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# Salvation Road

By

D. W. GREGORY

**Dramatic Publishing Company**

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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For inquiries concerning all other rights, contact:  
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New York, NY 10003 • Phone: (212) 842-9030

ISBN: 978-1-61959-143-1

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“*Salvation Road* was developed by New Plays for Young Audiences at New York University’s Steinhardt School under the direction of David Montgomery and opened there Oct. 26, 2012. It was subsequently produced by Walden Theatre of Louisville, Ky., as part of its Slant Culture Series and opened Nov. 8, 2012, under the direction of Alec Volz.”

*Salvation Road* was originally produced at New York University's Steinhardt School on Oct. 26, 2012.

Cast:

CLIFF KOZAK ..... Jack Dod  
JILL KOZAK..... Marshall Burgart  
DENISE KOZAK.....Natalie Mack  
BRIAN DUFFY.....Marco Santarelli  
ELIJAH ..... Spiro Tzakis  
REBECCA .....Alexis Lounsbury  
SISTER JEAN..... Rebekah D. Wilson  
SIMI..... Valerie Issembert  
PATTI/ENSEMBLE ..... Jess Honovich  
KARL/TANK/ENSEMBLE ..... Cody Allyn  
JACOB/ENSEMBLE.....Charlie Wright  
MELANIE/ENSEMBLE ..... Kathleen Turner  
RACHEL/ENSEMBLE ..... Haven Mitchell-Rose  
SARAH/ENSEMBLE ..... Leslee Aileen Myers  
BANDMATE/ENSEMBLE ..... Dan Walsh

Production Staff:

Director .....David Montgomery  
Assistant Director..... Jess Honovich  
Scenic & Lighting Designer..... Daryl Embry  
Costume Designer..... Michelle Humphrey  
Sound Designer..... Jack Dod  
Dramaturg ..... Sarah Chichester  
Production Stage Manager..... Talia Krispel  
Assistant Stage Manager.....Arielle Sosland  
Assistant Stage Manager..... Dan Walsh  
Production Manager..... Alix Claps

# Salvation Road

## CHARACTERS

CLIFF KOZAK: 17, and younger in memory.

JILL: 15, and younger in memory. Cliff's younger sister.

DENISE: 19, and younger in memory. Cliff's older sister.

BRIAN DUFFY: 18, Cliff's friend.

ELIJAH: Early-to-mid-20s, a current member of the Disciples.

SISTER JEAN: A campus chaplain.

REBECCA: A current member of the Disciples.

SIMI: 20, a girl who left the Disciples.

ENSEMBLE: Four to eight other actors who double as concertgoers, students, customers and partiers, including:

### FATHER'S VOICE

KARL/KARLA: An impatient clerk at McDonalds.

MELANIE: A flirtatious clerk at McDonald's.

RACHEL: A member of the Disciples.

SARAH: A member of the Disciples.

PATTI: A member of Denise's band.

JACOB: A member of the Disciples.

TANK: A member of Tau Kappa Epsilon.

## SETTING

Time: Autumn, present day.

Place: Suburban Philadelphia and a university town in central New Jersey.

## NOTES ON PRODUCTION

This play is intentionally minimalistic in style, more evocative than literal, allowing for a fluid movement from location to location with the use of a few furnishings and only those props essential to establish the scenes or serve the action. In such a staging, set changes are to be effected by the actors, whose movements should be incorporated into the ongoing action. At no point should the stage go dark for a scene change.

Slashes ( // ) indicate where the next line overlaps.

## MUSIC

The script suggests certain songs for key moments in the play, but other choices are possible. It is up to the producing organization to obtain the performance rights to any song used in the production. Should the producer use an original song—which would be a terrific addition to the play—then strike Denise’s line “My dad taught us this one” on page 10 and instead have her say, “Here’s something I worked out on the weekend ... Dad? This is for you.”

## SILENT SCENES AND ENSEMBLE

The silent scenes are projections of imagination and memory and, to that extent, can be stylized and, ideally, underscored with music. The ensemble can serve to create a sense of place in these scenes as well as in scenes of public activity, such as the McDonald's, the library and the frat house party. Other opportunities may present themselves, and the director and cast should feel free to explore those possibilities. However, care should be taken not to overdo the use of this device. Further, there is no obligation to use every member of the ensemble in every group scene. However they are staged, the ensemble scenes should be crisp and active, simple without being cartoonish. It is critical that the silent scenes be silent—no ad-libbed dialogue—and that there be some distinction made between past and present, memory and imagination. That distinction can be as simple as a lighting or sound effect, or as complex as a specific color scheme reflected in lighting or costumes. This can be particularly effective towards the end of the play, when the frat party merges into the party Cliff imagines Denise attending.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Salvation Road* began with a nudge from a friend who was eager to see a story onstage about young people who come under the influence of controlling organizations. Like Cliff, I initially resisted *The Call*. But after a few false starts, I found a way into the story and a production of a one-act version in the Philadelphia Fringe, beautifully directed by Aaron Oster. The script evolved from there with assistance and support from many wonderful theatre artists. I owe a debt of gratitude to David Montgomery, Cecily O'Neill, Dierdre Kelly-Lavrakas and the New York University Steinhardt School for the developmental workshop at NYU's New Plays for Young Audiences and the subsequent production at the university. Thanks to Alec Volz and the students at Walden Theatre, whose amazing work demonstrated the play's suitability for high-school actors. Additional thanks to Susan O'Neill, Kellee VanAken and Karen Glass of the Seton Hill University Theatre Department; to John Pietrowski of New Jersey Writers' Theatre; to Jacqueline E. Lawton and Mary Resing of the late great Active Cultures; to John Newman, Kelby Siddons, and Sandra Fenichel Asher, of the American Alliance for Theatre and Education; and to Marie Byrd Sproul and the cast and crew of the D.C. Fringe production. Every reading, workshop and production helped tremendously in strengthening the text. Finally, love and gratitude to my friends Charles and Ann Breinig, who got the whole thing rolling, and to Michael Langone of the International Cultic Studies Association, for his ongoing interest, support and assistance with vital research.

When Cliff Kozak's older sister becomes deeply involved in a charismatic church, her family observes a radical change in her behavior and personality. But when they attempt to intervene -- Denise disappears, declaring her family is "toxic". One year later, Cliff's best friend Brian encounters her at a shopping mall not far from where his brother goes to college. In this excerpt, Brian and Cliff's younger sister, Jill, present Cliff with the video evidence of that day -- as they attempt to persuade him that Denise is not a willing participant in the Disciples of Christ, but someone who needs to be rescued.

JILL. Did you talk to her?

DUFFY. Not really. That kid (*Indicating the video.*) did most of the talking.

JILL (*studying the video*). It's Elijah.

DUFFY. Elijah?

JILL. From Neechie's church.

CLIFF. The guy who ran that house in Amherst.

JILL. The one who said Daddy was toxic.

DUFFY. That's the // dude?

JILL. Said our whole family was toxic!

CLIFF. Dad was pretty volcanic. You gotta admit.

JILL. He just wanted to talk to her!

CLIFF. Correction. He wanted to yell at her.

JILL. So she would come home.

CLIFF. And you see how well that worked out.

JILL. It's not his fault, Cliff!

DUFFY. Hey. Guys. (*Turns off the video as they break.*) I thought you'd be interested in this.

CLIFF. Sorry, man.

JILL. Sorry, Brian.

(*DUFFY turns on the video again.*)

DUFFY. Anyway. (*Warming into it, the hero in his own story.*)

There I am. About to bite down on a Big Mac, when Scott goes, "Hey isn't that Kozak's sister?" And I look up—and there she is. So I say, "Get some pictures. I'm gonna talk to these guys." And I go out ... and tell this Elijah dude, OK, I'll take a flower. (*Pleased with himself.*) You know? And while he's making change, Denise is standing there—I can sorta feel her looking at me? But when I look at her, she looks away.

JILL. Like she was embarrassed?

DUFFY. Maybe.

JILL. Why would she be embarrassed?

DUFFY. Hard to say. But she's not saying anything, so I don't either. So I just talk to him: "So are you guys, like, here a lot? This seems like a good cause," blah blah—and he starts telling me how everybody needs an anchor in life and he didn't have one till he found Jesus and now he does, whatever. And just then, another guy drives up in this rusted out van, and before I can say another word—boom! Everybody piles in. And that's when she looks at me. Like, right at me—with this look of—I don't know—"help me."

JILL. Ohmigod.

DUFFY. Yeah.

CLIFF (*unimpressed*). Yeah.

DUFFY. I'm telling you, dude. She seriously wants outta there.

CLIFF. You don't know what she wants. You didn't even talk to her.

DUFFY. It was in her eyes, man.

CLIFF. Oh. Her eyes said what her lips couldn't?

JILL. Don't be such a dork. You weren't even there.

CLIFF. Neither were you.

DUFFY. I kinda got the feeling she was, you know. Afraid to talk?

JILL. Because of Elijah?

DUFFY. And if we went back—

JILL. When?

DUFFY. And got her alone—

JILL. 'Cause I'll totally go with you—

CLIFF. Hold it! You're not planning some kind of commando raid? 'Cause somebody tried that already.

DUFFY. I just figured make contact. You know? Let her know she's got help.

CLIFF. I hate to break it to you guys: She knows where we live. If she wanted a ticket home—she'd have one.

DUFFY. Might not be that simple, dude.

JILL. She might not have the money.

CLIFF. She can pick up a phone.

DUFFY. What if she can't get to a phone?

CLIFF. Who in America can't get to a phone?

DUFFY. So what are you saying, man? We just let this go?

JILL. We can't just let it go!

CLIFF. What are you gonna do? Kidnap her? Hold her hostage?

*(A moment.)*

JILL. Maybe you're right. (*Starts to exit.*) But you're still a dork. (*Exits.*)

DUFFY. At least think about it, OK? 'Cause if it was my sister—I'd at least try to do something. (*Starts to exit.*)

CLIFF. Like what am I supposed to do, man? Neechie doesn't take orders from me.

*(Sound of the folk song finishing offstage. CLIFF listens.)*

DENISE (*off, far away*). Hey, I love you guys!

*(Sound of an audience laughing.)*

CLIFF. Denise always set her own agenda. From the very beginning.

*(Light shifts to an early morning at the breakfast table. DENISE enters with an electric guitar, dressed in an affected, artsy fashion that cries out, "I am my own self (sort of)."* She picks at the guitar, which is not plugged in, and makes notations in a notebook.)

CLIFF (*cont'd*). Like, she was supposed to be a boy? Dennis. But she had other ideas.

DENISE. All children are female during the first ten weeks of gestation. Scientific fact. So Freud had it completely backwards. Women are not incomplete men. Men are overdeveloped women.

CLIFF (*to the audience*). Not exactly a candidate for the nunnery?

*(DENISE makes a face.)*

CLIFF (*cont'd, to the audience*). But we're not what you call mortify-the-flesh, Opus Dei type Catholics. At least I'm not.

I mean, I go to mass. When I can't get out of it. But I don't let that religious stuff affect me.

DENISE. The hell you don't.

CLIFF (*joining the scene*). I no longer buy into the Sky God myth.

DENISE. You tell Mom that?

CLIFF. She's aware.

DENISE (*amused*). I bet that went over well.

CLIFF. It's a process. I tell her how I feel. She tells me I'm wrong. Next Sunday I sleep in—we see how it goes.

DENISE. Cliff. I can tell you right now how it's going to go.

CLIFF. Isn't it better for everyone if I stay home? Otherwise, I'm just a hypocrite, going to mass. Right?

DENISE. You want my honest advice?

CLIFF. Maybe.

DENISE. The reason you're turned off by your religion? Is that it has nothing to do with the rest of your life.

CLIFF. Exactly my point.

DENISE. Because you don't let it, Cliff. It could be so different if you just let yourself be inspired. But instead, you put up this pathetic Chinese wall. Between going to mass ... and living your life. (*Plays a riff on the guitar; then makes another notation in the notebook.*)

CLIFF. You know that's not plugged in.

DENISE. I mean, I basically agree with you. No point going if that's how you feel.

CLIFF. How can you practice if it's not plugged in?

DENISE. 'Cause if you're going to even bother to have a religion—you need to like, you know, live it.

CLIFF. I guess you save energy that way, if it's not plugged in.

DENISE. I'm trying to work something out.

CLIFF. What, a new form of music? Like John Cage? Only worse?

DENISE. No, funny guy. I can't plug in before ten. Dad's rules.

CLIFF. Wise man, my father.

*(A beat. She regards him.)*

DENISE. So. Did you talk to Brian and Scott?

CLIFF. About?

DENISE. The benefit. For the earthquake victims? *(Off his reaction.)* You guys are going, right?

CLIFF. I'm not really into global issues.

DENISE. Cliff. It's not optional. You live in the world, you are "into" global issues.

CLIFF. Please.

DENISE. We're talking about human suffering!

CLIFF. Human suffering? Is that like, when I'm up till three, studying for my chemistry exam?

DENISE. No! It's like when you're ten years old, and you've got nothing to eat ... and your mother just died of some horrible infection because there's no drugs to treat her. That kind of suffering.

CLIFF. Way too early for this.

DENISE. That's the reality for millions of people, Cliff ... And we just make it worse by the way we live in this country.

CLIFF. And I'm supposed to fix that, exactly how? By not eating Cheerios?

DENISE. It's a start.

CLIFF. No Cheerios. Got it.

DENISE. If one person makes one small change ... another person will follow ... and another. And before you know it, a global movement is born.

CLIFF. I refuse to be part of any global movement that would have me as a member.

DENISE. You're hopeless.

CLIFF. And you're naive. If you think people are starving to death 'cause I eat Cheerios for breakfast. It's like, some big diamond cartel or some warlord in Zimbabwe. Or something. Believe me, I could like turn into a Franciscan monk overnight and eat nothing but worms and dirt for the rest of my life—and there would still be starving kids in Africa.

DENISE. What a convenient philosophy. "Why should I care? It's out of my hands."

CLIFF. It is out of my hands. Out of your hands, too.

DENISE. I don't believe that. And a lot of your friends don't believe it either. So if you stay home tomorrow night, you'll be the only one.

CLIFF. No, I won't. (*Leaning in.*) Phillies versus the Mets. Seven o'clock. Channel seventeen. (*Sits back with a smug grin.*)

DENISE. You are a selfish pig, you know that?

CLIFF. It's so interesting how, whenever you lose an argument with me—it's because I'm a pig.

*(He goes for the cereal as DENISE gets up and marches out.)*

CLIFF (*cont'd*). And for your information—a pig is not selfish. It's acting in rational self-interest by eating as much as it can. Thank you very much.



*(He snarfs cereal from the box. A beat, and DENISE returns. She studies him.)*

DENISE *(a shift in tone)*. Cliff. If you came to the benefit tomorrow night? It would mean a lot to me. Mom and Dad and Jill are coming. And if you came, then my whole family would be there ... and that would make me feel really, really good.

*(A beat as he takes her in.)*

DENISE *(cont'd)*. So I hope you will think about it.

*(With dignity, she exits again. CLIFF eyes the audience.)*

CLIFF. OK, I was a dork. I didn't go to the benefit. And I didn't ask about it either. Even when I heard it was some big deal, and they raised like fifteen hundred dollars or something, I made a point not to ask her about it. I made a point not to do a lot of things. Like take out the garbage when it was my turn. Or wait for her at the bus stop. Or lend her money when she came up short for her share of the pizza. I ate her share of the pizza. *(Beat.)* And then one day, she disappears.

*(Lights shift to late night as CLIFF picks up the remote control.)*

CLIFF *(cont'd)*. And becomes The Forbidden Subject. She Who Cannot Be Named. Because if you make the mistake of talking about it, your mom spends the rest of the night crying in the kitchen— *(Settles on the couch.)* While your dad sits in the rec room, with the remote in his hand—staring at a blank TV ...

*(He turns on the video again. Now that he is alone, he allows himself to feel the full weight of the images.)*

CLIFF *(cont'd)*. You figure it out pretty fast, what not to say.

*(JILL enters. A beat.)*

JILL. Cliff?

*(CLIFF abruptly turns off the video and turns to a textbook.)*

JILL *(cont'd)*. Were you watching it again?

CLIFF. Just ... flipping channels.

JILL. Can't you sleep?

CLIFF. I sleep fine. *(Beat as he gets busy.)* Got a paper due.

*(JILL picks up the remote and turns on the video again. She looks to CLIFF, who steadfastly ignores her.)*

JILL. I can understand. If you think we shouldn't try anything, but ... *(Bravely.)* We should at least tell Daddy about this.

CLIFF. Good idea. Then he and Mom can get into another fight.

JILL. They have a right to know.

CLIFF. Know what? Somebody saw her at a mall. That's all we know.

JILL. We know where she is now ... And we know she's not happy.

CLIFF. Just 'cause peddling carnations isn't your idea of a good time.

JILL. How could anybody be happy doing that?

CLIFF. Easy. She's with her friends. She's saving the world. For her, that's nirvana.

JILL. Get serious, Cliff.

CLIFF. I'm totally serious. (*A shift in tone.*) But look, you want to tell them, be my guest. Maybe this time, Dad will get a clue. And instead of calling the cops, he'll hire a private eye.

JILL. Very funny.

CLIFF. And they can lock her in a motel room until she comes to her senses.