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# Alone, Together

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“Commissioned and originally presented in June 2020 as part of the  
University of California, Santa Barbara, Department of Theater and Dance LAUNCH PAD Zoom  
Festival *Alone, Together*; Risa Brainin, Artistic Director.”

Thank you to all the playwrights; directors; actors; designers; dramaturgs; artistic, production and administrative folks; donors; and audiences who have contributed to making LAUNCH PAD a vibrant home for new plays.

## Foreword

On March 10, 2020, one week before the end of winter quarter, everyone in the University of California, Santa Barbara community received an email from Chancellor Henry Yang instructing us to move to online teaching as soon as possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The theatre/dance faculty immediately came together to figure out what to do to best serve the needs of our students. Final projects and upcoming productions had to be canceled, and students were heading home for the foreseeable future to take classes on Zoom from their childhood bedrooms! We were all thrown into a bit of chaos: how could we create a remote curriculum for all of our aspiring young artists?

It was at that point that my dear friend, festival co-director and head of the B.F.A. acting program, Annie Torsiglieri, had the vision to say: “Let’s commission playwrights to write monologues and plays that are meant to be performed on Zoom.” Well, I went a little crazy and invited every writer who has ever worked with our new play development program, LAUNCH PAD, over the past 15 years to participate. That was around 30 writers, and 24 answered the call! We gave the writers this prompt: *Alone, Together*. A total of 39 plays were written, 23 directors engaged, 61 actors cast, 5 stage managers, 3 designers, 3 dramaturgs and 10 staff assembled virtually, and, together, we created an all-day, live Zoom festival in four chapters on Saturday, June 6, 2020.

What we couldn’t anticipate is that not only would we be rehearsing during a global health pandemic but also in the midst of a revolution. George Floyd was murdered on Monday, May 25, and it reignited the cry against racism in our country. Our company was composed of students, faculty, staff and professional guest artists from across the country. Many were protesting by day and rehearsing by night. Even today, as I write this, the protests continue. It was important to both Annie and me that all of the artists involved in *Alone, Together* knew (and still know) that UCSB Department of Theater and Dance and LAUNCH PAD stand with our Black communities across the country on this day and every day. BLACK LIVES MATTER. We are with you.

As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote in a famous letter from the Birmingham jail in 1963: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” We, as artists, are committed to speaking out against injustice.

Xochitl Clare, one of our actors, announced *Alone, Together* on her Facebook page by quoting performance and installation artist Ester Hernandez who said, “We must continue to use our creative skills to give strength to our political, cultural and spiritual struggle.”

Xochitl then continued with her own thoughts: “‘Is making theatre really important now?’ my heart asks. As a young Black artist, struggling to grapple with our world, channeling my energy towards my craft has provided me some solace. Support me as I move forward in virtual solidarity with fellow theatre artists across the nation to do a very simple, yet important thing—to *come together*.” And that’s exactly what we did on 6/6/20. With an audience of 800 people over the course of the day, we all came together.

As theatre-makers, we communicate through the art we create. The 39 plays in this collection reflect many perspectives on life during the early days of the quarantine. They brilliantly offer moments of joy, pathos, insight, hope and comfort knowing we are never really alone.

—Risa Brainin  
Artistic Director, LAUNCH PAD

# South Lake Tahoe, California

By  
BRIAN OTAÑO

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*South Lake Tahoe, California* was commissioned and originally presented in June 2020 as part of the University of California, Santa Barbara, Department of Theater and Dance LAUNCH PAD Zoom Festival *Alone, Together*; Risa Brainin, Artistic Director. It was directed by Shianne Dingeman.

CAST:

HARRIET ..... Sara Neal  
GLENN ..... Matte Kranz  
JACKIE ..... Julie Caudill  
MIKE ..... Vishay Singh

AUTHOR’S NOTE

I’ve been a fan of horror stories since before I could read or form complete sentences. True story: the image of JoBeth Williams swimming in a muddy pool of skeletons during the climax of *Poltergeist* is my first TV memory. As I’ve grown older, I’ve found that the horrors visited upon us by ghosts and slashers don’t hold a candle to the real-life nightmares that have unfolded in the world during my lifetime. Terrorist attacks, natural disasters, elections, this pandemic—one of the things they have in common is that they make me feel utterly powerless. In this play, I explore that powerlessness and tip my hat to the brave folks who continue to face down danger in order to help the afflicted.

—Brian Otaño

# South Lake Tahoe, California

## CHARACTERS

**HARRIET:** The keeper of the Zoom meeting. She's the mama of every friend group she's ever had, and that's how she likes it. Her shit's together, she's brave. Camping, escape rooms, the apocalypse—you want her around for all these moments. Her heroes: Ellen Ripley and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. She's currently residing in a small town east of Carson City, Nevada.

**GLENN:** A pushy, slightly toxic cishet guy from a conservative family. They all secretly vote Republican (“We’re fiscal conservatives,” they’d say). He can recount the fact that one of his sisters died but won’t say how, won’t register any emotion and would rather pretend that she never existed. Think the family from *Ordinary People*, without the help of Judd Hirsch. He doesn’t have any heroes. Grew up with Harriet in Carson City.

**JACKIE:** A hyperactive stoner from Queens, New York. She doesn’t have an accent but can talk a blue streak. She has swag for days. She’s not gay, but she’s an ally. She’s the gal drag queens always save a seat for at the bar shows because she’s cool like that. She always carries cash and knows how to tourniquet a knife wound. Her heroes: Ginger McKenna from *Casino* (as played brilliantly by Sharon Stone) and Shangela Laquifa Wadley (drag superstar and three-time contestant on *RuPaul’s Drag Race*). After taking care of a very intoxicated Harriet at an unbearable theatre nerd party, Jackie and Harriet have been inseparable.

**MIKE:** A wealthy, somewhat sheltered kid from Northern California. He doesn’t deal well with pressure and isn’t very good at being uncomfortable. He’s the youngest in the group. He likes scary movies but hates being in the woods, which makes his current predicament all the more taxing—at present, he is quarantined in South Lake Tahoe, Calif., at his family’s lake house. He’s totally one of those kids who ignored the social distancing measures because he assumed that even if he did catch COVID, he’d be OK because he’s young. Of course, he got sick. His heroes: Batman and Mark Zuckerberg. Seriously.

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*(All characters are in their late teens to early 20s. Their bond: they’re all classmates at UCSB.)*

*HARRIET logs into a Zoom meeting. While she waits, she messes around with background images. Her room is charming, fastidiously decorated.*

*MIKE arrives, his video screen pops up next to HARRIET's. He's wearing earbuds.)*

HARRIET. Hey, Mikey!

MIKE. Hi.

HARRIET. How are you feeling?

MIKE. I'm OK. What are you up to?

*(GLENN logs in, his video screen appearing next to hers.)*

GLENN. Hey.

HARRIET *(to MIKE)*. Oh, you know, chillin'. Recovering after a particularly daunting afternoon of bleaching all the high-touch surfaces in my apartment and sitting on my couch. *(To GLENN.)* Hey, Glenn. I thought you had a family game night. What happened?

GLENN. We attempted a game of charades, but the whole thing got weird. My brother had a meltdown.

HARRIET. What do you mean?

GLENN. He started crying, and he couldn't stop.

HARRIET. Really? What happened?

*(JACKIE arrives, her video screen popping up in the grid.)*

GLENN. My sister held up her cat to the camera, and he lost it. *(To JACKIE.)* Hi, Jackie.

JACKIE. What's happening, you junkie whores? Glenn, who lost it?

GLENN. My brother.

HARRIET. Because of a cat?

GLENN. Yeah.

JACKIE. ... Put a pin in that. Mike! How's it hangin', Rapunzel? Are you feeling any better?

MIKE *(pissed off)*. Yeah, I'm feeling fucking fine.

*(A confused pause.)*

JACKIE. OK. Dial back the spice, baby, I'm just asking.

MIKE. Sorry.

HARRIET. What's the matter?

MIKE. My parents won't let me come home.

JACKIE. But it's been two weeks.

GLENN. Are you still sick?

MIKE. No, but they don't want to chance it, so they just dropped another assload of groceries on the front deck and told me I have to wait another week.

JACKIE. Did you do the pasta carbonara recipe I sent you? From the Bon Appetit video?

MIKE. Yeah, it came out OK.

GLENN. Why won't they let you come home?

HARRIET. His grandmother.

MIKE. Yes, my fucking grandmother is at home with them. She's got COPD, so they're being super paranoid.

HARRIET. I'm sorry, Mike.

MIKE. When all this started, they said we'd only be cooped up for a couple of weeks—

JACKIE. Yeah, but that was bullshit. We all knew that was bullshit—

HARRIET (*delicately*). I mean ... listen ... I get that you're feeling stir-crazy, but ... you're in a bougie, solar-powered smarthouse with a firepit and a Jacuzzi.

JACKIE. Yeah, that house would make Elon Musk cream his panties—

HARRIET. It sucks that you got a visit from Ms. 'Rona, but as far as quarantining goes, you could do a lot worse.

MIKE. I know. I'm just over being up here by myself.

HARRIET. Do you want me to come hang out on your front lawn? If I do ninety, I can get there in twenty minutes or so, I could—

MIKE. No, I'll be fine, I just ... I don't like it up here. Forget it, though. It be what it be.

HARRIET. OK ... So, wait, Glenn, back to your brother, he had a breakdown because he saw your sister's cat?

JACKIE. I'm lost, what—?

GLENN. We tried to have a Zoom game night, and my brother just started sobbing. I think the isolation's finally broken him.

HARRIET. I don't blame him. Colorado is remote as fuck under the best of circumstances. But the cat ... ? I don't get it.

JACKIE. That makes sense, people are wired differently. Someone sent me a video of a drag queen performing at this bar back home and that just sent me into a spiral.

HARRIET. Was her makeup bad?

JACKIE. No, I just miss drag queens, I miss *going out* and getting turnt, you know? I don't know. So, what did you do, Glenn?

GLENN. We all just slowly backed away from our computers and logged out one by one.