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Dramatic Publishing

WE WILL REMEMBER

A Tribute to Veterans

by

SANDRA FENICHEL ASHER

Commissioned by Prime Stage Theatre, Pittsburgh, Pa.,
and Pine-Richland Middle School, Gibsonia, Pa.



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(WE WILL REMEMBER: A Tribute to Veterans)

ISBN: 1-58342-309-5

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PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

Although much of the material in this script is presented in the words of real people, the characters and their stories are composites and therefore fictional. The stories are based on interviews, diaries, letters, and poems contributed by the students, staff and families of Pine-Richland Middle School, Gibsonia, Pa., and is used with their permission and my heartfelt thanks.

I would particularly like to thank Dr. Susan Frantz, who initiated the project, and her colleagues Aleta Lardin and John Dolphin, who did so much to help me see it through—great teachers and delightful people, all. A debt of gratitude is also owed to Wayne Brinda and Prime Stage, Pittsburgh, Pa., for encouragement and insight during the script's initial development; John D. Newman and his students at Highland High School, Salt Lake City, Utah, for their faith in my work and continuing support; and Mike Pearl and his students at Grandview High School, Aurora, Colo., for their rehearsed readings and invaluable feedback.

And, of course, to the veterans and their families who shared their time and stories so generously: my thanks and deepest respect.

The world premiere production of WE WILL REMEMBER: A TRIBUTE TO VETERANS was presented by Prime Stage, Pittsburgh, Pa., on November 9-18, 2001, at the Hazlette Theater. It was directed by Wayne Brinda and featured the following cast and staff:

STUDENTS . . . Stephen Arthur, Emily Cole, Ginny Rangos,
Sara Tamier, Dakotah West
MIDSHIPMAN Holly Glymour
KOREAN VETERAN Sam Nicotero
VIETNAM VETERAN John Palucka
GRANDMOTHER Ellie Reese
WORLD WAR II SAILOR Corey C. Rieger
CIVIL WAR SOLDIER Scott Van de Mark

Assistant Producer Lynn DeBree
Stage Manager Eboni McLeod
Production Manager Mark Whitehead
Set Designer Paul Grittle
Costume Designer Lisa Marie Bruno
Lighting Designer Michael Jehle
Assistant Lighting Designer Christian “Kik” Parker
Sound Designer Christian Parker
Dramaturg Michael Hinzman
Assistant Stage Manager Rachael Parker
Production Assistant Shane Weigel
Light Technician Ken Bedard
Sound Technician Sarah Parker
Crew Alex Traubert, Brandon Young
Mentor Students Rosa DeFerrari, Morgan Russell
House Manager Debbie Wirth

The Highland High School Theater Program, through the Kennedy Center Imagination Celebration of Salt Lake City, presented a second production of the revised script in February 2004. John D. Newman directed the following cast:

CIVIL WAR SOLDIER, VOLUNTEER. Luke
Leclair-Marzolf
WORLD WAR II SAILOR, BROTHER. Karl Hansen
NURSE Grace Davis, Amberle Allred
KOREAN WAR VETERAN Nick Watts
GRANDMOTHER Sasha Andersen
VIETNAM VETERAN Tyler Follett
STUDENT ONE Trishelle Revie
STUDENT TWO Bree Hoskisson
STUDENT THREE Aubrey Hostetter
STUDENT FOUR. Jessie Mulvey
STUDENT FIVE Erin Smithee
WORLD WAR II SOLDIER Patrick Charles
JAPANESE VETERAN, FATHER Colin Crebs
MIDSHIPMAN Natalie Blackman, Tatiana Garcia

WE WILL REMEMBER

A Tribute to Veterans

A Full-length Play

For 6m, 2f, 8m or f (doublecasting possible;
4 characters may be offstage voices)

CHARACTERS:

FIRST STUDENT, teen, male or female, shy, intense,
bookish

SECOND STUDENT, teen, male or female, cheerful,
warm, fifth student's best friend

THIRD STUDENT, teen, male or female, outgoing,
non-conformist, funny

FOURTH STUDENT, teen, male or female, confident,
well-informed, a leader

FIFTH STUDENT, teen, male or female, sensitive, fright-
ened, angry

CIVIL WAR SOLDIER, teen or older, male

WORLD WAR II SAILOR, teen or older, male

KOREAN WAR VETERAN, older male

NURSE, male or female

GRANDMOTHER

WORLD WAR II SOLDIER, early 20s, male (may be off-
stage voice or doublecast)

FATHER (or MOTHER, may be offstage voice or double-
cast)

BROTHER (or SISTER, may be offstage voice or double-
cast)

VIETNAM WAR VETERAN, middle-aged male

JAPANESE VETERAN, older male (may be offstage voice or doublecast)

NAVAL ACADEMY MIDSHIPMAN, college-aged female

SETTING: This piece works well with minimal set pieces in the round or 3/4 round. On a proscenium stage, upstage is divided into three raised playing areas. CIVIL WAR SOLDIER, FATHER and BROTHER will play their scenes on the highest, at UL. The WORLD WAR II SAILOR, JAPANESE VETERAN and WORLD WAR II SOLDIER will play their scenes on another platform UR. VIETNAM VETERAN's scene is on the third platform at center. DR is a wheelchair, waiting for KOREAN VETERAN. DL, two parlor chairs with a small table between them wait for GRANDMOTHER. Behind the raised area, across the back of the stage is a wall. It will eventually be decorated with memorabilia from various scenes, including dozens of colorful origami cranes attached to ribbons or streamers. Alternately, this display may be done on panels to the right and left of the proscenium arch or elsewhere. Actors should have a way to bring items to the display at various points during the action.

WE WILL REMEMBER

A Tribute to Veterans

AT RISE: *A bugle is heard, sounding reveille. As the last note fades away, LIGHTS come up on raised areas UL and UR. CIVIL WAR SOLDIER and WWII SAILOR enter and mime finishing up some morning business: perhaps making a bed, arranging supplies, cleaning equipment. They are unaware of each other; indeed, they are in different centuries. After a moment, each sits down and begins to write: the SOLDIER, a series of letters; the SAILOR, journal entries.*

SOLDIER. May 21st, 1862. Kind sister: I embrace the opportunity of sending you a few lines to let you know that I am in good health at present.

SAILOR. April 12, 1944. We are in the Irish Sea off the coast of Northern Ireland—my first glimpse of land in fifteen days. A welcome sight.

SOLDIER. It is one of the most beautiful mornings I have seen in Kentucky. It seems like an old Pennsylvania Sunday...

SAILOR. Puts me in mind of home, with its tall, sweeping hills...

(LIGHTS dim on SOLDIER and SAILOR, who freeze in position, writing. LIGHTS come up on GRAND-

MOTHER, who enters left and goes to chair, carrying a box of letters. Her entrance is accompanied by the distant SOUND of an old love song playing on a gramophone. MUSIC fades as she sits, opens one letter and reads.)

GRANDMOTHER (*reading*). July 25th, 1944. Darling Betty, I wish I could see you today, but it is quite some distance from France to the States. Seems like I miss you more every time I think of you, and that is all the time...

(GRANDMOTHER freezes in place. LIGHTS dim on her and come up DR as NURSE enters, assisting KOREAN WAR VET to the wheelchair. There is the SOUND of a hospital signal bell once or twice as they enter. It fades under the following dialogue.)

NURSE (*helping KOREAN WAR VET settle in*). How's that now? Comfortable?

KOREAN VET (*muttering grumpily*). Yeah. Thanks.

NURSE. We have students coming to visit this afternoon.

Would you like to speak with one of them?

KOREAN VET (*suspicious, unenthusiastic*). What about?

NURSE. Serving in Korea.

KOREAN VET (*quickly shakes his head "no" and looks away*). I don't have anything to say about that.

NURSE. I think maybe you do.

(KOREAN VET shakes his head, waves NURSE away. NURSE gently puts a hand on his shoulder. KOREAN VET and NURSE freeze. LIGHTS dim on them and come

up on VIETNAM WAR VET, who enters on center raised area, carrying a photograph album. His entrance is marked by the backbeat of '60s rock 'n' roll MUSIC, which fades as he looks at photos and begins to speak.)

VIETNAM VET. When I think about life...*before*...I think of Louie's: Early evening. Hot. Busy. Kids laughing, insulting one another—the way old friends do. I spent a lot of time working in Louie's. All through high school. *(He stops, staring at a particular photo.)* That's where I first heard that a friend was killed in Nam...

(LIGHTS dim on VIETNAM VET, who freezes. The SOUND of a distant drum cadence is heard and slowly grows louder under the following dialogue as STUDENTS enter from various points onstage or in the audience and slowly move toward downstage. They carry notebooks and pens, as if writing reports or studying for an exam. The facts they recite overlap one another.)

FIRST STUDENT. Eighteen sixty-one to eighteen sixty-five.

SECOND STUDENT. Nineteen fourteen to nineteen eighteen.

THIRD STUDENT. Nineteen thirty-nine to nineteen forty-five.

FOURTH STUDENT. Nineteen fifty to nineteen fifty-three.

FIFTH STUDENT. Nineteen sixty-one to nineteen seventy-five.

FOURTH STUDENT. Gettysburg.

FIFTH STUDENT. Sarajevo.

THIRD STUDENT. Pearl Harbor.

SECOND STUDENT. The 38th Parallel.

FIRST STUDENT. The Tet Offensive.

(The drum cadence ends with a flourish. ALL STUDENTS have reached the stage.)

THIRD STUDENT. Dates. Places. Borders. Battles—
what's it got to do with *us*?

SECOND STUDENT. What's it got to do with *now*?

FIRST STUDENT. Something's missing.

FOURTH STUDENT. I know. *People*.

THIRD STUDENT. What?

FOURTH STUDENT. Not *what*. *Who*!

(SOUND of drum cadence begins again. FOURTH STUDENT leads OTHER STUDENTS in walking among the frozen characters with curiosity, as if viewing exhibits in a museum. STUDENTS ONE to FOUR show various levels of interest and engagement, according to their personalities: FIFTH STUDENT is involved, but very tentative. They speak to the frozen figures.)

FOURTH STUDENT (*cont'd*). What was it really like?

FIRST STUDENT. What did you *do*?

FIFTH STUDENT. How did you *feel*?

SECOND STUDENT. Was it exciting?

THIRD STUDENT. Was it like in the movies?

FIRST STUDENT. Were you scared?

FIFTH STUDENT. Were you angry?

FOURTH STUDENT. Were you wounded?

THIRD STUDENT. Did you kill anyone?

FIFTH STUDENT. Weren't you afraid you'd die?

(SOUND of drum cadence ends in a flourish. STUDENTS now speak to one another, except for FIFTH STUDENT, who draws away from OTHERS.)

SECOND STUDENT. Nobody ever talks about it.

FIRST STUDENT. Whenever Dad asked my grandpa, he just said, "Why do you want to know?"

THIRD STUDENT. My mom says the memories hurt too much.

SECOND STUDENT *(as STUDENTS turn back toward frozen figures)*. But I still wonder...

FOURTH STUDENT. Who are the *people*?

THIRD STUDENT. Where are the *heroes*?

SECOND STUDENT. What's our *connection*?

FIRST STUDENT. I'd really like to know...

THIRD STUDENT *(off-handedly)*. So let's ask them.

FIRST STUDENT *(aghast at the thought)*. What?

FOURTH STUDENT *(with real enthusiasm)*. Yes! *Let's ask them!*

FIRST STUDENT. No!

THIRD STUDENT. How else will we find out?

FIRST STUDENT. We can *read* about it! Reading is good!

THIRD STUDENT. We've *been* reading, and we can read some more—but it's not *enough*.

FIRST STUDENT. My grandpa's gone now. It's too late.

FOURTH STUDENT. No, it isn't. There are others.

FIRST STUDENT. Total strangers?

FOURTH STUDENT. Reporters interview strangers all the time.

FIRST STUDENT. What if they don't want to talk to us?

SECOND STUDENT. We'll find the ones who do.

FOURTH STUDENT. You said you wanted to know...

FIRST STUDENT. I *do* want to know...

THIRD STUDENT. Then let's go for it!

(THIRD and FOURTH STUDENTS usher FIRST STUDENT into a huddle at the side to make plans. Wanting to join OTHERS, SECOND STUDENT turns back to find FIFTH STUDENT.)

SECOND STUDENT *(to FIFTH STUDENT)*. Come on!

FIFTH STUDENT. No, it's okay. You go.

SECOND STUDENT. But it'll be fun!

FIFTH STUDENT. *Fun?* War is your idea of *fun*?

SECOND STUDENT. Not war. *This*. *Talking* to people.

FIFTH STUDENT. I'm not sure I want to hear what they have to say.

SECOND STUDENT. Why not?

FIFTH STUDENT. I just *don't*.

SECOND STUDENT. Well, I do. It'll be interesting—

FIFTH STUDENT. Then go on. I'm not stopping you.

SECOND STUDENT. But I want you to do this with me.

(Beat.) Please? *(Coaxes FIFTH STUDENT toward OTHER STUDENTS.)* Oh, come on!

FIFTH STUDENT *(losing ground)*. I'd really rather not...

SECOND STUDENT *(with unabashed cheerfulness)*. But you will anyway! Right? I thought so!

(FIFTH STUDENT gives in, reluctantly. As SECOND and FIFTH STUDENT join OTHERS, there is the SOUND of distant rumbling, which could be thunder or explosions. FROZEN FIGURES stir. STUDENTS scatter

and whirl around to face FIGURES who do not speak directly to them. SOLDIER and SAILOR remain frozen.)

VIETNAM VET. Here, in the attic—

NURSE. There, in a basement—

GRANDMOTHER. Look!

NURSE. In a diary—

VIETNAM VET. In an album—

GRANDMOTHER. In her letters—

NURSE. In his heart.

VIETNAM VET. Hidden away—

NURSE. Hidden away—

GRANDMOTHER. All these years.

(Another burst of thunder or explosives. VIETNAM VET, NURSE, KOREAN VET, GRANDMOTHER freeze. STUDENTS sit huddled together, facing SOLDIER and SAILOR, who now respond to the SOUNDS, each as if they were in his own time and place, then begin a duet of experiences recorded in the SOLDIER's letters and SAILOR's journal. SOUNDS fade as they begin to speak.)

SOLDIER. December 1864. Why, Ellen, law me, I was surprised when I got that letter from you. I have not seen more than a girl a week for a long time, and it is so long since I saw one of your size that I expect they would scare me at first sight.

SAILOR. May 1944. Liberty in Cowes, England. Pretty faces are very scarce. *(Beat, shrug.)* Went to a movie.

SOLDIER. Some person tried to burn the railroad bridge across Nolin Creek last night. A rebel, I suppose...

SAILOR. Noticed bombed-out places, which were very many. Bombs hit churches and homes; shipyards untouched.

SOLDIER. I would not give much for the land this army has passed over. It will take a man a lifetime to get it repaired for use. (*Considers this for a beat, then—*) Be a good girl and study your lessons well...

(There is a brief SOUND of explosions and flash of LIGHT. Both SOLDIER and SAILOR react with concern, but in different directions, then go on writing.)

SAILOR. Rumors say invasion to start within three days. Completed operating room today. All battle equipment in readiness. Weather rather warm out.

SOLDIER. Our camp is beginning to feel comfortable and dry. The last time we moved was a very bad day and the soldiers lay out all night in the cold rain. Got a bad cold and felt very mean, mad, and muddy.

SAILOR. No liberty granted and doubt any will be granted until invasion is complete.

SOLDIER. P.S. If you see Uncle Sam, tell him he will soon owe us four months' wages and we are pretty near strapped, for it took nearly all our last payment to furnish us with boots and blankets that he ought to have *given* us!

SAILOR. Bad news: Special clothing being distributed for protection against gas attack...

(Another burst of explosive LIGHT and SOUND. Again, BOTH respond and wait until it fades before resuming writing and dialogue. They may move closer to STU-

DENTS and AUDIENCE, but are still recording their experiences.)

SAILOR. June 2, 1944: Docked in Southhampton at oh-two-hundred, stayed up all night taking on fresh water and cargo: jeeps, trucks, American-made ducks loaded with ammunition. Water surrounding Isle of Wight is jammed with ships, sure sign of invasion within the week.

SOLDIER. We are having good times now and chasing the rebels. We have got them into a swamp between here and Richmond and we are going to give them fits one of these days soon.

SAILOR. Meeting at oh-nine-hundred of all crew members. Skipper gave details of invasion. Also told us that D-Day is tomorrow.

SOLDIER. At three o'clock, the long roll of the alarm was beat. Every soldier that was able to carry a gun pitched into ranks and was eager for the fray.

SAILOR. Three task forces to hit coast of France: Planes will drop tons of bombs per square yard. Paratroops and gliders are to land behind enemy lines to take military positions and disrupt communication centers. We are to be second wave to hit beach...

SOLDIER. Thirty minutes after the alarm, our regiment had marched across the river through mud knee deep. I could hardly see for mud flying by. The whole country seemed to be alive with soldiers, horses, mules, wagons, and artillery, all making for the scene of the battle. *(SOUNDS of thunder and then heavy rainfall, which continues softly under following dialogue.)* The fuss was all for nothing.

SAILOR. Twelve-hundred. Received word the big push was postponed because of weather conditions.

(A pause, they write as SOUNDS of storm fade out, and may again move closer to STUDENTS and AUDIENCE.)

SOLDIER. It is one month today since the alarm.

SAILOR. At oh-five-hundred, left English coast. Within two hours we will be in sight of the coast of France.

SOLDIER. The third time will be the charm.

SAILOR. After getting there and unloading our equipment, we are to take on wounded and return to England.

(Beat.) Everyone's a bit excited and nervous.

SOLDIER. Either we will see a rebel or we will break a gut in the attempt!

(A pause in dialogue as SOLDIER and SAILOR react to SOUNDS of men shouting, feet running, explosions, flashes of LIGHT, and general confusion—all of which fades out as dialogue is resumed. SOLDIER and SAILOR are no longer writing, but stand, observe, and report in an urgent manner—)

SAILOR. Heavy resistance was met five miles before hitting the beach.

SOLDIER. We had a fight and our regiment was into it. We was marched out to the line and we was fired on before we had got loaded...

(A loud whistling SOUND, followed by a flash of LIGHT and an explosion. A pause as both SAILOR and SOLDIER respond to this.)