have to pray for you, I want to pray for you, right now. Is that OK?" When I said "yes," he asked me "what do you need me to pray for?" I asked him to pray for my family, and he did so.

(4) Another young lady, also in the receiving line, came up to me and began to tell me about the division between her and her father, and how much my story about my father and the character I had portrayed, and my telling of my experience in the performance spoke volumes to her about her own situation, and how she was inspired to reach out to him, and to try to make amends.

(5) After a performance at UCF, a young man came up to me and said that the relationship between his father and him was broken. He wanted to know where I had gained the strength to confront the situation with my own father? I told him that I never did gain the strength, and I never did confront the situation, and I lost my Dad before I could get to him. He said he was inspired to connect with his own father and would do so. Months later, that same young man sought me out to tell me how he had taken steps to repair his relationship with his Dad and was so hopeful for the future of that relationship.

There are countless other examples, of particular audience feedback, too numerous to fit in this paper, though I recall all of them vividly, and remember the transacted *life* they represented – every one of them a powerful, moving experience.

To add to my recollection of particular audience feedback, I wrote an email and sent it to a selection of individuals who know me and have seen my performance of the Script.

This is the text of the email:

I could truly use your help toward the completion of my studies. Most of you have, in some way, witnessed me perform *The Summer of '91* onstage... I would really appreciate a VERY short response/paragraph to what you saw, or how you felt during that or any performance. I know it may have been some time ago, but try to capture what you do remember, that which was lasting... one song, one moment, or entire performance; it can be general or specific. It can also be a personal response to me as a performer. And please no pressure, no worries if you don't have the time.

Thank you kindly.

These are some of the responses I received:

“Quentin Earl Darrington...This singer/actor...is simply a performer you have to see. He has a voice that certainly must rank with the great baritones of all time.”

John Olson (A Chicago-based Theatre Reviewer)

“Witnessing the sheer power of pure honest expression and the beauty of that voice that is

Quentin Earl Darrington is exhilarating. I have never before been moved so greatly than watching him...never moved more so by hearing him perform, his voice reaching the rafters and filling every crevice of space. This is one person I am certain is changing the world for better with his voice, his passion, kindness and heart.”

Annette Tanner (Co-Founder and Executive Director, Broadway Dreams)

“Darrington is a charismatic presence who breathes real authority into his scenes...”

David Rooney (Theatre reviewer – *Variety* and *Hollywood Reporter*)

“Quentin is a true artist. Not only an accomplished singer and actor, he is a soulful human being...He brought deep, personal choices to role. He never settled. He kept digging under the surface so he could create a full-bodied, deeply complicated character...At times he startled me with his insight. I always found his choices to be surprising, yet inevitable...He is able to communicate one-on-one and to large groups...”

Marcia Milgrom Dodge (Director)

“Mr. Darrington is one of the most exceptional talents and human beings that I have ever met...his talent is exceptional... [the performance] showed off Mr. Darrington’s range and his ability to move an audience with his great vocal ability and acting craftsmanship. He knows how to be honest with a role and deliver a performance of unquestionable sensibility to character...It is with unquestionable sentiment that I can tell you that Quentin Darrington is the complete package—an exceptional talent and human

being—a passionate individual about his art and life, his desire to learn and the understanding that one human being can have a positive impact on the world.”

Robert Freedman (Producer)

“The integrity and absolute commitment with which [Quentin] approaches every task, leaving no stone unturned, no angle unexamined, is evident...an exceptional quality he possesses is the ability to connect with people of all walks of life. He so clearly values personal relationships and seizes every opportunity to serve and brighten people’s lives.”

Tyler Campbell (A friend and Musical Director)

“He is a special person...He is one of the most positive persons I’ve ever known...He’s a great singer and actor...he is an incredibly gifted teacher and communicator...From the moment he begins acting, he engages an audience...I was able to watch the audience’s student’s faces as he performed and they were completely enraptured...in short, he is one of the most gifted individuals I know.”

Patrick Flietz (a friend and Musical Director)

“Quentin Earl Darrington is a one of a kind performer. Quentin embodies a spirit within him that is able to shine through into his performance work in a way unlike anything I have seen in other performers. Every word and every note comes directly from the heart (with love) and portrayed in a completely honest light. I have witnessed too many of Q’s performances over the years to even count or call out a specific moment, and yet every note

still rings fresh in my mind.”

Jake McCoy (a friend and former Production Manager for Broadway Dreams)

“He is the consummate performer and a fine person. What he does he truly does from and with his heart. Each of the characters I have seen him create have been spot on and wonderful.”

Tammy Serebrin (a Florida-based writer)

“I found his work to be captivating, entertaining, funny and uplifting. He brings an unprecedented amount of energy to anyone or audience he comes in contact with. Quentin’s ability to connect with the audience around him has been an asset to him becoming successful as an actor, entertainer, and singer/performer.”

Kenneth E. Stephens, Ph.D (South Eastern University)

I am thankful for the written responses that affirm observing and experiencing in and through my acting a “sheer power of pure honest expression,” that some “have never before been moved so greatly,” that others consider I am “changing the world for better,” that some say I have “a charismatic presence,” “real authority,” the “ability to move an audience,” to “connect with people of all walks of life,” that I embody a spirit within me “that is able to shine through into [my] performance work unlike anything...seen in other performers.” I see it as more significant, however, that I observed in audience members experiences similar to my own personal experience at the Tampa Bay Performing Arts

Center – particularly a sense of freedom, empathy, love, hope and reconciliation. As I once sensed *life*, they also sensed *life* but, significantly, their experiences occurred in the refined context of my solo performance of the Script, without the revelry and pageantry, and the solemn, great and gorgeous, yet momentary, theatrical vision of my Tampa experience. My preliminary conclusion is then that the transaction of *life* may not be because of pageantry or spectacle, the volume of sound or the brightness of lights, staging or scenery, or because of the size of cast, venue or audience. Without all those things, in relative simplicity, there was consistency between the initial idea for the Script, my personal experience that led to the narrative of the Script, and audience experience. That consistency is like that which exists in nature where there is consistency between the seed, root, body and the fruit of a plant. Tracing *life* back to the body, the root and eventually to the seed leads me to look beyond the fruit of audience experience to consider my experience performing the Script.

Performing the Script is an ever-changing experience. It often feels like the Script has a *life* of its own and as if I, the actor, am on the back of a horse going for a ride with only so much control over an animal that can choose its direction – living and breathing on its own even though I am following the discipline and direction of the written text. I have been surprised in the midst of performances because even though the Script is something I wrote, and have memorized, moments I crafted in order to expose my heart or to connect with the audience in a particular way continually break my heart, and touch a place in me that I cannot control. I had always assumed that prior performances would enable me to retain a sense of composure, to not cry, and to convey a clear and consistent writer's intent but, in the midst of performance, time and time again, I found myself emotionally exposed,

vulnerable and reliving the experiences I had written about, yet in a theatrical setting, before an audience. Experiences of falling in love, love lost, rejection, being bullied, pain of many kinds, and longing for my Mom's approval – always feeling real, always raw, always fresh - each theatrical moment representing a new moment there to be lived, and a moment I live for an audience. And in each living moment, I sensed an abundance of *life*, a supernatural power that is more than me, a substance entrusted to me that I am able to give to others – that enables me, in the performing moment to sing, speak, and to act. That substance feels like the same *life* substance I experienced at the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Centre. That *life* seems to me to be God's presence, God's being. The extent to which my sense is affirmed by artists and other individuals who have written or spoken about their own experience similar to mine, or have sought to define and articulate of *life* and how, where and why they say *life* originates and is transacted, has been set out in Chapter 2 of this paper.

CHAPTER 6: *MY THEATER IS SPIRITUAL*

Back in 2008 I was on a community service outing with Blair Hopley, a Chaplain at Morton Plant Mease Hospital, in Clearwater, Florida. I went from room to room with Blair, and met with the patients as he ministered to them. He introduced me to those patients, a lot of whom were in pain - we talked with some, prayed with others and on some occasions, I had the opportunity to sing something, at their request. As we approached one particular room, before we entered Blair prepared me by saying that the man in that room was actively passing - he explained it was likely that the man would die very soon, even as we were in the room with him. When we entered the room, the man's family were gathered around his bedside, about fifteen of them. At the time, it baffled me that they would allow me, a stranger, to be there at such a precious moment. The man in the bed was laboring to breathe and, as the family gave me permission to do so, I drew close to him. As I wrestled with many thoughts about why I was there, what was my life about, and what should I do, prayerfully, I did the only thing that made sense to me - I did what seemed to be the right thing...in the silence of the room, I knelt beside the dying gentleman and, very softly, I began to sing "The Impossible Dream". As I finished, I saw a single tear fall down the man's cheek, and as his tear fell, so did my own, and those of his family gathered about us. I stood up, and there was no applause, and no acknowledgment of what or how I had done. As I left the room, I was suddenly confronted with a clear sense of knowing that singing was what I would do for the rest of my life. Singing, acting, performing is what God created me for, this is what He has called me to do - to use the gift He has entrusted me with to help

people, whoever they are, wherever they are, to smile, to look up, to know His light, His beauty, His hope and His *life*.

I recall once hearing a sermon where the preacher said that the barometer to tell where we are with God, is how we treat people in our daily lives. The Bible says “If someone says ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also” (1 John 4:20-21, New American Standard Bible). Human experience can be painful, difficult, and unfathomable – for the family in that room, and for the man who was dying, as much as it is for audience members who come to see me perform. Their particular experiences, and the extent of their joy or sorrow, may vary, but through the relationship I have with them, whether in one on one moments, or as I perform to a larger audience, because God is with me, because of the gift of God in me, I am able to give something to them that is God’s *life*, God’s perfect gift for them. That is how I *love people, and serve people*; and that is how I love God – and that is my philosophy, of acting, and for life. As long as I walk alongside God, listen to Him, learn from Him, and move as He moves, I have nothing to fear, nothing to doubt. God gave me this gift, opens door for me to use that gift, and tells me how to use it – then I watch and see how He chooses to work in miraculous ways in the lives of those he brings me into relationship with. I know that if I ever decide to walk without God, subversively, in any way that does not represent or acknowledge His *life*, it would mean only death and destruction, including for me. It would not bless, help, encourage, lift, or meaningfully change me, or an audience. It would not be *life*.

Preparing, researching, thinking about, and writing this paper has helped me remember, deepen my appreciation of, understand and articulate my understanding of what I experienced way back at the Tampa Center for the Arts. All of this represents the foundation of a faith journey, walked hand in hand with God...from the beginnings of the script that I poured myself into, through the writing, refining and then the performing of that script. All of those things were steps taken in faith that God would work, in whichever way He may choose, through those steps - as I took them. I certainly am not the possessor of *life*, and I do not have the ability to give *life* how and where I will. God is the giver of the gift of *life*, and the *life* is that of Himself - God who, in the person of Jesus Christ, says: "I am the bread of *life*" (John 6:48), "It is the Spirit who gives *life*...the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are *life*" (John 6:63), "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" (John 7:37-38), and "I am the resurrection and the *life*; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies" (John 11:25). He is the Lord, I am His minister and, by His grace, I am able to give His *life*, and His truth to a community - theatrically, because it is the theatre that typically brings me into relationship with that community. I want to be a part of the *Theatre of Life* - living, researching, working, seeing, crafting and ministering in community with other like-minded artists. Perhaps there were artist ministers at work in the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center? Artists who were faithful to their own sense of calling to write, to act or sing, or to otherwise be part of that theatrical production, as I must be faithful to my own sense of calling. Artists hoping in, trusting in, looking to, and relying on God's gift of *life* to enliven their work, and to touch those they were in

relationship with – the unknown face in their audience who, on the particular occasion of my visit, was me. Glory to God!

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