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*Dramatic Publishing*

# somebody's children

by  
josé casás



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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José Casas

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(somebody's children)

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for

Alex Guillen  
my nephew and friend  
who constantly reminds me  
of the value  
of being an advocate for children  
through theatre

&

Gayle Sergel and Dorothy Webb  
two very special women  
whose support and belief in my work  
have inspired me to continually  
dig deeper into my imagination

&

a special “shout-out”  
to

Emily Petkewich  
my friend and “unofficial” dramaturg  
who helped me so much  
in the development of this play.

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*somebody's children* was a winner of the 2009 Waldo M. and Grace C. Bonderman Playwriting Workshop and was featured in a rehearsed reading at the Indiana Repertory Theatre, Indianapolis. Richard Perez, Director; Kathryn Moroney, Dramaturg; Yi-Hsin Lu, Assistant Dramaturg.

*somebody's children* was originally commissioned by Found Spaces Theater Company, Santa Ana, Calif. Artistic Director, Lindsey Suits. Workshop directed by José Casas.

### Cast

Kristen Gull  
Anthony Lucero  
Charles Stampley  
Valerie Rodriguez

*somebody's children* was honored by Breath of Fire Latina Theater Ensemble for their 2009 New Play Festival, Santa Ana, Calif. Artistic Director, Sara Guerrero. Reading directed by Angela Cruz.

### Cast

Alex	Daniel Penilla
Shannon	Kristen Gull
Shell	Casey Gates
Tariq	Joshua Lamont
Valerie	Angela Imperial

“home is where you can say anything you like  
cause nobody listens to you anyway.”

— anonymous

# somebody's children

## characters

alex & valerie cruz . . . . . 17-year-old twins: chicana/o  
father (unknown: abandoned the family)  
mother (a maid)

shannon landers . . . . . 18 years old: white  
father (works at a carwash)  
mother (works at a thrift shop)  
1 sister

tariq nelson . . . . . 18 years old: african-american  
father (military veteran; unemployed/disabled)  
mother (aid at a convalescent home)  
only child

shelley “shell” taylor . . . . . 17 years old: white  
mother (unemployed/on welfare)  
2 brothers; 2 sisters

*see pages 79-80 for character notes*



## character notes

Alex and Valerie were born in Mexico. Their parents crossed into the United States with them when they were infants. After years of financial problems and personal differences, their father left the family; supposedly, traveling back to Mexico. Their mother has struggled to raise them. Most of the time, they are alone in the motel; their mother coming home on the weekends from her nanny job. They always live in fear of being deported.

Valerie epitomizes the image of the “good” Latina girl. She is obedient and does what her mother tells her. She is proper and has a gentle demeanor to her being. She is inquisitive and intelligent. She constantly refers to the past to fuel her desires for the future. She dreams of becoming a bilingual education teacher one day.

Alex is the mischievous one. He is good-natured and always goes out of his way to cheer people up; hating to see people unhappy. He is also somewhat naïve. He is so focused on his dream of becoming a baseball player that he sees no other alternative for the future. He is the ultimate dreamer. Unfortunately, he also suffers from a learning disability that has only recently been discovered.

Shannon’s parents have always seemed to struggle; neither graduated high school. They have worked a variety of minimum-wage jobs their entire lives. Shannon has one older sister who has run away from home and has no contact with the family.

Shannon is the “thinker” of the group. She is determined to succeed. She dreams of becoming the CEO of a Fortune 500 company. Her perseverance is evident, but she also has a prideful side; almost too prideful. She sometimes seems ashamed of her

family and prefers to paint a picture of her life in terms of black and white.

tariq's family was changed forever by the persian gulf war of the early '90s where tariq's father served as a soldier. he's been suffering from post traumatic stress disorder since he returned to the states. for the last ten years, the family has been at odds with the military over his father's care. the family tries to survive on mom's salary, but they never seem to have enough money; always one step behind.

tariq is angry at the world. the confusion and hurt running through his veins is apparent to everyone. he plays the victim; so much so, that one wonders if that martyrdom will prevent him from one day doing something positive with his life. he is the one kid in the group most vulnerable to the negative forces of the world.

shell is the oldest of five children. her mother is on welfare. shell's family used to live a comfortable middle-class life. unfortunately, one day shell's father was in a car accident. He was badly injured and in a coma. he eventually died, but his death took a toll on the family in every way imaginable; especially, financially. the family has struggled because shell's mother was a homemaker and never had any "real" job experience and skills.

shell is the mature one of the group. she acts older than any child should have to. it's a struggle for her to balance school and family life. she rarely complains about her lot in life and she strives to help her mother and family dig out of their dilemma. shell is not only the mother figure to her siblings but to her friends as well. she dreams of becoming a social worker.

## points of interest

time: the present.

place: the city of anaheim, california; not too far from the shadow of disneyland.

setting: the el dorado motel: a shoddy and decrepit motel that is a remnant of the '60s. nothing in this place works and the owners do little to improve the conditions.

a neon vacancy/no vacancy sign can be seen. it is in constant disrepair. a public telephone is located on the edge. a prehistoric ice machine can also be seen on the property.

the outside of the motel is littered with some trash, crates and a shopping cart full of bottles/cans and other assorted items.

any other suggested locales can be visualized through props, lighting and sound design.

disneyland can be seen (faintly) out in the distance.

production notes: the use of (*extended beat*) is used as a way to utilize time in the most effective way. it can, literally, be taken as a long beat or any type of movement/action at the discretion of the director.

this play utilizes “slam” poetry (aka spoken word poetry). it is important that all efforts are made to effectively translate this form of poetry onto the stage.

there is no intermission, but if the producing party would like to incorporate one, it MUST be between the scenes of “(spoken word 2) my name is...” and “today (i don’t want to hate).”

any producing company or academic institution that wishes to make any changes/adjustments to accommodate for running time must get permission to do so by the playwright through the publisher.

## order of performance

- yesterday (father figures)
- quinceañera
- theo huxtable
- (spoken word 1) if i ruled the world
- aquanet girlz
- that honey is looking at me
- (spoken word 2) my name is...
- today (i don't want to hate)
- (spoken word 3) band-aid lady
- 99¢ store
- room 258
- 100 degrees and no ice in sight
- (spoken word 4/5) la luna y el sol
- tomorrow (the el dorado motel)

## **yesterday (father figures)**

*(the stage is dark except for a spotlight focused downstage. SHELL is standing in the spotlight with her eyes closed. she is listening to the silence.)*

shell. you never forget the voice. *(beat.)* “thee”...voice. it’s the voice you only hear in other people’s dreams. it’s the voice that carries with it the pain that poets have been trying to define since the beginning of time. it’s the voice that tells you nothing...will ever ever be the same.

*(extended beat.)*

shell *(opening her eyes)*. it was the voice that told me my father was dead... drunk driver driving past his inhibitions as he sped down the santa ana freeway going north carrying with him the pride of that girl’s fake phone number neatly folded in his left pants pocket. *(angrily.)* this sorry excuse for a human being now walks the streets with a slight limp and no conscience while i listen to my little sister cry for the umpteenth time because her cheap plastic shoes keep giving her feet blisters. *(beat; defeated.)* he stole my world and now i spend every waking moment trying to win it back.

*(lights go up. we see shell’s friends: ALEX, SHANNON, TARIQ and VALERIE, scattered around the stage. they are all standing in front of the el dorado motel.)*

shell. i miss my old house on terra cotta drive. the backyard where we played tag. the bedroom that i didn't have to share with my brothers. the swimming pool i lounged in for hours as i pretended to be a mermaid...i miss the happy family i used to-

*(a phone interrupts shell. she reacts with a painful expression as her friends watch helplessly; beat.)*

shell. the second that phone rang my mother forgot how to smile.

shannon (*pointing*). the girl known as shell no longer has the pretty little picket fence like all the other pretty little picket fences in the neighborhood.

valerie. no more jones jr. high. no more girl scout meetings. no more back-to-school specials at office depot.

tariq. no more cable tv...real cable tv that costs twenty bucks a month extra. hbo. mtv. tnt. tbs and espn where-alex. -everyone's life is a highlight film.

shell. no more pencil lines in vertical succession on the corner wall between the kitchen and the laundry room inspiring me to grow an extra inch in time for janet anderson's thirteenth birthday party...i miss my house on terra cotta drive where there was-

tariq. -no graffiti.

valerie. no taggers.

shannon. a place where people said "hi" to each other.

alex. a place where the cops came when you call.

shell. dad driving us away from the only home my family had ever known and watching it get smaller and smaller through the back window of the chevy suburban we no longer own.

*(extended beat.)*

shell. ten miles down the road and a lifetime ago i end up...here. *(she looks around; beat.)* a motel where father figures are not allowed.

alex. you can't escape it...dead or alive-

valerie. -papís are awol in this place.

shannon & tariq. in every sense of the word.

shell. different stories. different shades of grey...all playing the same stale record.

tariq. soldier boy killing babies on command as he dreams of another caramel-colored baby. his baby...back in the states wondering why daddy only talks to the voices in his head...wondering why when pops got home things didn't change and that sometimes one plus one doesn't always equal two and that the same pair of eyes that once stared into my crib, now stare into the eyes *(pointing to himself)* of this baby-turned-teenager overnight. the woman who gave me birth can't muster up the courage to tell me that the man living with us still hasn't come back from the war. *(beat.)* he ain't never coming back.

shannon. disillusioned soul caught in between limbo and minimum wage with the phrase "living from paycheck to paycheck" tattooed in between the wrinkles of his brow. he forces himself to wake up every morning convinced that life is predestined and that the day is always over before it begins. mother hops along for the ride never following her own path; never believing that she could play alongside the boys.

alex & valerie. anybody can make a baby, but that doesn't make you a man.

alex. ese hombre es cobarde! how could he do that? a mexicano is supposed to have pride. he's supposed to be honorable. he was supposed to put food on the plates and a roof over our heads. i don't understand why mama still sheds tears for him? why did he have to leave-  
valerie. -us? i don't understand. no se porque...all we ever did was love him.

*(extended beat.)*

shell. it seemed like only yesterday that my father walked me to my first day of school. *(beat.)* yesterday i was happy.

alex. yesterday i found out i had dyslexia.

valerie. yesterday i had to explain to my mother what dyslexia means.

shannon. yesterday i saw my sister run away from home never to return.

tariq. yesterday i had never heard of war or weapons of mass destruction.

shell. yesterday the health insurance company didn't pay the money they promised they would pay.

valerie. yesterday our familia lived in zacatecas, mexico.

shannon. yesterday there were no computers in schools; just typewriters.

tariq. yesterday i was an afro-american.

alex. yesterday i saw disneyland from across the street-

tariq. -and wondered what it would be like to-

shannon. -be normal for just one day and then i realized-

valerie. -that normal is a word you only find in the dictionary-

shell. -and when all is said and done i realized that-



alex. -yesterday, i stopped wanting to go to disneyland.

(*beat.*) yesterday was the day before today.

shannon. yesterday was the day i sent my application to harvard.

tariq. yesterday was the day i heard earth, wind and fire sing on the radio for the first time.

valerie. yesterday was the day that was supposed to be the first day of the rest of my life.

shell. yesterday was the day people forgot about-

valerie. -me.

tariq. me.

shannon. me.

alex. me.

(*extended beat.*)

shell. yesterday...was the day people forgot that we were somebody's children.

## **quinceañera**

(*valerie is sitting on a milk crate which doubles as a bus seat. she is wearing her uniform from burger king. as she does this, the rest of the group doubles as passengers as they sit in their respective seats. tariq sits up front; serving as the bus driver. a white quinceañera dress, covered in clear plastic wrap, hangs upstage.*)

valerie. route 147 on the o.c.t.a. bus line. it's the place where i do most of my best thinking. anaheim to santa ana, santa ana to anaheim. give or take a few minutes,

depending on traffic, this journey is exactly twenty-eight minutes long. i cherish those twenty-eight minutes...for those twenty-eight minutes, i don't have to-  
shannon & tariq. -hear the yells, screams and poundings on the wall.

valerie. i don't have to-

alex & shell. -lie to the kids at school about where i live.

valerie. i don't have to bear witness to my life if i don't want to.

tariq. next stop!

*(something catches the eye of the bus passengers. they point and smile; pleased by what they are seeing in the distance.)*

valerie. i couldn't believe what i was seeing...as my bus was stopped in front of the bowers museum, there was a quinceañera group getting its photo taken. i rubbed my eyes to prove to myself it was only a mirage because it was a friday afternoon and-

alex, shannon, shell & tariq. -no quinceañera ever takes place on a friday afternoon.

valerie. the boys were dressed in black tuxedos with lavender ties and the girls wore these really cute pink dresses. the birthday girl wore a beautiful white quinceañera dress. everybody seemed to be so happy. *(beat.)* i was curious to see how the picture would turn out...but, before the photographer could take the picture, the bus sped away to its next destination.

*(valerie looks at the fading image while the rest of the passengers return to looking forward.)*

valerie (*sadly*). i never had my quinceañera. there was no young man holding my hand at the front of the procession. there was no deejay playing a mix of tejano music and old school. there was no father beaming with pride. fate had found a way to steal from me a moment that every barrio princess should experience. (*beat.*) my familia did the best they could to raise my spirits up. my older brother, alex, gave me a-

alex. -writing journal so that she could create the kind of world you only see in magazine ads selling perfection.

valerie. my mama gave me a pearl necklace that belonged to her and that once belonged to my abuelita. (*beat.*) one day, hopefully, it will belong to my daughter.

*(extended beat.)*

valerie. on my fifteenth birthday, me, mama and alex went to the spanish mass at st. anthony claret catholic church. afterwards, we took some coupons and ate breakfast at denny's and laughed over a plate of french toast and scrambled eggs as we spoke of the previous night's episode of sabado gigante...we asked the manager to take a picture of us with a cheap disposable camera.

alex, shannon, shell & tariq (*sadly*). click!

valerie. before i went to sleep that night, i noticed the pain in my mama's eyes as she sipped her café. it was the pain that told me how sorry she was and that this was not the life she had planned for her children. mama asked me to sit down with her and i did...and, we sat

there in silence holding hands. (*beat.*) i'm the first girl in our familia to never experience a quinceañera. i guess that's what i get for living in a motel...i don't get the right to celebrate my life. no one ever celebrates anything around here.

tariq. no job promotions.

shell. no anniversaries.

shannon. no birthdays.

alex. no quinceañeras...nothing.

valerie. you can't celebrate in a motel and that's because everyday people aren't supposed to live in motels. motels are meant to be temporary, but the people who live in them shouldn't be.

alex, shannon, shell & tariq. but, we are.

valerie. so many nights i went to sleep envisioning that white dress. my quinceañera dress...envisioning the night that i was supposed to become a woman.

tariq. next stop!

*(valerie stands up and crosses to the dress and begins touching the plastic bag. the passengers look at her in silence.)*

*(extended beat.)*

valerie (*to herself*). i would've looked beautiful that day.

**theo huxtable**

*(the group of friends hum along with theme song from the cosby show that is playing. tariq, wearing a "loud" sweater walks around the stage comically and holding a small glass which contains jello brand chocolate pudding. he does a strange chicken-like type of dance and then takes a bite of pudding. he begins imitating bill cosby; much to the amusement of his friends.)*

tariq. i would like the world to buy some jello brand chocolate pudding!

*(tariq finishes off the pudding as the music fades away into the distance; beat. he begins talking in his normal voice.)*

i, mr. bill cosby, would like the world to buy some jello brand chocolate pudding

as i help spike lee finance the sequel to malcolm x.  
as i take my stand-up routine to convalescent homes  
across this great nation.  
as i buy up majority stock in nickelodeon at night.  
as i create a brand new cartoon about a diabetic mexican  
kid named fat alberto.

*(extended beat.)*

tariq. sitcom comedy coming to a tv station near you syndicated forever for the purposes of purposes whose purpose is to purposely con us into thinking our lives-

alex, shannon, shell & valerie. -can be like theirs.

tariq. who gives bill cosby the right to make me believe i could be theo huxtable?

shannon. only theo huxtable could crash his car into stevie wonder's limo and be ecstatic about it.

shell & valerie. only theo huxtable could be the captain of the wrestling team.

alex (*lustfully*). only theo huxtable could have a sister as hot as lisa bonet.

tariq. only theo huxtable could get away with being the perfect son.

*(extended beat.)*

tariq. mama says-

shell. -you ever seen this show?

tariq. i've never seen it.

shell. you need to see this show. i loved watching it when i was your age. everybody loved the cosby show.

tariq. i say, "whatever," but i check it out to get moms off my back.

*(tariq mimics turning on a tv set and begins watching; beat.)*

tariq. this episode was about theo freaking out because he got an earring. how lame is that!? they spent the entire show talking about a stupid earring and making it sound like it was some big drama. shoot, i wish my dramas were that simple. what a stupid show. screw it. i'm not going to watch it!