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Paternity Test: Finding a Director's Voice for Father

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Paternity Test: Finding a Director's Voice for *Father*

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Film and Theatre Arts
Theatre Performance: Directing

by

Jennifer L. Billot

B.A. The University of New Orleans, 2006

May 2014

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Table of contents

Abstract	v
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: <i>Father</i> Play Analysis.....	3
Chapter 2: Process.....	22
Chapter 3: Self-evaluation.....	34
Bibliography.....	42
Appendices.....	43
Appendix A - <i>Father</i> by Frederick Mensch, Director's script.....	44
Appendix B - <i>Father</i> design images.....	73
Appendix C - <i>Father</i> publicity.....	80
Appendix D - Production poster.....	85
Appendix E - Production program.....	87
Appendix F - Production Photos.....	100
Appendix G - Tennessee William Literary Festival.....	108
Vita	112

Abstract

The following thesis is a brief view of the production process of Theatre UNO's Spring 2014 production of the Tennessee William's New Orleans Literary Festival One-Act play competition 2013 winner, *Father*. This thesis will include analysis, production book, documentation from the production, and an evaluation of the process of putting this production on stage. The play was performed in New Orleans, Louisiana at the University of New Orleans, Performing Arts Center Robert E Nims Lab Theatre on February 11th- 16th, 2014.

Keywords: Jennifer Billot, Father, University of New Orleans, Frederick Mensch

Introduction

This thesis is a documentation of the process and production of *Father* by Frederick Mensch. This thesis is divided into chapters and appendices. Below is a guide to the purpose and content of the individual chapters. All citation will be indicated by numbers corresponding with pages within the *Father* script found in the appendix.

The table of contents in the front will list the corresponding page numbers for chapters and the appendix.

Chapter one: *Father* play analysis is a detailed look at the director's analysis of the text. The structure of this analysis comes from Francis Hodge's Play Analysis Community and the individual sections are indicated by roman numerals.

Chapter two: The director's concept for the show as presented to the production team and cast.

Chapter three: A look at the process through the director's journal throughout design meetings and rehearsals.

Chapter four: A the director's self-evaluation. This includes thoughts on the strengths and weaknesses shown through production as well as an assessment of the final result.

Included in the appendix are multiple items pertaining to this production, such as the director's script, *Father*, which included director's notes on blocking and character analysis, the production poster, press release, program, and production photos.

A Vita detailing the author/director of The University of New Orleans production of *Father* background.

Chapter 1 Father Play Analysis

I. The Given Circumstances of the play

A. Environmental facts

1. Geographical location, including climate:

- a. This play takes place in the United States of America, in an area of greater Chicago, called Arlington, Illinois. The specific location is never directly referred to in dialogue, however the stage directions specify “a Chicago funeral home.” (1) Vicki is meeting Peggy Usterboski halfway between the funeral home and Peggy’s home in Evergreen Park, which is south of downtown Chicago. Arlington is often referred to as “North Chicago,” and is a blustery area year round. The location was primarily used to inform costume and scenic style as a reflection of the climate, rather than a distinct regional aesthetic.

2. Date: year, season, time of day:

- a. Year - There is no specific reference to a particular year or time period in the script. The play takes place in present day. Based on the language, which is written in a contemporary style, it was decided against imposing a different time on the play.

- b. The only indication of Season is a statement made by Vicki “Early Christmas” (4) in relation to her mother’s excitement. Because of this, and as a function of the windy climate of the area, it was decided that the seasonal setting was Autumn.
 - c. It was decided the wake and funeral were held on the same day because of Richard’s financial situation and his poor health before his death. Vicki and Peter refer to the fact that they were rushed to arrive before the end of the service indicating they arrive close to the end of the visitation time, and near the beginning of when the funeral service would occur if anyone had been there for it. Also, the discussion of Vicki meeting Patty that night for drinks suggests the funeral service being closer to the early evening. Given all of these factors, it was decided the funeral was sometime in the late afternoon, between 4:00-6:00 p.m.
3. Economic environment: Everyone in the play falls into the category of middle class.
- a. Vicki is in an upper-middle class range. She has enough disposable income to fly to Chicago semi-regularly and has the resources to rent a vehicle each time. As part of her recovery from alcoholism, it was decided she exhibits responsible financial habits and does not spend money frivolously. She and

her husband are responsible with money, and are comfortable and able to support their children as a result.

- b. Peter lives with his mother and so, while he is not employed, he has no expenses. Peter does not own many nice or expensive possessions, but neither does he express a desire for them.
- c. David is upper-middle class. Working for his father and being raised upper-middle class, he has always held a job and earned money. Their family owns more than one location of the Kennedy-Ohler Funeral Homes, which speaks to the success of their business. David has also earned a college education.
- d. Richard, prior to his death, was the character who had the least financial stability. Peter comments “His hands are clean. That’s a first.” (2) so it was decided Richard had a blue-collar job involving labor, however due to his illness he was unable to work. Because of this, as well as his multiple divorces and children, he was unable to save a significant amount of money throughout his life. This is reflected in the choice of casket as well as the size of the funeral home. This choice about the size of the funeral home was also consistent with the spatial limitations of the space in which the production would take place.

4. Political environment

Politics do not play a role in the world of this show. Any overtly political subject matter is not directly addressed. Even the potentially provocative subject of Peter's sexuality is only expressed as a psychological event.

5. Social environment – Family relationships

- a. Peter and Vicki are siblings who have become somewhat distant in their adult years. This is mostly a result of their feelings about their estranged father. Vicki withdrew from their family to protect herself from her past – as manifested in her alcoholism – and the unhealthy outlook Peter has on their upbringing. Peter focuses his resentment on Vicki's withdrawal. Their adolescent relationship with their father was that of abuse and abandonment.
- b. We also see a father/son relationship between David and his father despite his father never appearing onstage. This relationship is portrayed as an ideal counterpoint to Vicki and Peter's relationship with their father.

6. Religious environment

- a. The setting being a chapel automatically imposes a kind of physical religious environment on the production. This religious environment of the funeral home is not acknowledged by the characters as such until

Richard's faith, which he came to late in life, is brought to light. It was decided the setting could not have obvious religious paraphernalia, such as crosses, crucifixes, or religious figures or statues. Only suggested symbols of faith were considered, such as hymnals or paintings with oblique religious undertones. This allowed the discovery of their father's faith to not be foreshadowed by their surroundings.

- b. The religious environment as a revelation for Vicki and Peter is abrupt. Once discovered, it is addressed quickly and with aggression and disbelief, leaving the audience with an air of tension and unease for the remainder of the play, even at the very mention of "Amazing Grace."
- c. The revelation of the religious environment and its indication of Richard's faith was a major catalyst of the conflict between Vicki and Peter for the remainder of the play.

B. Previous Action

1. Richard's first son, Bobby, Peter and Vicki's older brother, died during their childhood. This directly affected Richard's relationship with Vicki and Peter, and was a catalyst for his abuse and ultimate abandonment of them.
2. Richard subjected Peter to mental and possibly physical abuse from his early childhood into his adolescence. The basis of this was Peter's effeminate behavior.
3. Richard left Peter and Vicki's mother.

4. Richard ignored Vicki's attempts to continue a relationship with him for at least four years.
5. Richard severed all connections with Vicki and Peter.
6. Vicki became an alcoholic.
7. Vicki got married, moves to Denver and has children.
8. Richard was remarried and had at least two other children. That marriage ended in a second divorce.
9. Vicki got sober.
10. Richard became very ill, found his faith, entered hospice and decided to make arrangements for his funeral.
11. Richard befriended David in Mercy care before dying.
12. Vicki flew in from Denver and picked Peter up at before attending the funeral.

C. Polar Attitudes

1. Peter, at the beginning of the play, is unsure what he wants from seeing his father, but is attending the funeral out of familial obligation. Peter wants to hold on to his grudge and justify his anger toward his father, and seeks support from Vicki in endeavor. He resents that she does not offer her support. He avoids his father and denies it is even him in the coffin. Throughout the play he continues to vacillate between acknowledging his father's death and denying it. It is only after

physically striking his father's corpse he finds he has taken the first step to closure.

2. Vicki enters the world of the play with the intention of upholding her own familial duties: as a daughter attending her father's funeral, and also as an unspoken support system for her brother. By the end of the play she has given up pushing her brother to release his bitterness towards their father and has decided to let him make his own choices, however self-detrimental they may be.
3. David enters truly wanting to help the bereaved. Though he is met with hostility and resistance, he perseveres in doing what he believes to be most helpful. He ends the play shaken by the lack of Peter's compassion, but he is determined to honor the wishes of the deceased, and to offer Richard last respects.

II. Dialogue

A. Choice of words

1. The general speech pattern used between the siblings is very casual and concise speech. The only time their language is heightened is when Peter is insulting his sister, or when Vicki is making a point to Peter. The sibling rivalry manifests within their speech as a means of one upping each other. In these instances, their sentence structure becomes more complex, but their word choice does not necessarily elevate or expand.
2. When David enters his demeanor is somewhat formal, but he noticeably and quickly relaxes whenever speaking of things personal to him. It becomes

presentational at times to get him back on the right track for his role in this environment.

B. Choice of phrases and sentence structure

1. David repeats the standard funeral home sayings “These are difficult circumstances” (13 and 15) and “I understand” (13 and 15). These two phrases are common sayings at funerals and can be considered cliché.
2. There are many references to “Amazing Grace”. The song of redemption is brought up throughout the play. It is a statement to Richard’s change in faith and the lyrics can be placed in direct parallel to his own actions and change. The mention of this song is also used as a gauge to see where Vicki and Peter are at in processing the information concerning their father’s transformation.
3. Vicki repeats, “He is not a religious man.” (14 and 15) and “Who did he expect to be here?”(17). Reiterating their surprise as well as putting an end to Peter’s control of the conversation.
4. The sentence structure varies throughout the play based on the emotional state of the characters. Peter’s speech patterns are particularly inconsistent: sometimes he will speak about a point at length and in great detail in order to drive it home, and other times he will speak in very little detail when he feels he is ready to give up trying to make a point. The characters, again, particularly Peter, seems to shift rapidly from sarcasm to actual anger in their speech. Because of this, to decipher their triggers are hard.

C. Choice of images

The setting of the funeral home with a coffin containing a body is the general physical image that is used in the overall play to evoke the play's overarching emotion of grief.

The setting of a funeral home prepares us for all stages of grief and mourning of which we see throughout the play. David presents the image of Richard as a very weak, sick, yet kind man, which is in direct opposition to Peter's image of Richard as mean and abusive, as well as Vicki's neglectful memories of the same man.

D. Choice of peculiar characteristics --

1. It is stated in the playwright's description that Peter has a thick southern accent as well as a barely-suppressed flamboyance. The flamboyance reinforces his experiences with his father as a child, which are directly referred to in dialogue. The only specific application of the accent is its use to subtly inform the audience that they are not originally from the Chicago area, giving the children another instance of their father controlling their early life by uprooting them. It is also specified that Vicki does not have a southern accent, giving further sensory evidence of Vicki's deliberate distance from her family. The southern accent decided on is a mix of the dialects of Georgia, the Carolinas and Virginia. Georgia was selected because it is geographically far enough from Chicago to justify Vicki and Peter's mother not moving back after her divorce from Richard. The Carolinas

and Virginia influences on the accent were a more practical decision, allowing for more flexibility based on the actor's proficiency with dialects.

2. Rather than impose a Detroit or Chicago accent for Vicki, it was decided that she would have worked for a standard American dialect in an effort to lose her southern accent.
 3. Though, as a native, David would have a Chicago dialect, having three different distinct accents among the three characters would have done little to clarify location and may have been overwhelming to the audience. It was decided that Peter's character gained the most from having a regional dialect.
- E. The sound of the dialogue -- does the character use "hard" sounding words or soft sounding?
1. The inherent softness of Peter's southeastern accent worked as a contrast to Vicki's standard American dialect, which sounds harsher in comparison. The softness of Peter's dialect is also used as a tool to juxtapose the harsh content of his words. Pace and emphasis further assist in making Peter's language harsher in contrast to his dialect.
 2. Vicki and David use more softly constructed phrases as an attempt to calm and comfort Peter. Vicki only uses harsher words when she is driven to anger by Peter.
- F. Structure of lines and speeches -- how does it support the delivery of the subtext?
1. In the beginning of the play, the constant changing of the subject allows for pauses and breaks in dialogue which fosters an awkwardness between Vicki and

Peter. When David is present, these same rapid shifts in topics indicate a dismissal of the other sibling.

2. When Peter and Vicki are alone onstage, they create a volley between their lines. This allows a rhythm, ideal for the playful banter of siblings, and the awkward pauses slowly lift to be a comforting joust. The weight gets shifted whenever one of them speaks for more than a few sentences in a row. Vicki talks about their father ignoring her and Peter does little to engage until the topic shifts back to him.

III. Dramatic Action- Break down the play into workable units of action.

Unit 1 is pages 1-11 Vicki and Peter entrance

Unit 2 pages 12-23 at David's entrance

Unit 3 pages 23-27 after David's exit

Unit 4 the last moments on 27 with only David

A. Title the unites

1. Unit 1- "Is that him?"
2. Unit 2- "Everyone has strengths and weaknesses"
3. Unit 3- "Is your bitterness breaking his heart?"
4. Unit 4- "I once was lost"

IV. Characters- Treat each character under the following headings:

A. Desire -- what do they want most?

1. Peter wants to feel release from his father's power over him.

2. Vicki wants Peter to let go of his anger and to live his life.
3. David wants to help begin the healing process for these grieving individuals

B. Will -- relative strength for obtaining their desire

1. Peter has no strength throughout the play until the very end.
2. Vicki has no control over her goal as long as Peter is unwilling.
3. David has a good amount of control over his goal because it requires no long-term commitment; his goal can be achieved merely by planting the seeds.

C. Moral Stance- values, honesty, moral code

1. Peter is honest but uses it as a tool to inflict pain. His values are questionable, in that what he seems to be clinging the tightest to, is his bitterness toward his father and those around him.
2. Vicki has a good moral compass. She is as honest as the situation calls for, and attempts to not use it as a weapon as Peter does. While she does not share some information upfront with David in regards to their relationship to the father, she does this out of a sense of decorum, not of deceit. Her values give her strength and conviction to try to help her brother, even when it becomes difficult to maintain a constant level of support. She falls into a moral midrange because she is willing to manipulate Peter in order to embarrass him into making better decisions.

3. David is the moral standard. Everything he does is selfless and his outlook and advice is always honest and unbiased.

D. Decorum –

1. Peter is unsure and uncomfortable in his body. The abuse from his early childhood leaves him with an attitude suitable for seclusion and thereby personal style is not a priority. He thinks little of himself and moves with caution. He should look a little worn.
2. Vicki is confident and put together. She would carry herself with strong body posture as well as an air of confidence that Peter does not possess. Vicki needs to be firm and self-aware as an older sibling would take the reins in a situation similar to this one. She goes to great lengths to look nice even despite having come from the airport Vicki would have taken the time to fix her hair and makeup before attending an event of this nature.
3. David is physically contained, not restricted but rather he is young and energetic and so his physical demeanor appears to be a constant battle between containing his youthfulness and establishing his professionalism. He is an individual who is very well put together and very clean cut.

V. Ideas

A. Meaning of the title

A father is a main figure in a person's life, particularly in this case, who effects who you become. A father is often seen as a protector or a person who

challenges their children to grow and strive to reach their potential. In contrast mothers are often seen as the nurturers, who help the child to achieve the same goal. If it were to be a visualization mothers would pull a child up a hill to their successes, and a father would push the children. This is a very base idea of parental roles within a familial system. In this play we see characters who were shaped by their parents, particularly their fathers. While we have a choice as adults in who we would like to be; we are simply a mold of what our father's created. Richard is not the only father in this play, he is simply the one who did not live up to the expectations of being a father. The title is the idea that haunts Peter, the strength, patience, and love that David exhibits, as well as the idea that shaped Vicki into a person of survival and insight.

B. Philosophical statements in the play

1. Everyone dies alone.

a. Peter- "This is what everyone's afraid of, isn't it? To die alone and mourned." (4)

i. Peter is not only referring to the universal idea that to be remembered is to live on but that to be forgotten is to be unloved. It leads to the idea that if no one mourns you then did your life carry any worth?

ii. This is also a look at Peter shutting out life rather than moving past his childhood trauma and in doing that, his bitterness could isolate him leading him to this same fate.

2. Human beings in general are weak.
 - a. David- “Most people wouldn’t even do that, though, you know? They’ll just turn away from those moments because they’re just too awful” (22)
 - i. The average person cannot handle some of the most common personal tragedies such as death. We ignore other people’s pain in favor of our own comfort.
 - b. David- “Everybody has their own strengths and weakness”
 - i. We may not live up to expectations in every facet, but there must be redeeming qualities to look for.
 - ii. You cannot measure another man’s failures by your own standards without being disappointed.
3. Holding on to anger and pain only hurts yourself.
 - a. Vicki- “Is your bitterness breaking his heart?” (25)
 - i. We push people away with our anger and then are angry that we are left alone.
 - ii. Our grip on ill feelings do more self-harm than inflicting pain on the person responsible.
4. Happiness is a choice.
 - a. Vicki- “You can choose a different life...You don’t have to live this way.” (26)

- i. Most of the unhappiness that we feel is our inability to move forward.
 - ii. It is often a result of us not wanting to be happy or being afraid to allow ourselves change.
- 5. Everyone can be redeemed.
 - a. David- "Amazing Grace." (27)
 - i. No matter what you've done or if forgiveness is granted, you have the power to change.
 - ii. Do the children have to accept his change in order to move on as well?

C. Implications of the action

1. Peter continuously discusses their father's abuse and abandonment as a victim. He disregards Vicki's feelings because her closure threatens the validity of his continued anger. Peter constantly attacks Vicki's attempts to better herself. Peter hopes to use Vicki to justify holding on to his own resentments towards their father. Peter could not face his father while he was alive and is not ready to process the death by letting go of his anger. Peter redirects this anger to his sister, Vicki.
2. Vicki will challenge her brother, Peter, when the two are alone together. However, she makes excuses for Peter's outbursts on multiple occasions to

- David. Vicki maintains a decorum of social dignity on behalf of her brother. Her presence there is an effort to help her brother achieve closure. This action is a result of the duty and obligation an older sibling feels for a younger sibling.
3. The given nature of David's job informs us that his goals and actions are an obligation. The uniqueness of David's situation is that he has chosen this profession as a result of his complete selflessness. He wants to offer comfort and solace to grieving individuals for the nobility of the profession. David's actions all lead to him following in his father's footsteps and to make his father proud.
- D. Consider each scene -- determine the purpose of each scene in the play. What idea is it trying to convey? How does it help the overall idea?

a. The first scene – “Is that him?”

This scene is an important tool used to establish the relationship between Vicki and Peter. The viewer can see them interact and react to each other. In this section the audience will begin to see personality traits of Peter and Vicki. Background information is given such as Vicki's drinking, Peter's living situation, and the state of their relationship with their father. This section talks about the background circumstances leading to Peter and Vicki's estrangement with Richard, their father. This is a time for the audience to see the two lower their guard and come

together in the wake of this difficult time. Vicki shares an account of their father's neglect which affected her greatly. Vicki attempts to connect with Peter's suffering and is shut out by her brother. This information reveals their methods in dealing with their childhood. It also allows insight to how they will individually handle processing their father's death.

b. The second scene- "Everyone has their own strengths and weaknesses."

Offers the audience a perspective of Richard before his death that differs greatly from Peter and Vicki's account of their father. This section introduces the character of David and as a result the dynamic of the room shifts. We see many of Peter's social shortcomings with his interactions to David. The audience should recognize Peter's disrespect and Vicki's efforts to adjust his lashing out to a more socially acceptable behavior. David's character offers information about Richard's transformation to a man of faith. He also spent time with their father at an important time before his death. In this scene we see that a relationship between two individuals can be altered dramatically when a third party is introduced. The audience gains a deeper understanding of

the lengths Peter will go to in order to maintain the grasp on his resentment.

c. The third scene- “Is your bitterness breaking his heart?”

This scene poses an important idea to Peter. Vicki challenges the reason for Peter’s unrelenting anger and the toll it has taken on his happiness. The audience is faced with the idea that our choosing to hold on to our anger and resentment only causes more pain and stunts us in our human development. This section does not look at the process of acceptance but instead focuses on the impediments we place on ourselves. Peter’s, “it is finished” (27) does not symbolize he has been fixed but rather he has made a choice to let go. It is not the end of his journey but the catalyst that starts it.

d. The final scene- “I once was lost”

The audience is left with David and Richard on stage in the aftermath of Peter’s rage-filled outburst. David sings “Amazing Grace” to Richard despite the fact his own children could not complete this wish. The words of the song suggest an awakening of faith and an asking of forgiveness. The song is a common funeral song that speaks a great deal to Richard’s journey and makes Peter’s rejection more heartbreaking.

Chapter 2 Process

When first discovering I would be directing for my thesis; it came as a bit of a shock. Given my background in stage management, I felt confident the transition to directing would not be exceedingly difficult, yet I knew it would pose a unique set of challenges. I discovered I would be directing the Tennessee Williams Literary Festival one-act play competition winner from 2013. It was both a disappointment and an exciting opportunity to say the least. Despite my familiarity with original works from a management perspective, this particular one-act play, being unpublished and without a time period left me with little hard research opportunities. However, the idea of directing a one-act, a smaller manageable piece, put my concerns to rest. This work was to be a new adventure for me to close out my academic career at UNO and I decided to look at it as just that.

Our first design meeting was scheduled before we departed for the winter break on December 13, 2013 in the Design Lab of the Performing Arts Center. This was to give the designers ample time to develop ideas regarding the concept so we could dive in as we returned. The theme presented was the idea of physical and emotional distance between individuals. We discussed it as not only a tool on stage to keep characters away from one another, but the avoidance of the body of their father as well as their feelings towards him. We talked about how this could also translate to a visual of the separation between the characters and could also give us a greater sense of space in the setting to make the funeral home feel larger and therefore emptier. A secondary visual was that of human beings masking their true inner feelings from one another as a means to protect

themselves. The distance and the masks prevent us from really knowing one another. This is seen in the children's relationship to their father compared to David's experiences. Each of the characters were putting on different fronts and the person who was in the most control of the room affected the coolness or warmth. When the production team departed I felt as if everyone grasped the images given. It seemed like a good note to leave on.

Our second design meeting upon returning was a basic reiteration of the themes and practical necessities discussed in the prior meeting. However this meeting was accompanied with images and questions from the designers. Color palette was the main topic of conversation. The discussion included several arguments for both warm to cool ambiance but I felt a cool neutral in the scenic elements was necessary to get us to a place where mood shifted in the room. The scenic designer agreed and moved toward several ideas to create this with the resources provided. Textures were discussed at length: the carpeted chapel versus the tile to the back hallway. The other element discussed that day was line, masculine or feminine, simple or obtrusive, so we could start to build this world. The final selection of the scenic color palette allowed the costume and lighting designer to further their research in order to live in this world. We discussed time of year and location so that costumes could have a preliminary idea of season.

January 14th was our third design meeting where the scenic designer discussed various layouts to the ground plan. It was decided we would incorporate a piano and approved a final ground plan. The model was presented after the meeting and we were

ready to move forward. The costume designer needed a cast before there could be any further discussion regarding costumes. The lighting designer pulled photos of color palettes. Everything was on track. After this week, we moved into a habit of production meetings in lieu of design meetings. Subsequent production meetings took place on Tuesdays as well, until after the production opened.

Later that evening we had auditions for the season. This, unbeknownst to myself at the time, was unexpectedly difficult. The script calls for individuals in an age range not typical to a college setting, yet age is mentioned in the script as a point of inexperience on the part of the funeral director. Therefore, being able to create a believable age range was crucial. After much deliberation, and advice from my mentor, the cast was set with Meghan Shea as Vicki, Evan Eyer as Peter, and David Brown as David. The role of Richard had not been considered at this point because we believed we had done our best to mask the view of the body and I felt it would be a distraction to have a live actor on stage for the duration of the show.

On Saturday, January 18, 2014, the cast, the stage manager, the technical director, and scenic designer sat down for the first read of *Father* in the Performing Arts Center's Lab theatre. Everyone was introduced, the model and ground plan were presented to the cast and a brief explanation of the themes and images were discussed. Moving into this read, I was hoping to hear dynamics in the interactions from the actors in the relationships between the characters that I simply could not find on paper. The cast read through the script and we discussed initial ideas and relationships. After we discussed schedule, we departed for the day.

On Monday, January 20, 2014 we had a table work session at Squeal BBQ on Oak Street. I am a firm believer that more can be accomplished around a table of food. This helped to build camaraderie and allowed us to really delve into the text without the pressure of a formal rehearsal. This proved to be successful. Our time together lasted a little over an hour and a half of rather intense discussion ranging from individual actors personally identifying with the script to the psychology that motivated the actions of the characters. We solidified relationships and history. It was decided the mention of Bobby on page 2 was in reference to their older brother who had died. This gave them some catalyst from which their father's behavior stemmed. The actors also discussed their individual relationships with Margaret, their father's second wife, and their children. The timeline and the ages of the characters when significant events occurred leading up to this moment was clarified. The conversation also included the character of David, his dealing with their father and his relationship to his own. This informative meeting was a great success.

Tuesday, January 21, 2014 was the first official rehearsal. Putting the play on its feet was the priority of the evening. I discussed with the cast about the difficulty of the space and requested that as we move forward they give honest feedback about when they felt uncomfortable moving or being trapped. The task of blocking a show was an overwhelming feeling for me, having put them in a world with so many obstacles. Utilizing the whole playing area was a bigger challenge than I imagined. The blocking technique I utilized was a more fluid approach, allowing the actors to move in space of their own accord. As we went through the script I marked times they should be near or

away from the coffin, sitting or standing. All of the space in between was frustrating for the actors. I can see now a more structured approach would have been more beneficial.

Wednesday, January 22, 2014: We did not have David this evening so we focused on solidifying blocking in the beginning of the show. Taking the blocking slowly and working through to create motivated crosses has been more successful. I expect to change many things once we run the whole piece but I am pleased with the ground work we have set tonight. The actions presented were rather flat this evening. I am not sure if it is a result of a lack of choice, or a focus on the blocking. Vicki expressed a feeling of disconnect with her scene partner and so I tried some exercises to help them sync. First the actors ran through the script to page 9 (what we managed to block) with their eyes on each other to connect their lines. Then we followed that by running the lines again with over the top choices to stretch the actions. We ended the night a feeling of accomplishment which will help us when we come back to work tomorrow.

Thursday, January 23, 2014: The goal for this evening was to finish the rough blocking of the show. David returned to rehearsal. The first hour we went through the blocking that was set the night before, while stopping and starting to work through issues. Before moving on in the blocking I decided to continue the previous night's exercises with the remainder of the script. There was a strange and unexpected shift in the group, because David had missed the previous evening. Vicki and Peter seemed to play the exercise as an inside joke. David was the odd man out for much of the line-through. This was a happy accident because it helped create a sibling-like banter between the two of them that David had to try and keep up with. We discussed this

phenomenon briefly, simply to acknowledge what had occurred. We resumed blocking from David's entrance. The miming of fighting the corpse is shaky but the rest of blocking went much smoother than the night before. There were points that were difficult: adding a third person created different entrapments and required more complex maneuvering from the actors. I mentioned again the actor should express any discomfort in their movements so we could correct them. Vicki has proven to be extremely helpful by offering alternatives to open them up to the audience. We were able to block through David's exit on page 23.

Saturday, January 25, 2014: The goals for this rehearsal were to finish blocking the show and run through it to fix any issues that may have been missed. I successfully finished blocking the show and in the blocking of the end there was realization that Vicki explodes. In previous reads it had been a push to help Peter and today it became a line in the sand for Vicki. This choice is much stronger and spawned a whole new discussion about the nature of Vicki and Peter's relationship and their differing views on their father.

Monday, January 27, 2014: This was our first official stumble-through and a designer run. With a 30-minute show. The goal is to run through it, discuss moments that need to be worked, analyse the problems and run the show again. The second run was not possible due to the long run-time of the performance and the amount of notes actors wished to address. It seems the actors' saturation level is not equated to the time spent working but rather the number of times we go through the material. There also seems to be a struggle with lines that prevent the actors from actively wanting to run

through more than once. All in all, today was still a step in the right direction and in that respect a success. Our lighting designer was able to see the blocking and will begin work on the light plot.

Thursday, January 30, 2014: We lost two rehearsal days to snow days. Despite this, we decided to hold everyone to the off-book date today. I fully expected today's rehearsal to be a rough run due to the lack of repetition. In order to help the actors retain lines we did a speed through of lines followed by a run. While the speed through was rough and at times fell into a normal pace it did make the second run a less daunting experience. Everyone was shaky off book but no one exceptionally far behind. We will add one rehearsal to make up for the two lost.

Saturday, February 1, 2014: The goal was to get the actors more securely off book so we could start working moment to moment within the script. The rehearsal consisted of a speed through followed by a run, with notes to clean up discoveries made in the blocking. I have found Peter's physicality to be exceedingly interesting for the character but also problematic. Giving notes multiple times on basic adjustments in blocking has not helped this so perhaps working the individual moments and correcting it as we go will help. While the cast says they do not feel confident about their status of being off book, I saw a vast improvement in lines from a night off. Also it has been discussed and decided that we will need to have a father to lay in the coffin. It is being confirmed that the university is purchasing the casket so we will be able to have a person inside of it. The search for an actor to play Richard Snowden begins.

Sunday, February 2, 2014: We were without David, so the goal was to work through the scenes between Vicki and Peter. We have received walls today and it helped immensely to shape the world for the actors. We touched on all of the moments we wanted to between Vicki and Peter. The biggest struggle between the two actors is solidifying the mimed fight with the father. We are bringing in Erick Wolfe, a graduate student certified in fight choreography, to clean and clarify this choreography. I am confident everything else will get easier as we continue to rehearse and work.

Monday, February 3, 2014: The goals were to work through David's scenes and then have a run with notes. We successfully worked through David's scenes in a little under an hour. Caleigh Keith, a graduate of the UNO theatre performance MFA program, sat in on the run through to provide me with outside feedback. David tried to bring his youthful energy and physicality "over the top" and he landed pretty much on mark for where the character needs to be. This gave me the opportunity to point out very specific physical choices that helped embody the 24-year-old character. After the run, Caleigh and I discussed a few moments she felt were unclear as well as discussed some of Peter's physicality and line readings. Having had him in a previous acting class her insight was invaluable at this juncture. Notes were given, followed by a discussion of individual actions with Peter. The rehearsal was a great success with choices growing leaps and bounds.

Tuesday, February 4, 2014: Erick Wolfe attended this evening's rehearsal to choreograph and work the mimed fight. The goals for this evening were solely to have Vicki and Peter finish rehearsal comfortably with the major points of physical contact

throughout the show. Anything else we worked would be considered extra. David was not called so the entire rehearsal was structured for Vicki and Peter. The rehearsal started with a speed through up until the fight. Erick then worked with the actors on visualizing the body as well as a breakdown of movements required to create this fight. The mime alone was worked several times and cleaned until the actors felt comfortable and it was set. This was also an opportunity for Vicki to explore a point of physical contact with Peter. We discussed her violently thrusting Peter to the casket. Erick worked the physical breakdown of this with the actors. This choice helped Vicki in the final scene before she leaves and became a very powerful moment in rehearsal, which later led to a discussion with Peter about the extent of the character's abuse. I am hopeful that this conversation can inform some of his physicality throughout the play, particularly when he feels threatened. We witnessed an actor moment of Evan working through the questions posed that was nothing short of delightful. Finally, we worked the slap. Overall, this was one of our most successful rehearsals because the actors all left with a greater clarity and launching points for a more physical relationship.

Wednesday, February 5, 2014: The goals for this evening were to work through a few moments with line readings, running the fight choreography from the previous night to incorporate David's entrances, followed by a run. Liz Gore, an alumni of UNO's theatre program, sat in on this evening's run to provide feedback to me. The notes were mostly good; the concerns she expressed were in regards to pace and a bit of muddy blocking. There were quite a few acting notes given that were missed by myself because of my location in the house. This is an indicator to me that I need to focus less on the

blocking and sightline issues and shift the greater focus onto the choices in runs. There was overall a vast improvement with the run. There were new moments of sibling physical contact that were tried on the part of the actors.

Thursday, February 6th, 2014, David Hoover, my major professor and the department chair, sat in on our rehearsal to give notes. The actors started with a speed through per their request followed by a run. Notes from David Hoover were very positive. Main suggestions included several practical things I had not previously considered such as static electricity, Richard Snowden's anxiety level being unable to move, as well as the indication of an entrance. We discussed the change in pace on David's entrance. Overall, this rehearsal was a successful final run before Tech. David's physicality was toned back down but I am confident we can get back the youthful energy. Also, we officially have a "father": Scott Lytell has agreed to play Richard Snowden.

Saturday, February 8, 2014: This rehearsal was for the stage manager, Tim Moseley, to feel confident with the lights and scenic elements. Before the cue-to-cue there were a few minor adjustments that needed to be made to the boom lights. These were made quickly and we resumed to the scheduled day. After the cue-to-cue we had a technical run which had a few rough elements. It was our first run without the chairs we were to use. While the new chair width was larger than what we had rehearsed with, the height was also different and this height offered some interesting choices made by the actors I had not anticipated. Thankfully chairs seemed to serve as an asset rather than a new hindrance. The other element today included lighting. Shelby Tompkins, being a

first time lighting designer, made for an excellent challenge in my communication skills. I had to be extremely clear with what I was looking for in the notes. Our combined lack of experience would have made it likely that common questions could be overlooked. The lighting shifted from cool to warm and vice versa at very compelling points in the script; her analysis was exceedingly thorough. However, the warmth and coolness occurred in areas of the stage creating a surrealist world when characters would move. During the run, I discussed this with the lighting designer, the technical director, and the stage manager; everyone seemed very receptive and discussed remedies. Everyone involved in the technical aspects of this rehearsal were prepared and open to adjustments. I honestly do not think the day could have gone better.

Sunday, February 9, 2014: This was our first dress rehearsal. Scott joined the cast by playing the father. Having an actual person in the casket created an interesting dynamic on stage. The stakes seemed instantly heightened. The improvement on the lights was nothing short of amazing. There are a few small adjustments in times but it has made the world come together in a way I did not anticipate at the previous rehearsal. We added some sound at this rehearsal, however we will need to check the speakers because some of the cues sound distorted. We ran through the show and held notes afterwards. I can honestly say, barring the issues with sound. I would have felt comfortable opening the show today.

Monday, February 10th, 2014 the final dress rehearsal had overall slow pace. The show felt labored this evening however all of the choices that actors made were clear. I am confident that the tempo will improve with an audience.

Tuesday, February 11 through Sunday, February 18, 2014: The show *Father* by Frederick Mensch ran at the University of New Orleans in the Lab Theatre of the Performing Arts Center. The evolution during this run was perhaps the most interesting part of the experience thus far. The subject matter of this play is a heavy one and the piece was rehearsed as a drama, though it was stated early on by me that it was a dark comedy. The actors made new discoveries throughout the run, not just with each other but also with the audience. Surprisingly, the character who seemed to make the most discoveries while still holding true to our rehearsals was David. With the audience's sense of approval, he seemed to solidify his youthful presence as a natural extension of himself. This made his performance increasingly more genuine. This honesty allowed the humorous nature of the circumstances of an eager twenty-four year old running a difficult funeral service more and more accessible to the audience.

Chapter 3 Self-evaluation

Looking back on this experience as a whole, one of the overall factors in the success of this production was that success was never the goal. The goal was to take-in the experience, learn, and try to create an environment in which everyone could explore and enjoy themselves. As a stage manager, one of the most beneficial observations I ever made was, in general, as the pressure rises, the art itself suffers. When the focus of this show became a learning opportunity rather than a “success” or “failure,” there was no room for fear or stress. It was my hope this sentiment might be shared by the other people in the process: the cast, management, and designers. It was gratifying that on the opening night of the show, Kevin Griffith, the scenic designer thanked me for an enjoyable experience. I responded, “Why do it if you can’t have fun?” I did not set out to foster this specific environment, but it seemed that every choice I made cultivated it.

I came into this project in the hope I would open up the conversation for everyone’s input, and that collaboration would help guide me through my first venture in directing, while I secretly tried to keep my head above water. Contrary to my expectations, I never had that overwhelmed “drowning” sensation that is often described by others while directing or that I have felt myself in management.

Perhaps this experience was a perfect storm: gathering the right designers, cast, and crew for this work. That is not to say the final result was perfect, but it was more than I could have hoped for and it is something of which I am proud. Much to my delight, everyone seemed to be working together and enjoying the process. With this in mind,

had the final product been a complete disaster, I still would have considered the process as a whole successful.

Throughout the entire process my primary concern was communication. Based on my observations as a stage manager, I felt open lines of communication would be the most important element of this show. In the absence of the concerns of a major production, such as major schedule coordination, for example, I felt this show was small enough to encounter issues as they arose, and to try to keep everyone apprised of information as soon as it was available. Obviously this approach may not work as smoothly for a larger show or a less collaborative production team and cast, but as a departure from my habits as a stage manager it worked to my personal advantage in stepping into the director's role.

As a first-time director, a huge hurdle for me was the blocking of the show. I was always aware the ground plan of the set presented some difficulties in blocking, but ultimately those obstacles provided us with more opportunity to create interesting and dynamic physical distance between the actors, which hugely reinforced a major theme of the play. One of the biggest physical obstacles we were faced with was having an open casket onstage as a major focal point. Placing the casket downstage would have created sightline issues I did not feel equipped to sufficiently handle. Likewise, placing the casket upstage would have drawn much of the actors' focus and physicality upstage, which would have been an even less desirable option. While the ultimate placement of the casket presented its own blocking problems that were never solved to my complete satisfaction, specifically exhibited in the problem of the actors "cheating out," placing the

casket stage left was the best solution for our needs. It allowed for a wider playing area as well as isolating David's entrance point upstage, separating his access to the space from the other characters. The presence of the piano as a set piece was another element I was unsure of initially, but was ultimately a huge asset in that it gave the actors a destination point upstage right, and also balanced the visual weight of the casket on the stage.

The scenic and costume color palette was an exquisite neutral that allowed the lighting to dictate the mood. The lighting can be considered a character unto itself, not only supporting the actors' emotional transitions throughout the play, but also aiding the audience's journey on this rollercoaster. For example, the visual warmth that accompanied David's entrance contrasts sharply the coolness that Peter's rants inspire. It is my experience that an easy trap for lighting to fall into is to sacrifice the reality of a play and thrust it into a surreal or cartoonish setting. Given the nature of this piece, I did not consider this would be a concern, but the designer did have some moments in her initial design I felt compromised the reality of the piece. This was most likely a result of a lack of clear communication on my part. Her willingness to make adjustments spoke to the collaborative nature from which this process benefited so greatly. In the final production, there were a couple of moments when the transitions could have been subtler, but ultimately I did not feel the reality of the setting was compromised.

The costume design process felt the least concrete. We discussed early on that there would be layered costume elements to suggest fall weather, but there was never a formal presentation of design ideas. This was not something that particularly had me

concerned, and I did not feel it negatively affected the production. The textures chosen for Vicki and Peter's costumes were appropriate and visually interesting. The only notes given during costume approval were to make Vicki's ensemble, particularly her shoes, more attractive. The elements were adjusted to my satisfaction. An important function of the costumes in this production was to support the age of the characters, given the limited age range of available actors. The actors needed to be aged only about six to seven years, a range that did not call for any cosmetic alteration to their appearances. The aging was achieved chiefly through the costuming.

The biggest change I would have made in this process as a whole would have been to structure the rehearsal process differently. I would have spent more times working the scenes and specific moments, which is when we made our greatest strides, rather than repetitively running them. Initially, I attempted to allow the actors to organically find the blocking and movement that felt natural to them. This ended up just frustrating the actors because of their inability to recall what worked in previous runs. Fortunately, this lesson was quickly learned, and we began more concrete blocking after the first two rehearsals. Every production process is different. I feel many of the things I learned about the rehearsal process are unique to this show. I anticipate that shows of different sizes and subject matter will add to my understanding of the varying aspects of the production process.

Something I found particularly interesting during the process was the saturation level of the actors. Since the play was only thirty minutes long I fully anticipated running the show twice every night in our three-hour rehearsals. With this in mind I structured

the rehearsal with two nights off a week, with David having an additional night off, of which we worked the scenes with just Peter and Vicki. When we began doing full runs of the show, I discovered that if anything went wrong around the halfway point, the actors would begin losing their energy and commitment to choices, and what was supposed to be a full run ended up feeling like a mark through. With only three people on stage if one of the actors fell into this trap the others quickly followed; so quickly, in fact, I could not determine which person had started the energy decline. In hindsight, this was beneficial because it forced us to rethink the goals of rehearsals. We restructured rehearsals, working specific moments for eighty minutes, followed by a run, notes, and anything that needed to be addressed that evening. Gauging the actors' moods was a new challenge for me, different from challenges I've faced as a stage manager, and one I can see varies drastically from production to production.

Another important thing I learned in this process was what to emphasize in notes. In the beginning, my notes were typically to fix issues or offer a different option. I rarely focused on praising the actors for things I found delightful. I eventually began to make a point of noting moments I enjoyed so the actors could be aware of them. I never considered the cast would require almost as much positive feedback as critical or constructive notes to maintain a healthy level of confidence. Evaluating the room as a stage manager has always been an assessment of what the actors need logistically, as opposed to assessing their needs creatively. Offering a paperclip and a highlighter feels like second nature to me, as opposed to telling talented people they are indeed talented. There was a far greater need for reassurance of the actors than I ever anticipated.

A fundamental element of this process was that the piece was a comedy rehearsed as a drama. We discussed early in the process that while there were comedic elements, we would strive for honesty in them. I personally do not believe that manufacturing comedy is a skill I possess, and it came as a great shock to me on opening night when the actors stated “people were laughing.” More importantly, I do think the piece’s style of writing calls for less manufactured moments of comedy. The moments of humor come from the honesty within the lines. I did not consciously shun any ideas of comedy throughout the process, but allowing the honest humor to surface was extremely beneficial. This was particularly evident on the night of the third performance, February 13th 2014. Many of the moments that had gotten laughs the previous two evenings did not on this night. While this was certainly due in part to different audiences having different energy, I believe it was also due to the actors playing the moments for the laughs rather than for the honesty. When the honesty returned, which it did quickly, the audience’s appreciation of the humor was restored as well.

Moving on from this point I can take this experience and apply it not only to my work as a director but also my work as a stage manager. The demands of a director are vastly different than it may appear from the outside, or even from the next seat over at the table. The pressure of the decision-making process comes more rapidly than I anticipated. I felt I had to immediately answer questions about design elements, perhaps without time to give them due consideration, and then I felt locked into the things I approved without the ability to rethink them. That is not to say I am unhappy with the results, but the opportunities for discussion seemed to fly by. Another huge pressure was

to keep the other people who are involved in the process happy, while simultaneously not allowing that concern to arrest forward momentum. This brings to mind a recent production I worked on, as a stage manager, in which a schedule change upset an actor to the point where he held the rest of the rehearsal hostage. Looking back at that moment now, I understand how difficult that decision was for the director to make, but also how necessary it was for us to move forward in the process.

Throughout this experience I have also learned valuable lessons that will aid me as an educator, particularly in stage management. There were many times where small things would fall through the cracks, or my management team would need reminders to complete a task. This definitely gave me a different perspective on times when I, as a stage manager, have taken a few days to complete a task not knowing that the director is waiting on me. This is an area where I could have been more helpful as a mentor to my stage manager, Tim. I wanted to have the experience of being a director and not having to manage these elements, but I also wanted Tim to feel the freedom to take ownership of the show and develop his own style. When a task was overlooked or took more time to complete than it should have, I avoided correcting the situation for fear of stepping on his toes. In hindsight, there were several opportunities that would have been helpful teaching moments I could have seized. Upon reflection, correcting a habit, explaining why management does something a certain way, or helping to find a more efficient way to execute a task would have only made our process easier and helped the artist in the long term, much more than focusing on protecting the boundaries of everyone's roles. In

the future, I will try to focus on taking advantage of those teaching opportunities in the moment.

This has been an eye-opening experience that has tested my limitations and challenged fears as an artist. I am undecided about pursuing directing long-term, but it has been an invaluable learning experience I can take with me and apply to every aspect of theatre in which I choose to work in the future.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A - *Father* by Frederick Mensch, Director's script

Appendix B - *Father* design images

Appendix C - *Father* publicity

Appendix D - Production poster

Appendix E - Production program

Appendix F - Production Photos

Appendix G - Tennessee William Literary Festival

APPENDIX A

Father by Frederick Mensch, Director's script

W90

"Father"

by
Frederick Mensch

"Father"

(A Chicago funeral home. Lights up on ROBERT SNOWDEN, 68, laid out in his best suit, his complexion waxy and perfectly still. After a beat, PETER SNOWDEN, 33, enters with his sister VICKI, 38. They're southern transplants and while Vicki's accent has all but disappeared over the years, Peter has nurtured his to the point of theatricality: he carries himself with a barely suppressed flamboyance. They study the body.)

Peter avoid's the
casket

PETER
Is that him? I honestly can't tell. I can't! I don't recognize him.

(He looks around.)

Where are the MOURNERS? Shouldn't there be weeping and gnashing (Biblical)
of teeth? ** show anger or dismay*

VICKI
Be nice.

PETER
Well, do YOU recognize him?

VICKI
Not really.

PETER
Maybe we've wandered into the funeral of a random stranger.

VICKI
Stop it. Don't turn this into one of your dramas.

PETER
Well, where IS everyone?

VICKI
I don't know, but that's him. That's our father.

PETER
How can you be so sure?

VICKI *> better*
Because there's nobody here.

(They both smirk.)

PETER
That's why I love you, Vicki. You're sincerely wicked.

VICKI

And you validate my worst qualities.

PETER

I know. You're welcome.

(He leans over the body, frowning.)

PETER (CONT'D)

Where do you suppose he got that suit? Salvation Army?

VICKI

Maybe. I'm not sure I've ever seen him in a suit.

PETER

Bobby's funeral, probably.

Bobby - older brother

VICKI

Yes, I suppose. I don't remember.

PETER

His hands are clean. That's a first.

Father - mechanic laborer

VICKI

That pinkie ring. I recognize that.

Must see ring

PETER

Oh, good Lord!

(He studies the ring.)

What's that symbol mean? Some sort of secret society?

VICKI

I don't know. *V-sit*

PETER

Maybe he's Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan. Maybe they'll - *P-sit* show up here. Maybe they'll ride up on their horses to bid farewell to their ruthless leader.

(Vicki looks around the empty room.)

VICKI

Maybe.

PETER

You have no imagination.

VICKI

I have a life instead.

PETER

Well, goody for you.

*peter
move
towards
body*

(He sticks out his tongue. Vicki checks her watch.)

VICKI

Good thing I rushed here from the airport.

PETER

Well, EXCUSE me! I assumed his new family would be here en masse.
(He gestures grandly.)
Children and grandchildren and nieces and nephews and brothers and sisters and friends, colleagues and clients! I thought we'd have to FIGHT for seats.

VICKI

Looks like we're in good shape.

mechanic - as much a joke as loved ones

(She says this dryly as she takes a seat, stretching out.)

VICKI (CONT'D)

Anyway, they're not his new family anymore, Peter. It's been ten years since Margaret left him, I think, at the very least. Maybe more.

PETER

Well, you'd think those children would be here, anyway, wouldn't you? Their own father!

VICKI

They probably feel the same way we do.

PETER

Yes, but we're HERE like the good children we are!

(He stands before the body looking mournful, pretending to greet visitors.)

PETER (CONT'D)

Thank you SO MUCH for coming! / Yes, it was quite a shock. / We're both simply devastated. / Our dear father! *must build*

VICKI

Knock it off.

←

PETER

I'm TRYING to process my grief.

VICKI

Do you think we should sign the guest book?

near entrance → not in room

PETER

Good heavens, no!

Why not?
VICKI

That'll look TERRIBLE if no one else shows up.
PETER

Well, who do you suppose gets that book, anyway? Who made these arrangements?
VICKI

I have no idea. Do you think we should call Mother?
PETER

Oh, she'll be in her glory. Early Christmas.
VICKI

I know! She'll want every pathetic detail. She'll crow about this for months.
PETER

It's sad, really.
VICKI

* This is what everyone's afraid of, isn't it? To die alone and un-
mourned.
PETER

I suppose so.
VICKI

What if he's not really dead?
PETER

What are you talking about?
VICKI

What if he's just lying there ... waiting? What if we go up to say our final goodbye and he jumps up and GRABS us by the throat?
PETER

Oh, Peter. That's macabre. — *disturbing and horrifying because of involvement with depiction of death & injury*
VICKI

But it's not beyond the realm of his treachery. One final terror for his children.
PETER

You've been living with Mother too long.
VICKI

Yes, I suppose I have.
PETER

(Vicki checks her watch.) Peter scowls.)

*phone?
 ↳ more insulting in front of coffin*

PETER (CONT'D)

Somewhere more important to be, Miss Vicki?

VICKI

I'm supposed to call Patty.

PETER

Oh, good heavens. What on earth for?

VICKI

She's my friend, Peter. We're going to have drinks.

*sober for 7
years*

PETER

Tonight?!

VICKI

Why not?

PETER

Your mourning your father, for one thing. And you're supposed to have dinner with Mother and me.

VICKI

Well, what time is that?

PETER

I don't know. We're making something in the crook pot. Where does she live now, anyway?

dinner doesn't matter

VICKI

Evergreen Park.

49 minutes from the funeral home

PETER

Oh, Good Lord! All the way down there?

falls & prone to traffic

VICKI

We're meeting half-way. What difference does it make, anyway?

PETER

Is she still with that black man?

whispers

VICKI

God, Peter, now you sound like Mother.

(Peter sticks out his tongue.)

PETER

Every time you come out here you've got a thousand appointments. Drinks with this one and dinner with that one. You avoid your family like the PLAGUE, I swear that you do. How do you think that makes Mother feel?

VICKI
Oh, she doesn't care. She loves to hear about my friends. You're the one who pouts.

PETER
Well, I'm making a special dessert! I don't want you all sloppy at dinner.

VICKI
I'm drinking Seven-Up, Peter. I've been sober for seven years.

PETER
So you say. *strike 1*

VICKI
Jesus! How can you say that to me?

PETER
Oh, let's not quarrel. I'm just a little out of sorts, I suppose, under the circumstances.

(He gestures to the body of their dead father. Vicki fumes.)

VICKI *first turn on P*
You know what you need, Peter?

PETER
Oh, this'll be good.

VICKI *move into Peter*
You need to grow up. Seriously. I can't believe you're whatever you are ... 33? ... and still living with Mother. It's pathetic.

PETER
She's needs me, Vicki. She's almost sixty-seven years old, you know. It's not the same as when you left.

VICKI
Oh, that's bullshit.

PETER
Do you have any idea how many pills she takes?

VICKI
What difference does that make?

PETER
She's VERY forgetful! If I wasn't there to remind her she'd NEVER take her medication. She'd fall over in a dead faint under who knows what terrible circumstances!

VICKI
So you remind her to take her pills? That's your contribution?

*since she was 30
left at 21, alcoholic 9 yrs
with husband*

PETER
Don't you make it sound like that! I buy the groceries and the cable and most of her clothing, too.

VICKI
When you're working.

PETER
Yes, when I'm working.

VICKI
How often is that?

PETER *stamed off Down Right*
Oh, shut your mouth! I got laid off. That's not my fault. I've been looking and looking for something new. Everybody says it's a terrible economy. You act all high and mighty but you're not even here to share the burden. You have no idea what I go through, Vicki. Mother is a very difficult woman.

VICKI
God, you don't think I know that? That's why I'm telling you to move out.

PETER *— move away*
I'm not like you, Vicki. I don't run away when somebody needs me.

VICKI
I didn't run away. My husband got transferred. Anyway, Mother never needed me a day in her life.

PETER
I'm not talking about Mother.

(~~Silence. Vicki gets the point.~~)

VICKI
You were seventeen when I left, Peter. I thought you'd be going off the college. I never dreamed you'd be home alone with Mother for the next fifty years.

PETER
I did go to college.

VICKI
For what? A year and a half?

PETER
Almost that. Anyway, I am gonna move out. I just need to save up my deposit and so forth. I found a place in the city that's just perfect. I'm gonna move there in the spring.

(Vicki rolls her eyes. She's heard this story a million times before. She checks her watch again.)

*Purse

VICKI
I should call home, let them know I got here safely. Charlie actually offered to come with me this time, can you believe that? He said he wanted to be here for me.

PETER

Oh, good heavens.

VICKI

I know. I told him I barely knew the man. I feel nothing.

(She walks over to the body and looks down.)

VICKI (CONT'D)

I thought I might feel something when I got here, but I really don't. Well, maybe I do. I don't know.

PETER

Probably indigestion.

VICKI

There was a time when I wanted his attention more than anything in the world. When he first left, my God. Do you remember that apartment he had? I'd go over there every day after school and run the vacuum, do up the dishes. I tried to make him dinner a couple times but he didn't come home. I didn't want him to feel guilty so I threw everything away and cleaned up again so he wouldn't even know.

vicki's
abuse

PETER

Did you really think he'd feel guilty?

VICKI

I know, I was stupid. Anyway, when that didn't work I tried to make him jealous by going off with boys. Thirteen years old. I didn't even know what I was doing but the boys were happy to show me.

PETER

I want every detail.

VICKI

(Smiling)

Shut up.

PETER

Leave nothing out!

awkward

VICKI

You're such a perv. I actually brought one boy back to the apartment so he'd catch us in the act. Not that act, you know, but making out. And he did. He came home from work, after the bar, and he caught us on the couch. I had my shirt off. He just looked at us and pretended we weren't even there. He went into the bedroom and passed out. I know he saw us, though, because the next day the lock was changed. I don't think he ever really looked at me after that. One time I went over there after school and waited for him in the hallway but he just stepped right past me, let himself into the apartment and closed the door.

PETER

What an asshole.

who is this for?

VICKI

You had it worse than me.

PETER

How can you say that, Vicki? I was his pretty little girl.

VICKI

Oh, God.

PETER

He loved nothing better than to dress me up in one of your pretty dresses.

VICKI

Peter -

PETER

No, I deserved it, Vicki. I did. Because of my crying and carrying on and because sometimes I'd walk in that way that everybody KNOWS is forbidden. What choice did he have?

VICKI

Mother should have done something.

PETER

Oh, what could she do?

VICKI

She should have left him instead of the other way around.

PETER

Well, wouldn't THAT have been something. Wouldn't that have changed history.

maybe?

stand

(He looks over at the body and suddenly gasps.)

PETER (CONT'D)

Vicki!

Peter's
abuse

What is it? **VICKI**

He's alive! **PETER** *honest*

What are you talking about? **VICKI**

I saw him breathe. **PETER**

You did not. **VICKI**

I did, too. **PETER**

Peter - **VICKI**

Look! **PETER**

(He points at the body. Vicki looks. No movement.)

You're freaking me out. **VICKI**

I swear I saw his chest move. **PETER**

You're imagining things. **VICKI**

I know what I saw! **PETER**

(He walks over to the coffin, leans down close the body.)

PETER (CONT'D)
We know you're in there, Daddy.

VICKI
Peter, stop it!

PETER
It's me, Daddy. It's your little girly boy. Look how I'm walking!

(He camps it up; twirling around the coffin.)

*lighten
the
mood*

PETER (CONT'D)

Whatcha gonna do about it, Daddy? Huh?

VICKI

Peter -

PETEROh, what are you afraid of, Vicki? If he's dead he can't hurt us, right?// If he's dead he'll never hurt us again.**VICKI**

I know. It's just -

IDEA!**PETER**

You know what we should do, Vicki?

VICKI

What?

PETER

We should slap his face.

VICKI

What?!

PETER

I'm serious. We should just go up there and -

*(He pantomimes a swift, backhanded slap across the face. Vicki laughs.)***VICKI**

You're awful.

** giggles *
enjoy this moment***PETER**

Wouldn't that be FUN, though?

*(He pantomimes pulling his father out of the coffin and shaking him by the lapel.)***PETER (CONT'D)**

Who's your girly boy now, Daddy?!

*offer to Vicki-coax**(Vicki gets into the act with a wicked elbow to the imaginary body.)***VICKI**

I want you to meet my boyfriend, Daddy. Mr. Elbow!

(They laugh as Peter throws the phantom body to the floor. They kick and stomp him riotously until they suddenly become aware of another presence in the room. They look up.)

(DAVID KENNEDY stands in ²⁴the doorway watching them uneasily. He's 23 years old but looks even younger in a dark, conservative, grown-up suit.)

DAVID Startles

Oh!

Excuse us!

PETER

VICKI

PETER

We were just having a little fun.

(David forces a smile.)

DAVID

Of course. Certainly.

VICKI

Please come in. RECOVER

(David steps into the room, glances quickly at the guest book, checks his watch.)

VICKI (CONT'D)

Were you a friend of my father's?

DAVID

No, I'm sorry. I'm David Kennedy. I work here at the funeral home.

approach Peter - thinks hes Larry
(He extends his hand to Vicki, and then to Peter.)

DAVID (CONT'D)

You must be Lawrence.

PETER

I must? I'm not, actually. I'm Peter.

DAVID

Oh, of course. Peter. I'm glad to meet you.

PETER

Who's Lawrence? (your 1/2 brother)

VICKI

(To Peter)

He must mean Larry.

PETER

Oh, Leisure Suit Larry!

(MORE)

video game
→ inside joke for peter

PETER (CONT'D)

(He turns to David.)

We're Father's original family. Not the sequel.

DAVID

That's great. I'm glad you could be here.

PETER

We wouldn't miss it for the world.

DAVID

Is there anything you need? Anything we can do for you? *his family business*

PETER

Did you say you work here at the funeral home?

DAVID

Yes, I'm David Kennedy. We have a lounge downstairs if you need anything. Coffee or a soft drink. Water. Things of that nature. *offer to both*

PETER

Thank you very much. I'm not sure how much longer we'll be here, under the circumstances. *X to chairs → dismiss*

(He indicates the empty room. David smiles uncomfortably.)

DAVID

Of course.

VICKI

(Quickly)

It's not like we're in a hurry or anything.

DAVID

No, I understand. #1

VICKI

I didn't introduce myself, did I? I'm Vicki. I'm Peter's sister.

DAVID

It's a pleasure to meet you.

VICKI

I hope you don't feel like we were being disrespectful before. I feel badly. We were joking around. We get silly sometimes.

DAVID

These are difficult circumstances. #1

VICKI

Yes, they are. Thank you for saying that. *honest*

Of course.

DAVID

You're probably busy, right? **VICKI** We're probably keeping you.

No, not at all. **DAVID** Actually - X to piano
(He checks his watch.)

came in to start
knows what time
it is

What is it? **VICKI**

I was going to suggest some hymns. **DAVID** DAMP programs
JOKO **VICKI**

What?

DAVID
At this point in the evening your father thought we might have
some hymns.

SERIOUS!

Our father? **VICKI**

Yes. **DAVID**

PETER
(Pointing)
That man? That man suggested some hymns? Are you sure?
turn

Yes. **DAVID**

That seems highly unlikely. **PETER**

Peter! He's not lying. He wouldn't make that up. **VICKI**

I didn't say he was lying. I think he misunderstood. **PETER**

VICKI
(To David:)
Our father wasn't a religious man. That's why we're surprised.

He was a virulent atheist! **PETER**

Peter, he was not.

He most certainly was!

You're exaggerating.

Well, you're delusional.

End it. (To David:) Our father wasn't a religious man. Let's just put it that way.

I understand. #2

Oh, stop saying that! You understand this. You understand that. How OLD are you, anyway?

Peter, that's none of your business.

It's just a question.

I'm twenty-four.

Please excuse my brother. He has no filter.

These are difficult circumstances. #2

Oh, good LORD!

Peter!

Well, these are NOT difficult circumstances, Vicki. These are wonderful circumstances! Magnificent circumstances! TRIUMPHANT circumstances! *build*

Oh, my God. Here we go. *shut out*

What? Now I can't even TALK?

VICKI
(Ignoring Peter, to David:)
 You're saying my father made these arrangements himself?

Knew he was dying

DAVID
 Yes.

VICKI
 You met with him?

DAVID
 Yes. Several times, actually.

PETER
Several times?! You met with our father several times?

DAVID
 Yes. We met once here before they sent him over to Mercy Care, and then a couple times over there.

PETER
 Our father was at Mercy Care? *[Dignity Care in IL]*
Long term illness hospice care

DAVID
 Yes. You didn't know that?

VICKI
(almost apologetic)
 We haven't seen our father in more than 20 years.

*Vicki
 17 years -
 4 years after
 his apartment*

DAVID
 Oh, I'm sorry.

PETER
We're not!

VICKI
 Peter!

PETER
 Well, we're not! I'm not, anyway.

VICKI
(to David:)
 What was he like? If you don't mind my asking?

DAVID
 Oh, he seemed nice, actually. He was very weak, but ... nice.

PETER
 I knew it! That is not our father!

VICKI
 What did you talk about?

DAVID
Well, this. I mean, the arrangements. The hymns he'd like sung,
and so forth.

VICKI
What hymns did he want sung?

DAVID
"Amazing Grace" was the one he mentioned.

redemption
PETER
Oh my God! The nerve!

VICKI
Peter -

PETER
It's just PREPOSTEROUS!

DAVID
He did say he'd come to his faith late in life. He did mention
that.

PETER
How convenient.

VICKI
Who did he expect to be here?

DAVID
Excuse me? *can't hear + kneel by Vicki*

VICKI
Who did he expect to be here? His family? I mean, his other
family?

DAVID
(Uncomfortable)
Yes, I think so.

PETER
What about US? Did he mention us?

DAVID
Yes, of course.

PETER
What did he say?

DAVID
Well, just that he had other children -

PETER
That's ALL?!

DAVID
 Mr. Snowden, I wish you could have seen him before he died.

PETER
 Well, I don't!

DAVID
 If you had just spoken with him -

PETER
 Oh, please!

DAVID
 It might have helped.

PETER
 Helped with WHAT?

DAVID
 Your grief//

PETER
 My GRIEF?!

VICKI
 Peter -

PETER
 Did you hear what this boy said to me, Vicki? My grief? My GRIEF?! What the hell does HE know about my grief??

VICKI
 Peter, he's just trying to be nice. Good Lord! Why do you have to be such a beast?

(She turns to David.)

VICKI (CONT'D)
 Please don't listen to him, okay? He just loves doing this. Oh, the drama!

(She extends her arms theatrically. Peter sticks out his tongue. David smiles uneasily.)

DAVID
 It's not a problem. I'll be in my office if you need anything -

VICKI
 Please don't go.

DAVID
 I shouldn't interfere.

DAVID approach
comfort

VICKI
 Peter, apologize. — *beaming mother*

PETER
 I will not!

DAVID
 There's really no need.

VICKI
(to David:)
 He was very rude.

PETER
 Well, I'm an emotional person, Vicki. I just can't help it!

VICKI
 Apologize, then!

PETER
 All right, fine! *UPstage*
(He turns to David.)

PETER (CONT'D)
 I'm sorry. I truly am. *You obviously didn't know what you were saying.*
BACK DOWNstage

VICKI
 Peter!

PETER
 Well, it's true. He didn't know Father even if he thinks he did. Whatever was left of him at the end was certainly not our father.

VICKI
 Why? Don't you think people can change? *Loaded*

PETER
 Certainly not.

VICKI
 Peter, they can! Of course they can! Look at me.

PETER
I am looking at you. *look at her*
Strike 2 (His words penetrate. Vicki glowers.)

VICKI
 Very funny.

PETER
I'm not trying to be funny. You think you're such an evolved creature now, but you're still going off for drinks with Patty Usterboski.

VICKI
So?

PETER
So, nothing. I'm just saying.

VICKI
Saying WHAT?

PETER
Whatever.

(Vicki turns to David in exasperation.)

VICKI
Do you have a little brother, Mr. Kennedy? Someone who can push all your buttons?

DAVID
No, I'm sorry, I don't.

PETER
What about a father? Do you have a father?

DAVID
Yes, of course.

PETER *recovery*
I knew it! You're one of THOSE Kennedys, aren't you! I can see it in your face. "My Fellow Americans."

DAVID
Flattered (smiling)
No, I'm afraid not. Different family. I'm one of the Kennedy-Ohler Kennedys.

VICKI
Oh, of course! Kennedy-Ohler Funeral Home. I never made the connection. *Lauterburg-ohler → arlington IL*

PETER
You're a mortuary magnate!

DAVID
That's one way to put it.

VICKI
Is your father alive?

DAVID
Yes, very much so.

PETER
And do you get along?

(David hesitates, slightly embarrassed.)

DAVID
He's probably my best friend. *honest*

VICKI
Oh, that's sweet.

PETER
Seriously?

DAVID
I know it sounds corny. He's just a great guy, though. He's always been there for me. Coaching my teams, helping with homework, teaching me about girls or whatever.

PETER
Oh, my!

DAVID
I know! It sounds funny. He'd usually have pretty good advice, though. When I was in college we'd always talk on Friday afternoons and then sometimes he'd just show up the next morning to take me to breakfast. That's like a three-hour drive but he'd hear something in my voice or whatever and he'd just jump in the car. I had this place near campus that I liked for breakfast so we'd just hang out and eat and then he'd drive back up to the city for a service that afternoon. He probably did that a dozen times.

*taken
with his
story
TMI*

PETER
And did he insist you follow in his footsteps? *Did Richard?*

DAVID
Excuse me?

PETER
The family business!

DAVID
Oh, no. Not at all.

PETER
So you chose this line of work? *as opposed to being unemployed*

VICKI
Peter!

PETER
What?

VICKI
That's rude.

PETER
Well, it's an UNUSUAL line of work, Vicki. That's all I'm saying.

DAVID
I saw the way my father did his job. The way he'd help people through their grief. He'd reach out if they needed that, or sometimes he'd just listen. And not just the client, you know? Not just the person who wrote the check. All the guests. He'd stand back there - right there - and if he saw someone having a hard time, someone struggling, he'd do something, whatever he could. Maybe just a cup of coffee or a question to get them talking. Most people won't even do that, though, you know? They'll turn away from those moments because they're just too awful. My father's not that way. He never turns away. He just makes this seem like such an honorable profession. *DAVID can't turn away.*

(He shrugs, somewhat embarrassed to have shared all this out loud. Vicki is touched. Peter, though, can't help himself: he makes another joke.)

PETER
Well! Your father and our father sound like peas in a pod!

VICKI
Peter, shut up.

PETER
What? Don't you think so, Mr. Kennedy? Like peas in a pod? I mean, since you knew our father so well? *MOVE towards casket.*

DAVID
Everybody's different, Mr. Snowden. Everybody has their own strengths and weaknesses. *Lands on Peter*

PETER
Oh, my. That's a good one.

DAVID
Your dad was really sick. He was scared. Those few times we met, he needed a friend. I trimmed his toe nails, and he ordered me ice cream from the cafeteria. It was no big deal, but he was nice to me, that's all I can say. I guess he wasn't that way with everyone. Sometimes people are like that. *only acknowledged by Vicki*

Peter connects to casket. can not touch body *(They look at the body in silence.)*

VICKI *OUT*
Did he really want us to sing "Amazing Grace"?

DAVID
I'm sure he thought there'd be more people.

PETER *Locked to body*
I can't do it.

VICKI
(Sadly)
Me, either.

DAVID
That's fine. Don't worry about it.

VICKI
Mr. Kennedy, do you think we're bad people? *breaks Peter's
trance*

DAVID
Not at all. Listen, I should let you have your time.

(He starts to leave but Vicki calls after him.)

VICKI
Mr. Kennedy?

DAVID
Yes?

VICKI
Is your father still working?

DAVID
Yes. We have a suburban location. He's out there now.

VICKI
He must be very proud of you.
all they wanted.
(David shrugs modestly.)

DAVID
I'll be in my office if you need anything. *allow them time*
(He exits. Vicki turns to Peter.)

VICKI
You were awful.

PETER
What? Me?

VICKI
Yes! You were so rude.

PETER
Well, at least I wasn't flirting.

VICKI
What are you talking about?!

PETER
(Mocking)
Oh, Mr. Kennedy, do you think we're bad people? Oh, Mr. Kennedy, your father must be very proud of you!

VICKI
Shut up!

PETER
I can see right through you, Vicki.

VICKI
Peter, I swear -

PETER
What? Are you gonna TELL on me? Go ahead! Daddy's right there! Go ahead and tell him.

VICKI
I'm not listening to you. *Vicki turns away*

Peter says to Vicki's back **PETER**
You want to pretend you've changed, Vicki, but you're the same ol' slutty girl you were as a teenager.

STRIKE 3
VICKI
Can't you ever be nice?

PETER
I'll tell you what, Vicki. I'll be nice if you'll be honest. Tell me the truth: do you really think our Father changed? That he came to faith "late in life"? *That* *from Vicki to father*

VICKI
I don't know.

PETER
Why couldn't you sing for him, then, Vicki? Why couldn't you sing him a hymn?

VICKI
I don't know!

PETER
Because you KNOW he was the same awful, hateful man he was when we were children. That's why.

VICKI
Shut up, Peter. Can't you just let it go? Who cares what he was then? He's dead now! Let's just move on.

PETER
Oh, yes, that's the answer! Move on! Let's just forget everything that's ever happened. Let's move to Denver and have babies.

VICKI
Oh, for Christ's sake.

PETER
What? Isn't that the answer, Miss Vicki? Aren't you just happy all the time now?

VICKI
Who do you think you're hurting, Peter? Me? Him?

(She points at the body.)

VICKI (CONT'D)
Does he look hurt to you? Is he weeping? Is your bitterness breaking his heart? ★

PETER
Well, I certainly hope so. Who is this for?

VICKI
I'm leaving. You can take the train.

PETER
What?!

VICKI
I've had enough.

PETER
I'm not taking the train.

VICKI
Then walk, for all I care! I can't believe I had to pick you up in the first place.

PETER
You said you wanted to.

VICKI
I did not.

PETER
Well, I thought we'd have a nice visit.

real resentment of Vicki

PUSH

rented a car

VICKI

Peter, you could have met me at the airport! Did you ever consider that? In the 17 years I've been coming back here you've never once met me at the airport.

PETER

Well, I hate that traffic.

VICKI

I do, too!

(They stare at each other. Peter turns away.)

PETER

Go then, if you're gonna go.

VICKI

I will.

(She digs the car keys from her purse.)

VICKI (CONT'D)

You know, Peter, I want you to be happy. I really do. Don't you ever want that for yourself? You can choose a different life, you know. Look around! I know things haven't always been easy for you, but you have so many choices now. You don't have to live this way.

Final Peter
(Her words hang in the air, full of meaning.)

PETER

Let's not talk about that.

VICKI

I'll see you at Mother's.

PETER

Fine.

(Vicki exits. Peter stews. He looks at his father's body. His eyes widen.)

PETER (CONT'D)

He's breathing! I know that he is!

(He walks up to the casket and leans down close to the body.)

PETER (CONT'D)

Father?

(A tense, ripe moment. Peter suddenly shudders, recoiling.)

PETER (CONT'D)

No! I won't let you do this to me!

*(He backhands the body, twisting his father's face in the casket.)***PETER (CONT'D)**There! It is finished. *mnical**(He turns away, calling after Vicki.)***PETER (CONT'D)**

Wait for me, Vicki! Wait!

*(He exits. The room is empty. After a long beat, David re-enters the room, looking around. He sees the body, the face turned in the casket.)***DAVID**

What happened here?

*(He walks up to the casket and straightens the body. After a moment, he starts to sing.)***DAVID (CONT'D)**

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
 That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found
Was blind, but now I see.

Peter
 Vicki
 Richard] once was
 lost

(He pauses self-consciously, looks around the empty room, and then slowly closes the casket. He exits. LIGHTS FADE.)

APPENDIX B

Father design images

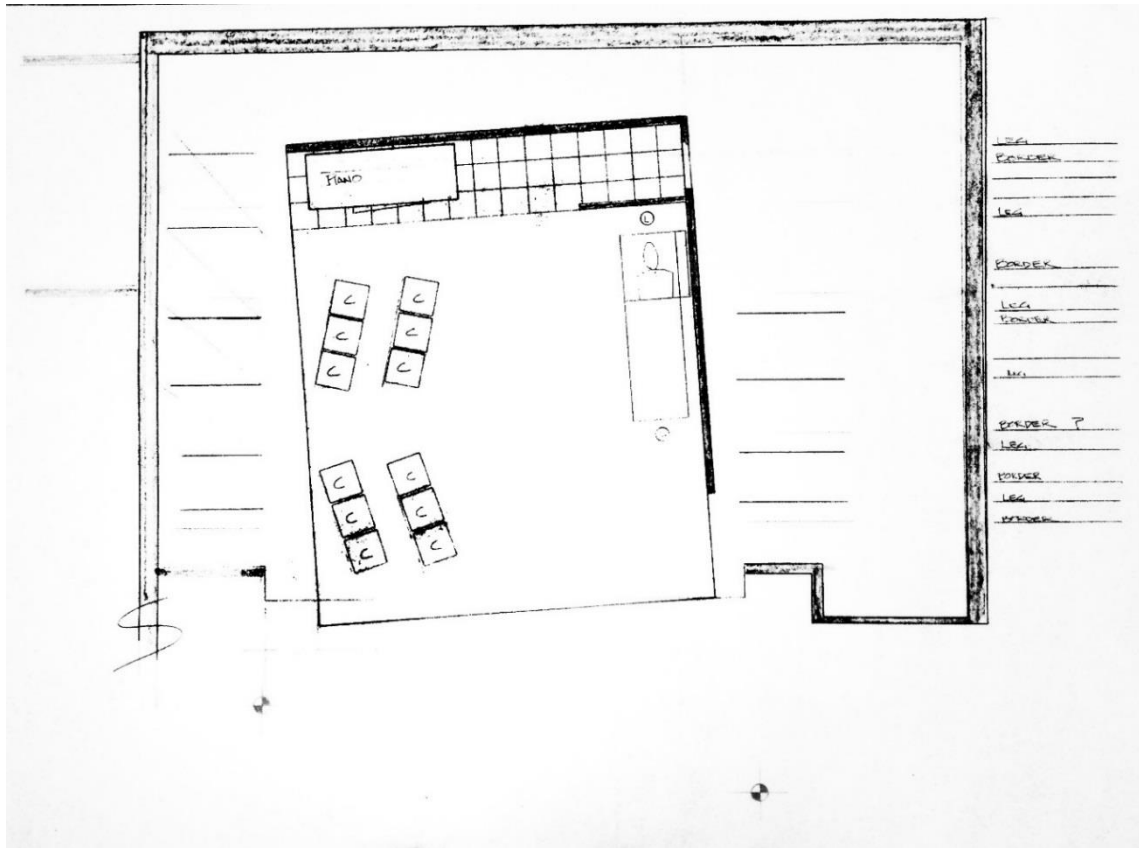
Father ground plan by K. Griffith

Father lighting plot by S. Tompkins

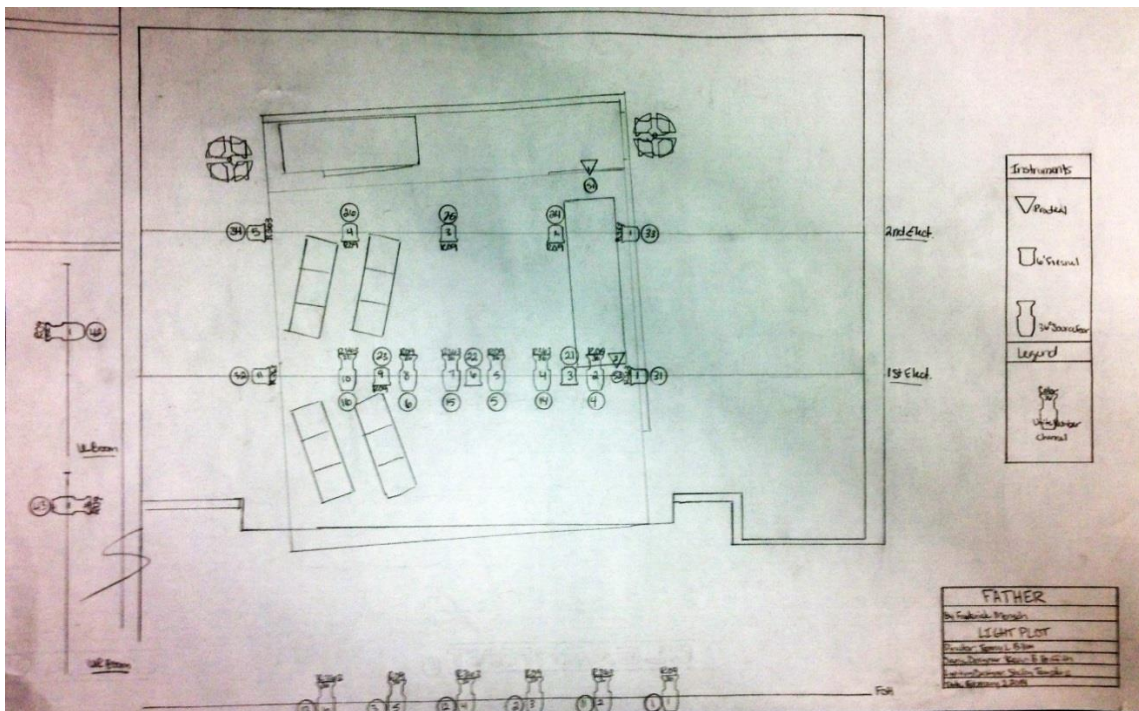
Father scenic model by K. Griffith

production design photos credited Liz Gore Photography

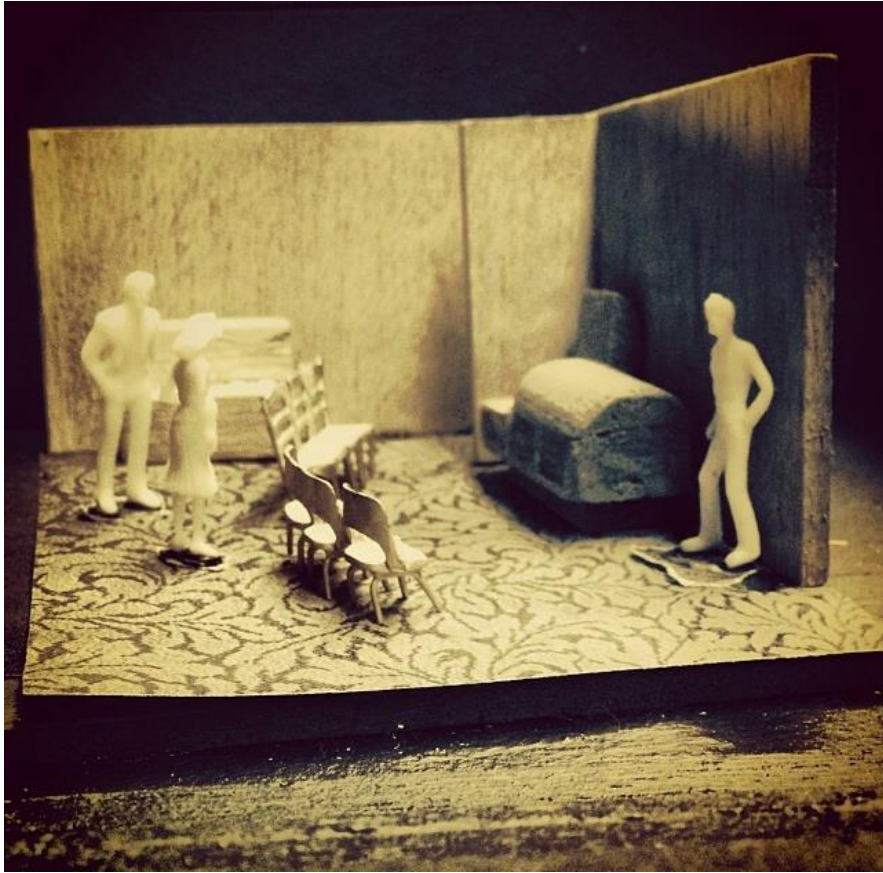
properties images



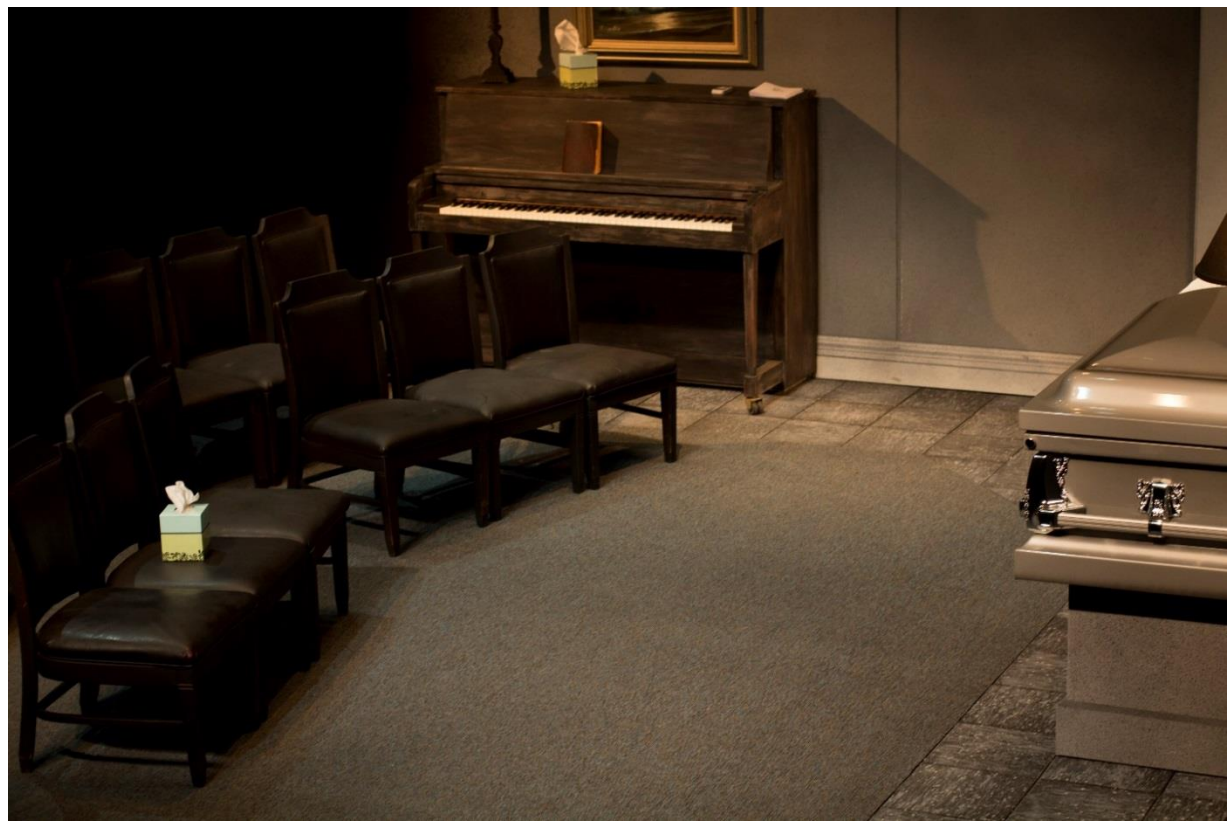
Father ground plan by K. Griffith



Father light plot by S. Tompkins



Father scenic model by K. Griffith



Production design photos credited Liz Gore Photography



Production design photos credited Liz Gore Photography



Father Properties images

Richard Snowden

Do not stand at my grave and weep: I
am not there. I do not sleep. I am a
thousand winds that blow. I am the
diamond glints on snow. I am the
sunlight on ripened grain, I am the
gentle autumn rain.

When you awaken in the morning's
hush, I am the swift uplifting rush Of
quiet birds in circled flight. I am the
soft stars that shine at night. Do not
stand at my grave and cry; I am not
there, I did not die.

Mary Frye, American poet (1904 - 2004)

In Loving Memory of
Richard Snowden



Sunrise
August 5, 1948

Sunset
October 3, 2014

FUNERAL SERVICE

Rev. Gary C. Caldwell- Officiating

Arrangements Entrusted to
Kennedy - Oehler Funeral Home
2000 East Northwest Highway, Arlington Heights, IL
60004 | 847-933-5423

Father Properties images

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found, Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas Grace that taught my heart to fear. And Grace, my fears
relieved. How precious did that Grace appear, The hour I first
believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come;
'Tis Grace that brought me safe thus far and Grace will lead me
home. The Lord has promised good to me. His word my hope
secures.

He will my shield and portion be, As long as life endures.
Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail, And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess within the veil, A life of joy and peace.

Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail, And mortal life shall cease;
I shall profess, within the veil, A life of joy and peace.

When we've been there ten thousand years Bright shining as the
sun. We've no less days to sing God's praise Than when we've first
began.

Chorus:

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found, Was blind, but now I see.

APPENDIX C

Father Publicity

press release

press photos

social media posts and images



THE UNIVERSITY of
NEW ORLEANS

DEPARTMENT OF
FILM AND THEATRE

January 30, 2014

Contact: Jenny Billot, Public Relations

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

280-7469; email: jbillot@uno.edu

Father

A new play by Frederick Mensch

Directed by Jenny L. Billot

February 11th – 15th at 7:30pm, Sunday, February 16th at 2:30pm

Lab Theatre, UNO Performing Arts Center

In FATHER, by Frederick Mensch, Peter Snowden and his older sister Vicki are the only mourners at the wake of their estranged and abusive father, Robert. They share memories of an unhappy childhood, but are forced to confront the possibility that their father may have changed his ways when they learn of his unlikely, late-in-life friendship with a young, amiable funeral home director, David Kennedy. An unsentimental family drama in the Tennessee Williams tradition, FATHER explores themes of redemption, forgiveness, and the possibility of change. FATHER is the 2013 winner of the Tennessee Williams One-Act Playwriting Competition.

Performances will take place in the Lab Theatre in the UNO Performing Arts Center, and will run February 11th through February 15th at 7:30pm, and Sunday February 16th at 2:30pm. FATHER is directed by Jenny L. Billot and features an all-student cast: David Brown, Meghan Shea, and Evan Eyer. This play also features the work of Kevin Griffith (Set Design); Tony French (Costume Design); Shelby Thompkins (Lighting Designer); Timothy Moseley (Stage Manager).

Ticket Prices:

\$5 General Admission

For Ticket and Information: 280-SHOW (7469) or www.theatre.uno.edu



Photos sent with the official press release



The image used for the Theatre UNO Facebook cover



A social media post made days before opening



A social media post made during the rehearsal process



A social media post made at the production's close.

APPENDIX D

production poster

Theatre UNO Presents

winner of the 2013 Tennessee Williams One-Act Playwriting Competition

Father

By Frederick Mensch

Directed by Jenny L. Billot

The University of New Orleans

February 11th- 15th at 7:30

February 16th at 2:30

in the Lab Theatre

general admission tickets \$5

Call 280-SHOW for Reservations

"Everybody has their own strengths and weaknesses."

APPENDIX E

production program



THE UNIVERSITY *of*
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FILM AND THEATRE



THE UNIVERSITY of
NEW ORLEANS

DEPARTMENT OF FILM AND THEATRE

Theatre UNO

2013- 2014 Season

A Truckload of Ink (World Premiere).....Sept. 4- 21

by Jim Fitzmorris

Robert E. Nims Theatre

A NOLA Project Production hosted by Theatre UNO

Album.....Oct. 8-13

by David Rimmer

Lab Theatre

Produced by The UNO Lakefront Players

Parcival Worthy(World Premiere).....Nov. 19-24

by Mark Medoff

Robert E. Nims Theatre

Father(World Premiere).....Feb. 11-16

by Fredrick Mensch

Lab Theatre

Tennessee Williams Festival 2013 One Act Play Winner

To Kill a Mockingbird.....March 25-30

by Harper Lee

Robert E. Nims Theatre

Rx.....April 29- May 4

by Kate Fodor

Lab Theatre

For more information

280- SHOW (7469)

Theatre UNO
proudly presents

Father

by Frederick Mensch
Directed by Jenny L. Billot

Scene Design
Kevin Griffith

Costume Design
Tony French

Lighting Design
Shelby Tompkins

Sound Engineer
Peter Smith

Stage Manager
Timothy Moseley

February 11-16, 2014
Lab Theatre
UNO Performing Arts Center

Winner of the 2013 Tennessee William
One-Act Play Competition

Thank you for Coming & Enjoy the Show!!

Father Cast

Peter Evan Eyer

Vicki..... Meghan Shea

David..... David Brown

Richard Scott Lytell

Father CAST

Meghan Rose Shea (Vicki) is proud to be a part of *Father*. Some of her favorite projects have been the off-broadway production of *Awesome 80's Prom*, playing Mother in *Ragtime*, and Directing *Godspell*. For the past few years Meghan has worked as a theatre teacher for the Talented Arts Program in St. Tammany Parish. There, she was able to direct and teach by day and act by night. She thanks Jenny for this morbidly fun experience.

Evan Eyer (Peter) is a Junior, Film option student at the University of New Orleans. He was recently seen on the stage as the Merchant in *The Taming of the Shrew* last Spring. He is happy to return to the UNO stage, and thanks you for coming.

Scott Lytell (Richard) is a native of New Orleans. He has just recently returned to theatre after a long hiatus. Scott has a very diverse background. He has worked as an elementary school teacher, as a wildland firefighter and as an EMT. Scott will also be in UNO's upcoming production of *To Kill A Mockingbird*.

Father

CAST CONTINUED

David Brown (David) started acting 5 years ago after obtaining an undergraduate degree in Korean. He pursued acting as a hobby while climbing the corporate ladder. In 2013 he returned to school to pursue a graduate degree in acting. He has acted in film, theatre, and comedic improvisation nationwide. He is a husband, an athlete, a father, a comedian, a student, a gamer, and a performer.

Father Production Team

Director Jenny L. Billot+
Stage Manager..... Timothy Moseley
Technical Director Diane Baas
Scenic Design.....Kevin Griffith
Costume DesignTony French
Lighting Design.....Shelby Tompkins
Sound Engineer Peter Smith
Master ElectricianJosh Courtney
Fight Choreographer Erick Wolfe
Light Board Operator Joseph Jacobson
Box Office Maria Hinterkoerner
House ManagerKen Halhober
Publicity.....Jenny L. Billot
Set Crew FTCA Theatre Practicum
..... Technical Production Students

+ This production serves as partial completion of the MFA in Directing

Father

PRODUCTION TEAM

Shelby Tompkins (Light Design) is a theatre option student at UNO. She is also the Treasurer of the Lakefront Players. This is the first Theatre UNO show she has worked on and she's super excited to be designing for the first time. She would like to thank Jenny for giving her this opportunity, Diane for helping her through it all, and everyone else in the cast and crew for being totally awesome.

Jenny L. Billot (Director) is a third year graduate student seeking her MFA in theatre. Having stage managed for years this show marks her Theatre UNO directorial debut. Jenny would like to thank her amazing cast and crew for such a great experience and her family for their continuous support.

Diane K Baas (Technical Director) is the Technical Director and Lighting Design faculty for the Film and Theatre Department at UNO. Professionally she has designed lights for numerous productions around New Orleans and the country. She has also participated in numerous capacities in the creation of new works in Pennsylvania and Washington state. She's very excited to be a part of creating new work closer to home and with the students at UNO.

Tony French (Costume Design) is a professor and costume designer at the University of New Orleans. He has designed numerous productions at UNO, including many original plays. He has worked with Southern Rep, The Shakespeare Festival at Tulane, Actor's Theatre of Louisville, The Old Globe Theatre, and The Cincinnati Playhouse.

Father

PRODUCTION TEAM CONTINUED

Timothy Moseley (Stage Manager) is making his Theatre UNO Stage Managing debut. He's a Senior, Theater major and has worked with the Theater off and on for the past three years. He's looking forward to his last year and is excited for this great show.

SPECIAL THANKS

The company of *Father* would like to thank several people who made this production possible.

Llew Evans

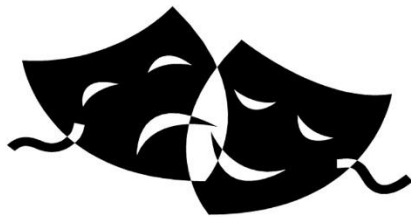
Liz Skinner-Gore

Caleigh Keith

Steve McDonald

Mike Harkins

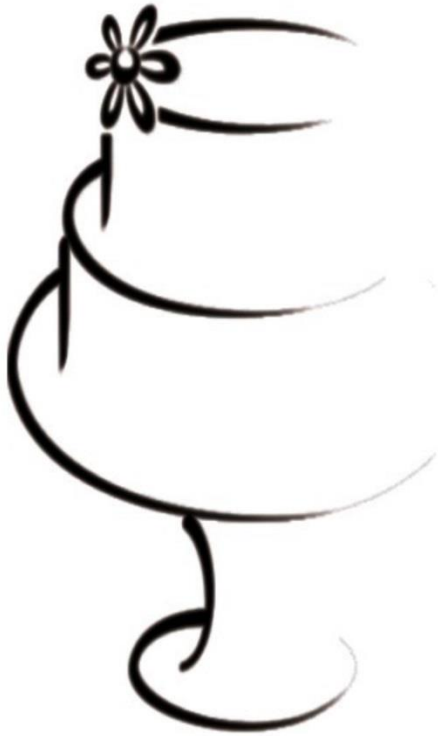
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The University of New Orleans Department of Film & Theatre Arts is proud to be an accredited member of the National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST).

NAST, founded in 1965, is an organization of higher education institutions (colleges, universities and conservatories). There are approximately 150 accredited institutional members. It establishes national standards for undergraduate and graduate degrees and other credentials.

UNO was first accredited by NAST in 2000. We continue to be the only NAST accredited program in the New Orleans metropolitan area.

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Sarah Beth James
Andrea Kuehnel

Samuel Malone
Venita Matthews
John Neisler
Megan Shea
Jared Stanton
Jessica Voelker

UNO Lakefront Players

President Kayln Hepting
Vice-President Jenny L. Billot
Treasurer Shelby Thompkins
Secretary Sarah Chatelain



custom lifestyle photographer
happiness is my business

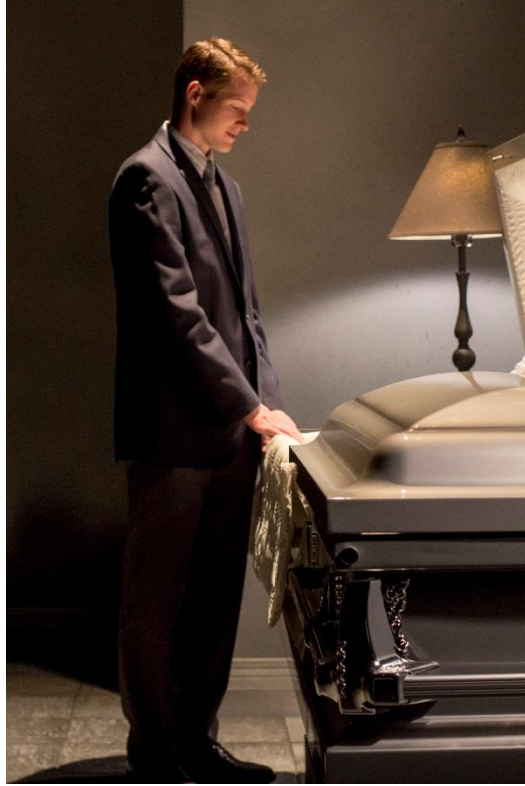


babies • couples • events
families • maternity • portraits



APPENDIX F

production photos















APPENDIX G

Tennessee Williams Literary Festival

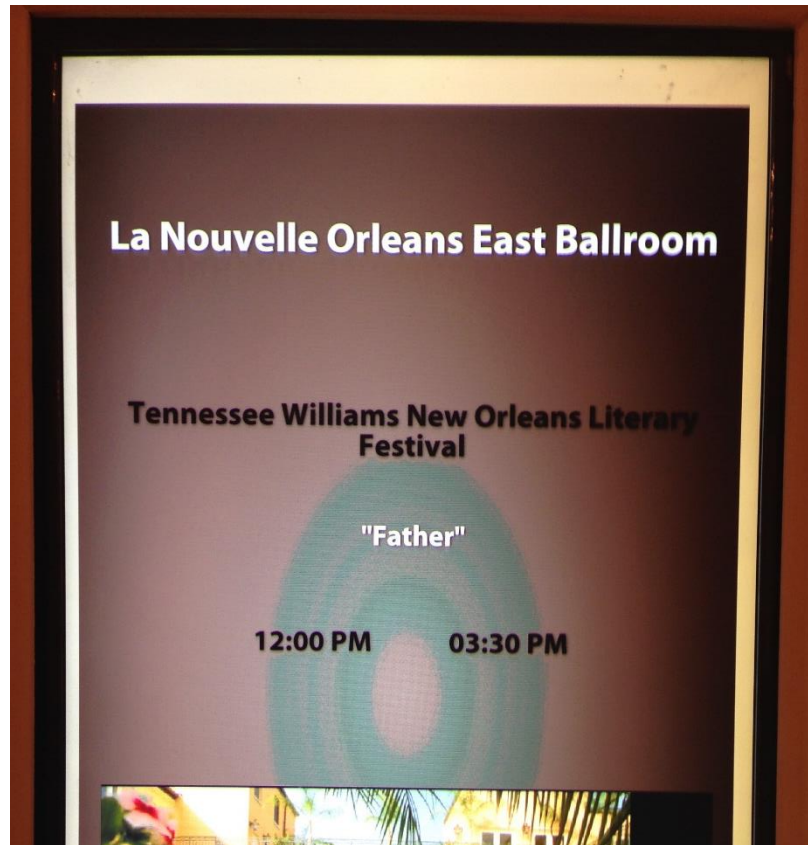
social media posts

production photos



Images used for social media during the remount for the Tennessee Williams Literary Festival





Father at the Tennessee Williams Literary Festival performance in the Hotel Monteleone





VITA

Jennifer Billot was born to Cristobal and Susan Billot in Hammond, Louisiana on May 19, 1982. She graduated from St. Charles Catholic High School in May of 2000. She next attended The University of New Orleans where her education in theatre began. She received her bachelor of arts in Film, Theatre, and Communication arts, in May of 2006 from The University of New Orleans. Jennifer entered graduate school at the University of New Orleans in the fall of 2011, and began working toward her MFA in Theatre Performance and Directing. Jennifer will graduate from the University of New Orleans in May 2014.