

SU-CASA Program

Growing Young

**“You Can’t Invite Change
If You Don’t Acknowledge Who You Are”**

Book by
Peter Michael von der Nahmer,
Anita Prestidge,
Marianna Mott Newirth

Based on interviews conducted in May and June 2018
by Peter Michael von der Nahmer

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Shelton Seniors Center
89-09 162 St. 1K
Jamaica NY 11432

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Participating Seniors:

Bertha Baskerville

Michelle Cotin

Josh. H.

Cynthia Hill

Veronica Kershaw

Caroline McNeil

Betty Morris

Isabella Roberts

&

Eric Stevens

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Keep On Moving

Character:

BERTHA: Speaks with a smile and a rhythm blending the country girl from the farm and the city. Her thoughts are always moving. A bright mind drifting, struggling to reach through the cloud of memory. Key ideas punctuated, suddenly solid coming out of the fog.

(Enter BERTHA XA deliver seated.)

(settles into a chair relaxed as if only her body is in the room, her thoughts are traveling)

BERTHA

(asking the audience innocently)

Where do I start? My name's Bertha...*(looks down for a beat thinking, suggests)*. My parents? *(nods with lips pushed out)* okay...*(begins and drifts)* My mother... my father... they...they were what you call sharecrop farmers - where everyone I think...see I don't know too much about sharecropping. I... don't think it exists today. No, no, I think... *(taking another tack)* Farmers today now have mostly the big operations, *(aside, conceding)* well they had it then too, but I never did too much farming. No more than what I see when I go to the farm - like I said before I'm just a typical country girl. I moved to the big city and tried to make it. Give me my bright lights. *(smiles at being in the city)*

(shifts to a lost feeling as she tries to remember and focus the memories) I had very happy moments with my *parents*. *(smiles)* You ever sit around a chimney with a fire? Talking... eating... *(chuckle)* Or cuddle up in the cold weather by the fireplace?*(lights up a little)* Or you could go outside, sitting outside underneath a nice big tree, eating a big piece of watermelon? *(chuckle of sweet delight)* Or with your friends?*(explains)* Your friends are your neighbors. They come over or you go over there. *(shrugs a little)* I was sort of content coming up. I take life as it is, an keep on moving.

(refocuses) I come out of a family of siblings, there were 14 of us, I'm third of the youngest. *(freely)* As a matter of fact I have a sister lives right here. We go out *shopping*. We visit each other. I have one brother left living in the Bronx. Two sisters live in Brooklyn. One sister in CA.*(loses count)* Three of us in queens. *(cherishing it)* I very much enjoyed having so many siblings. *(chin out to nod- telling a simple truth)* You're never lonely. *(thoughts wander)* And right now it looks like there's a lot of people who don't have family. *(worried for them)* How lonely they become *(explaining eagerly)* because they have no one to talk to, no one to call. *(sitting back)* I must say I'm lucky. *(aside)* And also,*(beat)* my mother and my father *(punchline)* they were never lonely. NEVER! *(chuckles)*

(musing) I don't *think* my mother was overwhelmed with so many *(smile, confirms it)* No, no, I don't think *so*. *(smiles)* We often talked about it - her having fourteen children. She said to me,

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“Hey! if I knew *then* what I know *now* about what they have for birth control, *half* of you wouldn’t be here!” and I laughed (*loud cascade of honest laughter*) and I say (*with a hand raised to be counted*) “I’m glad I’m here” and my sister (*raise her hand to be counted as well*) says “Me Too” (*matter of fact*) I’m glad they didn’t have birth control! (*chuckles to herself with the memory*)

(*completely open and honest*) I don’t know. Maybe my parents had Rocky Mountains (*explaining*) up and down, but I wasn’t in that marriage. Some times will be good, some times bad. But you give them a chance, at life. If you love this person, you wait to see if they improve. (*with a warning, stares down the audience*) I don’t say wait *forever*, if it it’s bad for your health *leave*, maybe the person’s not right for you. But the first thing is *love*, love *conquers* all and you hang in with them until *death. do. you. part*. If you *love*, you can *forgive*. But you’re just not going to forgive if you don’t *love* them. But if you *love*, then you can really forgive within your heart. When you love everything falls into place.

That’s how I married - stick it out. Until death did us part. I had a good husband. We had some Rocky Mountains (*smiles and laughs*) but he was very loving. Not only to *me* but to other people. He’s deceased now... I told him all I wanted to say before he passed. But he knew me *very well*, inside and out. I wish he was still here... (*admitting*) cause I get very lonely sometimes. (*shaking herself*) But I loved him ‘til death did us part and *now* I have to move on with my life.

One thing I miss, that’s my closest girlfriend. We grew up together. I had associates...but only *one*(*emphasizing the difference*) *friend*, (*with clarity*) Her name was Mildred Grant. We grew up together. (*to herself*) Oh wow, how old was I? (*to the audience*) I think I was about 12, she lived down the street. Then we became best friends.

A best friend, it’s just simple, it’s something like a *sister*. A friend you can go to *all* the time and don’t mind being with that person. Its someone you can talk to and if you don’t have any arguments, then... I calls that a *friend*. If she had something and *I* need it. (*simply*) She give it. If she could. And if *I* had something and she *need* ...If she needed help in any kind of way, ANY kind of way, I help her. And if I need her in any kind of way, she reach out to help me. But we didn’t share things like food...*thoughts!* No...we didn’t trade food, but...*thoughts*.

I miss her friendship.(*instistant*) I’ve been looking for *her* for *years*. (*to herself, talking to Mildred*) Where are you? (*giving up, to the audience, a little lost*) I can’t find her. (*apologetic*) I’ve tried to find her. (*beat*)

(*shaking it off*) Like I said, I’m lucky. I was content coming up. I take life as it is, an keep on moving. A typical country girl moved to the big city and tried to make it. That’s about it

(*BERTHA stands XD for FLORA. JOSH XB seated.*)

Sweet Moments, Gone

Characters:

JOSH (75) Speaks slow and measured, savored vowels, lilting and tender with the occasional punctuated emphasis that belies his relaxed intelligence. On punctuation - each period is a definitive ending with a beat, each comma a pause, each ellipsis a beguiling invitation to the listener to follow the trailing word

FLORA (15) A lovely teenage girl, gentle with a quiet passion.

(JOSH is CS in a chair with a small table next to him. an old book is on the table. FLORA is standing USL holding a picture.)

JOSH

Everybody in this building calls me Josh - if that's good enough for you? I was born in the Middle East. Particular country? Iran. 75 years ago. And that society was very interesting. No criminals. No crime. *(A laundry list)* I had a good job, I married, I had two babies - both born in Iran - but ... when the regime came - I took my kids out of Iran ... never to return! *(With finality takes a beat and then shifts wryly smiling)* I met my first love in Iran. *(Launching into the story)* As a teenager I went to high school *(smiling)* I had a girlfriend. Her name was Flora, a very nice beautiful girl.

FLORA

(in the background)

We both loved each other.

JOSH

I met her in her house.

FLORA

My parents asked his parents to help me in mathematics

JOSH

(proud but not boastful - with good humor)

'Cause I was very good. I had talent. And ... she did not do well in mathematics. *(Smiles)*

FLORA

(sweetly admitting)

No.

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JOSH

(proud of his acumen and love)

A teacher AND a lover! *(Enjoys remembering his teenage self and the tenderly slips into memory, caressing the words)* She was very honest, very loving *(intent)* - to me. *(lost in memory smiling)* And this love lasted a long, long time.

FLORA

(sweetly agreeing)

A long, long time.

JOSH

(Half throwing up his hands with a shrug)

Until, she moved to Israel. She got out of Iran. *(Impatiently explaining)* But I had to serve in the army to get my diploma... It took long long time for me - to finish the army ... and then go to Israel- it took three years! Flora was very young, only in her twenties.

FLORA

(with bittersweet longing)

I wanted marriage.

JOSH

(a little angry, still hurt)

She wanted to meet a man.

FLORA

(quiet, sadly apologetic)

You were far away.

JOSH

(Throwing up his hands again)

By the time I was finished? She knew somebody. *(reliving the disappointed for a strong beat then shifts again into tender memory and explanation)* In Israel I went to find her and we had good time... but she was there so long...she married. *(Sad)* She married somebody else. She said:

FLORA

(Walks DS to place the photo in the book)

I wish you very good luck and a good life and I always *(catches her breath and continues with intensity)* WILL love you forever and... *(runs out of words then continues matter of fact)* but I am marrying THAT man. *(Returns to her place in the background USL)*

JOSH

(Resigned disbelief)

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These were her last words. I never saw her - she was gone! First love gone. Second love married. And I ... *(becomes wistful again)* didn't see her. *(Takes a moment as if arguing with his memory and coming back to the same truth)* Yes... yes, she was. My true love. *(Calming down, apologetic)* I was... sorry and uh ...*(gross understatement)* not happy, when she married somebody else. *(Shifts to continue the story)* Her brother ... was my friend and I asked him how is her marriage and he said,

FLORA
(Close to tears)

Very bad.

JOSH
He hit her sometimes *(sniffs disapproval)* hm and he's not a good husband either.

FLORA
(asking for forgiveness for any pain she caused him)
I'm not happy.

JOSH
She thinks she made a mistake. *(Sighs as if brushing the dust from his hands with resignation.)* That's done. *(After his strong beat, shifts again to tenderness)* Yes... yes she was my true love. *(Takes a gentle beat and continues like almost like a shy teenager)* After fifty years maybe she didn't forget me now (chuckle and then hopeful)- if I didn't forget her? *(Pulling the book into his lap)* I still have her picture. *(Looks at where Flora placed the photo but does not open the book. Continues for the first time unsure of himself)* I don't know where she is... I would tell her ...

JOSH and FLORA
You were my first love. For sure. *(beat)* I was your first love. For sure.

(Flora in the background exits SL)

JOSH
(alone)
And I am still, thinking about sweet moments *(begins to explain)* teenage...*(poignantly gives up with a smile)* they're forever in your head. *(Sighs mildly happy and with disbelief)* Fifty years ago! *(Smiling to the audience)* Love story... done. *(Sits back leaving the past in the past)* Okay, I am tired.

(JOSH exits. Cynthia XA standing.)

“You Can’t Invite Change, If You Don’t Acknowledge Who You Are!”

Character:

Cynthia

CYNTHIA
(stands CSA)

First of all people should wear what they want to wear. I find that people in America dress American. When I say American I mean jeans and sneakers or whatever they wear but in Africa they wear African clothes so I kind of fit right into that because I like African clothes.

When I go out in the streets people ask me, “Why do you have on those clothes?” and my response is, “why do you have on *those*?”

Is it ignorance? What is it?

I went to like Mississippi or somewhere and the woman there she wanted to touch my material and I was like, “Miss, come on. Really. You cannot just touch me because I have on fabric that you’ve never seen.” No. You can’t do that.

She said; “Is that your Martin Luther King outfit?” - ‘cause I was down there for Martin Luther King’s birthday and I turned to her and said,

“What is a Martin Luther King outfit?” She just kind of looked at me like, “You know what I’m talking about.” No, I told her, no.

First of all you don’t ask people “Is that your Martin Luther King outfit.” ‘cause that to me has some little racial undertones. What does that mean anyway?

I was, like, a little annoyed that she asked me because you know it’s almost like you have on a costume.

I don’t have on a costume. This is what I wear. This is not a costume

So I always recommend that people wear what they feel.

Clothes is...clothes says a lot about a person. How they dress. How they express their self...I’m a person that expresses myself. You know I’m not an inward person I’m outward, you understand?

You shouldn’t, you shouldn’t judge a person by what they wear but honestly and truthfully clothes say a lot about a person. The era I grew up in, the dress was more important than the person. Because in my mother’s house children were to be seen... and not heard. Today, children are heard. I look at kids and say “How do you all do that?” Kids do lots, they’re more

expressive - children say things that I'm, like, shocked about. There were categories that you just never touched because you were a child. Nowadays there's no boundaries.

I was raised in a more rigid environment. Like I said children were seen and not heard. But I do believe that children have a place (*speaking to the imaginary child next to her*) **and your place is not in my conversation!**

Nowadays me and you we're talking, a child comes and he's talking; I'm talking; you're talking. He never says "excuse me" ?!?!?

Out of the hole and into, like, adulthood. There's no child time now- no play time. We played Skelley, we played Red Light Green Light, Jacks, whatever it was, Spin the Bottle... but we had games that we played, you understand? - children don't have that any more. They're not in children's places they're in adult places.

I think that in my time I was very fearful of communicating certain things that were, like, something you don't talk to your mother about. We were in a children's place. Children just didn't know how to approach their parents and just tell them things.

So, you hid it, you hid it, you hid it.

Do I think that's great? No I don't think that's great.

Is there a different way of doing that? Yes I think it probably is.

I think that a child should fear their parents at one time or another. I don't think it should be like we are on the same level. It really was a different world. I chose the things that I told my mother. You know.

And today the child knows everything about the parent. "My mama's a drunk - my mama's a drug addict - my mother was this, my mother was..." You know I mean?

I just think today children are involved in their parent's life so much. OK. For me kissing and doing all that in the street like I'm a prude. I don't do that. A man cannot come up to me and like tongue kiss me in the street. I can't do that! I never learned that! Some people feel that that's your expression and that's good. But I'm telling you things were well hidden. Children were not involved in ... you know what I'm sayin'?

Children that were born in my time, they would just be abused. They never opened their mouth because that is not something that you would go to say. Sad but true. It is. Look at the Me Too movement right now. How many women were abused by men and they never opened their mouths? Lots. Believe me honestly and truthfully I'm telling you there's women doing it too. It's getting ready to come out. OK. There's a man thing going on, some man-hunt going on, but there's women who've done it too! So just as we were quiet, there were men that were quiet! There's men that have been quiet for years. Back then we were fearful, very very fearful just like these women that are coming out now were fearful. Sad but true, you know I mean? Like wow look at Bill Cosby. ...look at the president!!!

(beat)

I think America is a trailblazer in racism. I really do

I only see it from my side. I never see it from somebody else's perspective. If somebody was standing by me right now and said "Cynthia I'll give you a free trip to Germany." I'd tell them, I don't want to go there. 'cause I don't think they'll like me there. I Honestly think, "wow! Do they like black people over there?" It comes from within, it comes from America. America is the one stopping people from going to Germany. It's what you learn. Its what is taught here. I'm taught to think, "Maybe they might put me in a concentration camp" because that's all they gave me to know. It's sad. It really is.

I like to go places but are they really gonna say, "What are you wearing is that your costume?" I mean all of those things run through my head. "Why do you have locks instead of straight hair?" And when you say "that's a stupid question" then they're hurt by that.

Why do I have locks? cause that's what I want.

As I grew up I did not look to people as colored or anything until one time a Spanish girl... me and her was like this. One day she had to go to her mother's house and she wanted me to go with her. When we got there she said "ya know, wait outside." and I said "Why?"

She said "because my mother doesn't like black people."

Now she was maybe a little lighter than me, not white skin but she was, like, you know, she had that Spanish look. When her mother came to the door I was completely shocked because her mother was dark like this! I was looking at her thinking, "You don't like black people? But you're black!" So this fueled me from that day forward you know I had a different opinion about people - that changed my whole attitude. First of all I was shocked to even hear that. But to hear that from a person that is my color is even worse.

It's not that the person on the other end does not see the beauty they do but it's the rhetoric that they get. It's the rhetoric. You understand? It's all racism to me. All of that is racism.

Why can't we be Cynthia and...whatever your name is?! Color and creede does not have to determine what we speak about.

Take my niece for example: She is such a lovely person and her wife is even more lovely. At one time I would never have embraced that. Not now. I embrace her so much. I truly, truly adore her. I adore her whole, her whole...What Is the word I want to say, **that she embraces life.** (*aside*) She's taught me so much.

Always be you and embrace other people never try to be me because...

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All I can do is embrace your culture and learn some things maybe learn how to eat some food that you eat or maybe do some things that you do. But I can never be another person's culture. I can only be Cynthia. Embrace. Embrace. But don't try to be me. Just like I can't be you. Embrace. But don't try to be the person. 'cause you never will.

You know, because I'm black, I'm more aggressive because of what I've learned and what I was taught and how I felt that my people were treated. What did I learn about black history? That we were slaves. I'm fighting every day not to be a slave. That's what I know. I'm fighting every day not to be a slave because that is my culture.

Perfect example: I was someplace and a guy says, "Oh is the bar open my girlfriend needs a beer." And I said it was closed and he said, "Well why don't you get her something anyway?" and I said "no. I'm not going to serve her because I'm not a slave." And he's like, "Cynthia, it's not that." But no! It IS that...for me. I don't want to think that you can talk to me and tell me to get up and serve you. My culture and what I've learned about my history teaches me that that's slavery and I don't want to do that.

Look at... Markle, Meghan Markle. She loves Prince Harry right? She married him. But the royal family was like "oh my God a black girl in the royal family?! Oh my God." But they finally accepted what he did. Princess Diana laid that foundation years ago when she had her kids. Lovely woman. I loved her spirit and her children exonerated her. And that's why Prince Harry is with Meghan Markel today. That would have never happened if she had not laid the groundwork for that. So can it be done? Yes it can be done. It's hard because we are people that kind of stick to what we know and we don't want to go out and try something else.

But you can't invite change if you don't acknowledge who you are.

There are things that I do. Like I said I'm just a different...people stop me to say "is that your costume?" No it's not Halloween and it's not my costume. This is the way I dress. Why do you ask me this question? Instead of deal with the person you're dealing with the outfit.

I'm different because I open my mouth as opposed to not saying anything.

I'm not looking for a man right now at all. I'm really not.

I will say this to you, though. I met the nicest person I've ever seen because whenever I talk to him he always says "I just want you to be happy." That's right. I don't find that in most men any more. I told him, "you have restored my faith in men by saying that" - there is somebody that is actually concerned about my happiness.

So really are we different? We're really not. It's what you make in this life. because at the end of the day we're all going to the same hole. So we're not different we're the same. Black, white, whatever...we end up the same all of the time. So you know I always think that it's not a gift

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unless you pass it on. Things that are given to me always pass them along because I know it's not a gift unless you give it to somebody else. You know once I pass that on to you I'm going to get another gift and I'm gonna pass that on too.

(Cynthia/Michele XC, Mike XB.)

I'm a story myself

CHARACTERS:

MICHELE

MIKE

(MIKE and MICHELE are sitting across from one another. There is a long pause before anything happens.)

MIKE

Michele, if you were to write a story about your life what would it be about?

MICHELE

Good people. Bad people. My childhood was better than it is now. Politics...politics make things different.

(She moves around, shifting a lot in her seat and looks out the window in a wistful memory)

My sister reminded me I was very funny

(beat)

I did not want to come to America but I like freedom, ya know. You have to go to the positive but when they hit me I have to fight back. When I talk to God...

(beat)

MIKE

What would you like to talk to God about?

MICHELE

I would ask God to change bad people to good people. I'm not mental. I'm a normal person. Sometimes I say to God, "Make me more happy."

(She shifts in her seat once again with a restlessness like she's dancing with an unseen demon.)

I can't please the world because the world not good to me – nothin. Like, they think I'm too strict, ya know? That's my way. I don't have no friend. I don't have nobody to call. I'm not crazy. I don't have time for these people. I have my book to study.

Give me book, book, book

They good when you read people's story.

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I'm a story myself, ya know!

And if I have some story to tell you don't put it...no way! One told me you can make a book
hmmmm hmmm (*as in 'no'*) That book to tell my business – I don't like to tell my business.

(She drifts off once again and there is a long pause)

MIKE

If you were to write a book, what would the title of your book be?

MICHELE

The book? My life. My life. My life's story
When you love someone, explain the way you are! Don't make believe you big and you know
you not.

MIKE

Is there someone you love in your story?

MICHELE

You need to have someone to talk to. But me...I don't have that. Friend...friend just talk junk

(She wrestles with the demon sitting in her chair)

Truth. Lies. It's hard to explain (*she says this from a very, very distant place.*)

A boy...there he was a boy and he was walking and I...(*she giggles*) and I went to him, you
know? He had white shoes and I keep it.

*(she giggles again – a young girl exposed for a fraction of a second and then is covered up –
Michele gets serious)*

If you get too close it can be no good. I don't trust people. I talk to them. That's it.

(Michele/Betty XA standing, Mike/Husband XC, Son/Cop XB)

I Wish I Knew

Characters:

BETTY
SON
HUSBAND
COP
SISTER

BETTY

I think you should be happy the way you grow up. What kind of life you had

My life wasn't as good as I think it should have been.

I have eight sisters and I'm the separated one, the one nobody got along with. My life was really, with my mother, there was not love there for me. It's more like distant. That's why I left home. What I do is I show the love that I wish I had to my four sons so I'm raising them the way I wish...that... I'd was raised

I think it's how you supposed to treat your kids and show them love and respect – something that...I didn't have. I gave it but I never received it. And I wonder why I didn't get to be the child I should have been. But I'm good, I'm good...I have a whole life I could start telling you stories cause it goes deeper than that. I write a diary so, ya know, when I pass away my kids can read the life story that I had. If I told them now I don't think they could take what I'd be telling them, ya know? So I'd rather be gone and have them read it

Now I'm living the life that...(choking up) I can't talk no more. I got four kids and I raised them real nice and I've got one son – he's the baby – he's a Muslim now so he's speaking Muslim and right now they fasting...I need some tissues...On mother's day all of my sons came to see me, well, everybody came to see me except him.

I've raised all the kids the right way, right? This one particular son, he got married to this girl and I remember this one time, a hard time, he cursed me out. He said that he wasn't going to speak to me unless I would change my religion. All my kids is Catholic. I believe in one God, 'cause there ain't but one God. We have thousands of religions there's only one God. Now my son, he don't speak to me at one time for a year and the girl, she's so scared of him. He cursed me out because I told him "How could you believe in God? You don't speak to your mother, you don't bring the grandkids" I seen them one time. One day he came over and I'm rushing downstairs thinking he's got the kids...it just him.

BETTY

"Where the kids?"

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SON

"They home. Where you think they at?"

BETTY

"When can I see 'em?"

SON

"Don't start axing me when you gonna see the kids. I'm not bringing the kids out 'cause I told you already...it's a religion thing. You're not Muslim and my kids don't come around nobody's who's not Muslim."

BETTY

"You changed that much you can't let your mother see the kids?"

SON

"I don't want to talk about it. I told you already, it's a religion thing and you're not Muslim so my kids don't come around nobody."

BETTY

"But they go around her mother."

SON

"Yeah, but her mother's Muslim. I don't want to talk about it. You're asking too many damn questions! It's none of your damn business."

BETTY

"So what's the problem, I'm just axin about my grand baby and you get mad? What's the matter with you? Are you crazy or something?"

Oh, what'd I say that for? He keeps getting real mad and I don't know why he's mad like that but then he did something that really scared me and I start yelling; "If you don't get outa my face!" and I took my umbrella and hit him across the back "Get the hell outa my damn face" and I walked all the way around the building so he won't wait around in the building. I got the phone in my hand, my other kids ask "Why didn't you call the police?" I got the phone in my hand and I still didn't call nobody. I walked all the way around the building until he left. I didn't see him for a year. And you would think it got better? I still don't see him. Didn't see him for Mother's Day, didn't see the kids so that's one thing...one of the sons.

I've heard families that are worse than my, with they children but I never think my kids would turn out to be like that. They had no reason to. I got two good sons and two...aint no good. What happened, though? What did I do? They had a father, took care of them good. I just couldn't get along with him because he had a hand problem. Ya know? He broke my nose and I still stayed

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with him for the kids. Two years later I planned to break his nose back, then I would divorce him so two years later he comes in one evening and says,

HUSBAND

“you didn’t cook.”

BETTY

“Did it look like I cook?!”

and I wanted to get mad ‘cause this was my day to break his nose back like he did mine. I took my kids upstairs to my girlfriend and said

BETTY

“Hold them for a minute”

so I go back down and he’s sitting on the couch I’m standing there and I grab a thing that’s real hard and he’s talking...running his mouth and I just took the thing and go “Whooooomm!!”

Blood went everywhere. So I thought I’d killed him. I went back upstairs to my girlfriends and I look out the window and there’s a thousand cops out there on the street and I think, well that’s it! So I know the cops be looking for me, right? So I ease on down the floor, the door’s open and the cops says

COPS

“That her? That’s you wife?”

HUSBAND

“yeah”

BETTY

“Yeah, I am! What is it?”

And my husband says

HUSBAND

“no, no. I don’t want to lock her up. She’s my wife. I love her”

COPS

“Why don’t you want to have her arrested?”

BETTY

“Tell him what you did? Maybe they understand.”

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COPS

“yeah, tell us...what did you do to her?”

HUSBAND

“I broke her nose two years ago.”

COPS

“She paid you back, right?”

HUSBAND

“yeah.”

COPS

“Ma’am, you can go.”

BETTY

And they take him to the hospital.

So I don’t care, I divorced him. But my kids didn’t see that. That’s why I took them upstairs.

You don’t touch women. I taught him a lesson. That was it. I raised my kids by myself. That might be why they turn against me; I don’t know. I have seen a lot of violence, ya know. Men just takes over and they beating woman. I never let a man put his hands on me. You hit me I’m hit you back and then you can go.

I’m done. I had my husband, that’s it. I raised my kids...they didn’t see no violence with me. I took them upstairs, ya know, so it wasn’t because of my violence that they’re treating me like this. I don’t know what they see. My other one, he got a bad habit of beating women. I don’t know where he get it from? And the girl he got now, she hit him back, so...

Nobody sees the kids – I don’t understand

My oldest son, he surprised me for mother’s day, took me out for dinner. He bought me presents and stuff it was real nice. I only got two, acting up, which I don’t bother with. I had ‘em, I tried, that’s it. On my husband’s side there was disrespect so perhaps that’s where the kids picked it up. From his side, not my side.

I know who my father is. When I was a child he was the only person who’d come around to my house, bring me food. I had to go outside or hide it under the bed and I used to eat looking out the window – why they all playing in the yard and I’m here eating ‘cause they didn’t give me nothing to eat. Other than that I ate in school. If my mom was home I didn’t get nothing to eat. And right in the bed is the sister who’s so mean to me. She’s blind now and she in the hospital, she fell, so I say

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BETTY

“give me the address of the hospital. I want to come see you.”

SISTER

“aint nothing you can do to come see me.” *(long pause)*

BETTY

“you don’t want me to come see?”

SISTER

“no. Ain’t nothing for you to do”

BETTY

“But you’re in the hospital I want to come to Washington to see”

but same thing she used to do me when we was little...when we were kids we shared a bed she used to pinch me, turn my skin like that. So she would start in pinching me she jumps on the bed and starts playing with me and she getting, trying to get to my skin...yeah, yeah...and I said;

BETTY

“Don’t do it.”

Don’t do it! I’m not little now and I’m gonna beat the shit out of you so don’t pinch me no more!

I’ve got me some weird family. Where the hell did that come from? Know what I’m saying? Where the hell did that come from? Everybody’s F’d up I’m telling you. It’s crazy. I been thinking about this some time – I’m telling you I’m writing a book. I’m writing a book. I’m serious.

I don’t know what my life is - I’m just in a lot of pain every day. I had a bad fall and I hurt my back and I ain’t going back to work no more but I can get back on my feet ‘cause it’s depressing me here. But once they fix this I can go back to being normal; having fun, goin’ out, you know. Soon I’m gonna be better. And, hey...what can I do? I got a whole lot I can talk ‘bout...deeper and deeper but I don’t want to go too far. ‘cause you know you don’t want to bring memories back. lotta memories back ya know. Mostly I’m just depressed about my kids. I don’t know what happened? I raised eight kids. I raised my four and I raised my dead sister’s four and my dead sister’s kids treat me better than my own kids.

It’s all about how you treat your kids.

How you treat your kids.

I’d sure like to know...I want to know, ya know, what’s going on.

(Betty/Caroline XB seated, Husband and Son/Cop exit SL)

There Must be a Purpose

CHARACTERS

CAROLINE (62) Speaks at a consistent fast tempo like she has to speak so fast because someone is walking away from her and she's afraid she won't get it all out before they stop listening. Not all of the words are important as long as there is a continual stream of steady sound. But she is not agitated. The words in **bold** should stand out from the patter enunciated with an intense emotion and connection to the audience.

CAROLINE

The Lord works in mysterious ways. I must be magic

Everything I've lived through, there must be a purpose. It's a miracle I made it to 62 and still looking good. My grandmother was real sweet, every time my mother had a baby or her sisters had a baby, she would come up. You know, she was one of them strict grandmas that if she made you stuff, like oatmeal and grits you had to eat it. It was ice cold. She'd say "Caroline. You sit there you're going to eat every bit of it" but

she loved us.

And we loved her. My mother was a homebody, but she was a flirt. Okay. We had boyfriends and we used to bring them back to the house. And every time my boyfriends came, she put on the hot pants and she'd be by the stove and she'd be cooking,

she was a good cook,

and she'd be talking and she'd have her little cheeks out and then the guys used to be like, "We can't eat our food because we see your mother's pubic hairs!" So, you know, she was always, **flirtatious.**

But she'd say "be home by 12 o'clock" but we were going to get punished anyway so might as well stay out and have a good time. But then she be waiting when we come home and she was like, "Didn't I tell you to be home!" and we'd have to sit at the table and listen to this whole big speech at one o'clock in the morning. The funny thing is when we got up in the morning, she'd be like, (*genuinely interested*) "So how was it, did you see your cousin Retta?" It was like a whole different thing in the morning, you know, (*conceding*) I guess she was worried we weren't going to come home.

She was a good mom.

My girlfriend, Brenda Lee, knew her like 37 years. We never had an argument, not one time, to this day. She's still my friend. She helped me with my son and I helped with her daughter and we're (*holding her clasped hand up*) real tight, tight, tight, tight. I always say if she would have been a man *that* would have been my man for a long time. I'm serious. I can tell her anything. She never judged me. When I fall she picks me up and, and me for her too.

Cause problems, never really end.

When she was there, I was fine. Soon as she left, that's when I started drugs. I was lonely because we was always together and when she left it was like

a big part of my life missing.

They used to call me two toke Carol because I take two tokes and I start getting paranoid. I took cocaine and then I went to crack and that was a nightmare. I didn't like it at first. So I was like, oh, that ain't for me.

I was lonely.

But then I'm around again, about a week later.

You're chasing something that you're not going to get.

Oh my God. It was terrible. I used to spend up to \$900, in like three days. Then I started selling my body, to get money for drugs. One time I got a call and three guys picked me up, right? And I'm in the back and they rape me. My mind it just basically told me to get more drugs and, and, and, and to get out there prostituting and um,

it told me that I was worthless.

I called the suicide line, when I had a baby. I didn't want to live, you know, um, the lady on the phone was really good. She was like, don't do this because

what happens when your baby gets older?

But I just wouldn't be able to stand still, you know, I was sitting there and just, just, just, just exist.

I couldn't sleep at night. I was standing on corners, going up to clubs at one, two in the morning **trying to escape.**

I was crying all the time, always crying, crying, crying, crying, crying. I went to bed crying, wake up crying, dropped to my knees crying. I said, God, help me, help me, help me please. I saw myself deteriorating. It felt like I was hallucinating, paranoid. I watch my son grown up and I saw that he noticed certain things about me and I didn't like the way he was living.

(beat)

One day I woke up

and I didn't do it. Never, never again. *(to the audience)* Don't do it. I could tell them addicts what happened to me, but you know what?

People don't listen.

(beat)

You have to get people in the space where they're ready to listen.

Before my son I had four miscarriages. My mom never told us four girls anything about the womanly things that we needed to know. She didn't tell us about our period, sex, boys. She never told us. So she was very sheltered with her life.

She always wanted to put on that facade that everything's okay,

you know, never wanted anybody to know the real story.

So I went through four pregnancies by myself in the club, in the train, in the house, on the job.

It devastated me. I still think about it now. I have a son but I wonder if any of them were girls. I say I would have had five kids but probably after the second or third one I would have stopped.

But I know one of them had to be a girl. It's still bothers me. Yeah. And I think that, that that, that, that really got me with the drugs, to try to forget. But all the drugs did was make me depressed. Now that's the hardest thing to tell your mother. She might've known, but

she didn't try to help me, she just didn't say anything.

My sister said, "oh, well" like it didn't matter. I'm at my lowest. Nobody helped me. None of my sisters, nobody called me, nobody counseled me. They just didn't try to do anything.

I still, was alone by myself, dealing with my own demons.

(beat)

You know, you could buy a kid anything in the world, but they need the love.

The father he was a player, but he fathered all my children,

I knew who my baby daddy was

He's still thinking about it too.

Yeah, I wonder what they would look like. If I had a girl,

I'd name her Sierra.

Sierra, after the perfume. I see her with my facial features,

I see her,

Like I said, I'm magic. Miscarriages, drugs, prostitution, violation of my body. And, and, and me and my sister, we never believed that we still standing here, you know, from the stuff that I always tell people

I should have been dead.

There must be a purpose.

(starts walking off SL almost talking to herself)

It's been a pleasure talking to you. You know, I got a lot out, so maybe I needed to release something. God moves in mysterious ways. I always say that. I'm serious because I never thought I come out here and let loose *(just before she exits completely)*

It was nice talking to you.

(CAROLINE exit SL, ERIC enter XC seated, MIKE enter XB seated)

Speck on a Speck

CHARACTERS

ERIC (67) A relaxed, thoughtful, kind spirit who even as he speaks gives the impression that he is listening to you. Constantly assessing the room, the situation, the periphery noise ready to act with compassionate action but waiting to get all the information. Physically: Leans back with his head tilted to the side when calm and considering - arms open hands folded in his lap. Loops an elbow behind the back of the chair when he's expansive. Leans forward elbows on his knees or arms of the chair when interested or intent. A sharp, well educated man his pauses should be read not as losing his train of thought but considering the best way to say something by interrupting himself or as enthusiasm.

MIKE (41) A German American. An open spirit, keenly interested in other people's stories and whirring with a barely contained energy on the edge of his seat. He is seriously intent in listening and twinkling with delight by turns. He always has another question. He is absorbing everything he hears and making connections to larger ideas.

(ERIC strolls in and sits in a chair kind, relaxed, and gently measuring the room, assessing the situation and sits. MIKE canters in dropping a overly heavy backpack and fussing a little with his recording device and notepad.)

ERIC

(with an easy rhythm) Take your time man settle down.

MIKE

(spoken quickly, still fussing) But, you only have a little time, yes?

ERIC

(Slowly) yes

MIKE

(earnestly) It's nice to meet you, I'm Mike. I really wanted to make the time for you.

ERIC

(amused) Thank you.

MIKE

It's very important to me. *(He is finally ready and sits up and gives ERIC his FULL attention which is considerable and expectant like a child waiting to open Christmas presents.)*

ERIC

(Grunts slightly and smiles.) All right, let's go. *(smiles kindly, gauging if the audience is open enough to hear his story or if they are too ignorant for a productive conversation. Deciding he begins.)* My name is Eric and I was born in New York City, Harlem, in Women's Hospital, 1951. *(Pausing smiling wryly to the side)* That we might have a little issue with... You probably noticed talking to a lot of seniors, the years start to get ...a little jumbled.

MIKE

You're totally fine.

ERIC

(shrugging) I don't feel like I have that much to contribute. *(Matter of fact)* My father worked in trucking, for a construction company. My mother, she was an aid. She wanted to be a nurse but she never got the certificates, but she *did* become, *(searching for an example)* what you see with all the elderly assistance? Primarily she took care of two families, two *white* families Which is common. Even today Black people take care of white children, and she formed very good relationships with the two families she worked for. I still hear from the kids she raised. She started out helping older people. Their children said, "Wait a minute. Can you stay and help out with the children?" And she would cook, clean, you know all the things they didn't want to do. *(important distinction)* More than a maid. They were *very* hardworking. They did what they had to do to survive.

My dad came home everyday by six. I knew he loved me but I can't remember a time my father ever hugged me. *(shrugging)* Fathers then didn't hug their sons. Their daughters maybe. But men at that time, and from the South, did not show much affection, *particularly* to sons. They wanted their sons to be masculine and they wanted their sons to respect them. There was always a little distance between myself and my father. My mother on the other hand gave us all the affection we could ever need.

MIKE

So...what kind of talks did you have around the dinner table?

ERIC

(Surprised) Most of our talks *did* take place at the table, at dinner time. I had two older brothers, they kept me straight. And being the baby and my parents *knew* what to look out for. What to tell me. How to be. What type of person to be. They taught me the basics—how to treat girls...

MIKE

(impishly asking for the secret half joking) How do you treat girls?

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ERIC

(definitively putting him in his place.) With respect. *(beat)* How to deal with police...that was very important

MIKE

(not comprehending) What do you mean?

ERIC

As soon as we were just approaching our teens they taught us how to deal with police. How to make sure we follow their commands, that we'd have our hands in view. How to follow instructions from police. *Very* important. That was told to us *over* and *over* and *over* again. *(simply)* So we'd make it home again. *(summing up)* That's what I learned from them, to be a decent person and the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. This has been *lost*. When I was coming up they used to teach civics in school. They taught us how to be a good citizen but it included how to say yes, and thank you, and may I. It taught you to have manners in public... all of those things.

MIKE

Really? I think that's a wonderful idea.

ERIC

I had a wonderful childhood but sometimes the positive stuff is boring. I try to be humble, as far as life experience, I'm a speck on a speck. The only thing I *can* tell you is *my* experience. And *my* life, involved being a black man. A white person doesn't have to think about being white. *(calm but emphatic)* Its not coming at them *every* day. Every time you go into a convenience store you get followed around. *Every* time...It's a *daily* thing... you get so *tired*. *(They both speak quickly through this passage words tumbling over and on top of each other excited to understand each other.)*

MIKE

I totally get it, if I can tell you one small thing. It's not comparable to this, but when I first came to America-

ERIC

(interrupts) Oh! You probably get that when you tell somebody you're from Germany! *(getting excited)*

MIKE

(a little surprised) Yes, that's what I wanted to say.

ERIC

And you had *nothing* to do with that, *nothing* at all.

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MIKE

Yes, so when I first came to America, my wife and I were looking for an apartment. When we went to look at it the person asked me, "So where do you come from?" And I said, "I'm from Germany" and he said *in my face* "We don't rent to Germans"

ERIC

(skeptical) He said that literally? Out of his mouth?

MIKE

Yes. And since we don't know anything in this country, I was just *shocked*. *(matter of fact)* And I thought this is what Americans think and everybody hates me and I will just have a lousy life. *(they both laugh a little at this depressing pronouncement)*

ERIC

(chuckles) That's funny... but I understand that feeling.

MIKE

(continuing with his newfound sympathetic audience) I have been called a Nazi by professors, I have been profiled, I have been called all kinds of *names*, from people who don't know anything about me! When I meet people and someone introduces me as being from Germany sometimes their face just *-shifts*. Once I was speaking in German with another friend and my professor came up and asked, "Should I be afraid of you now?" And I just stood there. I didn't know what to say. *(curling back to the present)* It's not comparable, but...

ERIC

(thoughtful) No, I think it is, it's definitely in the same category. Everybody has a history. It's just the worst part of people to brand people because of *(thinking to himself)*...huh...*(to MIKE)* I try to tell people that I talk to - we're not the only ones discriminated against. *(gesturing out)* This person wasn't your slave owner. They may reap the *benefits*. Maybe they have the *financial* backing of their forefathers...*(dismissive)* but they didn't... *(clear eyed)* you can't blame *them*. You have to take each person as you learn about them.

MIKE

(a little relief feeling seen for the first time) Yes.

ERIC

I certainly understand what you're saying. It's still here.*(replaying the conversation, shaking his head)* You would *think* after so many generations that they would give you a break on that. You know *(speaking out)* Give the man a break! He had nothing to do with it! *(to MIKE)* So I'm glad you understand what I'm saying.

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MIKE

(emphatically agreeing) Yes, I ...

ERIC.

When you told me, that broke my heart, *(surprised but suddenly angry and deeply saddened and anger breaks through his easy going nature)* because that shit its so...*wrong!* *(taking a moment)* I guess I'm getting sensitive in my old age. *(remembering and getting angry again)* You know we have an n-word. And we made it a point to hurt people who called us that. We got beat up. We got *locked* up. *Just* to get people to stop *using* that term. *(despairing a little)* The young kids... they say it in a friendly way but...*(remembering the feeling of less than)* We had separate *bathrooms*. We had separate *water fountains* for whites and blacks. Blacks couldn't *swim* in white swimming pools. *(beat)* We had to *fight*. We met and we *marched*. We held *demonstrations*.

MIKE

You don't have to answer this, but...*(wondering)* how did you deal with the anger?

ERIC

(alert) You mean *our* anger?

MIKE

(nodding) Yes. Because if you suppress a people, and if you keep them down, they *will* get angry.

ERIC

(explaining leans forward) We talked about that in our meetings, curbing that anger, using it in a positive way. Everything had to be *peaceful*. We didn't *instigate*. My parents marched with Martin Luther King and we took our cue from him. The anger was *there*, there's no doubt about it, but it had to be *controlled*.*(looking at the other hand)* Not everyone. Malcom X. He was saying we should be armed too, that we should have our own cities. *(thoughtfully)* That wasn't the route I took. I took the peaceful side. *(making a point)* I *understand* it, and I *heard* it, *(relaxing back)* but I was more on the peaceful side.

MIKE

(genuinely interested) I know almost nothing about this.

ERIC

We were trying to get people to run for office. Improving education by volunteering in schools, get on school boards. Doing small things we *thought* we might succeed at. We were trying to... have a little *power*, have a little *say* in what goes on in our community. And ultimately, the *country* by being able to vote and to pick and choose who you want making laws. When I was in college we would go out into the communities, to get EVERYONE to vote. I say it in a small way but it was a *big deal*.

MIKE

What was one thing you felt you were able to change?

ERIC

In the college I felt we changed something. We actually were able to change the curriculum. We brought in African American studies. (*explaining*) When you went to school it was all about white history, (*aside*) and a lot of that was lies. By changing the curriculum to include African American studies we were able to bring in *our* stories. That was something I definitely was part of, I'm very proud of that.

MIKE

(*curious jumping on his last line*) And, did what you see during the marches influence your decision to become a police officer?

ERIC

Yes (*remembering*) something just clicked (*beat*) and I thought... we could use more African American police officers. (*musings*) Maybe, I could do something on that end. In those days it was hard to get work, even harder to get work with benefits. And when I went into the police academy, I loved it. I loved everything about it. It was, the most interesting thing I've ever done in my life. (*slowing a little to remember*) You're taught sociology, police ethics, and law. The rest is physical activity and the mentality to protect yourself no matter what.

But ...you see things that are difficult to see as a police officer. You also see things... *about* police officers that are... not cool. (*pausing, considering whether or not to open up, and continuing seriously*) I'm only going to give you one example. (*told with controlled emotion but serious disapproval and anger*) When I first started, I saw a white officer, beating the *crap* out of a kid AFTER he cuffed him. (*disbelief*) I had to *pull* the officer off of this guy. (*tired*) And that caused a problem. He was mad, "Don't you ever do that again, you're a rookie." Well, he made a complaint against *me*. I was called in in front of a sergeant and he wanted to know why . (*reliving it his younger indignation firing up and he gets louder*) "Because the guy was- (*stops himself, rethinking his response but crescendos losing control*) Why should I stand there and let him beat the hell out of a prisoner that is *already* cuffed?!" (*cooling down, chuckles without humor*) They seemed to have a little bit of a problem with that. (*said with calm contempt*) He said "We want them to understand, if you make us chase you, you're going to get a beating." (*beat, huffing out the bad odor of that experience*)

(*moving on brighter*) I see people *here* that I've locked up and the response I get from those people isn't threatening. It's like (*loud with good nature*) "Whoa, whoa, Officer Stevens! You locked me up! What's up?". (*smiling*) They *wave*, they want to shake my *hand*. (*making a point*) When I would lock people up I never mistreated them, I treated them humanely. (*sitting back*) I'm proud of that.

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MIKE

I can't believe it! That's incredible. You tell people the law and they don't get mad? Police make me so angry. I've been stopped sooo many times for no reason in Germany. It's something about the way I look. Once a policeman stopped me twice in the same night because he didn't remember he had already stopped me. But I have another question... How were you taught not to hate?

ERIC

(surprised) From my mom and dad. The only time hate comes to mind is when people who've mistreated you... or, unfortunately whites. I was taught that I should try to understand *why* they felt that threatened and try *not* to further that. Hate? My mom said hate will just drag you down. It makes your heart weak. It makes you a weak person. I don't hate whites, I don't hate blacks. I don't hate anybody. What for? I mean maybe I could develop a short term hate...but what makes you think I don't hate? *(interrupting himself, curious)* Your question...how did you *know*?

MIKE

Because from so many people in America I feel suspicion or hate, but I don't feel any hate from you. Which is amazing to me. After everything that has happened, I wonder how can you *not* hate.

ERIC

(slowly) Well the fact that you open up to me helps me open up. You're very honest, that's why I'm talking, cause I can see your open to listening. Some people, I just won't talk to because they're ignorant. But there has to come a time when the whites WANT to understand. To read a book, that tells *our* story to understand why we *act*, why we *feel* a certain way, a TRUE depiction of who we are. That's going to take at least a generation if not two. 'Cause they *still* treat us as less than.

Blacks don't feel that way about whites. But there is a *mistrust*. Blacks *mistrust* whites tremendously *(getting a little exasperated, raising his voice a little)*...*doggone it man* we have *reasons* we maintain these feelings. It's not about *hate*. It's about *mistrust*, *anger*. We don't *hate* you... but we don't *trust* you. They have to understand that. More than half the whites are fed up too, if they would just *step up*. Well, I understand they don't want to lose anything, but we're not looking to take anything away. We're just here, because... you *brought* us here.

MIKE

I'm learning a lot from you. I find I am becoming more open to people in general, trying to start fresh.

ERIC

Well we have to be *open* because *that* helps us survive. So, we *watch* you. We try to *understand* you. We have to *really* understand you in order navigate, everyday, through our lives. We go out of our way not to get in *your* way so we so can survive. *Whites* do just the

opposite. There's always this wall that's up. They control the wall. They control the narrative for the most part. We're always peeking through the door because we *have* to, whites don't have to. It's needed for you... well I don't mean you...your doors wide open.

MIKE

(not offended in the least) Nononono it's totally fine.

ERIC

Whites need to open up that door and look at us and get a better understanding...and its *happening*.

MIKE

Yes.

ERIC

But it needs to happen over a course of *generations*. It's going to take *generations* we're still another generation out but it's going to happen. Martin Luther King said "...I may not get there with you, but I have already *seen* the mountaintop." He meant be patient, it's going to come, but it's going to take time for the races to come together.

MIKE

When I grew up in Germany I didn't think in terms of race. My father was a Hindu priest and my friends were all colors. In fact my best friend at school was black.

ERIC

Your best friend was black my best friend was white *until* we got to a certain age *then* I wanted to have a black best friend and he wanted to have a *white* best friend. So its *learned*, people aren't *born* racist. They're not *born* to want to separate. *Society* makes you separate.

MIKE

Yes totally this is what I meant. When I came to America I was trained to think in races.

ERIC

Yeah, its your environment that makes you what you are, *(as an afterthought)* to *some* degree.

MIKE

Actually, I found my friend again recently and I told him, he was one of the few people that really rescued me in school. And he was very happy to hear that. I have never forgotten him. He was hugely intelligent, we shared the same interests, and he was just such an important friend for me. I think this is one of the reasons I have a different feeling for African Americans, because I'm always reminded that he was such a close friend to me. As a boy I didn't think about his color, I just thought he was an awesome guy.

SU-CASA Program - Shelton Seniors Centers

ERIC

Now guess whose story you just told? You just told *my* story. My first best friend was white. We lived in a neighborhood that was very well integrated *at that time*. I found *him* to be smart, he even helped me with my homework. Plus his *family*, they were Italian, his family was very nice to me. And I would have dinner at his house and they had a thing called spaghetti and meatballs (*smiles*) And I was like what is this spaghetti and meatballs? (*smiles*) We were like *this* man. That kind of a friendship gives you a different *view*, especially as a young person. Those days help me to understand *these* days. People are people *first*. Then you figure out the other things about a person. (*suddenly getting up*) I gotta go. (*looking at the clock in disbelief*) Man. An hour and a half?

MIKE

(*pleased*) It was just so interesting.

ERIC

(*still amazed at the time*) Wow. (*amused and expecting another question*) You have anymore?

MIKE

(*pleased with himself*) I always have more questions. (*eager*) Would you like to meet one more time?

ERIC

(*serious*) No. (*smiles*) Yeah we could.

MIKE

(*suddenly worried*) You don't have to.

ERIC

(*reassuring*) No I would like to, you leak out some stuff that's pretty interesting too(*smiles, a student of life*) I'm always willing to learn something.

(*ERIC and MIKE exit SL strike seat A, ISABELLA enters XA standing*)

Remembering Unity

CHARACTERS:

ISABELLA (70's)- A happy woman laughing with the world. Repetition is used to remember but individual words are also repeated, bubbling a gentle cascade like the steelpan. A broad range of volume and speed but never angry even when speaking strictly there is a wry playful smile.

FATHER - plaintive voice offstage

ISABELLA

My name is Isabella. I was born, in Trinidad... I can tell you *WHERE* I was born. *(smiles)* I was born in Trinidad. *(takes a second look)* *WHEN?* *(laughs)* I don't have that information. *(laughs)* I had five, em, I think, there were seven of us, em, five of us? *(waves a hand to dismiss)* Well, I don't know my mother said one died, but when *I* grew up there were two boys and three girls. My parents... my mother was a housewife and my father was a property owner.

Trinidad was very different when I was growing up. It was nice! You could walk all over, in the street if you wanted. If you wanted to talk to three o'clock in the morning nobody would tell you to go home! But now? No.

We grew up in the culture with, em, Trinidad Carnival, it's all about *celebration* and *coming together*. *(with pride)* You know we got independence in 1962 and we had parades all in the streets. We used to go every year in February, and have this, em, Festival. You know the Pan? *(proud)* The steelpan originate in Trinidad we used to go behind the pannists we used to go...*(mischievous)* Sometimes your parents would be mad ... ?*(shrugs and laughs)* Sometimes you run away and do - *(smiles)* uh these things - going to parties and things... *(shifting)* My father used to... *(drops into memory then shakes her hand to clear the air - brushing away any harshness)* It's not like these children now. They used to punish you to keep you straight. You couldn't ask questions "WHY!" and "WHAT!". When they tell you to do something - you do it.

We got up all the way in the morning, very early. We had chores. We couldn't go out to play except when the grownups had visitors, so we liked when the parents came and we children could go out in the street and we would play cricket and rounders. It was a happy go lucky life.

We got along very well, yes. Brothers and sisters, growing up with five of us and any time when the rain was falling, and the rain fell plenty, and we had to stay home or anytime we were alone we would romp and have a pillow fight *(smiles sitting up in her chair pantomiming with her arms reaching from pinched shoulders)* THIS one jump on THAT one...it was good.*(smiles)*

And we sing, we sing, we sing, and that kind of thing. *(looking expectantly with a smile)* We used to sing songs. We used to start with *hymns* and end up with Calypso! I have a lot of Calypso... We had the Mighty Sparrow the king of Calypso! We sing on holiday time, em, carnival time, and perhaps, em, if we had a party, yes. We sing with steel pan. My father had every instrument in the house. He had violin, he had banjo, cuatro, chac chacs... We used to,

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(smiles playfully secret) sometimes when he was not there, we used to take it, and play with it, and you know. And sometimes we put it back and sometimes we break a string. And when he would come home he would call, he would say,

FATHER

(plaintive whine from offstage)

Who was touching my things?! Who was in my room?

ISABELLA

(Giggles in cahoots with the audience) Well you know what everybody would say? Everybody would say not them, not them, not them! Sometimes the the bridge would break, sometime the string was broke *(smiles)* yeah, so everybody would say not them *(laugh)*.

[MUSIC opt.]

We had a good childhood, happy-go lucky!...*(wistful)* until everybody got big and strung off!
(sweetly realistic) What can I say...I think everybody misses their home. I like to go... and come back *(smiles satisfied)*, America is my home now.

(A little lonesome thinks to herself)

Well... I had one story that I want to remember.

I was very active in church, in the Unity Temple of Christ in New York, Queens. I was very active for thirty three years! And it was a very nice gathering. Yes, when I was there it was nice - young and old and *everyone together*... everyone was happy, happy, happy! That is something I want to remember.

I would open the church get everything ready...the speaker, the music, straighten up the water, the flowers, fix the things for the minister, decorate, go clean up. I used to... I was very active there. For everything, they call for me. *(proud)* I had the keys. So they had to call *me*. *(Smiles quietly with the power)*

We were always together as a congregation. Our minister, she, em, she teach us everything. We go here, we go there - we traveled all over the world. And everyone was *(clapping her hands pressed)* really together, really loved each other. She would teach you this and she would teach that, she would teach you love. *(insistent)* She was a very educated person. And she taught you what you should do. She never had a bad name. Everyone liked her. But she was very very strict! You can't fool with her, she would put you in your place! ...It was a nice congregation, but she died.

My husband never came to church! No, no. Oh no no. Well that was my thing. That was me, that was me, ME, me alone, not my husband! Of course I go alone, I... he would help with music or

whatever but em he wasn't into church. Why not? How would I know? How would I know what he didn't like about church?! (*explaining*)

You know everyone has a different version of a church? Well, it's like that. But for *me* that congregation was (*savoring the sweetness*) oooh... wonderful! (*almost disbelief*) We so happy happy every Sunday. (*explaining earnestly excited*) You know when you go to church and you come out empty... when you come out you feel like nothing? But when you go the THAT church! She was ALIVE! And she would talk and when you come out, you feel good and you feel happy... you feel like helping *everybody* to feel good. It was nice, it was very very nice. That is what I will always remember THAT church, everybody feel good. It was like that. The Unity Temple of Christ, is the best thing that ever happened to me. That is something I always want to remember, yes, my second life.

(*ISABELLA/VERONICA pulls the music stand XUSD sits heavily*)

Come With Me For The Ride

Character:

VERONICA:

VERONICA

The center itself has been here for a long time. Jamaica Service Program for Older Adults runs it so when I say JSPOA [jespoah] that's what I'm talking about.

What I do here is I do the programming and everything else that needs to be done because basically I'm here by myself. I will be getting a part time assistant from JSPOA, supposedly by July first. We see if that happens, but it will because it's already been approved. It will happen. It will happen. I'm sure it will happen.

I love what I do and it's a pleasure coming into work every day...even when they get on my nerves. See my mom's a very compassionate person, I learned from her. At first I thought I wanted to go into nursing but no, no, no-no-no-no; too much blood. So I studied sociology and I'm thinking of studying social work now 'cause I've always been in this type of environment. All the time in each position I've held I've always had an affection towards the elderly. Even when I was a kid I've always been around seniors. I love seniors, that is what I love and here I am – here I am. It's a good thing.

There are so many issues facing seniors – people are living longer now and they really need to live in age-friendly cities; cities that are geared towards making it easier for them. For instance, you have a million steps to go up from the number seven train...no elevator...no escalator...so seniors end up taking a slow behind bus that takes forever to get them to the place where they are to go. And even here...the other day when the elevator got sabotaged, people missed appointments 'cause they couldn't get out of the building! Ya know they say to me all the time they lost because we're not open on Saturday and Sunday. There should be some place that they go to relate with other seniors so on the weekend they could feel comfortable so they could feel, ya know, that sense of community. But we are not open Saturday and Sunday and they say, "Oh, on the weekend we don't go out the house." And I'm like, "well that's not good."

Seniors need more consideration

They need more programming

They need places where they can sit down for a moment, rest.

Simple stuff that could just make the city more age friendly.

We need to make seniors consistently aware of new technology – new scams to avoid – better doctors to find, you know. It could be worked out, I'm sure of it. We are all getting older which is a good thing, and we need to care for one another better.

SU-CASA Program - Shelton Seniors Centers

People forget that seniors were young once. They're not necessarily a burden or are going to be a burden. We take for granted a lot of the time, the wisdom and the knowledge that this age group has to offer.

I'd like to see more intergenerational programming going on here. You know, you get the younger ones together with the older ones and when that happens there is more understanding...both ways, by the way, the conversation goes both ways.

I have so many ideas for how their life can be better lived in the city. I think about this a lot. I wrote a whole paper on it and most of these ideas don't cost that much – they just need to be done. Americans, ya know they are...

(noises coming from the other room)

VERONICA

Did somebody call me?

(ERIC and MIKE speak from offstage)

ERIC

Veronica's telling you her story?

MIKE

Yes

ERIC

(talking to Veronica)

Somebody stuck a broom in the elevator. It's not working now...
(talking to Mike) Just when it was getting good?

MIKE

Yes

VERONICA

Always drama. *(she smiles)*

(VERONICA exits SL)

THE END