

Theater Therapy

Rick Burkhardt, William Gillespie,
Joe Futrelle, and Mark Enslin

(1992)

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Introduction

An early version of Theater Therapy was first performed July 11, 1992 at the Red Herring coffee house, Urbana, Illinois, with the original cast of Rick Burkhardt, William Gillespie, Joe Futrelle, and Mark Enslin.

The present version was premiered August 15, 1992 at the Blind Pig Co., Champaign, Illinois.

The parts of JOE and WILLIAM have since also been played by Keith Johnson, Susan Parenti, and Rishi Zutshi.

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This transcript was compiled by Mark Enslin and rendered in HTML by William Gillespie for exclusive publication at spinelessbooks.com. Rights to perform this play are offered on a sliding scale if you acknowledge the writers and invite them to the performance. We ask that you do not rewrite or excerpt the script without our explicit permission.

Set-up

Audience seated in a circle.

Four performers, seated in four rolling swivel chairs, at the four quadrants of the circle.

Initial seating arrangement:

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Rick William

Joe Mark

Parts and Props

In the script, although the performers are referred to as RICK, JOE, MARK, and WILLIAM, the parts are not gender specific. When these names appear in the script, substitute the first name of the performer. Each performer plays several roles, occasionally using other names (for instance in Shrink, Shrank, and Shrunk).

WILLIAM white terry cloth sports headband
 clipboard
 water glass
 pitcher with water
 microphone with small amp
 portable cassette tape player (boom box)
 tape for Drive Thru 2
 cash register or passable fake thereof (for instance, an adding machine)
 small table
 offstage:
 “Mom” costume bathrobe, obvious wig, head scarf
 a big pair of scissors
 fly swatter
 photo album with dispensable photos loosely taped in

RICK white terry cloth sports headband

clipboard

water glass

flashlight

2 portable cassette tape players (boom boxes)

7 tapes: typewriter; street noise; first minute and 43 seconds of Intermezzo for string quartet by Hugo Wolf immediately followed by bars 20 through 34 of Mahler's fifth symphony; Song Without Words for Violoncello and Piano in D major, op. 109, by Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy; "The Family Must Be Reunited At All Costs" game show theme song; football crowd noise; brief sobbing (ca. 5"); tumultuous applause with the end of Tchaikowski's 1812 Overture.

bouquet

small table

several egg cartons or other generic imitations of fast-food packaging

white apron

fake eyeglasses

large jar

cigarette lighter

dollar bill

JOE white terry cloth sports headband

clipboard

small glockenspiel or call bell

offstage:

white apron

mop or broom

several egg cartons or other generic imitations of fast-food packaging (same as those used by *RICK*)

MARK white terry cloth sports headband

clipboard

water glass

2 jackets

2 hats

Theater Therapy is composed of 21 linked scenes to be performed without break.

1 Veterans Story, part 1

(After audience and performers are seated, dim. Performers don headbands in dim. RICK starts tape of typewriter sounds. RICK reads the following by flashlight.)

RICK: Associated Press—Indianapolis, July 19, 1992. Stress, not disease, most likely caused mysterious ailments afflicting dozens of Persian Gulf War veterans from Indiana reserve units, Army physicians said in a study released Saturday. Disorders reported by 79 veterans from four Indiana reserve units include chronic fatigue, depression, hair loss, aching joints, rashes, and sore and bleeding gums. “There’s no evidence to suggest the outbreak of any disease,” Lt. Colonel Robert F. DeFraitcs, a researcher for the Walter Reed Army Institute, said at a news conference. “Stress associated with the return to civilian life is a plausible explanation for many of the symptoms,” he said.

(Stop tape. Lights up)

2 Let’s get started I: Word Association

MARK: Okay, Let’s get started. In case you don’t remember, my name is Don, and I’ll be your group therapy leader for the next eight weeks. This is our third session already, but as you can see we have some latecomers, so maybe if the three of you could introduce yourselves so we know who you are?

WILLIAM: My name is William, and I just lost my job. *(supportive applause, plus “good job,” “well done,” etc.)*

RICK: I’m Rick, and I just got a new job today. *(applause, etc.)*

JOE: My name is Joe, and I’ve been working the same minimum wage job for the last eighteen years. *(applause, plus “all right,” “keep up the good work,” “way to go,” etc.)*

MARK: Okay, now I’m going to say a series of words, and after each word I want you all to say the first word that comes to your mind, there’s no right or wrong answer, just be spontaneous and say the first thing that occurs to you. Okay? The first word is: boat.

WILLIAM: *(pause)* Water.

RICK: Ocean.

JOE: Fish.

MARK: Hmm. Okay, the second word is: frustration.

WILLIAM: Aggravation.

RICK: Election.

JOE: Fish.

MARK: That’s very interesting. And the last word for now is: rhinoplasty.

WILLIAM: *(immediately)* Timorous.

RICK: Fricative.

JOE: Interdenominational.

MARK: Okay, thank you. Now, I’d like to ask you a few questions about your responses. William, when I said the word “boat” you said the word “water;” do you remember that?

WILLIAM: Yeah, I guess.

MARK: Okay, now why do you think you might have responded in that way?

WILLIAM: I’m not sure.

MARK: Try to think.

WILLIAM: Well, I think I might have been in a boat once, and—

MARK: Careful, don’t lose your focus.

WILLIAM: Hmmm—?

MARK: Anybody else is welcome to help William out.

JOE: Do boats remind you of something?

WILLIAM: Well, I guess they’re kind of curved and hollow—

MARK: Retrace your steps in your mind: how did you get from the word “boat” to the word “water”?

WILLIAM: Hmm.

RICK: Is there something that's been on your mind lately?

WILLIAM: Well yeah, I just lost my job.

MARK: And what does that mean to you?

WILLIAM: I can't pay my bills, I can't—

JOE: But deep down, how does it affect you to lose your job?

WILLIAM: Um—?

RICK: It's easy to blame yourself, but you have to learn not to do that.

WILLIAM: Well, no, it's my boss's fault, he fired me for being in contact with the union, when I wasn't even planning—

MARK: One of the things we've learned in this group is that not blaming yourself does not mean blaming other people.

WILLIAM: Yeah, okay, but this guy—

JOE: Do you often have difficulties relating to authority figures?

WILLIAM: Well, since I'm not one, I can't really—

MARK: Who are the other authority figures in your life?

WILLIAM: Um, Illinois Power, Illinois Bell, Westfield Insurance—

RICK: See if you can try not to lose your focus.

JOE: What kind of a relationship did you have with your father?

WILLIAM: He can barely live off retirements.

MARK: It's very important that we get beyond all this to a deeper level. I'm still interested in the fact that you said the word "water" when I said the word "boat," and I don't think we can go any further until we really understand this.

3 Voter Therapy

(RICK starts tape of street noises. MARK immediately stands and becomes a person-in-the-street, as though responding to a roving news reporter.)

MARK: I was gonna vote for Jerry Brown in the primaries, but now that he's out of the race I feel like I have to vote for Bill Clinton, because I'll do anything to keep George Bush out of the White House. But every time I hear Clinton make a speech, he says things I don't agree with at all! How can I vote for him when he doesn't care what I think? Why is he doing this to me?

(Ding. Tape stops. MARK freezes.)

JOE: *(Voice appropriate for a self-help tape)* Just because you don't agree with a candidate doesn't mean you should feel guilty about choosing him. When you hear a candidate express a view which you don't share, say to yourself: It's okay for me to disagree with the candidate I've chosen to vote for. He's a human being, and human beings aren't perfect. If your opinion still continues to bother you, consider changing it to match the candidate's.

(Street noises. WILLIAM stands to become person-in-the-street.)

WILLIAM: I voted for Carter, Mondale, and Dukakis in the last three elections. I'm sick of losing! Why should I even vote anymore when the guys I pick always blow it?

(Ding. Tape stops. WILLIAM freezes.)

JOE: Choosing to vote for a losing candidate can be a difficult decision. But being part of the election process is more important than whether your side wins or loses. Remind yourself that your candidate still might win, and you'd regret it if he did it without your vote's help.

(Street noises. RICK stands to become person-in-the-street.)

RICK: *(carrying boom box, finger poised on stop button)* I hate politicians. They would never vote for me, so why should I vote for one of them?

(Ding. Tape stops. RICK freezes.)

JOE: Even if you don't like a candidate as a person, he may still be qualified to be president. If your emotions are getting in the way of recognizing a candidate's qualifications, try imagining that the election is over and he's already president. Does he look like he's working hard? Does he remind you of any of your favorite presidents? Try to remind yourself that some of the most important men in history have been difficult to get along with.

(Street noises. JOE stands to become person-in-the-street.)

JOE: This election is the same as the last one! The candidates are all rich old white guys in suits. All they want is more power and money, and they're gonna get it no matter which one of 'em I vote for.

(Ding. JOE freezes for a moment, and sits to become the reassuring voice.)

JOE: Just because the candidates are similar to each other doesn't mean they aren't individuals like you or me. Try to make a list of everything you can remember about each of the candidates. Ask yourself questions like: What color is his hair? What does his voice sound like? (*RICK changes tape to Wolf quartet, beginning at low volume*) If the election coverage you're watching or reading about is too boring to remember, try switching channels on your TV or reading a different newspaper. Ask your friends if they've noticed anything about any of the candidates. That way when you do vote, you'll feel like you're voting for a real person, and not just a name or a party.

4 Let's Call Him Bob

(Wolf music continues. MARK moves his swivel chair in front of JOE, approximating position of a psychiatrist's couch. MARK becomes BOB, miming making his morning toilet (vary particular actions as appropriate); BOB looks bleary-eyed in a mirror; selects and puts on a jacket and hat, checks himself in mirror; mimes putting on deodorant, mimes flossing teeth; and sits in chair as in a psychiatrist's couch. Music stops.)

MARK: (*To JOE, who, as PSYCHIATRIST, listens and takes notes. Confessional voice.*) I get really bothered when I'm around eggs. Actually all breakfast foods get to me, but eggs—(*As if rejecting this beginning, new voice, boisterous*) NAAAAH!

(Music resumes. BOB returns disapproving to mirror, changes jacket, changes hat, checks mirror; mimes taking toothbrush, unscrewing cap of toothpaste tube, squeezing toothpaste on brush, brushing teeth and tongue, rinsing, taking cologne or perfume bottle, slapping on scent; and sits in chair as before. Music stops.)

MARK: The guys at the office have been teasing me a lot about my wanting to be manager, but I think I could be really good at it, if only they—(*Rejecting story as before, boisterous voice*) NAAAAH!

(Music resumes. BOB returns disapproving to mirror, changes jacket, changes hat, checks mirror; mimes trimming mustache and beard or grooming hair; and sits in chair as before. Music stops.)

MARK: I feel like I've been constraining myself for years, boxed in, like I've closed off so many possibilities—(*BOB thinks this story might work. Boisterous voice.*) Well, what do you think?

JOE: I think it's very interesting.

MARK: (*Still boisterous*) Yeah, but does it go with the hat?

JOE: Well, yes, I think they go together quite well.

MARK: (*Stands and shakes PSYCHIATRIST's hand*) Thanks a lot.

JOE: See you tomorrow.

MARK: Okay.

5 Mom and Kid

(WILLIAM, having changed into the MOM costume, and RICK swiftly bring out a small table (preferably round), the photo album, and their swivel chairs to the center of the circle and sit facing each other across the table. This scene consists of RICK as KID asking four questions of WILLIAM, playing MOM, who delivers answers. Furthermore, RICK asks each question four times in a row, and WILLIAM answers differently each time. In general, WILLIAM's answers to each question start off long and involved, and become shorter and more euphemistic or dismissive each time. WILLIAM and RICK strike a characteristic pose for each question. For each re-asking of the question, RICK and WILLIAM rotate 90 degrees counterclockwise around the table to a new orientation, maintaining as much as possible the pose for that question. After the fourth time a question is asked, instead of rotating they strike a new pose. The effect for the audience should be that they see each of the four poses from four angles as they hear the four questions answered in four ways.)

(Pose 1)

RICK: Mom, is my father still alive?

WILLIAM: (*rapid, unpunctuated, low monotone*) Yes, dear, he is living the life of a hermit with a semiautomatic weapon in the jungles of Kona. You see, he never really recovered from his experiences in Vietnam and was unable to adapt to a peacetime existence. He could not sleep or eat or relax at all. He would stay up all night pacing the darkened house with an uncocked pistol convinced there were intruders lurking patiently in the gladioli. Sex with him became increasingly terrifying as he lost his ability to experience or express tenderness. I saw in his eyes the same terror and loathing he must

have felt for the Vietnamese women he raped with other American soldiers obeying blind pack training. I fled the house, pregnant with you, late one night. I will never go look for him and I hope he never finds out where we live.

(Shift 90 degrees counterclockwise around table, still pose 1)

RICK: Mom, is my father still alive?

WILLIAM: *(Still fast, but more of a condescending sing-song)* Yes. It eventually became easiest to love him in memory. You see, he fought in Vietnam and he wasn't a very good soldier or a good father because he eventually couldn't distinguish between ally and enemy, I decided it would be best for our relationship if we never saw one another again.

(Shift 90 degrees counterclockwise around table, still pose 1)

RICK: Mom, is my father still alive?

WILLIAM: *(Loud, halting)* Yes, but I don't know where. He EXPERIENCED A LOT OF CONFUSION and had PERSONAL DIFFICULTIES he eventually left to sort out and he and I HAVE FALLEN OUT OF TOUCH.

(Shift 90 degrees counterclockwise around table, still pose 1)

RICK: Mom, is my father still alive?

WILLIAM: *(Loud and slow)* No, dear. Daddy died in the war. It was an UNFORTUNATE ACCIDENT. *(slight smile)*

(Change to pose 2)

RICK: Mom, was I always an only child?

WILLIAM: *(Rapid, low, monotone as before)* You would have had an older sister but she committed suicide shortly before you were born. I named you after her. She was a calm and brilliant child. It seems your father raped her shortly after being discharged from Vietnam and she fell into a deep depression unable to stir from bed or have conversations for a year. It seemed she was trying to end her own life by refusing to participate in it. She then overdosed on sleeping pills while your father and I were at the Veteran's Ball. If it was up to me she would have been our only child. Her suicide seemed to me to be a response to my pregnancy with you. She could not bear the thought of a little sister having to experience what she did. I would have had you aborted but you were all I had.

(Shift 90 degrees counterclockwise around table, still pose 2)

RICK: Mom, was I always an only child?

WILLIAM: *(Condescending as before)* It's a sad story so we don't tell to many people. Before you were born you had a sister who was similar to you. She was extremely sensitive and could not deal with the stress of day-to-day existence. She turned to drugs for assistance and that's how she died.

(Shift 90 degrees counterclockwise around table, still pose 2)

RICK: Mom, was I always an only child?

WILLIAM: *(Louder and halting as before)* I'm not sure you're old enough to know about this, but you had an older sister. She EXPERIENCED A LOT OF PERSONAL DIFFICULTIES and DIED IN AN UNFORTUNATE ACCIDENT.

(Shift 90 degrees counterclockwise around table, still pose 2)

RICK: Mom, was I always an only child?

WILLIAM: *(Loud and slow as before)* No, dear. Why do you ask? *(sweet smile)*

(Change to pose 3)

RICK: Mom, how come you never drink?

WILLIAM: I used to drink every day, throughout my every waking hour. It was the only way I could live with your father. After we ran away from him the second time and he didn't track us down, I gave birth to you and then sought clinical assistance. In short, I don't drink because total abstinence under the supervision of a clinician is my only method of control. I just found out my mother was an alcoholic. Somehow that's a relief.

(Shift 90 degrees counterclockwise around table, still pose 3)

RICK: Mom, how come you never drink?

WILLIAM: I used to drink plenty, Honey, when I was young. Eventually, as you get older, you will become more responsible. It happens to everybody.

(Shift 90 degrees counterclockwise around table, still pose 3)

RICK: Mom, how come you never drink?

WILLIAM: I used to drink freely, but then I EXPERIENCED A LOT OF PERSONAL DIFFICULTIES and decided to stop, for a while.

(Shift 90 degrees counterclockwise around table, still pose 3)

RICK: Mom, how come you never drink?

WILLIAM: Booze makes Mommy sick. (*Sweet smile*)

(*Change to pose 4*)

RICK: Mommy, didn't our family album used to be larger?

WILLIAM: Yes it did. I edit it now and again with my sewing shears. I remove the pages that bring back horrible memories. I find it's easier to keep my friends if I never talk about serious issues, and it's easier not to think about them when I am not reminded of them. Your father and all his relatives had to go, certainly, and your older sister. My father was the third to go, followed by my older brothers. When I told my mother about them I had to remove her too. She keeps meticulous scrapbooks except, now she has removed all my pictures and newspaper clippings. Then there was no point in having photos of my grandfathers and uncles and really, no one but us, and the people at the office.

(*Shift 90 degrees counterclockwise around table, still pose 4*)

RICK: Mommy, didn't our family album used to be larger?

WILLIAM: Yes. So did our family.

(*Shift 90 degrees counterclockwise around table, still pose 4*)

RICK: Mommy, didn't our family album used to be larger?

WILLIAM: Well, I have FALLEN OUT OF TOUCH with a lot of people.

(*Shift 90 degrees counterclockwise around table, still pose 4*)

RICK: Mommy, didn't our family album used to be larger?

WILLIAM: No, dear. Why do you ask? (*slight smile. RICK and WILLIAM hold pose briefly and then clear the table and album and return their chairs. RICK sits and begins next scene while WILLIAM changes out of MOM costume.*)

6 Teacher

RICK: I remember, this must have been when I was five years old, at the very most, I had a teacher who I just loathed.

MARK: Why did you hate your teacher?

RICK: I can't remember so well—

MARK: Was your teacher unfriendly to you?

RICK: No, she was always real friendly, but she was—uncompromising.

MARK: Did she demand a lot from you?

RICK: I don't remember much actual work—

MARK: What did she teach you?

RICK: She liked to talk about things going on in the world—

MARK: Events in the news—

RICK: They weren't on the news. She kept going on and on about South Africa and Central America.

MARK: To a class of five-year-olds?

RICK: It was all so negative. Everything in Central America was *our* government's fault. It was like, no matter what we did down there, nothing was ever good enough.

MARK: How did you react?

RICK: I telephoned the principal and informed him that I considered this teacher a disgrace to the community.

MARK: You did?

RICK: Well, what a way to teach children, exposing them to all the evil in the world and filling their heads with subversive lies about the USA!

JOE: Yeah. You know what she said? She said Christopher Columbus didn't discover America, it used to belong to (*scoff*) INDIANS. Is that something to tell five-year-olds?

RICK: They're very impressionable at that age, so unless you want them sticking feathers in their hair and putting on war paint like those barbarians—

MARK: (*interrupting*) Joe, is this your memory, or Rick's? (*pause looking at JOE*)

RICK: The principal was an enormous man with a mustache. I was frightened of him.

MARK: Did the mustache remind you of anything you had seen before?

RICK: Well, I couldn't see it when I talked to him on the phone. I told him that if he didn't fire Mrs. Torez, I'd certainly stop giving yearly donations to the school board.

MARK: The teacher's name was Mrs. Torez?

JOE: Yes, and I said a lot of other parents would withdraw their donations.

WILLIAM: And if that didn't work, we'd sue the school.

RICK: Right, one of my lawyer friends said he'd handle the case for me.

MARK: How old do think you were when this happened?

RICK: Well, five—

WILLIAM: Five or six—

JOE: Six at the very most.

MARK: Do you remember what happened next?

RICK: The principal said he'd look into it.

MARK: Did you feel any satisfaction as a result?

WILLIAM: No.

JOE: Meanwhile, I started making phone calls to Mrs. Torez.

MARK: What kind of phone calls?

RICK: At first, warning her to alter her teaching style if she wanted to keep her job; then later, threats.

MARK: Can you tell us some more about the phone calls?

WILLIAM: I would call her up late at night, tell her she didn't know how to teach, ask if she lived alone, why didn't she have a man there to protect her.

RICK: A couple of times my wife and I drove by her house with the lights turned off. I'm pretty sure she saw the car.

JOE: I also sent a threatening letter.

MARK: What was in the letter?

WILLIAM: It was my choice, not hers, how my children were educated—

JOE: and if you don't like America, why don't you just leave!

RICK: (*Embarrassed*) It wasn't very original.

MARK: How long did this go on?

JOE: Not long.

RICK: I'd say at most a month.

MARK: And how did it end?

RICK: I finally went to the school board with fifty other parents' signatures.

WILLIAM: So they fired Mrs. Torez.

JOE: And then she suddenly left town.

MARK: When do you believe all this took place?

RICK: I was so young then, it's all a blur.

JOE: I can't have been older than six or seven ?

WILLIAM: It's in the past now.

JOE: At the very latest, I'd say last April.

7 Let's Get Started II: Veterans Story, part 2

MARK: Okay, Let's get started. In case you don't remember, my name is Don, and I'll be your group therapy leader for the next eight weeks. This is our third session already, but as you can see we have some latecomers, so maybe if the three of you could introduce yourselves so we know who you are?

JOE: (*stands up*) I'm John Lawhorn of the 425th Quartermaster Corps, which was posted in Saudi Arabia and Iraq. I believe my excessive weight gain and daily headaches go deeper than the Army report indicates. I just don't believe stress is going to put you in the hospital for three days. I and others in my unit have linked our medical problems to exposure to petrochemicals. The 425th supplied diesel and jet fuel to combat units. (*sits*)

WILLIAM: (*stands up*) Loren Rosalius, operations sergeant with the 209th Supply Army Reserve. On returning from service in the Persian Gulf I suffered from hair loss and halitosis. Those problems have cleared up but fatigue and joint pain persist. I honestly believe there's some type of cover-up going on out there. If they don't know the answer, why blame it on stress? Why not just say "we don't know"? (*sits*)

8 Tone of Voice

RICK: *(As though continuing the sequence of veterans' stories, also standing; brazenly)* Well, I would never have voted for Nixon! I mean—

MARK: *(interrupting)* Excuse me, we have an understanding in this group that when we speak, we use a non-confrontational tone of voice.

RICK: Oh, but I wasn't being non-confrontational, I mean Nixon's whole platform was based on this genocidal war—

MARK: *(interrupting)* We're here to support each other.

RICK: Yeah, I know—

MARK: Which doesn't mean there's no room for constructive criticism. It does mean that when we criticize, we do so in a non-hostile way.

JOE: *(mildly)* You're behaving very aggressively, and I think that's very ironic considering what you're trying to say about Nixon.

RICK: Whoa. I'm saying the Secret Plan to win the war involved killing over a million people who weren't even declared enemies, and—

MARK: *(interrupting)* We have another understanding in this group, and that is that we don't interrupt each other. *(gratitude from JOE)*

RICK: *(referring to JOE)* But he's saying I'm—

MARK: *(interrupting)* Everybody has something important to say, whether you agree with it or not. Everyone should feel that his contribution is equally welcome and valuable.

WILLIAM: *(mildly)* Yeah, because when you use that hostile tone of voice you're being just as bad as Nixon and Kissinger.

RICK: They didn't kill a million people with their tone of voice—

WILLIAM: *(interrupting; bland, quieter)* Please don't interrupt me. If you used a less hostile tone of voice, maybe we wouldn't find you so repulsive.

JOE: *(quieter)* When you're trying to communicate an idea, you have to make sure that the people you're speaking to feel included.

MARK: *(quieter)* It's very important to master non-verbal signals such as tone of voice.

JOE: *(still quieter)* When someone is speaking to you, you should nod your head to show interest, so they feel that you're really paying attention.

WILLIAM: *(barely audible)* Even when you plan to say something negative, start each sentence with a positive word like "Yes" or "Okay," so that people feel they've really connected with you.

MARK: *(too quiet for much intelligibility)* And smile when you talk, so people feel that you've accepted them and their point of view.

(WILLIAM, JOE, and MARK continue talking silently, mainly addressing RICK, occasionally each other. JOE and MARK could begin speaking (silently!) to RICK at the same time, and mime to each other: "I'm sorry!" "No no, after you!" The silent conversation lapses into all three smiling and nodding at RICK, who sinks dumbfounded into his chair. After a kind of dwindling of the nods and an excruciating pause, RICK prepares for the next scene.)

9 Music Therapy

RICK: *(RICK gets up, places boom box with the Mendelssohn tape on his swivel chair, starts the tape, and pushes the chair so that it rolls out by itself to the center of the space. The music begins, and RICK, with clipboard and pen, joins the tape in the space and addresses the following text to the music as though it might be in a therapy session. RICK's comments are timed with the music such that changes in the music appear to be utterances to which he responds.)*

That's very interesting ... Ah yes, tell me more about this ... Hm, so everything isn't so well-resolved as you told me earlier. Please go on. So where does all this leave you? ... I see, so it all ties in ... Still, there seems to be a lot of contrast here with what you were telling me a minute ago ... yes, this part. I'm getting the sense from you that you have some unfinished business here ... You seem to be leading towards something ... Ah yes, this seems to be a theme you return to quite often ... Tell me more about your relationship to your composer ... I see, so there is some turbulence in the relationship ... This seems difficult for you. You want the relationship to go somewhere new ... but you end up going in circles ... Please don't stop, I think we're making real progress ... This seems to be a very important phase in your development ... So you've achieved a certain balance in the relationship ... but then you find yourself forced

into the dominant position . . . and it's a position you're stuck in . . . and then you feel that you've been left hanging, as if you're walking on a highwire, and all your supports are gone . . . Yes, I'm starting to understand how your motives are connected on a deeper level. You seem to be searching for a way back to a previous time, when everything was simpler and less uncertain . . . Yes, these are the times when you seem to be most in tune with your feelings . . . Of course you still have a need for some variation . . . but still you always return to safe and familiar territory . . . I see. . . Sometimes the variations threaten to fly out of control, to become more than you handle, and they steer you away from your main goals . . . I must say, I'm very impressed by the way you managed to defuse that conflict. . . Naturally you will still require some confirmation . . . and occasionally experience some doubt . . . but it sounds to me as if we've resolved it all very smoothly, and you can consider yourself back at home base, as it were . . . Well done, I think this has been an excellent session.

10 Cough

(As RICK returns his chair to its place and sits down, JOE begins to try to say something, but explodes in a fit of coughing. JOE continues to cough throughout this scene.)

MARK: Okay, this is a very positive development. What do you think is behind that cough? *(MARK drinks some water. JOE tries to respond, but coughs instead.)*

RICK: That's all right, don't suppress the cough. Let it out, let it have its time. *(RICK drinks some water.)*

WILLIAM: Get it all out in the open. *(WILLIAM drinks some water.)*

RICK: It sounds to me like that cough comes from deep inside.

WILLIAM: I really admire the courage of what he's doing.

MARK: What's important here is that Joe is confronting his cough, and not burying it deep down where it could ultimately do more damage.

RICK: *(During this speech, WILLIAM produces a water pitcher and offers a refill to MARK, who graciously accepts.)* I think we're taught from a very young age not to cough. Coughs are treated as signs of sickness. If we go to a play, or a concert, we feel stigmatized if we cough, as if our coughs aren't wanted. We ignore the affirming quality of a cough, and I think we essentially forget that coughing is a very healthy thing. *(WILLIAM offers RICK some water.)* Oh yes please.

MARK: I agree, and I think that's really important because Joe is doing just the opposite, he's accepting his cough; and in that sense Joe's cough is a sign for all of us that the healing process has really begun.

(JOE continues coughing; his cough turns into the sound of revving an automobile engine, leading into the next scene.)

11 Drive Thru 1

(Making motor noises, JOE begins to mime driving his swivel chair counterclockwise around the circle. RICK and then MARK similarly begin revving noises; RICK mimes driving his swivel chair following JOE; when RICK passes MARK, MARK mimes pulling out and driving his chair behind RICK. When JOE pulls up in front of WILLIAM, JOE mimes rolling down the window and WILLIAM speaks into a microphone, his voice distorted by amp.)

WILLIAM: Hello and welcome to Therapy. How can I help you?

JOE: Uh, when my father got his second job, I felt kinda rejected.

WILLIAM: Was there any feeling of worthlessness attached to that?

JOE: Yeah, I felt kinda worthless, too.

WILLIAM: Okay, that's one father, two jobs, one rejection, one worthlessness. Please drive around.

(JOE drives off to his place. RICK pulls up, rolls down his window.)

WILLIAM: Hi and welcome to Therapy. How can I help you?

RICK: I had a dream where there were these wolves sitting in a tree outside my bedroom window.

WILLIAM: How many wolves?

RICK: Five, six.

WILLIAM: Could you speak up, sir?

RICK: Five or six wolves.

WILLIAM: Is this a recurring dream, sir?

RICK: Uh, no thank you.

WILLIAM: Okay, that's one dream, one bedroom window, five or six wolves, one tree.

RICK: Right.

WILLIAM: Your total is one father, one sexual awakening, one rejection. Please drive around.

(RICK drives off to his place. MARK pulls up, rolls down his window.)

WILLIAM: Hello and welcome to Therapy. How can I help you?

MARK: Yeah, I think my son is a homosexual, and my religion forbids that, so I threw him out of the house.

WILLIAM: Any guilt with that, sir?

MARK: No.

WILLIAM: Okay, that's one father, one homosexual encounter?

MARK: *(interrupting)* Uh, no, because I'm not sure he is one.

WILLIAM: One second for your total... Okay, that's one father, one near-homosexual encounter, one rejection, and one religion. Please drive around.

(WILLIAM begins next scene, still using mic, as MARK drives around the circle and backs into his place.)

12 Let's Get Started III: Shrink, Shrank, & Shrunk

WILLIAM: *(into mic)* Okay Let's get started. In case you don't remember, my name is Don, and I'll be your group therapy leader for the next eight weeks. This is our third session already, but as you can see there are some latecomers, so maybe if the three of you could introduce yourselves so we know who you are?

JOE: *(standing)* I'm Wilbur Shrink of Shrink, Shrank, & Shrunk, Incorporated.

RICK: *(standing)* I'm Albert Shrank of Shrink, Shrank & Shrunk. We're a contracting firm.

MARK: *(standing)* Rupert Shrunk of Shrink, Shrank, & Shrunk.

(JOE moves swivel chair to the middle and sits; this is Shrink's office. RICK, goes offstage, i.e. outside of the circle and, if possible outside a door. MARK, smirking smugly, sneaks up behind JOE.)

MARK: *(to JOE)* We got it.

JOE: We got it?

MARK: It's sealed up.

JOE: *(surprised and elated)* We got the contract!

MARK: *(shouting to RICK)* Hey Shrank, get in here!

JOE: How'd you do it?

MARK: It was a miracle. They'd just gotten off the phone with McDonnell-Douglas—

RICK: *(entering)* What is going on here?

MARK: *(continuing to JOE but also now for RICK's benefit)* with the McDonnell-Douglas rebuilding contractors, and just when it's dawning on 'em what a trauma they've got on their hands, my call got through and nailed 'em into the right frame of mind.

JOE: They accept just like that?

MARK: Accepted? They *wanted* it. They were *longing* for us. We slid right into their mental image, not neuron out of place, not a synapse too soon. *(JOE and MARK snap fingers.)*

JOE: Ya smooth-talked 'em!

MARK: Naw, they think it's their idea. I tell ya, it's all psychology.

RICK: What's this ego trip I'm witnessing?

JOE: Shrunk here just landed us the Los Angeles contract.

RICK: *(incredulous)* Get outta here!

MARK: When McDonnell-Douglas picks up the physical rubble, the psychological rubble underneath is ours.

JOE: We'll be in there for years after McDonnell-Douglas is gone.

MARK: I told 'em, maybe if you'd hired us last year, might've avoided a riot altogether. Betcha McDonnell-Douglas wouldn't have been too happy about *that*.

RICK: Or about us keeping 'em out of Detroit.

JOE: What?

RICK: (*holds up signed contract*) Faxed in just five minutes ago.

MARK: You mean, we got Los Angeles *and* Detroit in one day?

RICK: Poverty, unemployment, factory closings, blue collar restlessness, white collar insecurity, black anger, white guilt—in short a city sown with dissatisfaction, with a bumper crop of psychoneuroses and neuropsychoses that are nobody's business but ours.

JOE: (*skeptical*) What's the duration of the contract?

RICK: Indefinite.

JOE: (*ecstatic*) You're nuts! (*spins in his chair*)

MARK: (*overjoyed*) Hot damn! (*MARK and JOE high-five*)

RICK: Well, who knows how long it'll take? The city's in a deep depression, it's tearing itself apart, doesn't know which way to turn, feels inadequate, betrayed, blames itself. It's perfect.

JOE: And now that it sees what happened to Los Angeles—

MARK: Detroit knows *it* needs help—

RICK: . . . and turns to us.

MARK: Brilliant.

JOE: How do you do it, Shrank?

RICK: Hey, positive thinking! (*JOE and RICK laugh.*)

MARK: (*slightly peeved, claps and then rubs hands to break into the laughter*) Let's get on it. You two find out what you can about Detroit's past; I think it has a couple of sister cities.

JOE: You gonna start a file on the city of dreams?

MARK: Yeah, I'll be plugged into the American consciousness for a couple hours at least.

(*JOE returns this chair to its place in the circle. RICK returns to his chair.*)

13 Dollar Bill Story

RICK: Well, *my* childhood was perfectly normal. (*JOE and MARK move to sit crosslegged at the feet of RICK and listen rapt to his story.*) I remember how we kids would sit around the table in the family bargaining room, playing office. In those games, we were all Daddy, and we competed fiercely to portray the real Daddy as vividly as we could—whoever was most convincing was the winner. This made the game even more fun, since none of us had ever seen the real Daddy for more than a few minutes at a time. Thus our imaginations could run wild. Some of us presented Daddy as the Ruthless Corporate Executive, while others fashioned him as the Workaholic Sports Fan, the Cancer Fund Donor, the Arts Patron—anything that made it clear where Daddy's money came from and where it went.

There were many ways to win the game; most involved scoring highest on standardized tests which we designed for each other. But there even more ways to lose. The poor losers were forced to perform staged suicides at an alarmingly increasing rate, or to act out scenes of unprovoked domestic and racial violence, at which the rest of us feigned exaggerated dismay and alarm which always made us roar on the floor with laughter.

Every few hours, Ma would come into the room with a huge pitcher of liquid assets and set it down on the bargaining table, and then the real fun began. Bidding for the contents of the pitcher was as ferocious as it was fabricated—none of us had anything to bid with—but, as Daddy had told us, neither did anyone in the real world. Whoever won the pitcher would pay for it out of its contents.

Daddy came home from the office each day with a brand new dollar bill, and instantly we kids around the bargaining table fell silent. Daddy would set the bill in the center of the table, and with a touch of his forefinger on the trigger of his cigarette lighter (which was shaped like a handgun), he would set the bill gingerly aflame. Ma would dim the lights, and for the next thirty seconds our faces were fixed on the blue-green glow which rippled along one corner of the bill, across its folded edge, flickering like the pale tongue of a lizard as the bill curled into a frail ball, then a point, then nothing. I believe these were the times when my family was closest together.

Afterwards the family TV fixed us dinner and put us to bed, reaching up to the two-foot bookshelf above our heads and reading from the pages, whitened from disuse, of a book like *Making Millions from the Coming Recession*, or *Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun*, or *How to Enjoy Sex with Your Partner—Finally*.

Once a year we kids got into the elevator and went upstairs to visit Grandpa. He told us the most wonderful stories, stories I'll never forget; and though none of us spoke, I know that as we listened, we were all thinking the same thing:

How could we change this to broaden the target audience? Would it sell better as a movie or a miniseries? Which of us would get the rights?

(JOE and MARK return to their seats.)

14 Mom and Photo Album

(RICK starts Wolf music. WILLIAM as MOM, with photo album and equipped with scissors and fly swatter, enters and does a sort of ballet which begins with a few swirls leading up to opening the photo album; then flipping through a few pages; stylized perusing, scrutiny, disapproval, head shake “uh-uh!”, pulling scissors out of pocket and making a preparatory snip-snip in the air; stylized dance swoop and lunge with scissors into the open album and excising a photo with a snip and flick of the wrist; more swirls, turning pages, disapproving scrutiny, lunging and snipping, littering the stage with photos, crescendo with the music, blowing snipped photos out of the album if they don’t fall (a flurry of falling photos could coincide with the subito piano and chromatic pizzicato descent in the music); follow the last decrescendo of the music down, face into the album, until, immediately after the last note of the Wolf, the full orchestra fanfare of bars 17 through 25 of Mahler’s Fifth; WILLIAM viciously snaps the album shut in coordination with the music, stands straight, pulls the fly swatter from his bathrobe tie like a saber from its scabbard, and struts about menacingly, surveying the horizon. This is the beginning of the next scene.)

15 Family at War

WILLIAM: (still as MOM, but now with the demeanor of a boot camp drill sergeant; roaring to RICK, who is offstage) BILLY!

RICK: (Rushing in to stand at attention, and, somewhat in the manner of a military salute, adjusts his fake glasses; voice of military obedience) Yes, mom!

WILLIAM: At ease, sweetie. Honey, I hate for you to have to know about your family, but it’s time. We’ve been stockpiling weapons against Steve Johnson next door. (brandishing the fly swatter like an officer’s riding crop) We have a territorial dispute which is nearly a decade old about the southwest corner of the backyard, between our toolshed and his Zinnias. Yesterday, at about 1700 hours, Steve began a compost pile there! Your father gave him 24 hours notice over the phone and attempted a peaceful settlement, but Steve hung up on him.

RICK: What about Chip, Mom?

WILLIAM: Chip can’t be blamed just because he’s Steve’s son. If Chip wants to help you and your mommy and your daddy overthrow Steve, then it’s alright. Otherwise you can’t play with him. He’s the enemy, dear. He’s a Johnson! (spits)

RICK: Yes, mom! (glasses salute, as before)

WILLIAM: Right now your father is climbing the telephone pole with the pruning shears to sever Steve’s electrical capacity and telephone. As soon he does that we want you to take out his windows with a slingshot and your father will lob in cans of Ortho Home Fogger. When they evacuate your father will secure the house while you and I maintain supply lines from our house.

RICK: We’re going to occupy the entire house? Mom!

WILLIAM: The time for compromise is over!

MARK: (facing outside the circle to approximate the sound of a voice from offstage; as FATHER: bellicose brigadier bellow.) Billy! Report to the living room A.S.A.P.!

16 Veterans Story, part 3: Applause Therapy

(WILLIAM goes offstage to change out of MOM costume and returns to his seat; RICK returns to his seat. MARK stands up as though to continue the series of monologues from scene 7.)

MARK: I’m Lt. Colonel Robert DeFraités of the Walter Reed Army Institute. We have made a thorough review of the Indiana veteran’s complaints and have ruled out petrochemical fuels as a cause of their problems. (pause) Most of it seemed to be the stress of norbal—uh, normal people to very abnormal (pause) conditions. Deployment was a very intense experim—uh, experience? (long pause; abruptly sits down as he says, sotto voce, to the other performers) Let’s just go on to the

next scene. *(pause)* I don't actually have the script here.

(RICK, JOE and WILLIAM indicate, also sotto voce, that MARK should go ahead and try to finish the scene, with encouraging comments—"come on", "it's okay, just keep going", "you can do it", etc. MARK insists as discreetly as possible under the circumstances that the scene has been blown and that they should just leave it and go on. The standoff begins to escalate, with MARK becoming more and more obstinate and embarrassed and the others becoming more and more openly encouraging and supportive, gradually adding light applause to their encouragement. MARK, to appease them, takes an embarrassed, sarcastic bow and says "Thank you, let's get on with it," etc. Meanwhile the applause becomes wild and enthusiastic, with cheers; MARK goes to the center and bows more formally to WILLIAM, JOE, and then RICK, who tosses him the bouquet; MARK is duly moved and grateful; he goes offstage with the bouquet while the cheering becomes a rhythmic chanting of his name. The chanting lasts for a little while, and then RICK, JOE, and WILLIAM set up for the next scene.)

17 Drive Thru 2

(WILLIAM is sitting in JOE's chair turned somewhat sideways facing a table with the cash register and tape recorder; JOE and RICK are in white aprons; JOE is offstage; RICK sits at table in the middle of the stage doing something repetitive and work-like with cartons.)

MARK: *(entering, as manager; to RICK)* Do you know how many cars are lined up out there? You're two orders behind!

RICK: I need more happiness meal boxes!

MARK: You need more boxes! Well, where *are* they?

RICK: In the back room. I haven't had time to go get them.

MARK: Well, speed it up! And reread your job description. *(leaves)*

RICK: Christ.

WILLIAM: Where's that Dad Re-ject order?

RICK: It's coming!

WILLIAM: Come on Rick, there's six cars out there pumping exhaust.

RICK: Okay, as soon as I quit this job, I'll design a better car.

WILLIAM: We're forming our own private ozone hole out there.

RICK: Wanna shut up?

WILLIAM: And here comes car number seven. *(same intonation as scene 11, as if into mic)* Hello and Welcome to Therapy. How can I help you?

JOE on tape: Uh when my father got that second job, I felt kinda rejected.

WILLIAM: Was there any feeling of worthlessness attached to that?

JOE on tape: Yeah, I felt kinda worthless, too.

RICK: *(to WILLIAM)* I'm working as fast as I can.

MARK: *(reentering; to RICK)* Haven't you finished those orders?

RICK: I needed the boxes!

MARK: Get on the ball. I'm watching you. *(exits)*

WILLIAM: *(shouting at RICK)* Dad, Double Job, Reject, Small Worthless!

RICK: Coming!

WILLIAM: *(back to mic voice)* Okay, that's one father, two jobs, one rejection, one worthlessness. Please drive around.

RICK: Oh, shit I'm out of worthlessness. *(Shouting to offstage)* Hello! Joe!

WILLIAM: *(to RICK)* The amount of money I stuff into this cash register every day, you'd think I'd be rich.

JOE: *(from offstage)* What?

RICK: We're out of worthlessness, drive-up window!

WILLIAM: *(still to RICK)* Instead the bank's charging me for bouncing checks, my landlord charges me five dollars every day my rent's overdue, *(JOE enters)* there's late charges tacked onto my power bill—why do they always charge you extra for being poor? *(into mic)* Hello and welcome to Therapy. How can I help you?

JOE: *(carrying mop, bringing boxes to RICK)* Here ya go.

RICK: Thank god.

RICK on tape: I had this dream where there were these wolves sitting in a tree outside my bedroom window.
 (WILLIAM, JOE, and RICK look at each other knowingly, burst out laughing.)

WILLIAM: (barely controlling his laughter) How many wolves?

RICK on tape: Five, six.

JOE: (leaning on mop, laughing, to RICK) Classic!

MARK: (entering, drowning out tape; JOE immediately looks busy with a mop) What is going on here?

WILLIAM: (mic voice) Could you speak up, sir?

RICK on tape: Five or six wolves.

WILLIAM: Is this a recurring dream sir?

RICK on tape: Uh, no thanks.

WILLIAM: Okay that's one dream, one bedroom window, five or six wolves, one tree.

RICK on tape: Right.

WILLIAM: (yelling to RICK) Dad, sex, reject! (mic voice) Your total is one father, one sexual awakening, one rejection. Please drive around.

JOE: (to MARK) Rick ran out of worthlessness, so I brought him some.

MARK: (to RICK) This just isn't your day, is it?

RICK: No, sir.

MARK: (belligerent) Is something bothering you today, something on your mind, that makes it so difficult for you to do your job? You know, you're not paid to be moody, distracted, or depressed.

RICK: I realize that, sir.

MARK: Okay. I expect to see a much more positive attitude out of you.

RICK: Yes, sir. (MARK leaves) Anal.

JOE: (to RICK) He's always like that. That's his job.

RICK: Fucking better-paying job than mine, isn't it?

WILLIAM: This job is really stressful. That's why I'm glad I get twenty percent off all my diagnoses. I've had five different cures this week!

JOE: When I get to be manager, I'm gonna be nice—nice and rich!

RICK: I'll be the hell out of here by that time. Hate this job. Can't wait to quit.

WILLIAM: Goddammit, Rick, if you don't hurry up those orders they'll take it out on me!

JOE: (still to RICK) You just don't know how to get along with people.

RICK: (working frantically) Building so-called friendships in an anti-social economic deathtrap, and then calling the inevitably blooming animosities "personal problems" is not a skill I'm anxious to develop.

WILLIAM: Rick!

JOE: (still to RICK) So you admit it, you just lack basic interpersonal skills.

MARK: (yelling from offstage) Patients up front, Joe!

WILLIAM: Hello and welcome to Therapy. How can I help you?

MARK on tape: Yeah, I think my son is a homosexual, and my religion forbids that, so I threw him out of the house.

WILLIAM: Any guilt with that, sir?

MARK on tape: No.

WILLIAM: (shouting to RICK) Dad, gay sex, reject, god! (mic voice) Okay, that's one homosexual encounter?

MARK on tape: (interrupting) Uh, no, because I'm not sure he is one.

RICK: I'm quitting this job as soon as I can, because I hate it!

JOE: Yeah? Well, fuck you too! (JOE exits as MARK enters)

MARK: (to RICK, forced pleasantness) Rick, do like this job?

RICK: Yes, sir.

MARK: Do you want to keep this job?

RICK: Yes, sir.

MARK: Good. I wanna see cheerful employees and satisfied customers around here, starting now!

RICK: (as MARK exits) Yes, sir.

WILLIAM: One second for your total. (*shouting to RICK*) Make that diet gay sex!

RICK: Get it right the first time, asshole.

WILLIAM: (*into mic while giving RICK the finger*) Okay, that's one father, one near-homosexual encounter, one rejection, and one religion. Please drive around. (*snaps at RICK*) Faggot!

RICK: (*immediately*) Fairy!

18 Let's Get Started IV: Support

(*Stage is cleared and performers return to chairs in a seating arrangement that puts RICK opposite JOE.*)

MARK: Okay, Let's get started. In case you don't remember, my name is Don, and I'll be your group therapy leader for the next eight weeks. This is our third session already, and I'd like to begin with a question: If you could be a major international military conflict, which one would it be?

RICK: Um, the Persian Gulf War. (*MARK notes the answer*)

JOE: (*to himself*) Darn, I was gonna take that. (*to MARK*) The invasion of Panama. (*MARK notes the answer*)

RICK: (*looking at JOE with a big smile but speaking quietly to himself*) Oh yeah, I forgot about that one.

WILLIAM: The American Civil War. (*no response from MARK*) What, doesn't that count?

MARK: Well, it isn't international.

WILLIAM: Oh, sorry, uh, I guess Vietnam.

MARK: Hmm. Isn't it interesting how the thought of conflict seems to make William very uncomfortable?

WILLIAM: What do you mean?

MARK: Well, Rick and Joe both chose very positive wars whereas you chose a rather negative one.

RICK: Yes, you seem to have some trouble finding a war that you can feel good about. In an election year that can be a serious problem.

WILLIAM: (*to RICK, incredulous*) You felt good about the Persian Gulf War?

RICK: (*flatly*) It's true the initial euphoria has worn thin and sometimes is replaced with a sense of lingering doubt and dissatisfaction, but that's all.

WILLIAM: What euphoria?

RICK: (*suddenly petulant*) Everybody felt it. It was on all the stations.

MARK: Obviously William didn't feel it. It seems we're uncovering a lot of interesting things about William today.

WILLIAM: (*to JOE, skeptical*) Panama?

JOE: (*assumes a satisfied slouch with hands clasped on head, punctuating every comment till the end of the scene with a kind of shrug*) A well-planned, well adjusted, well-executed maneuver. I gave it all my support.

RICK: (*echoing JOE's gesture*) I supported it too.

JOE: And I supported our troops in the Persian Gulf.

RICK: They needed our support.

JOE: And more than that, they *needed* our support.

MARK: In therapy, it's important that we learn to be supportive.

JOE: Even if we couldn't really help them, we gave them our support.

RICK: Even though we couldn't *make* the decisions, we could support the decisions.

JOE: And even if we never really know what happened over there, I think we really need to give it our whole-hearted support.

19 The Family Must Be Reunited At All Costs

MARK: (*As though continuing the previous scene, addressing WILLIAM with concern. RICK readies the tape of the theme music for The Family Must Be Reunited At All Costs*) This country's crisis in confidence is a direct result of the dissolution of American family values. Your family is a perfect example of the moral decay that results when the family is divided; (*during the next sentence, MARK's voice mutates from that of a concerned therapist to TV game show host as he rises from his chair. RICK starts the tape so as to have the theme song overlap with the end of this sentence. The theme music should sing the title of the show.*) The family Must Be Reunited At All COSTS! Hi, and welcome back. (*MARK continues as game show host and RICK whisks about the stage setting up the family tableau coinciding with mention of*

people and props in the script. WILLIAM changes into Mom costume) Your father has been located in the jungle and rescued by a special helicopter division of Army parapsychologists. (*RICK pulls JOE, who is slightly mannequin-like, to the middle of the performance area and sets him standing tilted.*) He is now receiving veteran's benefits he didn't know he had, and with our assistance he has found gainful employment!

JOE: (*as FATHER*) I used to think I wasn't worth much. I feel much better now that I realize nobody else is worth much either. I've been reaccepted into society, with a good job as an army contractor for McDonnell Douglas, working on the production team that makes hard porn movies for our boys overseas. It's a great job, where I can really put my skills to work. And it's great to be back with my family.

MARK: Your mother has been entered into therapy thanks to a generous loan from Mutual Feelings and Trust! (*RICK wheels out WILLIAM in a swivel chair and sets him up next to JOE tilting the same direction.*)

WILLIAM: (*as MOM, drunk; RICK meanwhile sets small table with jar in front of the family tableau, and places two boom boxes [to be used in scene 21] under the table.*) I understand now that my husband has been expressing love for me in the only way he can, and I have to support him in that. My desires to escape are really just manifestations of an aprodance/avoich disorder that can be treated with regular doses of beer. (*synchronous with this statement RICK places a beer bottle in WILLIAM's hand*) In addition, I now smoke tobacco instead of marijuana through a special detoxification program sponsored by Winston-Salem, a corporate outpost in the war on drugs.

MARK: (*still game show host*) Your sister has been excavated from her grave and returned to the family! Special ventilation has been installed at no extra cost! (*During this speech, RICK selects a male audience member to take the place of the sister in the tableau: lying face up approximately at the feet of JOE and WILLIAM.*)

RICK: (*to the audience*) As you can see she is dead. This is a very serious condition, it means she can't move or eat or sleep or even breathe.

WILLIAM: (*still as MOM*) At first I was ashamed of her, but now I realize I just need to be patient, and do a lot of things for her, like helping her get around. It's wonderful to have her back. It's brought the family much closer together, since we all have to deal with her handicap. (*During this speech, MARK fades away from the performance area.*)

20 Veterans Story, part 4

(Family tableau still in place)

RICK: A number of Gulf War veterans from around the country have complained of similar disorders. "I just take aspirin and try to keep going," said John Lawhorn of the 425th Quartermaster Corps. Colonel Norman H. Tier (*RICK takes a dollar bill out of his pocket and holds it up. Slow fade of lights to black by the end of the speech.*) of the 125th Army Reserve Command (*RICK takes a cigarette lighter out of his pocket, and, during the rest of this speech, lights the dollar bill and puts it in the jar so that it burns there.*) said stress management teams, which include a psychiatrist, will conduct follow-up studies on the Indiana veterans. (*The burning dollar should be the only illumination in the room. Let the dollar burn out completely before going on to the next scene.*)

21 Let's Get Started V: Outdoor Ball-Fixated Competition Disorder

(After dollar burns out completely, change set in the dark: audience member guided back to his seat, boom boxes on table and another swivel chair placed at the table. Lights up on RICK and JOE sitting side-by-side in swivel chairs at the small round table in the middle of the performance area. They are sportscasters. Occasionally during this scene, RICK and JOE roll in their chairs slowly a quarter way around the table, as though they are on a revolving stage. MARK and WILLIAM circulate around the perimeter of the audience chanting as cheerleaders and, as hecklers, interjecting pop-psychology-related phrases, like "Get it off your chest!" "It's okay to cry!" "Vent!" "If you love something let it go!" "I'm okay, you're okay!" "Hold that Thought!")

RICK: (*Immediately when lights come up, tape of football crowd noise comes on and intro begins.*) Okay, Let's get started!

JOE: In case you don't remember, I'm Bob Polemic, Ph.D..

RICK: And I'm Jack R. Perera, DSM-III-R.

JOE: And we're back with more outdoor ball-fixated competition disorder.

RICK: There's a lot of bottled aggression on the field today.

JOE: There sure is, Jack. The Compulsions' quarterstop Ted Grapple was having some trouble juggling all those priorities. And now it looks like they're piling up on him, one after another.

RICK: The Boston Priorities are having an amazing season, Bob. After humiliating the Chicago Outbursts last week in front of their own hometown audience, they went on to traumatize the New York Manics in a seemingly endless overtime session—and that’s a trauma from which the Manics just haven’t recovered.

WILLIAM and MARK: (*unison chant*) Get in touch with your inner rage! Get in touch with your inner rage!

JOE: Well, the pressure’s on this afternoon, and Grapple’s letting it get to him! He doesn’t look too happy.

RICK: Not at all, Bob, in fact I’d say he looks sullen and a little anxious.

JOE: The referee’s calling that a neurosis.

RICK: That’s no surprise, but it’s just more stress for the Compulsions, and two affirmations for the Priorities—half-goalie Chuck Migraine, points that may increase his self-esteem after some of the emotional wounds he’s received this season. And indeed Bob, the tails of the wolf pack become erect, flickering like an infinite field of thousands of furry father phalli. And I can’t help but wonder, Bob who could resist the urge to become one with such a pack? Peel back foil to expose tater tots.

JOE: It’s always tough to break in on you, Jack, but Grapple’s out!

RICK: Grapple is out of the game.

JOE: Grapple is out of control, he no longer trusts members of his own team!

RICK: A sure sign of a serious group identification dysfunction, Bob.

JOE: I don’t think I could have said it better myself.

RICK: Well, sure you could have, Bob.

JOE: Thanks, Jack, it helps to hear you say that.

RICK: No problem, Bob, that’s called reactive attachment disorder. And we’re looking into Grapple’s childhood at our radio headquarters in Salem.

WILLIAM and MARK: (*alternating*) Gimme a C—C! Gimme a O—O! Gimme a P—P! Gimme an E—E! What’s that spell?—*Cope!* What’s that spell?—*Cope!*

JOE: That’s a demanding crowd, Jack.

RICK: They’re hard to please, alright. That may be why three members of the ’Pulsions starting line-up have given up hope so far this game!

JOE: Do we have a tape of that, Jack?

RICK: Yes, we do, Bob, and we’ll take a look at that now. (*tape of sobbing with cheers in the background.*)

JOE: That’s pathetic.

RICK: Grapple’s being replaced by number 71, Vince Miffed, who scored three mid-life crises over the Priorities in their last encounter.

JOE: He’s walking onto the field now, shaking his head.

RICK: It’s exactly the mood to project, Bob, because while he looks concerned, he doesn’t look hysterical, and while he looks determined, he doesn’t look obsessed. It’s that kind of attention to detail that’s won Flanders his role as backup quarterstop this year.

JOE: Right now he’s grabbing his crotch, Jack, and I think that demonstrates just how in touch this young rookie from Buffalo is with his masculine side.

WILLIAM and MARK: (*alternating chant*)
Accept yourself—*Accept yourself,*
For what you are—*for what you are!* (*repeat*)

RICK: Like dandruff in the sand, Bob, the tire tread is reminiscent of a field of waving spokes.

JOE: Well the ’Pulsions are coming to terms with the substitution, Jack, as each team member gets into position, whether it’s compromising, difficult, awkward, or just plain uncomfortable.

RICK: Well, the bland articulation of the edifice leaves much unquestioned, Bob. But that’s allowed the Boston Priorities to take some time off and work on themselves, and they’re a more relaxed, more well-adjusted team than they were last season. But the surface is not curved, Bob, it follows linear arcs of curved angles, just as industry is not singular, it’s plural, it’s multifaceted, a tessellation on the surface of a Klein bottle. And we’ll be explaining that in greater detail, Bob, in our next volume.

JOE: That’s exactly what we’re gonna do, Jack, but right now the bell has gone off! Members of the Compulsions are salivating, while the Priorities are acting defensively, and Vince Miffed seems to having trouble learning to let go of the ball!

RICK: I wish I could describe to you the excitement on the floor, Bob, but I feel inadequate to the task!

JOE: Well for Priorities linefielder Tax Fiddle, the ball seems way too close for comfort! Whether it reminds him of a chronic concern, or it forces him to come to terms with his own feelings of inadequacy, I can't tell from our observation tower over three hundred feet above the playing field here at Empathy Stadium Hospital. (*crescendo of excitement*) But as the Compulsions put up a passive-aggressive line of resistance, Fiddle seems to be distancing himself from the ball as much as possible! (RICK and JOE spin in their chairs as though they are watching the ball is fly over their heads.)

WILLIAM and MARK: (*Chant*)

Not all our cheers

Have to be good! (*repeat*)

JOE: What a magnificent play!

RICK: The American character has been probed and probed, Bob, and if there's one thing it can't get enough of, it's skillful oration!

JOE: He's a team player if there ever was one, Jack, and by seizing the initiative this way, he's brought everybody together in their time of crisis!

RICK: There's a positive feeling here, a sincere feeling, and a strong sense of group identity which was missing just a few weeks ago!

JOE: And it's hard not to feel impressed by the way so many people have overcome their differences here today, and produced such a warm, sincere endorsement of Bill Clinton!

WILLIAM and MARK: (*alternating*) Gimme a C—C! Gimme a O—O! Gimme a P—P! Gimme an E—E! What's that spell?—Cope! What's that spell?—Cope!

RICK: Bill Clinton! (*Begin, in addition to tape of a crowd wild cheering, tape of the 1812 Overture, around the firing of the cannon*) Even if he wasn't their first choice, even if he wasn't their second, third, or fourth choice, even if they would never have chosen him at all, still, they're voting for Bill Clinton now, maybe out of desperation, maybe hopelessness, maybe embarrassment, but nevertheless, wholehearted, enthusiastic support!

JOE: Enthusiastic support!

JOE and RICK (*in unison*): And we'll be right back!

(*Immediate cut off sound and black out of lights.*)

End