

ABSTRACT

CREATING NEW REPRESENTATIONS OF DISABILITIES IN THEATRE

by Dashanyua Sharonda Robinson

This is a creative thesis in playwriting. By re-examining works by well-known, abled-bodied playwrights such as Tennessee Williams, this thesis inspects how people with disabilities (PWDs) have been portrayed on stage throughout theatre history. This thesis exposes the negative image of PWDs on stage, while arguing that the reasoning for these negative representations is due to the lack of education about PWDs. Demanding that a new representation be made, the purpose of this thesis is to encourage new playwrights to break the cycle and end the negative images of PWDs on stage. Using my own play, *Puzzles*, which focuses on Autism, this thesis shows how a play can be used as an educational tool to break stereotypes and create a work of art where PWDs are not portrayed as villains.

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Introduction

A little girl anxiously waits in the principal's office in her tan slacks and navy blue uniform shirt. She is wide eyed and scared as she watches the principal talk to an unknown female authority figure. As their conversation comes to an end the unknown female, tells the girl that she will be taking her and her brothers home. The three children load into the car, and drive away. The little girl knew something was wrong, the car ride was too long, but she said nothing. Finally the car stopped some place downtown where all the houses are three stories. The female ushers the children out of the car and walks up to house number 354. The female knocks, the door swings open and the little girl's ears are instantly filled with the sound of children screaming and playing. Inside, the siblings squeeze each other's hands while the female talks with the person in charge. When they are done talking the female walks to the sibling and explains to them that this house would be their new home until the day their mother was able to take care of them. That day never came and that little girl faced separation from her brothers and a string of undesirable foster homes.

This is the first time that story is being told, without me writing it no one would ever know. If you haven't already guessed that little girl was me. So what is the point of me opening my Master's thesis with this story myself? My thesis is playwriting, and to me a playwright is not just someone who writes plays; to me a playwright is an individual who writes stories and dialogue that would otherwise go untold. The interesting thing about playwrights is, in most cases their playwriting voice come from their own experience, surroundings and ideologies. One of my favorite playwrights is Eugene O'Neill. I identify myself as being a feminist, and even though O'Neill's portrayal of women are problematic I still find his work to be inspirational and intriguing. That to me is a good playwright, someone that you don't complete agree with yet you appreciate the way in which he or she tells a story. I look up to O'Neill because he shows that a writer is always a part of his/her own work. For example my favorite play by O'Neill is *A Long Day's Journey into Night* which is said to be an autobiography of his life. I want to write a play that I see something of myself in each of the characters, because if I can identify with one of the characters then hopefully someone in the audience can too.

This thesis is about writing a play about a subject with which I have both a distant and close relationship. This is how I came up with the idea behind *Puzzles*- a one act play about four

individuals with autism, showcasing an important day in their lives. Where did *Puzzles* come from? In my years of being a foster child, I developed a negative image on life and began to act out. When the foster system could not “tame” me, they decided to “teach me a lesson” and give me community service. My service involved working with children with autism. This was done to show me that “my life could be worse.” Authorities sent me to do my services for a place called Elywn. Alfred Elwyn founded Elwyn in 1852 with the hopes to change care of adolescents with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Located in Media/Elwyn Pennsylvania, what started as a small school for only 26 students has developed into a varied, human services program helping individuals with a broad variety of intellectual, physical, behavioral and developmental disabilities.¹ I did my community service at Elwyn in a division called T-Camp (a therapeutic camp for individuals with autism). I enjoyed working and learning from the children so much that I applied for a position and have now been working for Elwyn for the past eight years of my life. However, even though I have been working in this field for almost a decade, autism is such a mysterious disability to leave undefined and I am still learning about it.

What is autism? According to *The National Library of Medicine*, autism is, “a developmental disorder that typically appears in the first three years of life, and affects the brain’s normal development of social and communication skills.” Autism Spectrum Disorder (commonly known as Autism) is a brain development disorder with complex variations that are still being defined today.² The word autism has been around for a little over 40 years and has recently spiked within the past decade. According to Autism Speaks, an organization devoted to spread autism awareness, 1 in 88 children are diagnosed every year. The diagnoses is commonly found in males.³ Even with that definition, it is still hard to understand autism because it’s such a complex disability. This brings me to the problem, even though I have great intentions for *Puzzles* my work could be considered problematic because I am an abled-body person writing about individuals with autism. With autism being so mysterious how could I, a new playwright, write about a subject that even the best doctors cannot completely understand?

The first chapter divided into three parts. The first is a historical and theoretical analysis of the representation of disabilities in theatre in regards to well-known works. It is at this point that I introduce my thesis question. I follow up with a brief yet important summary of three recent plays that further shape my question. These recent plays deal directly with autism. The second chapter is my creative chapter that contains the script of *Puzzles* as well as my personal

journal in relation to the play that I kept during the production process. I finish my thesis with answering my question and offering additional questions which exposes the gaps that still need to be filled for a complete discourse. A final thought on the future of *Puzzles* concludes the thesis.

NOTES

¹ Elwyn. "Elwyn Has Been Providing Services to People with Special Needs for 160 Years." Elwyn. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Nov. 2013.

² Pub Med Health. "Autism." NCBI. U.S. National Library of Medicine, n.d. Web. 21 Nov. 2013.

³ Autism, Speaks. "What Is Autism?" Autism Speaks. N.p., n.d. Web. 03 Nov. 2013.

Curing the Representation of Disabilities in Theatre

The disabled person in film [and theatre] is a stereotyping device that manages to convey narrational meanings economically and emphatically.¹

-Petra Kupper

the only true disability is a crushed spirit; a spirit that's been crushed doesn't have hope, it doesn't see beauty, it no longer has our natural child-like curiosity and our innate ability to imagine.²

- Aimee Mullins

Disability happens around us more often than we generally realize or care to notice, and we harbor unspoken anxiety about the possibilities of disablement, to us or someone close to us. What we fear, we often stigmatize and shun and sometimes seek to destroy.³

-Paul K Longmore

In November 2014 The Oxford Community Art Center opened its doors for the world premiere of *Puzzles*, a one act play I wrote dealing with autism. When I first started writing *Puzzles* (2012), I was primarily focused on spreading awareness about autism spectrum disorder (ASD). It was not until I took a disability studies course in the spring of 2014 that my focus changed. At that time I saw the “circus” being made of individuals with disabilities. My focus on the second draft of *Puzzles* (2013) was to create an “accurate” representation of autism on stage. This immediately became problematic. How could I, an abled-bodied woman, write an “accurate” representation of a “disability” that I do not have? Even if I had said disability how could I create something “accurate” on a disability as complex as ASD? I started to read other plays that dealt with autism to understand the “do's and don'ts.” Due to lack of knowledge on the

subject, unfortunately there are very few plays published about autism. Therefore, in order to increase understanding and foster a better representation, I must take a look at the representation of disabilities in general. I have found that most plays fall under four stereotypical categories of disability. Thus the first portion of this chapter will explore those four stereotypes through plays and scholarly works. The second portion will be aimed at finding and stating my thesis question. In this chapter I will use people first language- putting the person before the disability and staying away from terms that can cause negative and sometimes hurtful implications. According to my disability studies professor, Dr Kathy McMahon-Klosterman, “You wouldn’t call someone with cancer a ‘cancer person’ would you?”

Part 1: Three Commonly used Stereotypes of Disabilities

After reading several plays about people with disabilities (PWDs), I have realized that most of the characters in these plays fall into one of four categories: pitiful, evil, innocent, or violent. In this section I will go into a detailed analysis of at least one play for each category borrowing words from scholars to further engage in the discussion of disability studies as it relates to theatre.

Disability as the Object of Pity

This category is commonly associated with but not limited to an illness or disease. First I would like to start with a well-known play, Tennessee Williams’ *The Glass Menagerie* and more specifically the character of Laura. Williams writes the following character description,

A childhood illness has left her crippled, one leg slightly shorter than the other, and held in a brace. This defect need not to be more than suggested on stage. Stemming from this, Laura's separation increases till she is a like a piece of her own glass collection, too exquisitely fragile to move from the shelf.⁴

Williams’ states, “This defect need not be more than suggested on stage,” meaning her “defect” is very slight and hardly noticeable. As the readers familiarize themselves with Laura’s personality, they begin to understand that she is shy. Therefore, another reading of Williams’ statement can be read as Laura’s personality is not due to her “defect.” However if that is the case, what does the audience take from this? We see a fragile woman, now throw in a limp and we find ourselves saying “poor thing.” It is hard to view Laura’s fragility as solely a personality

trait. Society assumes that PWDs' sadness, shyness and/or weakness is directly connected to his/her disability. Therefore the reason we perceive Laura as broken/fragile is due to the fact that society correlates a limp as an inability to be whole. Although this assumption is ludicrous, this is what society has taught us and Williams only adds to the misinformation. Laura is written with these assumptions. Her fear of being heard when she has on braces forms her shyness. Let us examine a passage from the script:

JIM: You know I have an Idea that I've seen you before... Didn't we have a class together or something together?

LAURA: It was- singing- Chorus... Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

JIM: Now I remember- you always came in late.

LAURA: Yes, it was hard for me, getting upstairs. I had that brace on my leg- It clumped so loud!

JIM: I never heard any clumping.

LAURA [*wincing at the recollection*]: To me it sounded like- thunder!⁵

Laura shyness directly stems from her young adulthood experiences. She is unable to make it to class on time like the rest of her peers. On top of being late, her presence is announced thanks to the sounds of her braces. We must question, is Jim telling the truth when he states that he never heard Laura's clumping? I think that Jim is playing the role of the "gentlemen caller." Nevertheless if we must play into the text and believe that he is telling the truth, then where does that bring us? It brings us to another problem with the script. Not only is Laura the object of pity for the audience she is also an image of self-pity. Andy Kempe a Professor of Drama Education at the University of Reading, UK states, "If the only way we came to know anything about [PWDs] was through the way they are represented in plays, what would we know?"⁶ From this excerpt the audience insinuates that PWDs pity themselves, which in turn makes it acceptable for people without disabilities (PWODs) to pity them. PWODs view the world as they want, therefore being in a constant state of denial. For instance, for every disability there is a research team looking for a cure. We currently live in a society where PWODs are under the assumption that PWDs want to be cured. We sit in the doctor's office hearing our loved ones and sometime our own diagnosis, these conversations typically end with the doctor saying, "We'll do everything in our power to fix this." This response indicates that there was something broken in

the first place. In Williams' play no one is truly trying "to fix Laura," but more so, they are denying her disability altogether. Here is a conversation between Laura and Amanda, Laura is about to admit to her mother that she thinks it is unlikely for her to get married.

LAURA [*in a tone of frightened apology*]: I'm- crippled!

AMANDA: Nonsense! Laura, I've told you never, never to use that word. Why, you're not crippled, you just have a little defect... When people have some slight disadvantage like that, they cultivate other things to make up for it- develop charm... That's all you have to do!⁷

At first glance this could be seen like a mother encouraging her daughter to see the best in herself. However upon closer examination the reader sees that Laura, although she thinks negatively about it, accepts her disability. Amanda unintentionally encourages the negative image behind disabilities by telling her daughter to deny its existence and to mask it with something "better" such as "charm". In her thesis *Freak Out: The Representation of Disabilities* Emma MacLean states:

The unfamiliar land of disability is familiarized through character journeys that culminate in getting "better." Although the impaired character starts different, he or she is constantly working toward an able-bodied ideal.⁸

The able-bodied idea here is that men only want women that are "perfect" Laura could not possibly get married to a decent man if she embraces her disability. Sadly this is the one thing upon which both Amanda and Laura agree. The able-bodied ideal is similarly related to the notion that the majority group, able-bodied white men, know what is best for the "minorities." The same thing happens later in the play when Laura is on her "date" with Jim and she seems to be nervous. Jim says "Somebody needs to build your confidence up and make you proud instead of shy..."⁹ Jim creates an able-bodied ideal, assuming that the only way for Laura to have confidence is if PWDs give it to her. Throughout the script we pity Laura and fear becoming her. That fear eventually can turn into creating PWDs into monsters which brings me to my next category.

Disability as Sinister or Evil

With help from Disney movies, our society is subjected to negative images of PWDs in early childhood. At a young age, we begin to associate a hooked-hand, pegged-leg, and a hunched-back as mediated signs of evil. Most people are familiar with J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* and Disney's adaptations. Those iconic green tights remind us that our inner child is somewhere inside of us waiting to be released. Yes, I am guilty of being one of the many people that at one point wished that Peter would come and take me away from my troubles. After watching a recent adaptation of *Peter Pan* at Miami University, I started to get a sense of nostalgia remembering the days when I played pirates with my brothers. During these games there was one character no one ever wanted to be, Captain Hook. Why would anyone want to be the (handicapped) villain? Yes, in a play where a boy convinces children to fly away from their homes, the man with the hooked-hand is considered the villain. Captain Hook is named after his disability. In fact, in many adaptations we never learn what Hook's name was prior to losing his hand. Therefore, Hook has no true identity and he must live out his days only being remembered by his disability. In the play, Hook is used as a punching bag. As an audience member we bet against him and welcome with open arms Hook's inevitable demise. The late Paul Longmore, creator of the Longmore Institute on Disabilities states:

Giving disabilities to villainous characters reflects and reinforces, albeit in exaggerated fashion, three common prejudices against handicapped people; disability is a punishment for evil; disabled people are embittered by their "fate;" disabled people resent the nondisabled and would, if they could, destroy them.¹⁰

All three of these prejudices can be found in Barrie's play. From reading the excerpt below, we know it was Pan who cut off Hook's hand.

CAPTAIN HOOK: Shiver me timbers, Smee! I can't sleep. I can't eat. I won't rest until I find Peter Pan. Just look what he did to me! (Holds up arm with hook.)

SMEE: A terrible, terrible thing, Captain. Chopping off your arm!

CAPTAIN HOOK: And feeding it to a crocodile. That slithering reptile likes the taste of me! He follows me wherever I go just hoping to get a nibble!¹¹

It is never revealed why Pan chopped off his hand. From all the stories that Pan tell Wendy, one can assume that Pan made the Hook an amputee because Hook did something "evil to "deserve"

it. Therefore Hook can also be categorized in a later section of this chapter, disabilities used as punishment. Longmore's next prejudice "[PWDs] are embittered by their 'fate'" is also prevalent in Barrie's play. From the above excerpt it seems as if the Captain is in distress. He cannot do the things he did prior to losing his hand. Hook states, "Look at what he did to me" as if he finds himself monstrous. Smee responds by calling it "a terrible thing" which only reinserts the pity that Hook already feels. It is at this moment that the audience might pity Hook, because we sympathize with his inability to be what we perceive as "normal."

CAPTAIN HOOK: ... tell us where Peter Pan is!

WENDY: Never!

CAPTAIN HOOK: Tell me where Peter Pan is!

ALL LOST BOYS & MICHAEL & JOHN: Never!

CAPTAIN HOOK: Very well, then! Prepare the plank!

Wendy, you're first!¹²

This excerpt feeds into Longmore's last prejudice "[PWDs] resent the nondisabled and would, if they could, destroy them." Hook cannot accept his disability, he wants to get revenge for the "damage" Pan caused him. One can argue that Hook's anger is just. However the problem stems from the message the audience receives. Hook not only wants revenge on Pan, he also seeks to destroy everyone else. Hence we see a battle between PWODs and PWDS, a battle that almost always ends with the demise of PWDs. Which brings me to a prejudice I want add to Longmore's list, PWDs can never be the hero or win. Barrie wrote:

CAPTAIN HOOK: No, not the Crocodile! This bad form, Peter Pan. Bad form indeed! (CROCODILE moves a little faster this time. Perhaps the smell of CAPTAIN HOOK has sharpened his appetite. CAPTAIN HOOK moans and tries to escape by climbing on the plank. CROCODILE drools below him.)¹³

This excerpt comes directly after Pan has defeated Hook. Not only does Hook lose, in this moment it would seem that he is also about to lose his life. Even still we find ourselves cheering for Pan, after all society teaches us that a disabled life is not worth living anyway. That is

precisely what this play is teaching millions of unsuspecting innocent children. Speaking of innocence let move on to the third stereotype.

Disability as a Source of Innocence

This category is typically associated with intellectual disabilities. (There are numerous plays that fall under this category however I will focus on one play that I feel guilty to admit is a personal favorite of mine; nonetheless I will treat it as I have the previous scripts). The play that fits into this category is Judith Thompson's *The Crackwalker*. Unlike the other plays in this chapter, *The Crackwalker* is not afraid to admit that the character has a disability. The character description reads,

Theresa is sexy, seductive, and mentally challenged. She turns tricks at \$5, is addicted to Tim Hortons' doughnuts, lies without thinking, and overflows with endless kindness, but she continues to hold on to her limitless innocence.¹⁴

When I think of the word innocence I immediately think of a child, full of naivety. The playwright's description describes Theresa's innocence as being "limitless," meaning Theresa is in a constant state of childhood in which Thompson does not allow her to escape. Throughout the play Theresa is treated like a child. She is told what and when to do things and like a defiant child she rarely listens. Thompson furthers the idea of Theresa's childlike qualities by writing all of Theresa's dialogue phonetically as if a child was trying to pronounce words.

THERESA I hope you don't want no babies. Not sposda have none... The sosha worker say I gotta get my tubes tied.

ALAN What's that?

THERESA They tie it up down there so ya won't go having no babies

ALAN They can't do that to you no way!

THERESA I know they can't but they doing it anyway.

ALAN They don't have no right.

THERESA Yah they do Al I slow.¹⁵

We need to examine why Theresa thinks she cannot have a baby. She doesn't believe that she should have children because someone has deemed her “unfit” for motherhood. The more troubling matter is the realization and self-awareness that Theresa has when she realizes that she cannot have children because she is "slow". I return to the notion of Theresa being childlike. She absorbs information like a sponge. Without being told, Theresa is able to link the reasoning for her social workers command (to not have children) to her disability. This proves that Theresa has intellectual intelligence however, there is nowhere in the play where Theresa or the other characters acknowledge it. The other characters only dwell on Theresa's disability. Even Allen who claims to love Theresa calls her a “retard” when he is unable to use her to hide his questionable sexuality. The social worker's demand for Theresa to get “her tubes tied,” due to Theresa's disability, unintentionally promotes the idea of sterilization.

Due to lack of understanding of genetics, the belief that sterilization was necessary to prevent “genetic transmission of mental retardation”¹⁶

Theresa never goes through with getting her tubes tied and she and Alan eventually have the baby. When first reading this play I was excited that Theresa could get her happy ending but like most plays, PWDs never truly get a happy ending.

ALAN: My little Danny boy baby. Come on.! Shhhh! [On the last shhh, he squeezes the babies neck till it dies. He Looks at Theresa who is watching him wonder]¹⁷ 65

Yes, the baby dies but at the hands of the boyfriend Allen. Yet, we, as an audience, blame Theresa because if she did what the social worker told her to do this “terrible thing(s)” “the murder,” would not have happened. Regardless, we still tend to view Theresa's disability as a reason that she could not provide a proper father figure for her child. As sad as the death of the baby is, the true tragedy is the audience members with the same disability as Theresa who long to start a family who are now questioning that choice. Not only did Thompson sterilize Theresa, she potentially sterilized other members of the disability community. In most societies motherhood is a rite of passage into womanhood, by denying Theresa that basic right Thompson has trapped Theresa in a perpetual state of childhood thus preserving her innocence.

The Victim of Violence and Punishment

Our last stereotype is typically associated with individuals receiving a disability as a result of violence and/or punishment. Like most teenagers, I was required to read Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. The story is well known and there are even psychological terms associated with it such as the Oedipus Complex. Therefore it is no surprise that I use this well-known work as my final talking point. I will begin with an excerpt from the play,

OEDIPUS: Teiresias, you are versed in everything,
things teachable and things not to be spoken,
things of the heaven and earth-creeping things.
You have no eyes but in your mind you know¹⁸

When it comes to disabilities the play starts off well, the first person we see with a disability is Tiresias, an older man who is blind. Tiresias is well respected for a man of his age, and people come to him for help and guidance and although he is blind Tiresias has the ability to see the unknown. The citizen and king treat him gently. However, when he is unable to produce the results Oedipus desires, Oedipus lashes out at him and calls him names verbally attacking his blindness. The audience gets an understanding that people with disabilities are acceptable only when they are useful. After this moment, Tiresias is not seen again thus eliminating the only character with disability. From this we see the violence in which people with disabilities are subjected to when they don't prove useful. Ironically Oedipus receives the same disability after he finds out the truth about himself.

SECOND MESSENGER

He tore the brooches—
the gold chased brooches fastening her robe—
away from her and lifting them up high
dashed them on his own eyeballs, shrieking out
such things as: they will never see the crime
I have committed or had done upon me!
Dark eyes, now in the days to come look on
forbidden faces, do not recognize those
whom you long for—with such imprecations
he struck his eyes again and yet again

with the brooches. And the bleeding eyeballs
gushed¹⁹

He punishes himself- which to him seems like a fate worse than death. In modern society how many times have we heard the statement, “I’d rather die than live without my legs, arms, eyes etc?” In modern society, statements like this are continually teaching people that having a disability is worse than death. This in itself can make PWDs feel worthless as well as give PWODs permission to treat PWDs poorly.

Part II Thesis question

These are not the only plays that have PWDs nor are we limited to these four categories. However, to me these are the most problematic. All of these plays have been performed countless times in the U.S receiving stellar reviews. Yes some of the writing can be considered good if not outstanding. The problem lies with PWDs being used as a device- as if putting a disability in a play is an achievement worthy to be praised. Based on the above stereotypes we know to fear and pity PWDs; they are the “other,” separate from who we are and who we want to be. Therefore I must question agency and ask what do all of these plays have in common? They were all written by able-bodied playwrights, therefore, my thesis question is, can an able-bodied playwright write a play about disabilities that do not fall into the previous stereotypes? To answer this we must question reasons why playwrights write about individuals with disability? What do the characters represent? Are these plays only to serve as a cautionary tale for PWODs because PWODs understand that abled-bodiness is only temporary?

Although the above examples are all of negative images of disabilities, it is important for me to take the time to acknowledge the good images as well. I believe that in order for me to find the answer to my thesis question I must acknowledge plays written by PWDs. Playwrights such as the late John Belluso, Nabil Shaban, Todd Bauer and others have dedicated their lives to write work for and about PWDs. I will focus more on Belluso’s work because he is well known in both the disability and theatre community. Belluso was bound to a wheelchair at a young age due to a bone disease therefore it is no surprise that after graduating from Tisch School of the Art writing program his body of work mainly focused on disabilities. Belluso’s plays include *The Body of Bourne*, *The Rules of Charity*, *A Nervous Smile* and many other plays all involving characters

with varied disabilities. His plays do not fall under the stereotypes mentioned above, instead his characters are dynamic, well developed and humanized. I question why hasn't Belluso's and other play like his do not have the well dissevered recognition as some of the plays with negative images mention earlier? In Carrie Sandahl's *Bodies in Commotion Disability & Performance*, one of the first books emerging disability studies with performance, Sandahl she states:

...When Disabled artists create work beyond the traditional roles provided for them, they necessarily change rigid aesthetic conventions. A dancer with one leg, for instance, upsets expectations that a dancer's body will be symmetrical and able to execute standardized choreographic movements.²⁰

Is Belluso's lack of recognition due to society unwilling to accept to see PWDs as happy individuals? By accepting Belluso's work society would have to inadvertently accept that it is okay to have a disability and get rid of notions of normalcy. However society is not ready to admit it's wrongfulness towards people with disabilities. What about P(laywrights)WODs can we also create positive work that help in the fight against society's belief. Hopefully with creating my play *Puzzles* I will be able to answer this question.

It is not just enough to write plays, playwrights also need safe spaces to get their work seen. Over the past few years disability has entered the theatre in other ways. Theatre companies such as Mixed Blood Theatre, That Uppity Theatre Company, Theatre Horizon and many more have dedicated time, resources and energy to create what many are calling "Disability Initiative." These companies give both PWDs and PWODs opportunities to create, act in or produce new original work about disabilities. Theatre Horizon takes "Disability Initiative" one step further, not only do they create new works, they created a program for and about PWDs (autism) called Autism Drama Program (ADP). ADP creates a therapeutic acting spaces for individuals with autism who wish to write or perform. It is interesting that with the great work Theatre Horizon has done, they have yet to produce a play about autism on their main stage theatre season. This could be due to the lack of plays published about autism. Therefore the next section will shed some light on some of the plays being produced about autism.

Part III: Recent Plays Addressing Autism.

There are three recent plays about autism that helped strongly shape *Puzzles*. The first play is Ken LaZebnik's *Theory of Mind* (2008). This play illiterates that what could be

considered as simple social skills could be difficult for an individual with autism. This is strongly showcased in LaZebnik's *Theory of Mind*, about high-school senior Bill Gates (Who was named after his grandfather "who was Bill Gates before Bill Gates was Bill Gates was Bill Gates") on the autism spectrum. Bill's inability to pick up on social cues prompts him to ask his best friend Hilo out on a date. Unaware of Gates feelings towards her, Hilo agrees to go to the Hollywood Bowl with Bill as friends. The play takes place in one evening in Los Angeles. Hilo is a free spirited individual who loves animals and God. She only perceives Bill as a friend. Most of the action takes place in the car on the way to the Hollywood Bowl. Along the way, they experience several hiccups: getting pulled over by a police officer after hitting a squirrel, then finally getting to the concert only to realize that Bill lost the tickets. While they look for the tickets Bill reveals that he has applied and been accepted to the same school that Hilo wants to attend. Hilo is uneasy about this choice and tries to convince Bill to go to his back up school (M.I.T), during which time Bill comes clean about his feelings towards Hilo. Hilo rejects Bill leaving him confused about how he should process their friendship. However, in the end the two friends listen to the concert from the car.

The second play is Deanna Jent's *Falling* (2011). This play explores the dynamic and complicated reality of a family blessed/cursed with a young adult with autism. When Grammy Sue comes to town, this typically "structured" family is thrown out of balance, with the entire family trying to figure out what is best for the family as well as what is best for each character individually. This heart wrenching play boldly confronts the truth about family, loyalty, love, inspirations and dreams. A famous quote that is typically associated with this play is, "How do you love someone who is difficult to love?" *Falling* first debuted at Mustard Seed Theatre in St Louis in 2011. Due to the plays ability to capture the audience, *Falling* was moved to an off-Broadway stage.

The last play is *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time* (2012). This play follows fifteen year old Christopher, (an individual is believed to be on the autism spectrum) and his journey to find his neighbor's dog's killer. Christopher is the first person to find the dead dog therefore when the police officer sees him next to the dog he automatically assumes it was Christopher who killed the dog. Christopher's father forbids him from doing any "detective" work on the deceased dog but Christopher disobeys his father and documents his findings in a journal. Although Christopher's inability to understand social cues makes him seem odd to most

people, his exceptional brain and math skills make him intuitive enough to find out a secret that his father has been hiding from him for years. Now unable to trust his father Christopher ventures outside of his comfort zone to find the truth encountering setbacks and surprises along the way. I will not go into much details about this play only because of the speculation over if Christopher does indeed have autism. There is never a time in the play in which it is stated that the character is on the spectrum. He does show signs of having autism, and in every theatre review and synopsis of the play the critic/viewer states that he has autism. The reason why this play is mentioned is because of the speculation as well as the fact that the play was just moved to the USA and is currently have a successful run on Broadway.

So what do all these playwrights have in common? None of them have autism yet they were still able to write plays about autism which have received great reviews. Two out of the three playwrights wrote the play based on knowledge of knowing someone with autism. For example, the playwright, Deanna Jent, is the artistic director at Mustard Seed Theatre. Jent is a wife and mother of three children: two daughters and one son. Although Jent has been a part of the theatre community for some time, she is currently most known for *Falling*. In a fairly recent interview/article “*PLAYBILL BRIEF ENCOUNTER With Deanna Jent, Playwright of the Off-Broadway Drama Falling*” Michael Gioia states that Jent wrote *Falling* based on her real life story of a family blessed and cursed with a child with autism. Engaging in a close reading, Gioia notes the similarity between the main character Josh and Jent’s son with autism Andy, Gioia goes even farther and compare the mother, Tami, to Jent herself.²¹ In another interview with Caroline McGraw, Jent discussed, what inspired her to write *Falling*. She responded:

After a very difficult summer, the one in which [my family and I] were looking for placement for my son and felt like we were in a war zone every day, when he got back to school I started writing about it. I wrote scenes; I wrote down what had happened.²²

The *Theory of Mind* author also identifies as someone being close to individuals with autism. Ken LaZebnik is mostly credited for films and TV shows such as *Prairie Home Companion*, *Christmas Cottage*, *Touched by An Angel*, *Army Wives*, *Star Trek: Enterprise*, and many more. His plays include: *On The Spectrum* which is another play about autism (I don’t go into detail about this play because it is not published and I could not obtain the rights for it). He also wrote *Theory of Mind* which premiered at Cincinnati Playhouse. LaZeBnik also has relative

with autism. In a April 2013, LaZeBnik did an interview on the web show *Let's Talk Autism with Shannon & Nancy*, when asked about his inspiration LaZebnik states:

Well it's very personal to me, I have two nephews and a niece that are on the spectrum and I have been engaged in their live for the last twenty years... Over the years this has been a subject that I have obviously been personally engaged with...²³

Both of these playwrights have family members in which to draw experiences. I have read both of these plays and I saw the Playhouse production of *Theory of Mind*. I must be honest when I say that although I think that both plays are important works, I personally believe LaZebnik's work is less problematic. Both reading and seeing the play, I liked the way that in *Theory of Mind* the audience at times forgets that there is a character with autism. I believe this is because the individual with autism is the active voice in the play. We understand what he is feeling because we are seeing it in his prospective. Another interesting thing that LaZebnik does is that he doesn't set the individual with autism up to fail. Yes, Bill does get rejected but he still gets to go to one of the top school in the country, and for a brief moment he finally understood what friendship was.

On the other hand with Jent's *Falling*, I agree with Andy Webster's review in The New York Times:

But the playwright has stacked the dramatic deck: the petulant Lisa has a disdain for her brother that's hard to believe, as is Grammy Sue's ignorance about her grandson's disorder. (To its credit, "Falling" is likely to prompt viewers to investigate autism further.)²⁴

Yes Jent's play does a great job spreading awareness about autism as a disability. However, her portrayal of Josh (the son with autism) made me as a reader feel like I had to hate Josh. It made me feel like everyone's life would be better without Josh. Well, be careful what you wish for because you don't have to wonder long. Towards the end of play Jent writes in a dream sequence (which readers don't know that it is a dream for a few pages it was quite confusing the first few times reading it) in which Josh dies suddenly and the entire family seems happier. To me this scene makes it seem like life would be better without autism. The only thing on my mind during this scene is the young boy/girl in the audience with autism who believes that

this is how his/her family view their existence. The silver lining comes when you realize it was all a dream and Tami (the mother) accepted that she has to “love someone who is hard to love”. I believe the most interesting thing about *Falling* is that I believe that Jent shows the struggles and joys of having a family so involved and she was not afraid to show the violence that sometimes comes with autism. Those are the things I want to take from Jent’s work

I wanted to take inspiration from both playwrights. I want my characters with autism to have a voice of their own like Bill. I want to show the struggles of the family dynamic in a similar yet obviously different way than Jent. Lastly, even if only for a moment, I want the audience to forget about autism and just see the character in my show for who they are. To me those moments were the best moments in *Theory of Mind*. Now for my own play about autism, *Puzzles*

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¹⁹ Sophocles, Stephen Berg, and Diskin Clay. *Oedipus the King*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.) 42.

²⁰ Carrie Sandahl, *Bodies in Commotion Disability and Performance*, (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2008) 4.

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Chapter 2: Creative Chapter

Part 1

PUZZLES

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Preface to Play

My intentions for this play is not to romanticize or commercialize autism. Instead this play should be viewed and produced with the intention to teach. This play was written with three specific goals.

1. To educate the audience as well as anyone involved in the production on autism.
2. To eliminate any negative stigma about individuals with autism.
3. To create a safe community where anyone can openly discuss and talk about autism.

With these three goals in mind, I would recommend that all future productions consider a panel discussion after the production. This panel should consist of individuals with autism, parents of individuals with autism and an autism expert.

Things to consider when casting:

Anyone can be born with autism therefore future productions should consist of a multiracial and multigenerational cast. Lastly and most importantly any future production should have individuals with autism in the cast.

CHARACTERS

Eric: A 33 years old male with autism, it is hard at times to tell that he has autism. He is intellectually gifted but at times lacks social skills. His speech is very precise as if he is calculating every word. Eric is very straight forward he sees the world in black & white there is no gray area he doesn't get the simplest joke.

Marcus: A 18 years old male with autism. He is nonverbal and is typically able to communicate with pecs. Although he cannot produce actual words, he makes sound whenever he is happy or upset. Marcus does not know his own strength and at time he can become very physically. Marcus is very hyper and bounces up and down flapping his hands. Marcus does not like loud or noises he is typically seen wearing big noise blocking headphones.

Bobby: A 10 years old male who has trouble making eye contact with anyone. He is obsessed with video games and works on a timer. It is important to note that Bobby does not like new things that he doesn't understand. Bobby is typically a happy boy but will sometimes become aggressive towards objects when he is frustrated.

Kayla: A 15 years old female. Kayla is extremely smart and enjoys math and drawing. She is very timid and under no circumstances does she ever get violent. She has trust issues. It is important to know that Kayla is very loving and wants affection but doesn't know how to show it.

Mom: Plays every mother figure in the show.

Dad: Plays every father figure in the show.

Boy 1: Older teenager

Boy 2: Younger teenager.

Girl: Young teenager

Woman: About Eric's age.

Waiter: any age over 16 and can be played by a male or female.

Guest 1: Woman mid 20's

Guest 2: Man mid 20's

Double Casting Option

Eric

Kyla

Bobby

Marcus/ Boy 1

Mom/Woman

Dad/Waiter

Boy 2/ Guest 2

Girl/Guest 1

Setting

It differs in each story, however most of it is set in present day. The stories are being told over different times in no particular order feel free to arrange the stories in anyway just keep the beginning and ending the same.

Set

Most of the scenes will take place in a small house. There should be at least one entrance to the outside world and three doors leading to bedrooms/bathrooms. There should be a small dining area connected to a visible kitchen, there should also be sizable living room with a couch and 2 other sitables. I would like the wall to be visually puzzle pieces with some missing as if under construction. If possible by the end of the play the house should be whole all pieces filled in. Eric scene takes place in a restaurant in which the lighting would help to isolate the dining room table as restaurant table.

Lighting

The lighting should help move the story along. There are spotlights needed certain moment and scenes. There should be realistic lighting however when the characters give their monologues, lighting should create a dreamlike world.

IMPORTANT

It is extremely important to know that people with autism are unique and the people displayed in this play do not represent all people with autism. As Dr Stephen Shore states:

“If you’ve met one person with autism- you’ve met one person with autism”

Scene 1

(Five spot lights highlight five young adults all wearing modern clothes.)

ERIC:

February 15th 1967

MARCUS:

July 7th 1992

BOBBY:

April 28th 2000

KAYLA:

December 25th 1990.

ALL:

On this day, I was born.

KAYLA:

Daddy told mama to push

(A pool of light shows Mom on a table in a hospital gown and Dad holding her hand)

DAD:

Push honey, Push, come on, one more time.

(Mom pushes and sounds of a baby crying is heard lights goes down on Mom and Dad)

ALL:

I arrived.

KAYLA:

The doctor said-

BOYS:

-It a boy!

GIRLS:

It's a girl!

KAYLA:

Mom and dad were happy.

ERIC:

They thought I was perfect.

ALL:

Until-

ALL BUT ERIC:

three years later

ERIC:

Ten years later.

ALL:

Everything changed.

ERIC:

I was defined by one word.

ALL BUT ERIC:

Autistic

ERIC:

Abnormal!

(Lights go up on a living room Mom and DAD are sitting on a couch holding each other. Mom has been crying and Dad is trying to comfort her.)

MOM:

What are we going to do?

DAD:

We'll get through this.

(Mom and Dad freeze in a holding position)

ALL BUT KAYLA:

And they did.

KAYLA:

Mine didn't.

ERIC:

This is my story.

ALL:

My story.

END OF SCENE

SCENE 2

(Blackout with transition music. The lights come up at full revealing a living and dining room area with a small visible kitchen to the side. Kayla is sitting on the living room chair drawing a picture. She stops drawing then looks at the picture with disgust and began to scribble things out. Dad is sitting at the table reading a paper. Mom's first line is heard off stage.)

MOM:

Babe?

DAD:

At the table.

(Mom emerges from one of the rooms in a bathrobe holding two shirts)

MOM:

Which one should I wear?

DAD:

Where are you going?

MOM:

To court about- *(She looks over at Kayla who has been drawing on her sketch pad)*

DAD:

We never agreed to keep-

MOM:

Shh, Kayla can you go to your room and draw.

KAYLA: *(Not looking up)*

Drawing is for the living room.

MOM:

Can you take a little break and read a book in your room?

KAYLA:

No book.

DAD:

Kayla, knock, knock?

KAYLA: (*Looks up excitedly*)

who's there?

DAD:

4 plus 4.

KAYLA:

4 plus 4 what?

DAD:

4 plus 4 equals 31. (*Kayla laughs*) what's so funny?

KAYLA:

4 plus 4 equals 8

DAD:

Silly me. How would I make 31?

KAYLA:

4 plus 27 equals 31.

DAD:

Are you sure?

KAYLA:

Yes

DAD:

I have a game.

KAYLA:

(*Losing interest, start drawing again*) I don't want to play a game.

DAD:

It's a counting numbers game.

KAYLA: (*She looks up again*)

I like counting numbers.

DAD:

So will you play?

KAYLA:

Yes.

DAD:

Okay I need you to go in your room and count until you reach five minutes then you can come out, I'm going to count too so I'll know if you come out too early.

KAYLA:

Five minutes is three hundred seconds. *(She begins to count) 1, 2, (She stops and looks at Dad).*

DAD: *(Realizes that she is waiting for him to count with her)*

Oh, 3, 4.

KAYLA:

We have to start at the same time.

DAD:

Okay, but I'm only going to count to ten out loud I'll do the rest in my head. You ready?

(Kayla nods)

BOTH:

1, 2,3 *(Kayla begins walking to her room)* 4,5,6 *(Kayla enters her room).*

DAD:

7,8,9,10. *(Notices Mom smiling at him)* What?

MOM:

You're good with her.

DAD:

I know what you're trying to do, we never said we would keep her.

MOM:

I've read her file.

DAD:

So have I.

MOM:

Doesn't it make you want to do something?

DAD:

I am doing something, I'm helping her.

MOM:

Exactly, I want to help too!

DAD:

I help by teaching her social skills like... how to make a joke or.. or how to be responsible. As soon as she masters these thing we will send her back to find a family. That was the deal.

MOM:

You are talking about her as if she is a dog.

DAD:

How?

MOM:

You want to train her, makes sure she understands tricks and then give her to a lovely family.

DAD:

That's not what I meant and you know it.

MOM:

Well that's what it sounds like. *(She walks to a filing cabinet and pulls out a file, she walk back to the table and throws the file down)* Read it.

DAD:

I told you, I've already read it.

MOM:

She has been in 44 foster homes including this one. When is it going to stop, when can she start believing that someone cares enough to stick around?

DAD:

That's not our Job.

MOM:

We're parents it is our job, what if it were our son.

DAD:

He has us.

MOM:

What if we died?

DAD:

What?

MOM:

BAM! Car crash we're dead, gone! We are both an only child and god knows our parents couldn't do it. Who would take care of our son? hmm? He would be put in the foster system and passed around to families who think he is too old, too odd, or not smart enough. Wouldn't you want one family to say enough and keep him?

DAD:

That is a highly over the top hypothetical question. The likelihood of both of us dying at the same time is... *(Beat)* a car crash really?

MOM:

- That's not the point. What would you want for our son, honestly?

DAD:

I would want someone to take him in.

MOM:

Then why can't we do this for her?

DAD:

It's different.

MOM:

Why because she is autistic? Is this what it's going to be like all her life? People turning her away because she is different?

DAD:

Yes, that's just how the world works.

MOM:

Not my world, and I thought you were better than that. (*Beats*) I see how you are with her, like a father would do his own daughter. You love her just as much as I do.

DAD:

It is not merely the fact that she is autistic.

MOM:

Then what?

DAD:

In three years our son will hopefully go to college.

MOM:

You're saying no because you don't want to raise any more children? That's pretty selfish.

DAD:

Let me finish. In three years are son will go to college. After college he'll start his career, he will eventually find a nice woman or partner or whoever he wants to marry and start a family of his own.

MOM:

What is your point?

DAD:

We will always be there for our son, but there will come a time where he won't need us. When we die it will be hard on him, but he will eventually move on and continue not needing us. What about Kayla?

MOM:

What?

DAD:

In three years where will Kayla be? She will be right here. Kayla will always need us. The moment we die, what will happen to her? Will she understand that she will be on her own or know how to? What will she do?

MOM:

She'll have our son.

DAD:

We can't put that responsibility on him.

MOM:

Please just read the file.

DAD:

I know what's in the file.

MOM:

They said she never smiles.

DAD:

I know

MOM:

She speaks only when needed, other than that she speaks through her art.

DAD:

I've read the file.

MOM:

What about Numbers?

DAD:

What?

MOM:

Did it say at any point that she liked numbers? No, you found out that she likes numbers and now she uses numbers to understand a joke. She is currently in the other room playing what she believes is a game because you found out what interest her.

DAD:

I know but-

MOM:

- Who's going to take time to find out more to help her?

DAD:

Honey I understand where you are coming from but we can't teach her everything.

MOM:

That's the point she doesn't need to be taught. She already knows. She knew what numbers were before you started your numbers jokes. She just needed help communicating that. I know that when I asked her to go in her room she didn't listen, but she did answer me without getting frustrated. When we first got her she didn't respond to anything. Now look at her.

DAD:

I know.

MOM:

We don't have to adopt her, we can just give her a place to call home.

DAD:

It's a huge responsibility.

MOM:

I know.

DAD:

It is not guaranteed that we can teach her enough to be independent.

MOM:

I know, but we can try.

DAD:

We have to ask our son.

MOM:

Already done.

DAD:

(Slight laugh at the fact that she already thought everything out) Okay.

MOM:

Okay?

DAD:

Obviously you knew you would convince me.

MOM:

Should we tell her?

DAD:

Yes.

MOM:

Kayla? Kayla, come out here please.

DAD:

She won't come until she reaches five minutes.

MOM:

She's special.

DAD:

One of a kind.

MOM:

You know I always wanted a girl.

DAD:

Remember we are not adopting.

MOM:

I know, but it already feels like she's ours.

DAD:

You were right.

MOM:

About what?

DAD:

I do love her.

MOM:

I know.

DAD:

She's smart.

MOM:

I know.

DAD:

She can do math in her head faster than I can do it on a calculator.

MOM:

Honey a dog can do math faster than you can.

DAD:

Get over here

(He pulls her into an embrace the two kiss. Kayla emerges from the bedroom.)

KAYLA:

DONE!

DAD:

Good job.

MOM:

Kayla how would you like to live here?

KAYLA:

I already live here.

MOM:

Yes you do. I'll be going to see judge Amy today. Would you like to come?

KAYLA:

Can I bring my pictures?

MOM:

Of course you can.

KAYLA:

Okay.

(Kayla starts walking over to the coat rack to put on her jacket)

MOM:

Not yet Kayla, I have to shower first.

KAYLA:

How long?

MOM:

Not too long.

KAYLA:

How many minutes?

MOM:

20 minutes.

KAYLA:

That's 1200 seconds.

DAD:

You better go now she already started counting down in her head.

MOM:

oh, okay

(Mom rushes off into the bedroom which is connected to a bathroom and closes the door behind her.)

KAYLA:

Did I win the game?

DAD:

Yes you did.

KAYLA:

Do I earn a prize?

DAD:

Yes, what would you like?

KAYLA:

A chocolate milkshake from Wawa.

DAD:

You got it kiddo.

(Dad gets up and walks over to put on his jacket. Kayla goes back to her chair and picks up her sketch pad.)

DAD:

You ready to go.

KAYLA:

I'll stay here.

(Dad looks at Kayla and then at the door in which mom disappeared. He debates if he should leave Kayla alone or not. He soon decided she will be fine.)

DAD:

Okay, I'm only going up the street so I'll be right back.

(Dad starts to leave but is interrupted by Kayla speaking to him)

KAYLA:

She was wrong,

DAD:

What's that?

KAYLA:

This is 46.

DAD:

What?

KAYLA:

At 67 seconds, she said I've been in 44 foster home. She was wrong it was 46.

DAD:

How much did you hear Kayla?

(She doesn't respond she sit on the chair and continues to draw. Dad looks at her before walking out the door. A few second pass before the light turn into a dream like state and Kayla starts to speak to the audience)

KALYA:

Every time I try to draw my life something always seems to be missing. *(Beat)* I guess that's the story of my life. My parents found out I had autism when I was three years old, they thought something might be wrong when I didn't quite socialize as "normal" children did. Over the next two years every time I didn't do something right, momma would get that sad look in her eyes and cry. Pretty soon the hospital bills and stress of having an "autistic" child got to them so they decided to give up their rights. I became a ward of the state, never staying anywhere for more than 3 months. *(Beat)* I don't mind traveling, I like seeing new things every day and drawing them. What I really like is the different schools, all of my teachers call me special and I like it, it means I'm unique. As you already heard this is my 46th foster home. I like it here, the people are nice. *(Lets out a sound of frustration, she begins to talk to herself almost forgetting about the audience)* No, no stupid, stupid, why are you doing this to yourself again? *(Lets out another sound of frustration. She soon remembers the audience is there)* I'm angry because I am allowing myself to get too close. Closeness sucks for me, it makes everything that much hard when they give me away again. Look at this *(She stands up and hold out her drawings for the audience to see. It is a picture of a beautiful sun set with some scribble on it.)* I draw with red and yellow when I'm happy and purple when I'm sad or confused. *(She looks at her picture and smiles)* I am happy here; it will be fun to stay in one place for a while. *(There is laughing coming from outside of the house. Kayla look to the front door.)* I guess my stories not over.

(Kayla sits back in her chair and continues to draw. Light go back to the realistic setting. Three teenagers come in from outside Two Boys and One girl. One of the boys is carrying a basketball. Boy number one notices Kayla and starts talking to his friends)

BOY 2:

Where is your mom?

BOY 1:

Sound like she is in the shower.

BOY 2:

I should knock on the door and see if she needs help *(He begins thrusting the air)* with anything.

BOY 1:

Dude!

GIRL:

You are *so* immature.

BOY 2:

You're just mad because no one wants to bam chicka wam wam with you. *(He notices Kayla sitting in the chair)*

BOY 2:

I see you got a new one?

BOY 1:

Yeah.

GIRL:

A new what?

BOY 2:

A new foster kid, stupid.

(Girl gives boy a playful tap)

BOY 1:

Yeah we got her about a month ago.

BOY 2: *(to Kayla)*

Sup, what's your name? *(Kayla doesn't answer)* is she deaf?

BOY 1:

No.

GIRL:

Retarded?

(Boy 1 doesn't answer)

BOY 2:

No way, she looks normal.

KAYLA: *(Not looking up)*

I'm not retarded.

BOY 2:

She's ALIVE.

BOY 1:

Come on guys let's just go in my room.

BOY 2: *(ignoring BOY 1, sits on the couch and talks to Kayla)*

So you're not a tard.

KAYLA:

I am not retarded.

BOY 2:

Then what are you?

KAYLA: *(Finally looks up with a puzzled look on her face)*

I'm a girl.

BOY 2:

I know that. I mean what's wrong with you?

KAYLA:

Nothing.

BOY 2:

There's got to be something wrong with you.

GIRL:

What shuck face means is, this family only gets foster kids with some kind of problem.

KALYA:

Problem?

BOY 2:

You know a little *(He does the universal signal, twisting his finger in a circle motion next to his head. Kayla looks at him still confused.)* Crazy.

KAYLA:

Crazy?

BOY 2:

Yeah, you know, a little coo coo in the head. But you don't look so crazy.

KAYLA:

I'm not.

BOY 2:

Good, because I think you're cute.

BOY 1:

That's enough dude.

BOY 2:

Why are you always trying to ruin my fun? First your mom is off limits and now this perfectly beautiful girl? Dang man leave a bro be.

BOY 1:

Let's just go to my room.

BOY 2:

You like her don't you?

BOY 1:

No.

BOY 2:

You like your foster sister, isn't that like incest or something.

GIRL:

Why are you so stupid? You have to be related for it to be incest.

BOY 1:

Look, I don't like her like that okay.

BOY 2:

Why not, she's cute.

BOY 1:

She's autistic.

(Boy 1 immediately regrets what he said.)

BOY 2:

I knew there had to be something wrong with her.

BOY 1: *(Trying to take it back)*

There is nothing wrong with her, she is just different.

GIRL:

What autistic?

BOY 2:

You don't know what autistic is?

GIRL:

Do you.

(Boy 2 doesn't respond)

GIRL:

That's what I thought.

BOY 2: *(To Boy 1)*

So... are you going to tell us what it is?

BOY 1:

I think it's a social disorder, or something like that.

BOY 2:

What the heck is a social disorder?

BOY 1:

Someone who doesn't like to be around people. Or doesn't understand a knock knock joke. Look it doesn't matter she's nice, now can we please just go in my room?

(Walks over to Kayla)

BOY 2: *(To Boy 1)*

In a minute, I want to try something. *(To Kayla)* Knock. Knock.

KAYLA: *(Excited.)*

Who's there?

BOY 2: *(Looking around pleased)*

Boo.

KAYLA:

Boo?

BOY 2:

You have to say boo who.

KAYLA:

Boo who?

BOY 2:

Boo who, why are you crying? (*Laughing at himself*)

KAYLA: (*puzzled*)

I'm not crying.

BOY 2:

It's supposed to be a joke.

KAYLA:

You're playing it wrong.

GIRL:

What?

KAYLA:

Knock, knock. You're playing it wrong.

BOY 2:

What is she talking about?

BOY 1:

Kayla can you show us how to play it.

KAYLA:

Knock, Knock

BOY 2:

(*Unenthusiastic*) who's there?

KAYLA:

326 time 17.

BOY 2:

(*Unsure*)... 326 x 17... Who?

KAYLA:

What.

BOY 2:

What?

KAYLA:

326 times 17 what? You said who?

BOY 2:

(Annoyed) 326 times 17 what?

KAYLA:

326 times 17 equals 5,542

BOY 2:

That's not a joke, does 326 time whatever even equal 5,542?

KAYLA:

Yes.

BOY 2:

I don't believe you and it wasn't a good joke.

BOY 1:

Leave her alone she's better at math than you. Let's go play video games.

BOY 2:

Whatever, bye Kayla.

GIRL:

If she's so smart at math is she still retarded?

BOY 2:

Only a retard wouldn't get a knock, knock joke.

(Everyone laughs except BOY 1. BOY 2 and GIRL enter the bedroom. BOY 1 stands behind Kayla looking at the drawing)

BOY 1:

I like your picture Kayla

KAYLA:

It's a drawing.

(BOY 1 looks as if he is about to say something but decides again. BOY1 head into the same room as the other two teenagers. out her drawling then looks at the door where the teenagers exit. Kyla picks up a purple crayon and begins to scribble things on her drawling. Kayla then looks at the audience)

End of Scene

Transition ONE

BOY 1, BOY 2 and Girl re-enter, they surround Kayla and chant “Autistic autistic autistic” Kayla eventually finds her voice and shouts “I am not autistic I have Autism” Music begins to play while other cast members come on stage and joins in. it becomes a calculated dance. Eventually Kayla joins in on the dance. The dance involves setting up for the next scene As the transition comes to a close, characters proceed to dance off the stage. However the people who are in the scene dance into the positions of how the next scene will start.

SCENE 3

(Mom is pregnant and cleaning the living room. Dad is somewhere off stage. The phone rings mom answers it and continues to clean)

MOM:

Hello? Oh hi Jill, Yes we are still on for tonight. We made reservations Oslo's tonight at 7 o'clock. Okay, see you then. Bye.

(She hangs up the phone and continues to clean. Dad comes out and places his arms around here)

DAD:

I told you I would do this.

MOM:

I know, but you've been doing everything lately.

DAD:

I don't mind. *(Takes the cleaning supplies from her and looks at the spray)* Besides I don't think you should be around this stuff it can't be good for the baby.

MOM:

I'll be fine.

DAD:

Why don't you just go lie down, I'll finish up in here.

MOM:

I've been lying down all day.

DAD:

Are you hungry? I can I make you something to eat?

MOM:

We are going to dinner with the Smith's in a few hours.

DAD:

I forgot about that.

MOM:

You did make the reservations right?

DAD: *(unsure)*

Yeah.

MOM:

Honey?

DAD: *(smiling)*

I made the reservations.

MOM:

Thank you. *(Dad kisses mom)*

DAD:

Anything for you darling.

MOM:

(Remembering something)

I want to show you something.

DAD:

What?

MOM:

I have to get it.

DAD:

I can do it. *(She gives him a look)* Or you can, whatever works best for you.

(She walks off stage into one of the rooms. He starts cleaning where she left off. She re-enters holding a weird looking sculpture)

MOM:

Look at this! *(He stares but says nothing)* Well?

DAD:

What am I looking at?

MOM:

If you keep looking you'll get it.

(He looks at it for a few seconds trying to understand what it is.)

DAD:

Its...

MOM:

Art.

DAD:

Art?

MOM:

Yes art.

DAD:

Hmm.

MOM:

Hmm?

DAD:

It looks like a piece of junk to me.

MOM:

I made it.

DAD:

I love it.

MOM:

Lies.

DAD:

I think it's beautiful.

MOM:

I want to put it in his room.

DAD:

I thought the room was going to be circus themed.

MOM:

This is a part of the theme.

DAD:

Where would you find that in a circus?

MOM:

Next to the ticket box.

DAD:

There's nothing next to the ticket box.

MOM:

Well there could be.

DAD:

You're right.

MOM:

You think he'll like it?

DAD:

He will love it.

(They both touch mom's stomach and smile. Mom seems to be in deep thought before she speaks)

MOM:

I secretly wanted a girl you know, but the more I think about it, another boy will be fine.

DAD: *(Playful and kissing on her.)*

We can work on that girl if you'd like.

MOM: *(ignoring him)*

Just think, in just a few weeks, this house will hold a family of four.

(Dad lets go of mom. It is clear that he has something on his mind. He attempts to say it but holds back.)

MOM:

What's wrong?

DAD:

You know what I'm going to say.

MOM:

Not this again.

DAD:

Did you at least think about it?

MOM:

What's there to think about?

DAD:

We won't be able to handle both him and the baby.

MOM:

We'll figure it out, we always do.

DAD:

Can you at least give it a little more thought?

MOM:

We are not sending our boy away.

DAD:

Boy? He is 18 years old.

MOM:

With the mind of a child.

DAD:

And the rage and strength of a full size adult.

MOM:

We can handle him.

DAD:

How can we handle him when we never know what is going to set him off?

MOM:

We've managed for the last 18 years.

DAD:

And the last four have been tough. Did you at least look at the pamphlet?

MOM:

I started to, but I couldn't get over the name.

DAD:

What's wrong with the name?

MOM:

Sunrise Village?

DAD:

Your point is...

MOM:

Don't you think it sounds a little portentous?

DAD:

What?

MOM:

All I can imagine is a group of people wearing cheerleader smiles saying (*Mocking*) Welcome to Sunrise Village, where every day the sun shines bright and we study the importance of rainbows and butterflies, would you like some juice?

DAD:

You are being ridiculous.

MOM:

Am I?

DAD:

If you took the time to open the pamphlet you would have realized that Sunrise Village is one of the best autistic facilities in the state. They provide the best 24 hour care with onsite therapy, education and recreational fun.

MOM:

I guess I was wrong. Their motto seems to be Sunrise Village where we shut off autistic people to the rest of the world. Don't worry citizens of society we make sure you never have to deal with someone you might be perceive as different from you.

DAD:

Can you take this serious?

MOM:

How can I? What you are proposing is ludicrous. Let's just pawn our son off to someone else so we won't have to deal with him.

DAD:

That's not what I'm saying and you know it.

MOM:

Do I?

DAD:

I love Marcus. But can you look me in the eyes and tell me the last 4 years have not been hard.

MOM:

Are we supposed to run away when things get too hard? Is that what we want to teach Marcus and our unborn child?

DAD:

We wouldn't be running away.

MOM:

What would you call it?

DAD:

Realizing you have done all you can and it is no longer enough.

MOM:

Well, if that's the case, I don't think I've done enough yet.

DAD:

You have to be reasonable.

MOM:

No, I *have* to be a mother.

DAD:

(Looking at her Stomach) Exactly.

MOM:

He won't know anyone there.

DAD:

We can visit him every day.

MOM:

Seems like prison.

DAD:

What if we just put him in for a few years, just until the baby can walk and talk?

MOM:

So he won't be able to grow up with his brother?

DAD:

I don't care about that. Answers me this, what do newborn babies do.

MOM:

What is the relevance of this question?

DAD:

Cry, they cry a lot.

MOM:

I know.

DAD:

You also know that Marcus hates loud noises.

MOM:

He'll get used to it.

DAD:

He won't. You say you are thinking about Marcus. Think of what the crying would do to him.

MOM:

Don't turn this around.

DAD:

I'm not, I'm just being honest.

MOM:

I will not send my son away. For the first few weeks we will lock the baby in the room with us and be sure not to leave him alone. After Marcus gets use to him, which he will, we can start putting the baby in his own room.

DAD:

What if he doesn't get use to him? Then what?

MOM:

We'll try something else.

DAD:

And then?

MOM:

We'll keep trying.

DAD:

And when will it stop?

MOM:

When we stop being his parents.

DAD:

Okay.

MOM:

Okay?

DAD:

I'm not going to argue about it anymore.

MOM:

But you still don't agree with me?

DAD:

No, but I trust you. We'll try it your way. But if he does anything to hurt his brother-

MOM:

He won't.

DAD:

I love you, you know.

MOM:

I know.

DAD:

You have the biggest heart I've ever encountered.

MOM:

Yours is pretty big too.

(Door opens, we hear the song from Barney playing. Marcus steps out jumping up and down and clapping his hands loudly.)

DAD:

Marcus, quiet hands please.

(Marcus stop clapping, but he is still jumping up and down. He is making mumbled noises he does the sign for more)

DAD:

More what buddy?

(Marcus continues to jump up and down he points in the direction of his room where the Barney song has been on repeat.)

MOM:

Do you want to watch the Barney DVD again?

(Marcus, jumps up and down faster and clapping his hands.)

DAD:

Okay buddy.

(Dad goes in Marcus room and Marcus follows, we hear an episode of Barney start as dad walks out of the room. Marcus follows him and grabs his hands, Marcus point to his eyes then at Dad then at the room)

DAD:

No buddy, Daddy all done. No Barney for daddy.

(Marcus walk over to mom and tries to pull her up a little too aggressively)

DAD:

Whoa Marcus remember nice hands. Show Daddy nice hands. *(Marcus fold his hand together)*
Good job. Now go to your room and watch Barney.

(Marcus starts to make noises again and flapping his hands. He points at Mom and then to his room, mom pull out a timer)

MOM:

In 10 minutes mommy will come watch Barney with Marcus.

(Marcus tries to take the timer)

MOM:

Leave here, Mom has to hear the timer. 10 minutes okay?

(Marcus is happy and claps his hand, he rushes over to Mom and hugs her. Dad is alarmed.)

DAD:

Too tight Marcus.

(Marcus lets go and hops to his room and closes his door.)

MOM:

He has a lot of love, he wasn't hurting me.

DAD:

You know, he doesn't always realize his strength. Are you really going to watch Barney with him?

MOM:

Yes.

DAD:

I want to burn that DVD. At work I hum it. *(Talking to the unborn baby)* When you're around five years old you'll have to watch it with him.

MOM:

When he's five they'll basically be the same age. I'm going to finish cleaning before this timer goes off *(Dad gives her a look)* I won't use the chemicals, I'm just going to dust and vacuum.

DAD:

Okay.

(Mom starts to clean again and notices Dad staring at her.)

MOM:

What?

DAD:

I like watching you work.

MOM:

Don't you have cases to review?

DAD:

Yes.

MOM:

Go work on them, you know how much I hate when people are around when I'm cleaning.

DAD:

Oh, I know.

MOM:

Then go.

DAD:

I'm going, I'm going. *(He starts to leave)* Yell for me if you need anything.

MOM:

Can you tell Marcus to put on his headphones?

DAD:

Okay. *(Dad opens Marcus' door, we hear the Barney episode still going)* Marcus, mom is going to vacuum. Head phones on please. *(Dad shuts the door)* Make it quick he might not want to keep them on long.

MOM:

Okay.

(Dad exists. Mom retrieves the vacuum as she plugs it in she begins humming the theme song to Barney)

MOM:

Dang it, now I'm humming it too. *(She begins to sing it)*, "I love you, you love me, let's get together and kill Barney. *(She rubs her stomach)* I hope you introduce him to another show.

(Mom, turns on the vacuum and begins to vacuum. After a few seconds Marcus comes out of his room covering his ears and jumping up and down aggressively. Mom's back is toward Marcus and she can't hear his cries. Marcus, no longer able stand the noise, loses control and attacks Mom from behind. He pulls her down to the ground and starts to bang her head on the floor. The vacuum is still going. Mom is trying to calm Marcus down)

MOM:

Honey, Help! *(Pushing through the pain, to Marcus)* Marcus its okay, let go of mommy, I'll turn it off.

(We hear dad's voice from off stage)

DAD:

I thought you didn't need help with cleaning *(He enters the room and sees the situation)* Marcus! *(Without thinking he pulls Marcus off of my and Slams him into the wall screaming at him)* Don't you ever do that!

(Marcus begins banging his head against the wall and crying, Dad realizes that he mishandled the situation. he unplugs the Vacuum and hugs Marcus. Mom is getting up off the floor and rubbing her head)

DAD:

I'm sorry but, look the noise is all done.

(Marcus is still crying when looks over to his mom he begins to hit his head hard)

DAD:

It's okay Marcus calm down.

(Marcus points to his mom and signs the symbol for "I'm sorry")

MOM:

Its okay, look Mom has happy face (*She smiles at him*) If you're happy and you know clap your hands (*She claps, Marcus is still upset but he is beginning to calm down*) If you're happy and you know it clap your hands (*Both Mom and Dad clap*).

MOM AND DAD:

If you're happy and you know it, and you really want to show it. If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands (*All three clap, Marcus jumps up and down in excitement*)

DAD:

Good job.

(Marcus starts to walk towards mom, dad step in the way)

MOM:

Let him come.

DAD: (*Dad looks at Mom and then at Marcus.*)

Remember nice hands. (*Dad steps out of the way*).

(Marcus walks over to Mom and touches her head. He again signs for sorry and hugs her)

MOM:

I know you're sorry but you have to be careful.

DAD:

Okay, Marcus let's go back in your room.

(Marcus let's go of Mom and he and dad walk into his bedroom. We hear Barney start again. Dad re-enters after closing the bedroom door. Mom is sitting on the couch crying and rubbing her head. Dad sits next to her and puts his arms around her)

MOM:

How is he?

DAD:

He's okay.

MOM:

It was an accident.

DAD:

I know.

MOM:

What happened? Why didn't he put his headphones in?

DAD:

He did. The DVD froze he was probably just coming out for help.

MOM:

Oh.

DAD:

How are you?

MOM:

Fine.

DAD:

Are you sure you're okay?

MOM:

I said I'm fine didn't I?

DAD:

Okay. I'm sorry I lost it on him.

MOM:

I know you didn't mean to.

DAD:

I don't know if I could control myself he does something like that to the baby. He could kill him.

MOM:

(Trying to convince herself.)

It wasn't his fault. I just wasn't paying attention, you know I'm usually good at protecting myself.

DAD:

I know, but it's not just about us anymore, we have to think about the baby.

(They sit in silence for a moment, neither knowing what to say to the other.)

MOM:

So what do we do now?

DAD:

You already know. *(He hands her the pamphlet)* Call Sunrise Village. *(She looks at the phone as if you she doesn't want to touch it)* It's the only way. I'll go check on him.

(Dad leaves to go check on Marcus. Mom stares at the phone and then rubs her stomach. She begins to dial.)

MOM:

I would like to speak to a representative about a potential client.

(Mom sits in a freeze frame, the dream light come up as Marcus comes on stage he looks at his mother with sad eyes then he addresses the audience. As he gives his monologue, the lights slowly go down behind him concealing the mother from the audience.)

MARCUS:

I know what you are thinking? I can see it in your eyes. I shouldn't have exploded like that. And you're right. But don't for a second think this is entirely my fault. You saw me holding my ears and getting excited, she saw it too. Didn't she? She told me to wait a few seconds she was almost done. I waited, I really did. That was more than just a few seconds. It felt like an hour had gone by. You ever had the feeling that there was a minivan inside your head crashing against your skull? Well that's how the vacuum makes me feel. I was screaming for her to stop. You could hear right? Why couldn't she? How else was I supposed to make her stop if my screams weren't enough? When I walked over to her I didn't know what I was going to do. I planned to ask her nicely to please stop. The words didn't come out. They were there and I felt like I was saying them, but she must not have heard them. Did you hear them? I had to get her attention somehow. I didn't choke her hard did I? I just wanted her to see me and understand that the sound was driving me crazy. I'll let her calm down and I'll tell her tomorrow how sorry I am. She'll forgive me right? I mean wouldn't you? Tomorrow it'll be okay, just wait and see. Tomorrow

(END OF SCENE)

Transition 2

Marcus looks at his mother and motion for her to join him in a dance. Music begins to play while other cast members come on stage. the group joins in and it becomes a calculated dance. The dance involves setting up for the next scene As the transition comes to a close, Marcus does one last dance but this time with his distant father. Meanwhile characters proceed to dance off the stage. However the people who are in the next scene dance into the positions of how the scene will start.

SCENE 4

(The light come up on the kitchen and small dining area Mom, Dad, Bobby and two guests are sitting at the table eating. The adults are engaged in conversation while Bobby plays with a handheld device.)

GUEST 1:

So there we are hiking up the mountain when suddenly he stops. I ask him what's wrong and he says "I thought it was a bear"

GUEST 2:

It could have been a bear.

GUEST 1:

There was not a huge bear population where we were.

GUEST 2:

Enough about us, tell us about you guys.

MOM:

Well, this summer we are thinking about taking a family vacation.

GUEST 1:

Where?

MOM:

Peru.

DAD:

It has not been decided yet, we were *also* thinking about Italy.

MOM:

We haven't worked out the details yet. I honestly don't care we can go to Peru-

DAD:

-Italy

MOM:

Or Peru.

GUEST 2:

(To Dad) I don't think you will win this one.

DAD:

A guy can try.

GUEST 1:

So are you guys going to leave Bobby with a family member?

DAD:

No. we are going to take him with us.

GUEST 1:

Do you think he is ready for something like this?

MOM:

Absolutely, a lot has changed since the last time you were over.

DAD:

We got him a new Therapist, and he is attending a therapeutic school.

GUEST 2:

How does he like it?

MOM:

Ask him yourself.

GUEST 1:

Will he answer?

DAD:

He should.

GUEST 2:

Bobby, how are you liking your new school?

(Bobby too involved with his games doesn't answer.)

DAD:

Bobby, someone is talking to you buddy.

(still no response)

MOM:

Bobby do we have to put the game away?

BOBBY:

No I have to finish playing.

DAD:

First listen, then play.

BOBBY:

First listen then play.

DAD:

Yes. *(Indicates for guest to ask the question again)*

GUEST 2:

Do you like your school Bobby?

BOBBY: *(Not looking up)*

Yes.

MOM:

Bobby can you show us your eyes?

BOBBY:

(look up but does not make eye contact)

Yes.

MOM:

Try again; remember you have to look at me.

BOBBY:

(This time making eye contact)

Yes.

DAD:

Good job buddy.

GUEST 1:

Bobby can you tell us what you are learning in school.

BOBBY:

(Not looking at Guest)

Math, Gym an-

MOM:

Eyes.

BOBBY:

Math, gym and social skills.

GUEST 2:

That sounds like fun.

BOBBY:

Can I play my game now?

DAD:

Try again.

BOBBY:

(looking at dad)

Can I please play my game now?

DAD:

Yes.

MOM:

We are working on his social skills. We have playdates with kids in his class. I think we are making progress most of the time he just sits and plays by himself, but if someone asked him a question he will respond unless he is too distracted.

GUEST 1:

That's great!

MOM:

We are still working on things as you can see. Eye contact is a huge problem, you have to ask him more than once but eventually he'll look at you.

(A timer goes off)

DAD:

Okay buddy timer went off.

BOBBY:

Five more minutes please.

MOM:

Bobby first?

BOBBY:

Dinner.

MOM:

And then?

BOBBY:

Game.

MOM:

Now?

BOBBY:

Bath.

MOM:

Good boy, put game away please.

(Bobby walks to a dresser in the living room and place his game in it. He then starts to walk towards the bathroom)

DAD:

Do you want daddy to help?

BOBBY:

By myself.

DAD:

Okay I'll set the timer for five minutes and then I'll check on you.

(Bobby exits)

GUEST 1:

When did you start the timer?

MOM:

A few months ago. We found that if we gave him set times he would be more likely to listen without breaking down. Also he like to keep it in front of him so he can see how much time he has left.

GUEST 1:

I might need that for him. *(Pointing to Guest 2)*

GUEST 2:

I'm always on time.

GUEST 1:

We'll I'm glad to see that you guys have found a routine that works for you.

GUEST 2:

Yeah, I can see a difference in him since the last time we all got together he's a bit calmer. Do you mind if I ask if you upped his meds or put him on new medication?

MOM:

There is no mind at all; he is on the same meds as before the only thing new is the school and the timer.

DAD:

I think the timer is a big help, I think he feels a little more in control.

GUEST 1:

Well, I'm glad things are working out.

GUEST 2:

You guys are putting a lot of trust in him, letting him shower by himself.

DAD:

He's been doing it for a while now.

GUEST 1:

You're not afraid he'll hurt himself.

DAD:

He's autistic not a maniac.

(Mom gives Dad a look and then begins to nervously laugh).

MOM:

What he means is, Bobby enjoys bath time and he like to be by himself. As long as he get clean there is no use in fight with him about how he gets clean.

DAD:

Yeah, that's what I meant.

MOM: *(notices the silence)*

I don't hear the water running, *(to dad)* honey, will you go check on him?

DAD:

Do you think I should?

MOM:

Yes.

DAD:

Let's at least wait until the timer goes off.

MOM:

Okay. *(To Guest)* It is really good to see you both again we have to decrease the timing between visits.

GUEST 1:

Absolutely.

GUEST 2:

What do you guys want to do now?

MOM:

Let us get Bobby to bed and then we can play couples charades like the olden days.

GUEST 1:

I have not played that game in ages. I might have forgotten how to play.

GUEST 2:

Who forgets how to play charades?

GUEST 1:

Me, you got a problem with that?

GUEST 2:

No ma'am.

MOM:

Then it's settled, we'll play charades, I'll clear off the table. Honey can you get the game out of the closet?

DAD:

Yes

(Mom begins to clear the table and GUEST 1 helps her. GUEST two moves to the couch as DAD looks in the closet for charades. There is a cry from off stage.)

BOBBY: *(off stage)*

get it off!

(Dad abandons the search for the game and starts to rush towards the bathroom. Mom stops dad.)

MOM:

(To dad) Give it a second before you go rushing in we'll just ask him what's wrong. Bobby what's wro- *(Bobby enters wearing only underwear)* Bobby! What are you doing? Go put some pants on.

BOBBY:

Get it off! Get it off!

(Mom looks around apologetic to her guest; Dad makes his way towards Bobby)

DAD:

Hey buddy calm down.

BOBBY:

Get it off!

GUEST 1:

Should we go?

DAD:

Yes I think that's best.

MOM:

No, we'll get him calmed down.

DAD:

Come on buddy let's go talk in your room.

BOBBY: *(Running away from dad)*

GET IT OFF!

DAD:

Get what off Bobby?

(Bobby starts fumbling with his underwear as if he is about to take them off. Dad hurried to Bobby and grabs his hands.)

DAD:

Buddy I can't help you unless you tell me what's wrong.

BOBBY:

Hairy, Hairy.

DAD:

What?

BOBBY:

There is a hair down there *(He snatches away from dad trying to pull down his underwear. Dad stops him again.)*

GUEST 2:

We can always come back tomorrow.

MOM:

No, we'll get to the bottom of this I promise.

BOBBY:

Get it off, get it off.

DAD:

I'll get it off buddy, but you have to calm down.

MOM: *(Having enough).*

Bobby enough, go get in the bath and get ready for bed. We will handle this problem tomorrow.

BOBBY:

Not tomorrow, not tomorrow.

MOM:

Bobby what did I say?

BOBBY:

Tomorrow.

MOM:

Thank you, now go to the bathroom now.

BOBBY:

Get it off!

MOM:

Bobby.

DAD:

Honey we have to handle this now.

MOM:

Bobby do you want to lose your game for tomorrow?

BOBBY:

NO!

(Bobby begin to freak out knocking down the lamp throwing anything in his path. Dad hurries over to him and put him in a one person stability hold. The Guest look uncomfortable and began to get up.)

GUEST 1:

We are just going to get going.

GUEST 2:

Yeah it's been a long day and we are tired.

MOM:

I suppose if you have to go. I'll walk you to the door.

(The guest put on their belongings and starts to head out of the door)

BOTH GUEST:

Goodbye.

MOM:

Do come over tomorrow.

(The Guests look at each other)

GUEST 1:

We'll call.

MOM: *(Looking defeated)*

Okay, see you soon.

(Bobby is still rocking a back and forth quietly saying "get it off.")

Mom looks at Bobby and Dad as if she is going to cry)

MOM: *(To dad)*

Honey, can you handle this by yourself?

DAD:

Yes. Don't worry about the cleanup I'll do that too.

MOM:

Thank you.

(Mom exits into the bedroom without looking back)

DAD:

Are you calm now?

BOBBY: *(Still crying, shakes his head)*

Yes.

DAD:

Okay, I'm going to let you go, then I'm going to go to the bathroom and get scissors.

BOBBY:

(Getting upset again) No scissors. No Scissors!

DAD:

Okay, Okay can I get the clippers?

(Bobby nods his head yes)

DAD:

I'm letting go now.

(Dad releases Bobby, stands next to him for a few seconds to make sure he is okay. He then exits towards the bathroom Bobby plops on the floor rocking himself back and forth his head is buried in his knees. The lights change only shedding light on him he speaks addressing the audience)

BOBBY:

Every day is not like this, you hear me! Every day is not like this. I'm a good boy a real good boy. Did you see the look in mommy's eyes? I did, she was so embarrassed, but what was I supposed to do? One day you're hairless and the next day bam! Anyway, why should I care about our guest? You saw how they talked about me as if I wasn't even there; they expected something like this to happen. Why would I get a hair on this day, I was doing so well. You would be scared too. *(He looks in his underwear and shakes his head)* I mean it's disgusting and it shouldn't be there. I guess I could have waited until the guests left. I figured if I waited too long a whole forest would grow down there. Now look at me I'm out in my underwear making my parents look bad. *(Stands up and removes the blanket from the couch and puts it on like a cape)* Superhero's wear underwear, is it a bird is it a plane? *(Laughing)* Maybe we will laugh about this later, maybe mommy will get that look out of her eyes and she'll see it my way. She has to understand right? She has to understand that I was scared I've never had hair there before. She seemed to be having fun before I ruined it. You saw her face when she was talking about the vacation. Oh no, we'll still go on our vacation right? I was really looking forward to this trip. I have to promise her this won't happen again. After all it was just a reaction to the unknown, nothing will be scary on our trip. Will it?

DAD: (off stage) Okay buddy I have the clippers.

(END OF SCENE)

Transition 3

Bobby starts singing “Leave Out All the Rest” by Linkin Park. “I’m strong on the surface not all the way through, I’ve never been Perfect but neither have you” Music begins to play while other cast members come on stage. Bobby continues to repeat “I never been perfect but neither have you” the rest of the cast joins in and it becomes a calculated dance. Marcus starts repeating “Tomorrow is a new day things will be different” Eventually Kayla starts to say “I am not autistic I have autism .The dance involves setting up for the next scene As the transition comes to a close, characters proceed to dance off the stage. However the people who are in the scene dance into the positions of how the next scene will start.

SCENE 5

(A pool of light shines on the table where Eric and a young woman are sitting enjoying a meal)

ERIC:

(To the woman) Are you sure you don't want anything else?

WOMAN:

Yes I'm sure.

ERIC:

A Salad is an awful little to eat.

WOMAN:

I don't know if you notice, but I'm a few pounds overweight.

ERIC:

I noticed.

WOMAN:

What?

ERIC:

Judging on your age and height you should be no more than 140 pounds. I can tell you're about 10 pounds overweight.

WOMAN:

You can tell that just by looking at me?

ERIC:

Can't you?

WOMAN:

Well now I'm glad I only ordered a salad.

ERIC:

Why?

WOMAN:

If you could tell I was overweight, I'm guessing everyone else can tell too.

ERIC:

That is a possibility.

(He continues to eat. She stops eating and the two sit in silences for what seems like at least 30 seconds. He finally notices her face)

ERIC:

Have I offended you?

WOMAN:

As a matter of fact you have.

ERIC:

I apologize, I didn't mean to.

WOMAN:

Did you not think calling me fat would offend me?

ERIC: *(Confused)*

I didn't call you fat, you said you were overweight and I merely agreed with you.

WOMAN:

If I'm soo overweight then why did you ask me out on this date?

ERIC:

That's simple, I don't care if you're overweight. I thought you were beautiful, so I asked you out.

WOMAN: *(Blushes)*

Oh.

ERIC:

I am truly sorry if I offended you, can we start over.

WOMAN:

I suppose.

ERIC:

Okay, let's get to know each other a little better. Besides working at the coffee shop, what else do you do?

WOMAN:

Well I own the coffee shop, so most of my time is spent there. Other than that I try to relax at home. You?

ERIC:

I graduated from college a few years ago and got a Job working as an engineer for a small uptown company.

WOMAN:

Engineer? Wow! Is it hard?

ERIC:

With all the training I had its not hard at all. Did you go to college?

WOMAN:

Yes, I went to Penn State University. It has an excellent business school.

ERIC:

Yes, I've heard that Penn State is a good school.

WOMAN:

Where did you go to school?

ERIC:

University of Penn.

WOMAN:

Now that's a good school.

ERIC:

It should be it's the number 6 Ivy League school in this country.

WOMAN:

I didn't know that. Maybe I should have went there.

ERIC:

What was your GPA in high school?

WOMAN: (*Proud*)

3.2.

ERIC:

You wouldn't have got in. (*Silence again*) Did I offend you again?

WOMAN: (*Sarcastic*)

No, what would make you think that?

ERIC:

You're being sarcastic.

WOMAN:

What gave you that Idea?

ERIC:

Your voice. I working on picking up cues. Humans are hard to understand. I have a dog at home I understand him perfectly.

WOMAN:

Why didn't you ask him out then?

ERIC:

He won't be allowed in here.

WOMAN:

I'm surprised I came on this date with you.

ERIC:

Why?

WOMAN:

For starters, I don't know you too well.

ERIC:

I come in your coffee shop every day.

WOMAN:

I know, but I didn't know much about you besides the fact that you like hot chocolate with four marshmallows and now I you're rude.

ERIC:

Well then it's a good think I asked you out.

WOMAN:

Yeah yay for me.

ERIC:

I've wanting to ask you out for a while.

WOMAN:

I was hoping you would before I started to talk to you.

ERIC:

And now?

WOMAN:

Now?

ERIC:

Are you glad I asked you out?

WOMAN:

I'm still determining that but it's becoming clearer every second.

ERIC:

Well I'm having a splendid time with you.

WOMAN:

Good for you.

ERIC:

Thank you for agreeing to come out with me. People normal say no.

WOMAN:

I wonder why.

ERIC:

Me too. I was glad you said yes I think you are the most beautiful woman I've ever met.

(Woman blushes again, she decides to cut the sarcasm and give Eric another shot.)

WOMAN:

You know I haven't been on a date in 3 years.

ERIC:

Why?

WOMAN:

I've been busy with the shop.

ERIC:

If it makes you feel better, I never go on dates. I've only been on three. I guess I know why.

WOMAN:

Why.

ERIC:

I have to tell you something but I'm afraid to.

WOMAN:

You are afraid to say something?

ERIC:

It'll make you think different of me, however, I rather you know sooner than later.

WOMAN:

You're not a murder are you?

ERIC: (*Horried*)

No

WOMAN:

It was a joke, I guess it wasn't very funny.

ERIC:

No it wasn't.

WOMAN:

So what was it that you wanted to tell me?

ERIC:

Oh right. I have autism.

WOMAN:

Really?

ERIC:

Yes.

WOMAN:

Oh.

ERIC:

Is that okay with you?

WOMAN:

Why wouldn't it be?

ERIC:

I don't know, I guess some people are put off by it.

WOMAN:

Are you dangerous?

ERIC:

Why would you ask that?

WOMAN:

I don't want to seem uneducated but, to be honest I don't know much about autism.

ERIC:

Not many people do,

WOMAN:

What is it?

ERIC:

It's a cognitive disorder.

WOMAN:

How do you get it?

ERIC:

I was born with it.

WOMAN:

Hmm.

ERIC:

Hmm?

WOMAN:

Well I really don't know what to say.

ERIC:

Say anything.

WOMAN:

Why did you feel a need to tell me?

ERIC:

I feel like this date is going well.

WOMAN:

You do?

ERIC:

Yes.

WOMAN:

Let's say the date is going well, that still doesn't answer why you felt the need to tell me now.

ERIC:

I like you, and if this date continued to go well, I would want to ask you out again. We would go on more dates. I wanted to tell you now so that you wouldn't find out later,

WOMAN:

Don't you think that's a big thing to tell someone on a first date?

ERIC:

Why prolong the inevitable? You would find out sooner or later. However, this way you get a choice.

WOMAN:

A choice?

ERIC:

Yes, you can decide if you want to continue seeing me, now that you know.

WOMAN:

You think that I would just stop talking to you because you have autism?

ERIC:

You wouldn't be the first.

WOMAN: (*Trying to convince herself*)

I'm not that kind of woman.

ERIC:

What kind of woman?

WOMAN:

The kind that runs away because something freaks her out.

ERIC:

I freak you out?

WOMAN:

No. I meant to say because something is different.

ERIC:

But you didn't say that.

WOMAN:

What do you expect when you put me on the spot like that,

ERIC:

I'm sorry I seem to be making you upset.

WOMAN:

I'm not upset, just a little uncomfortable.

ERIC:

Why?

WOMAN:

Because I feel like I am being judge on my reaction to really big news.

ERIC:

I promise I'm not judging you.

WOMAN:

You don't seem like there is much wrong with you.

ERIC:

Is there supposed to be something wrong with me?

WOMAN:

No I just meant (*She thinks of a way to dig herself out of a whole*) you seem perfectly normal.

ERIC:

Thank you.

WOMAN:

For what?

ERIC:

Calling me normal, no one's ever called me that before.

WOMAN:

Oh, well it's true. I mean you have some quirks but other than that you're normal.

ERIC:

What kind of quirks?

WOMAN:

Well for starters you speak as if you are calculating every word you say. I like that it makes you seem intelligent.

ERIC:

I am intelligent.

WOMAN:

That the other quirk you're not modest and you can be quite blunt.

ERIC:

Blunt is a form of honesty, do you not like honesty?

WOMAN:

Yes I do but-

ERIC:

I read online that girls like guys who are honest and funny. I'm still working on the funny part.

WOMAN:

There is such a thing as too honest.

ERIC:

If I'm not completely honest, wouldn't that be lying?

WOMAN:

Yes but-

ERIC:

So women like being lied to. Interesting.

WOMAN:

No Eric women do not like being lied to.

ERIC:

Thank god, I thought I was going to have to read another article about how to get a girl.

(Waiter comes to clear off the table)

WAITER:

Would you care for dessert?

ERIC:

The lady is watching her figure, and I believe that it would be very rude of me to enjoy dessert in front of her.

WAITER: *(A little unsettled)*

Uhh okay. I'll get this out of your way *(takes the dishes from the table)* I be right back with your check.

WOMAN: *(Embarrassed)*

Thank you Eric, I had an interesting time. *(She gets up as if she is ready to leave).*

ERIC:

Leaving so soon? I thought we could maybe go for a stroll in the park.

WOMAN:

I really must get home, I'm afraid that you tired me out.

ERIC:

I can at least walk you to the car like a gentlemen.

WOMAN:

Its really no trouble, besides I'm parked right out front.

ERIC:

Okay, well I have a wonderful night with you. *(He stands and kisses her on the cheek).*

WOMAN:

I had a great night with you too.

ERIC:

We should do it again sometime.

WOMAN: *(coat and gloves on, looks at Eric and smile)*

Yes, certainly. I'll give you a call and we can set something up.

ERIC:

Looking forward to it.

(Woman exit, Eric sits back down. The waiter return with the check)

WAITER:

I hope you enjoyed your evening sir.

ERIC:

I did.

ERIC:

(to the audience) I like to tell people that I had autism before autism was a thing. I was diagnosed when I was 15. Before that I was just the weird kid, and geek face. I actually liked being called Geek Face it meant I was smart. So as I said I've only been on two dates before her, they all ended pretty bad. But that one was different. How do you guys think that date went? Well I'll tell you that date happen three years ago, she did eventually call me, thank goodness because for a while I thought I was going to have to change coffee shops. Do you know how hard it is to find a good coffee shop in this city? Anyway she called and said I intrigued her with my honesty. We went on a few more dates that pretty much went exactly as the first one did. I didn't seem to scare her away like I did with the other two. she kept coming back for more. Two weeks from

now we will be getting married, and guess what for a wedding she dropped those ten pounds. Well I guess I should go get ready for this bachelor party, I don't know why They call it that I am not a bachelor.

(Lights out End of scene.)

SCENE 7

(The characters are where they started at the beginning of play, all highlighted with spot lights. As the scene progress, the dream lights reveal the house. We see the pieces of the house that were missing coming in like a puzzle.)

KAYLA:

You've heard our stories.

ERIC:

What did you think?

MARCUS:

Do you understand us?

BOBBY:

Are you afraid?

KAYLA:

Do you sympathize?

ALL:

We don't need sympathy.

KAYLA:

We need love.

ERIC:

Hope.

BOBBY:

Understanding.

MARCUS:

Family.

KAYLA:

Friends.

(Kayla pulls out a blue red and yellow ribbon with puzzle pieces on it)

KAYLA:

The colors for autism are blue, red and yellow.

ALL:

We don't like it.

MARCUS:

I like purple.

KAYLA:

Green

BOBBY:

Pink.

ERIC:

Black. (beat)

KAYLA:

This Ribbon labels us as the same.

ERIC:

We are all.

KAYLA:

Different.

BOBBY

Unique.

ERIC:

We are not.

MARCUS:

Abnormal.

KAYLA:

Retarded.

MARCUS:

We are all.

ERIC:

Including you.

ALL:

Puzzles.

(Spot lights go out only revealing the house. The house is now whole. Lights slowly go down)

End of Play

This Is 46 (Transition One)

From Puzzles by DayDay Robinson

Anthony Thompson

Grave Ballad

Flute

Piano

p *mp* *mf* *f* *ff*

Maestoso

Fl.

Pno.

p *mf* *mp*

Fl.

Pno.

mf

Adagio

Fl. ¹⁹

Pno.

Fl. ²⁴

Pno.

Fl. ²⁸

Pno.

Grave

Fl. ³²

Pno.

The Words Didn't Come Out (Transition Two)

From Puzzles by DayDay Robinson

Anthony Thompson

Flute

Adagio

p

8va

mf

mp

p

Piano

Fl.

6

Grave

Pno.

Fl.

11

Pno.

Adagio Grave

Fl. ¹⁴

Pno.

Superheroes Wear Capes (Transition Three)

From Puzzles by DayDay Robinson

Anthony Thompson

Maestoso **Maestoso**

Flute

Piano

6 Fl.

Pno.

11 Fl.

Pno.

15 Fl.

Pno.

1. 2. **Adagio**

Grave

20

Fl.

Pno.

Chapter 3: Part II

Creative Journal (As written)

June 12th 2014

Before I start to engage in the rewriting of Puzzle, I had to come up with a set list of things I want to change and the rationale behind it.

I want to take one of the stories/scenes out. Currently I can estimate that as is the show will run for about 1hr and 15mins. Based on the show I would like it to run between 45 minutes to an hour. Which brings me to my next task.

1. What scene should I cut out? I need to find a scene that maybe does not add a new element to the story.
2. Will I have transitions? If so, what shape will they take?
3. Who is the audience?

Tomorrow I will begin the rewriting process with these 4 questions in mind.

June 13th 2014

I didn't get much writing done today I'm still having writers block when dealing with what scene to cut out of the play. I'm currently leaning towards cutting out Marcus' scene. Reasoning behind this is that his character is violent and he gets aggressive towards his pregnant mother and he has to be put into a chokehold by his father. I think that the scene could seriously do damage to what I'm trying to do instead of spreading awareness about autism I would be creating fear audience against people with autism. Overall I'm feeling frustrated because I don't know what to do.

June 14th 2014

Today I finally figured out what story I wanted to cut out of puzzles. I decided to cut out Jesse scene (young woman who only spoke in scripted TV lines from her favorite shows) because I didn't think that it really added to the play if anything it seem like it was more confusing than anything else. Therefore I am keeping the Marcus' scene. I decided to keep the scene because this scene is real it is something that could happen in real life. I thought it would be a disservice if I wasn't completely honest with my audience about some of the challenges that can come with raising an individual with autism. I am still skeptical that this scene will invoke fear however, I think that in Marcus' monologue I could set it up any particular way in which people are not afraid but understanding. Now that I made this decision I feel confident enough to go in and make the necessary changes for draft two.

June 16th 2014

I spent the last two days editing and writing and rewriting the play. I think that I have a good foundation to where I want the show to go but I still think that I'm missing things. I did finally decide on having transitions between each scene which will come about in the form of music and dancing. I picked a few songs which I think captures the moment of each scene. Currently there's nothing more I can do to the script without hearing it allowed so I am going to put the writing process on hold until I get back to school and have a staged reading of it to see what else I need to fix. I will say that I'm feeling extremely accomplished and excited to challenge myself.

September 9th 2014

Today I held auditions at the Oxford Community Arts Center (OCAC). As of right now I have two characters already cast the mother and the father. I also think that I might've made a decision for the character Marcus but it scares me. Marcus is nonverbal I need someone that can physically bring him to life without seeming like we are making fun of individuals with autism. The actor that I am considering was able to show me that he could be versatile as well as emotionally connected to Marcus. The rest of the cast will have to wait until tomorrow because a lot of people who auditioned tonight also audition for another production and are waiting to hear back to see if they got apart. The waiting part is very frustrating because I know who I want to play the character of Eric but if he got the part in the other production he wouldn't do my show so I'm at a crossroad and trying to figure out who I can cast besides him if he is unable to be at my show. In the words of *Little Orphan Annie* "the sun will come out tomorrow, bet your bottom dollar that tomorrow there will be sun"

September 10th 2014

I got a call earlier today that there was a girl waiting at the OCAC to audition for puzzles because she thought that auditions were tonight and not last night. In my mind I already had the show cast pending hearing who got cast and the other show. Therefore I didn't think that I needed to audition this girl however something in the back of my mind told me to go and let her audition because she came out of her way to do so. I am extremely happy that I made the choice to let her audition she was perfect for the role of Kayla. Not only was she closer to Kayla's age she also had the right innocence and maturity level that Kayla possess. After that unexpected audition, the cast list for the musical finally went up and I was able to see who I still had to choose from. Luckily for me I was able to have all of my first picks, the person who was originally going to be Kayla agreed to be my stage manager instead which means I finally have a production team put together.

September 17th 2014

Tonight was an exciting night we had our first read-through as a cast. Tonight was also the first night that I heard the script out loud since I made the changes from last semester. I realize that the script still needs a lot of work but it's all manageable. Before I actually started the read-through I had my cast answer the question if they identified with a disability or if they know anyone who does identify with a disability. I asked this question not to invade in their personal life but to see what level everyone was at and how comfortable they would fill with such a controversial and intimate subject. I want to treat autism with as much respect as possible and I want to make sure that I had a cast that are able to respect it as much as I am. A lot of great things came out tonight red-through I got my cast a little better and I found out that one of the cast members like to compose music so he said he would help me out with creating original music for the transitions. Overall tonight was exciting and a huge success I know there's still so much work to be done and I am ready to hit the ground running.

September 25th

Today I had a meeting with the department chair to figure out what the department can do to assist in the production. This meeting actually opened my eyes to a lot of things that I didn't realize I wasn't prepared for. Things such as how was I going to use publicity what are the props I needed my show. After the meeting I contacted my stage manager and we sat down and had a meeting and we went to the script and made a list of all the props that will be needed for the show and any costume things that I personally didn't think I could find that I could ask the department for. Overall today I'm feeling frustrated with my lack of preparation.

September 30th 2014

Today I met with the marketing team to discuss publicity and posters. For this meeting I felt more prepared than when I had my meeting with the chair. I came into this meeting with an idea of what I wanted to posters to look like as well as how I wanted to market the show on campus. Today I also had a meeting with the treasurer of autism speaks which of the organization in which is getting half of the proceeds from the production is going. In this meeting we both figured out that we haven't quite grasp how we will be working together. The treasurer assured me that if I needed help with set up or clean up during the run of the show that autism speaks members would be able to help me. While I was on this publicity kick I decided to make a Twitter feed to document the process of puzzles which will be retweeted by the University and seen by our student population. Overall I'm finally feeling organized enough to start and focus on rehearsal next week.

October 9th 2014

Today was the first day of rehearsal and I entered the space with a lot of anticipation and anxiety as well as excitement. I am so fortunate to have a cast that are so willing to work and be patient while we build this show together. We discovered an important roadblock today, what is "acting like someone has autism." I had to stop rehearsal for about 30 minutes to watch videos with people with autism and try to understand certain mannerisms and which seems to be relevant. I wanted to make sure that anything that we did not convey a message as in we are making fun of the person with autism.

October 10th 2014

Tonight was our second night of rehearsal and I think that tonight's rehearsal might have been the hardest rehearsal that I will actually have. Tonight we blocked Marcus' scene. This is the scene that have been worried some on my mind since I wrote the play because it is the scene in which there is the most violence there is the opportunity to poke fun there's also the opportunity to show a negative light and scare the audience. Therefore tonight we did more table work for the first hour and a half of rehearsal just to understand why things were happening. Making sure that the actor playing Marcus had a clear understanding that Marcus was not a violent person it is just some time he has no other way to communicate.

October 11th 2014

Tonight's rehearsal was revisiting the Marcus scene from last night and cleaning up blocking and making sure that intentions were being conveyed through actions. As of right now the main thing that needs a lot of work is the fight choreography therefore I am going to send an email out to the chair of our department who utilizes stage combat often and see if she has any suggestions of how to make the fight scene work. Other than that tonight rehearsal went well and I think that we are taking leaps forward into creating an amazing heartfelt scene when dealing with Marcus.

October 16th 2014

Tonight's rehearsal seems to be well prepared I think it was because we were working on blocking the Eric scene and that scene was the first scene I wrote it had the most edits so I was well prepared with my vision. Also the scene takes place in a restaurant so they are sitting down almost the entire time until Eric gets his monologue.

October 19th 2014

Today was monologue day I didn't work anything else I only worked each characters individual monologues. Some of the cast members are farther along with their monologues and others and it was easier for me to fix potential problems because the actor knew what she/he was doing. However for the actors who were not as familiar with their characters it took longer to develop a building block for how to deliver the monologue to the audience almost everyone seems to be a little nervous about sharing themselves with an audience with the exception of Eric's character. I am making tomorrow another monologue day because I need tonight to digest what we've done and come back in tomorrow with a new plan and a way in which we can all understand the characters and how they relate to themselves as well as the audience.

October 23rd 2014

Tonight we worked on the Bobby scene and it became the hardest thing for me to block. I think it was because it is the scene with the most people as well as the scene that has three different scene going inside of one another. Also I think one of the biggest challenges of tonight was trying to figure out how to age all of my actors who range from 17 to 20 and are all playing early thirtysomething-year-old successful parents. I just stop the scene and started to do improvisational games with them to help them get into character and understand the maturity level of someone of that age in hopes to help them understand all of their relationships with one another because that was also something that was lacking in the scene.

October 25th 2014

Today was our first run through and front of my thesis advisor. Overall I think it went okay. I think that we have progressed as a cast in telling the story. After the run through I had a short meeting with my thesis advisor where we discussed how what I presently have is a foundation and we need to continue to work it so that we built more on the relationships of everyone in the show. My thesis advisor will be coming to rehearsals for the next three days to help inform and shape the interactions between the actors and their characters and the characters and the audience. Overall I'm feeling happy with our progress and I cannot wait to take it to the next level.

October 26th 2014

Today my thesis advisor was at rehearsal and we worked mostly on the Eric scene. We worked on giving the scene more action and making sure that everyone was clear on where each beat in the scene was. By the end of rehearsal I thought that this scene was ready to be performed for an audience now I just need to get the rest of the scenes to be right where that one is as well. Overall I'm feeling accomplished.

October 27th 2014

Today we worked on the Kayla scene in which in my opinion I think is a scene that needs the most work. I think one of the biggest problems with the scene is that I wrote the mom in a way that the actor is unable to connect with her. So we spent the first part of this rehearsal kind of rewriting some of the lines to make them more genuine and a way in which they wouldn't make sense in the scene. The next thing we did was we worked on the relationship that the mother and father had with each other and trying to figure out how this particular relationship is different from the mother and father relationships in the other scenes. I feel like today was kind of a setback because we went back into table work. However it was needed because by the end of rehearsal it seems like everyone had a clear understanding about goals and objectives in the scene. Currently I think it still needs a little more work however with the new table work that we've done that I think in our next rehearsal we will be able to clean up the scene so that it is performance ready. Honestly overall I'm feeling a sense of déjà vu like I've been in this place before and I don't know how I feel about it.

November 1st 2014

I am writing this journal earlier than the rest because for the next two days we are at rehearsals and I will probably won't be up to record a journal. I have ideas of what I want the lighting to look like however we have limited resources when it comes to light the program Coordinator at OAC promised me that we will be able to find something that will work for all of us. Overall I am feeling anxious

November 2nd 2014

Second Tech rehearsal went really well I got everything that I want it under the scope of what was feasible. Therefore today was another run through of the tech through but we did stop in case some of tech was unclear. Overall I am feeling accomplished and ready to open up with the light I feel like shit was coming to life and I'm ready to open in a few days.

November 4th 2014

It is two days before opening and after tonight's rehearsal I feel extremely frustrated. I feel like all the hard work we put into the show is gone and it could be that the actors are tired and as frustrated as I am. I feel like we took a ten steps back in this process. I am left with no words, feeling lost.

November 5th 2014

For tonight's rehearsal I came in with a positive attitude I decided to let last night's rehearsal go and focus on how to bring the cast back in the fold of greatness. I started the night by telling the cast that starting tonight and for the run of the show we will come in with a why are we doing this moment. Today's moment came from an article I read about a young girl getting taken off of a school bus in handcuff because the bus driver "didn't know how to handle girl autism" After this moment there was a fire in their eyes that I hadn't seen since the first week of rehearsal. Tonight I think they gave the best performance they ever did. Overall, I'm feel ready for opening night.

November 6th 2014

Tonight was opening night and before we opened the house I had all of the anxieties that most directors probably have on opening night, will people show up? Will everything go well? Will people relate to or like the show? We actually oversold the show and had to bring in extra chairs so that everyone had a place to sit. I was extremely proud of my entire cast they had a fire in them that I haven't seen in a while and were able to do all of the characters justice on that stage. Like many opening nights there were some unforeseen circumstances that the cast had to work with. For instance one of my actors sometimes gets bloody noses and of course on opening night he got a bloody nose during his scene however the actors around him adjusted lines that made sense and therefore the actor was able to push through the bloody nose and still give a powerful ending monologue. When the show ended I was surprised to see how many people stay behind for the talkback because they were genuinely interested in the topic as well as what the show meant. I believe that my panel was very well put together I had a professor of disability studies the president of autism speaks who also has a sibling with both of them as well as one of my cast members who he himself has autism. It was amazing to get feedback from them about what they thought of the show as well as what they thought of the role of autism and society and the work that still needs to be done dealing not only with autism but with disabilities and general. Overall I feel that the night was a huge success and it feel like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders and I can't wait to see what the rest of this run brings.

November 7th 2014

Tonight's performance went better than last night's we didn't have any hiccups no bloody noses and my actors were 100% one point the entire night. What I didn't realize tonight though, was that I am getting closer and closer to the end of this process and after tomorrow I don't know how I'm going to feel once it is all over.

November 8th 2014

Tonight was the last night of the performance of puzzles and it is bittersweet. I lost my light board operator for the night so I have to control the lights myself which I've never done. Although I was worried that I wouldn't mess up the show, (because some of the characters cues were based on lights) I was able to pull it together with minimal mistakes. As suggested by one of my professors, I had another talk back which went really well and made me actually question what I wanted to do with puzzles after all of this is done. There are currently some stories that are missing from puzzles that I would like to add in however I don't know how. Although this

process was stressful and sometimes I didn't know if I could do it, I'm so proud of the work that myself as well as my cast and crew did to make the show possible and as successful as it was.

November 9th 2014

I'm still pumped from last night's closing that I woke up early this morning and started editing the script again. I haven't added any stories yet however I did change some of the language and how the character speak to make it seem more natural. Now that the run is over I don't really know what to do I feel lost and I feel like a piece of me has been taken away. Currently I'm sitting down pondering how to keep puzzles alive even though it is no longer being performed or rehearsed. I think that the way to do that is to continue to edit continue to write and lastly continue to spread awareness about autism.

Conclusion

The U.S. still does not quite know what to make of disability and this is where performance can be of vital assistance.¹
-Davies Williamson

Although my thesis focuses on the autism spectrum disorder, it is important for me not make the same mistakes as writers before me by understand historically the representation of disabilities on stage. By looking at plays by able-bodied playwrights it has become clear to me that the problem does not lie in our writing but in the perceptions that we have been taught about PWDs. Thanks to Disney, at a young age we are taught to fear, pity or poke fun at the unknown. Therefore, PWDs do not become our equal but separate entities that do not deserve our respect. We as a community PWDs and PWODs owe it to ourselves to create a new and wholesome representation of PWDs in theatre. Some people in the disability studies community would disagree that able-body people should be able to write about disabilities however, it is in this mindset that we fall back into the very exclusion that we are fighting against. PWODs looking to write should ask themselves why is your work is important, and how do you avoid traps others have falling into?

I started off this thesis by asking can an able-bodied playwright write a play about disabilities that do not fall into the previous pervious stereotypes? For me the answer is yes! I worked at a camp for people with disabilities where my job was to teach social skills in young children with autism. In the eight year that I have worked there those children have taught me more than I could ever teach them. After working with these young individuals, my world-view about disabilities has changed. Without meaning to, I at one point was guilty of placing PWDs in negative categories. I was once told in my disability studies class that I am responsible for the knowledge that I have gained. I now have a working knowledge of who these individuals are and it is my responsibility to help others understand. As an abled-bodied playwright I had to ask myself important questions when writing *Puzzles*. What purpose does the individual(s) with disabilities play? Does it compromise beliefs? What do I expect the audience to receive from the play? It is my belief that PWODs can write plays about PWDs by answering these questions.

1. Why create a character with a disability? Looking over the recent published plays I discovered that few have characters with autism. Among the recent plays are *Curious Incident of the Dog in Nighttime*, *Theory of Mind* and *Falling*. Besides dealing with autism all three of these plays were published after the creation of Autism Speaks, an organization dedicated to spreading autism awareness. This troubled me, are disabilities, particularly autism, becoming commercialized? Is autism just a product that will be shelved as soon as something “new” and “better” comes along? Writing *Puzzles* was not about embracing the “next big thing.” Instead it stemmed from a conversation I had with a college co-worker. I told her that I worked with individuals with autism and her first response was “Aren’t they dangerous?” Naturally I found her ignorance infuriating. Nevertheless, I couldn’t blame her. Before the creation of Autism Speaks the word autism was unheard of in many American homes. Even with Autism Speaks there is still so little known about autism. Hence, this is why I first started writing *Puzzles* to help spread awareness on autism. It was my hope that by creating awareness that I would help to eliminate the fear of this mysterious disability.

2. Is the character fully developed? First one needs to stay away from underdeveloped characters. What we see with all of the plays mention in Chapter One, with the exception of *The Crackwalker*, are individuals with disabilities that are not as completely developed as the rest of the characters in the play. The difference with *The Crackwalker* is, although the play is not about disabilities, the play is about a person with disability. This is why Theresa seem to be more developed than the rest of the other plays. I believe that this is due to the playwright’s ignorance towards the disability. If not already familiarized with the disability, it’s the playwright’s responsibility to do in-depth research of the disability. For *Puzzles* I have had eight years’ worth of experience with individuals with autism. Nonetheless when writing the play I still made sure that I read articles and medical diagnoses about autism. Thanks to the research I was able to give the characters a more realistic essence. I strongly believe that if the playwright doesn’t do the research, it will show in his/her work and this will result in the playwright’s ignorance being passed to the audience.

3. Have you met someone with the disability? To get the most “authentic” representation, it is best to get to know someone with the disability being written about. In her thesis paper, Mallory Nelson’s states:

Inclusion requires participation by both parties in order to tell an accurate story. Only a person with a disability can help a person without a disability better understand who he or she is.²

If possible, do an interview with someone with said disability. I am sad to say that when creating *Puzzles* I was unable to get an interview with many people with autism. Which made creating the “authenticity” of the characters difficult? Yes as I stated I did read about the disability however those articles and journals were typically written by able-bodied people. As I progress with *Puzzles*, I want to do interviews with as many people as I can. I plan on adding more stories to the script and having those interviews would help my portrayal of those characters. (Not withstanding I had a performer with said disability and eight years of work experience)

4. How many characters have a disability? I believe in the power of numbers. The whole idea behind having people with disabilities in plays is to spread awareness as well as "normalize" disabilities. Having one person with a disability on stage, they stick out like a sore thumb. Without knowing it the audience automatically focuses on the "abnormality". However with multiple people with disabilities onstage they become the “norm” or at least a sizable presence. For *Puzzles*, after the first scene the plan was for the audience to see an individual with autism in every other scene that followed. I did this in hope that the audience would focus less on the disability and more on the story being told. As I continue to add stories to *Puzzles*, I hope to not have to announce that the character with autism self describes, but let it be an unspoken characteristic that is just a small part of who the character is.

5. What does the audience get from the play? I know that is hard to put oneself in the mind of the audience because every audience member is different. Nonetheless there are certain objectives for a playwright who is writing about disabilities. These objectives are knowledge, care and a desire to expand their consciousness about the disability. It is the responsibility of the playwright to present a clear and knowledgeable script to his/her audience to help create an educated community and eliminate negative stigmas about disability. These are the five questions that helped me develop my script as well as looking at current plays that are being produced about autism.

I think that is fitting that I conclude with the future of *Puzzles*. The future of *Puzzles* is almost as much of a mystery to me as autism is to the world. Currently there are so many pieces of the “*Puzzle*” missing. There are relationships that have gone untold- such as the siblings, marriage, and individuals with autism who also have children with/without autism. These stories are no less important than the ones that I decided to develop in the current script. It is my hope the after reading and/or viewing *Puzzles* that people can create a better understanding of all relationships involving autism. My thesis *Creating New Representations of Disabilities in Theatre* focuses on the autism spectrum disorder. Chapter one of this thesis is crucial because it was important for me not to make the same mistakes as writers before me. It was also important for me to understand, historically, the representations of all kinds of disabilities on stage. To do this I look at plays by able-bodied playwrights to make sure that I did not deceive or disrespect a group of unique individuals who deserve and need their voices to be heard. In my production of *Puzzles* only one of actors actually had autism. If I could in the future I would have like to cast all individuals with autism to play role of the characters with autism. Having PWDs in the production insures authenticity and a deeper level of feeling and understanding.

NOTES

¹ Davies, Telory Williamson. *Performing Disability: Staging the Actual*. (Saarbrücken, Germany: VDM, Verlag Dr.Müller, 2009.) 14.

² Mallory Kay Nelson *Inclusion of the Disabled Theatre Artist*. Master's thesis, 2012.

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