

Note: Anyone wishing to produce this play must contact the author for permission. Royalties are based on a sliding scale.

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Whatever Kindles
by Tricia Gates Brown
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Preamble (to be printed on programs, preferably on the front)*

Christian Peacemaker Teams, or CPT, began in 1987 as an effort of Mennonites, Quakers, and Brethren to explore alternatives to war. CPT sends individuals trained in methods of nonviolent intervention into areas of conflict around the world. In its short history, CPT has done violence reduction work in five of the seven continents, and has grown to include hundreds of trained corps members, ordinary people dedicated to honoring life by doing the risky work of Christian peacemaking.

Though the following stories are fiction, most are inspired by actual events in the life of CPT. The characters in this play are fictional characters. To learn more about CPT, see www.cpt.org.

* Though not preferable, the Preamble could be read by a narrator at the beginning of the play.

Staging / Sets

The set for the play will not be realistic. At any given point in the play, several locations are represented on the stage simultaneously as different characters are in different parts of the world. For the majority of the play, the seven main characters occupy the stage, staggered across it. The set could include three or four small risers. Each character should have a chair or stool beside them. The backdrop should ideally be a scrim or other backdrop onto which are projected images.

At points in the play, scenes will develop out of the characters' monologues. During these segments, slides of the places where CPT works (i.e., old city of Hebron, Opón River valley in Colombia) could be projected onto the backdrop.

Cast

Alex: 20s. Must sing and play guitar well.

Cheryl: 30s, Caucasian.

Bill: 50-60s, somewhat impassive.

Diane: 40s, African American.

Maria Inez: 30s, Colombian. Must speak with accent.

Grace: 60s, Caucasian.

Jeff: 20s, "ordinary" guy.

Two Male, One Female to play:

Soldier 1—Male

Soldier 2—Female

Palestinian Young Man

Benjamin [pronounced *Ben-ya-meen*]

Sue (a CPTer)

Two Colombian Paramilitaries

Retreat Leader—Female

The song "Singing For Our Lives" is by Holly Near, © 1979 Hereford Music (ASCAP), www.hollynear.com (used by permission). The song "Riverbottom" is by Matt Schaaf (used by permission). The song "Round and Round" is by John Krumm (used by permission).

Act One

[The stage is dark with the exception of one candle, front and center.]

ALEX, CHERYL, BILL and DIANE enter the stage and scatter across it. They all wear red CPT hats. CHERYL and BILL stand beside their stools, DIANE sits on hers, and ALEX, front and center, sits cross-legged on the floor beside a stool. He holds a guitar.

Each character holds a taper candle in a candlestick holder, except ALEX. His candle sits in front of him and is already lit.

As the other characters prepare to speak, each of them takes out a lighter and lights his or her candle.]

ALEX

[ALEX plays and sings the song “Singing For Our Lives” (music available from playwright upon request)—just the chorus. After finishing the chorus, he begins to speak. Laughs.]

I remember my first time singing that. I was one of the song leaders at the S.O.A protest in Fort Benning, Georgia. S.O.A, you know? *[Ruefully]* School of the Assassins... I mean School of the Americas! US-based training ground for the thugs of CIA-supported Latin American regimes—torture manuals, the careful implementation of paramilitary terror tactics, how to plot effective disappearances...that kind of stuff. Believe it or not, it’s a real place.

[Blows out candle, sets down his guitar and stands up.]

Anyway, I’d been taught the song earlier that day and was leading my little group, mostly other grunges from Reed College—from which I proudly hail *[Takes a little bow]*—among this enormous group of protesters. Me and my friends

were pumped, you know, as only a group of slightly-buzzed college students, who'd spent the night all crammed into tents together could be, hormones thumping and the like. *We loved protesting.*

Anyway, we'd sing in these pretty voices, then all yell out "ANGRY" whenever we got to that word. Like we were picking some kind of fight with our peace songs. We were indignant, you know. [*Laughs*] Though none too righteous!

But the group next to us... Here are these people all wearing red hats. [*He touches the bill of his CPT hat and rolls his eyes.*] They're holding hands in a line. Looks like they're praying or something. They're a flotsam and jetsam kind of crowd, you know. Old people, overweight people, a couple Amish-looking folks, some young punks like us, a middle-aged guy in a button-up shirt and fleece-sweatshirt. And they're all just singing so...well...peacefully.

CHERYL

We were singing this song. Can't even remember what it was. We knew the body was up ahead 'cause we saw the vultures circling the water, probably fifty yards upstream. That's when I felt it coming. I bent over the side of the boat and just wretched.

We had been praying and singing, and I'd felt pretty strong—till I saw the vultures...and knew it was real. A dead body in the water, bloated, probably missing limbs, the way dead bodies usually are on the Opón River. Colombia.

ALEX

When I noticed the red hat people, I stopped yelling the word "angry", started just singing it. So did others in our group. The way they looked, the CPTers: I don't know, so grounded, you know, and...loving. They sort of calmed us all down. And that was my first contact with CPT—Christian Peacemaker Teams.

There's no shortage of irony in my wearing this hat. I admit, the word "Christian" still sort of trips across my tongue. I was the one all the church folks gave up on—off to Reed, joining up with the Pagan Society, refuting my parent's every belief at the dinner table. Some great family moments, I assure you! [*Sits on the stool next to him.*]

Then one day I sit down to watch some TV while I eat my Lucky Charms. Getting ready to head to class. I turn on the TV and drop my spoon. There's an airplane on the screen, hitting some skyscraper, people scurrying around the city streets like ants. [*Footage from Sept 11, of people on the street, could be projected onto scrim.*]

BILL

I was in Hebron, the West Bank, when the second intifada started. I had served there with Christian Peacemaker Teams many times. The soldiers were rounding up Palestinian men like I'd never seen. You could just feel the tension in the air—and it's always a little tense—but you could tell something big was set to explode. I was out on street patrol a lot at the time, since I was one of the most experienced members of the team.

[*SOLDIER 1 and a Palestinian YOUNG MAN enter in the dark of stage right, and take their places, in the downstage area of stage right. BILL sets him candle on his stool and walks over to them.*]

Check points sprang up everywhere, and at every one you could see Palestinians lined up, often women with small children, trying to get into the next town to buy groceries, or men needing to get to their jobs in the next village, or their fields. This was before the separation wall—just checkpoints. It was not unusual to see young men hand-cuffed, often in uncomfortable positions, waiting and waiting for Israeli soldiers to interrogate them or check their ID's. The soldiers took their time—checkpoints

being a key form of harassment. Eventually, the soldiers would either arrest them or let them go.

This one day, I came upon a checkpoint.

[Light shines on the SOLDIER 1 and the YOUNG MAN, who is naked except for his underwear. He is handcuffed behind his back and is being forced to crouch down. He is obviously in pain and distress.]

BILL

What is this young man charged with?

SOLDIER 1

Back away! Get to the end of the line!

BILL

I am with Christian Peacemaker Teams. We live in Hebron and work as human rights observers. I am going to have to stay with this boy. I will not leave. What are his charges?

[With the soldier distracted, the YOUNG MAN kneels and bends forward to cover his body.]

SOLDIER 1

He is a terrorist. Now back away!

BILL

Do you have a commander here? I would like to speak to your commander. This boy is freezing. *[Takes a notebook and pencil from his pocket and takes off his coat, drapes it around the YOUNG MAN.]* He is in pain. This is a violation of this young man's rights!

[SOLDIER 2 approaches.]

BILL

Are you the commander here? Where are this boy's clothes?

[*To audience*] A teammate was with me, she was taking pictures with a digital camera, taking notes in a small reporter's notebook.

SOLDIER 2

[*Speaking calmly and with authority.*] You are not allowed to take photos in military areas. Put the camera away or we will confiscate it.

BILL

We must do our jobs. We are documenting human rights abuses. We will not leave.

SOLDIER 2

You will have to put the camera away or it is ours.

BILL

[*To audience*] My teammate puts the camera in her bag.

SOLDIER 2

Now, we are processing the papers on this man. He is suspected of conspiring with Hamas. Get to the end of the line, or you will be arrested.

BILL

I will not leave until you treat this boy with dignity. It is beneath you to treat him in this way. You can do better.

SOLDIER 1

You are helping terrorists!

BILL

If this man has committed a crime, charge him with a crime. But

do not torture him. I will not leave.

[*To audience, as he is undressing*] With that, I stripped down to my undershirt. I started taking off my pants. I would leave on my long johns, so as not to offend the Muslims who were present. But I wanted to show that as long as the boy was suffering, I would suffer too. [*He kneels next to the boy like he is praying.*]

Hodhu layhv h kiy-thobh kiy le`olâm chasdo. Hodhu lê'lohêyhâ'elohiyim kiy le`olâm chasdo. Hodhu la'adhonêy hâ'adhiyim kiy.le`olâm chasdo. Le`osêh niphlà'oth gedholoth lebhaddo kiy le`olâm chasdo. [*Prayer is a Hebrew transliteration of Psalm 136:1-4.*]

[*Stands up and speaks to audience.*] Within thirty minutes, they released him.

[*Light shifts to CHERYL and as it does, BILL, the SOLDIERS, and the YOUNG MAN exit stage right.*]

CHERYL

[*Sets down candle.*] Just a week earlier we were riding in this same boat. This same river. We were on our way to visit some friends. It was a scorching hot Colombia day, and we were in a playful mood. Someone had fashioned these makeshift water skies and we were doing our best to tow each other behind the boat. Laughing, really cracking up whatever audience we had on the shore—mostly the farming families we accompany along the river—you know, to keep them safe from the armed groups...guerrillas, paramilitaries. But there were some paras too, at a checkpoint. We wanted to show them that peacemaking is not all serious, like war. It can be singing, and laughing, and making friends. Even they laughed at us!

DIANE

When I told my friends and family I was going to Iraq, they were like: Girl, you are *crazy*!

[*Stands up. Sets her candle on her stool.*] I know they're thinking: here she is, over forty and not even married, just out of graduate school. She is throwing her life away for some pipe dream! [*Laughs*] When I became a pacifist, I'm sure my church and family thought I'd lost touch with reality. The church back home tends to be supportive of the military. After all, that *is* where the bulk of the young people end up after highschool.

But I'm saying: what about MLK, what about South Africa? If *anyone* can speak authoritatively about nonviolence in this country, with integrity, it's African Americans! ...But I know they are just afraid for me. They just love me is all. [*Continues standing, holding candle.*]

[*JEFF, GRACE, MARIA INEZ all enter and take places downstage. MARIA INEZ and GRACE stand while JEFF sits. They are all wearing red CPT hats. Like the others, they light candles as they speak.*]

The seven main characters, minus BILL, should be staggered around the stage in places they will retain for most of the first act. BILL's space is still empty.]

MARIA INEZ

I love my country. So I do this [*Shrugs. Sets candle on stool.*]

The blood never stops flowing it seems.

Decades of civil war and the blood never stops.

The guns—US military aid—do not bring peace.

They turn us into slaves, a whole nation in slave to fear.

It is time for mass nonviolence in Colombia, and so I do this.

Most Colombians believe in non-violence, but they

cannot do this. They have fields to tend, children to feed.

I can do this, so I must.

We must *stop* our brothers and sisters from killing each other,
controlling each other!

It is all because of fear.

And money.

God-forsaken money. The ground springs forth money,
and the armed groups trample each other to get it. The mining
money—gold, emeralds, the palm oil money, the crude oil
money, the drug money.

We are so rich in things we don't want!

Things most Colombians do not even want!

What *do* we want? We want to eat.

We want to sing and dance and create.

We want to love.

But the rich want land; the rich want oil.

So, what then? Money is the grand inquisitor.

Who will kill their brother for a dollar, for a hundred,
for a hundred-thousand dollars?

You think you can survive off the land?!

HA!, money says.

But I say YES. I say a day will come for Colombia
when the guns are laid down, and the land is freed
from bondage and fighting,
from the poisons that are used to fight coca,
the poisons sprayed from the air that pollute our yucca,
our mangoes, our fish.

There has to be a better way.

ALL

There has to be a better way.

GRACE

Oh, I've been with CPT for years. I was one of the first fulltime
CPTers, back in the early 90's. Went to Haiti then. Now I've
been in Hebron for most of my time. Feels like home now, I
guess... and CPT a bit...*[looking at other characters]* like a

family. [*Some of the other characters smile and nod agreement.*]

I chose not to marry, not to have a family, because I always wanted to do peace work. I grew up Mennonite—wore a head covering and the works. As a girl the most radical thing I considered doing was cutting my hair. Oh mercy, how God cared about my hair! [*Sets down candle.*]

But there was always this talk about peacemaking growing up, not *radical* peacemaking necessarily, but peacemaking. That appealed to me. I always knew Anabaptists had died for their beliefs, and that nonviolence had been a big part of their beliefs. I was born during WWII. Many Mennonites went to jail at that time—conscientious objectors to the war. Or they did alternative service in labor camps.

Well in highschool, I did the unthinkable for my conservative family...*I cut my hair*. I was immediately branded the black sheep! It was the early 60's and I thought: Hey, why not go into peace work, now that I'm a *bona fide* radical.

ALEX

After September 11, I had to do something concrete for peace. Everyone was angry: angry at the terrorists, angry at the US government, angry at everyone who wasn't angry at the right thing. I remembered the CPTers I'd seen at the S.O.A protest, and I looked 'em up. I wasn't much into Christianity, mind you, but I hadn't known Christians to protest the war machine either. If these people were putting their necks on the line for peace—not just talking about it, then I belonged with them!

I joined a CPT delegation, did CPT training for a month in Chicago, then was off to Colombia.

CHERYL

The thing about Colombia is it's all about fear. We're not talking about armies attacking each other, or anything like that. The guerrillas and paras—paramilitaries, they control the civilian population through fear. The paramilitaries use disappearances, assassinations, rumors. With the guerrillas, it's kidnappings, threats, sometimes killings...

They all strike at the people they suspect to be supporters of their enemies. Sometimes, especially the paras, strike at the leaders of *communities* they suspect of being sympathetic to their enemies. Sometimes it's just to warn them: *Don't step out of line!*

Mañe Vargas was such a strike. He was a community leader, and a friend. A friend of our team.

ALEX

[*Joining in CHERYL's story. At this point they talk to the audience, and to each other.*]

When I saw his body, I couldn't believe it was him. We had stayed outside his family's house on many occasions, eaten with them, sang songs late into the night. [*Sings two lines of "Caminamos por la Luz de Dios," or some other up-beat peace song in Spanish.*] The people didn't want the paras to come, and they didn't want the guerrillas to come, so we would stay.

It was the first village in the *campo* I had accompanied, just after arriving in Colombia. Everyone was unbelievably friendly. They made us fish and those banana things—you know, plantains? They would cook on a fire in an outdoor stove, out in the yard. We'd drink this thin, watery coffee.

To our friends on the Opón, Colombia isn't a news headline; it isn't a war zone. It's their home.

Mañe had three daughters—Yessica, Gloria, Marcela.

Gleaming eyes and big old smiles.

CHERYL

We would sit in hammocks and visit before the mosquitoes descended. Then we'd zip up into tents and listen to the cacophony of bugs around us.

Some of those evenings were the best of my life. Such hospitality, ...open-handedness. But then night would come.
[Blows out candle.]

I don't know how they do it—go on with life, you know? It's there every day and night: the danger, the threat.

Where were we when Mañe Vargas was killed?

[Sets candle under her stool and sits down.]

ALEX

The family asked us to accompany them as they retrieved Mañe's body. The community wanted to give him a proper burial.

ALEX, CHERYL, & MARIA INEZ

We followed the vultures. *[MARIA INEZ blows out her candle, sets it down.]*

[ALEX, CHERYL & MARIA INEZ walk downstage left as Maria speaks. They gather in a half circle facing the audience, surrounding a small barbecue that sits low to the ground.]

MARIA INEZ

We held a vigil at the riverbank two days later. The community made a "death list" including the names of targeted individuals they know, in their community and in other communities. We burned the list and prayed.

Should my name be on this list? I wondered. I know CPTers have been on death lists before.

But I am Colombian.

For North Americans it is different; there is a kind of protection that derives from their passports.

But me?

Colombian.

Woman.

My name on a list.

My name no different from the others.

Yet this work is for Colombians.

I know the only protection I have comes from God.

[MARIA INEZ begins leading litany.]

MARIA INEZ

O Creator, Source of our peace,
From the shadow of death over Colombia,
from the death lists of the armed groups,
from intimidation and fear,

ALL *[including the other CPTers on stage]*

DELIVER YOUR CHILDREN

MARIA INEZ

from our complicity in the killing,
from profiting by arms sales,
from providing training for those who kill

ALL

DELIVER YOUR CHILDREN

MARIA INEZ

from the violence of war everywhere,
from enlisting of youth in armed groups,

from the suffering of innocent victims,

ALL

DELIVER YOUR CHILDREN

[MARIA INEZ crouches down beside the barbecue. She picks up a lighter and a long list of names from off of the ground. She slowly lights the list and sets it in the barbecue. All is still while the list burns.]

MARIA INEZ

by infusing hope in the midst of death,
by transforming the hearts of those bearing arms,
by enlightening armed leaders in the power of
nonviolence,

ALL

DELIVER YOUR CHILDREN

MARIA INEZ

by our rejection of violence as a means to justice,
by our refusal to cooperate in the export of violence,
by our confronting of unjust systems,

ALL

DELIVER YOUR CHILDREN

MARIA INEZ

by seeing your image even in enemies,
by teaching all children to celebrate life,
by converting economies of greed to ones of sharing,

[ALEX, MARIA INEZ, & CHERYL return to their places, possibly changing spots, as they speak. ALEX & MARIA INEZ sit, while CHERYL remains standing.]

ALL

Raise us up from these ashes.

O Loving Creator, grant us peace. Amen.

CHERYL

It was after that the nightmares began.

I became very afraid. Couldn't sleep. It didn't matter where we were—back in the city in the team apartment, or in the *campo*. Intense headaches. I had them every day.

[Slowly drops to her knees. As if she is seeing it right before her...] We found an arm first, entangled in some vines at the side of the river.

[Drops her head. After a few moments, abruptly sits up straight.]

By the time we found his body I had gone numb. I turned off inside. I had to do the work.

I was heaving; there was nothing to bring up. Nothing left in my belly—just emptiness, ...a hole.

He was white as ash, his skin nothing like human skin. It is his skin that haunts my dreams.

He was a beautiful man. So beautiful. Eyes that danced. His smile was so caring, ...soft. He was a gentle, kind man. How could he be so kind?

...This shouldn't happen! ...This...killing.

But why was *I* so scared? I felt almost guilty. *[Sardonically]* I have white skin. Healthy, living white skin—a kind of protection here. *I* could leave at any time. Where could our

friends go?

Who am I to condemn killing when I don't have to live this every day of my life? I came here because I thought I would be brave. I thought my faith in God, in what we're doing here, would make me brave. But I am so damn scared. I thought I came here to help people. *Me* helping someone like Mañe Vargas!

God, I don't know anything anymore. [*Stays seated on floor.*]

[*BILL walks in and goes to his stool. Remains standing.*]

BILL

When the attention turned to Iraq, late 2002, I went there—to start up a CPT presence.

We CPTers were working closely with another peace organization, one with extensive experience in Iraq. Our goal was to position ourselves in strategic locations in case bombing started. We would stay at hospitals, community centers, ...water treatment facilities. We would make our presence known, in the hope that we would deter US generals from bombing these places.

After the bombing campaign, we stayed. We're one of the very few foreign NGOs operating outside the Green Zone in Baghdad—the zone protected by occupation forces. At that time, the air raid sirens were still a mainstay of Baghdad life. In our neighborhood, we had electricity about three hours a day...if that. [*Blows out candle, sets it under chair, and sits down.*]

JEFF

Iraq was my first “assignment,” so to speak.

I went right after college.

It sort of shocked everyone. I mean, I don't come from a liberal

background or anything. Was raised Catholic.

In highschool I got involved with a church youth group, ended up attending a Christian college. Majored in philosophy.

[*Shrugs*] There's not much you can do with a philosophy degree but more school.

[*Stands up and sets candle on stool.*] I needed a break.

But that's not really why I joined CPT.

People ask why I joined. It's not easy to explain, I guess. It just felt like the right thing to do, like the thing God wanted me to do. I wanted to do some kind of service. And there certainly seemed to be a need for peacemakers. I read a lot of Tolstoy in college. I guess you could say I was influenced.

The state we're in—in this world, you know.

We just keep digging our hole deeper and deeper.

One person ascends to power—say an upright person with a commitment to equality and peace, and they just adopt the same tactics as the last guy.

They determine force is necessary to maintain their power—the power they wanted to use for good.

So they use violence and hoard wealth.

They repress people and take freedom away from friend and foe alike. Just to maintain control.

It's like we're on this merry-go-round that never stops.

It's all about returning evil for evil.

People die and new ones are born, but violence keeps spinning around like a wheel.

[*Long, thoughtful pause*] I think Jesus came to stop it.

DIANE

[*Sets candle on stool.*] I've seen racism all my life. It was always around me, like the air we breathe. I grew up in the

South, Atlanta. In school, in church, in the neighborhood—I was always having to prove myself. Prove I was as smart as the white kids, prove I was as smart as the boys, prove I was as reliable as someone more white or more male. ...It just tires a person out, you know? I guess it consumed a lot of my energy for a lot of my life.

Well, when I realized I never could prove myself, that racism and sexism come from people's heads, not from my performance whether good or bad, ...I had to let go of some things. ...All my striving. [*Laughs*] I had to let go and find something else to live for for a change!

Well, one thing my upbringing helped me to see? It helped me see the power of love. It sounds sentimental, I know. But listen.

I would see the way some old black woman—*smart as a whip*—would hold her head high when someone talked down to her. She would hold her head high, perhaps retorting with some brilliant remark, but *would not return the hatred*. She would speak with a fierce love in her eyes. And you know? That just made her so much stronger, so much more alive than those folks talking down to her. That is what I saw again and again.

It was like these people were refusing to catch the disease. They *knew* love was stronger than bigotry and they kept refusing to act any other way.

I decided this was a pretty good thing to live for!

When I went to Palestine, I watched Israeli nationals help rebuild the demolished home of some Palestinian family—a house the Israeli government had destroyed. I saw Palestinians sharing food with Israeli soldiers right outside their doors.

I saw Iraqis welcome us Americans right into their homes when

we went there, and US war planes were dropping bombs all over their cities. They just lavished kindness all over us! I am telling you, that kind of thing is what it's about. I have watched the way people react when you surprise them with love, when you return good for evil. Now, *that* is something to live for! It's the most beautiful thing I have ever seen. [*Sits on stool holding candle.*]

JEFF

Sarah. She was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen.

She worked with one of the other NGOs in Iraq. Like me, she was just out of college. I hadn't dated a lot. ...But I guess she and I were sort of...drawn to each other.

When I met her I thought: "Hell, this is not what I need. I need to focus, I need to be willing to die here. The Iraqis don't need some human rights observer distracted by a girl." [*Blows out candle, sits down.*]

BILL

As soon as the war began, early 2003, the US forces started rounding up Iraqi men, especially young men, separating them from their families who had no idea where they'd ended up. At that time, few people knew where *any* of them were ending up.

We began to hear stories. No charges were made against many of these men, they were just taken. [*Photos from Abu Ghraib could be projected on backdrop, possibly in rapid sequence.*] Family members would come to our apartment and tell us about their sons, or brothers, or uncles who had disappeared. Raids were made in the night on homes. [*During this line, takes his wallet out of his pocket and pulls two photos from it.*] Occupation forces barging into people's living rooms, throwing all the men to the ground, taking them away.

[*Pause. Looking at photos*] I have a family, in Ontario,

Canada—a wife, two grown sons. [*Holds up two photos to audience.*] They are very supportive of my CPT work. But they are having more trouble with Iraq. Every day they hear stories of suicide attacks in and around Baghdad. Foreign contractors and aid workers are targets of kidnapping, murder.

My wife's health is suffering.

JEFF

In the months after the major bombing campaigns were over, the team was able to get out more. We were crazy busy. Traveling the length of Iraq frequently, visiting detention facilities and advocating for the families of detainees, taking Iraqi concerns before Occupation officials.

I rarely saw Sarah, though I thought of her every day. I was trying so hard, *so* hard to stay focused and to be...

ALL: Effective.

JEFF

She went on a trip with me once to Karbala, to meet with a delegation of Iraqi grassroots organizers. It was a fluke that we got to go together. But we did. And it was terrific, just us and a driver. ...We connected.

But I don't know. I was trying to stay detached too, trying to stay above ground with all the stress of the work. I didn't have time for emotions. I kept trying to turn them off, just when they'd get turned back on [*Smiles at the pun he's made.*]

It was a hard time. Our team was always changing, you know. People coming and going—team members taking breaks, new people coming on. It was a constant struggle to keep continuity in the work, to make sure the ball was not dropped in the case of some detainee, to make sure we followed up with US officials.

ALL [*Looking at each other*]

Team life was strained.

[*Everyone looks at ALEX, who notices everyone looking at him.*]

ALEX

Okay, so I'm a slob? No, I don't expect people to clean up after me, but neither do I feel I should have to submit to someone else's standards of cleanliness.

GRACE

Well, maybe I *am* a bit of a neat freak. But hey? It comes with my German-Mennonite upbringing. I can't control it. It's like a tick.

CHERYL

You know what really, really...

ALL

Bugs me?

CHERYL

When a teammate has a problem with my actions but doesn't tell me directly.

BILL

When people forget to recharge the cell phone, the batteries for the digital camera, the...[*cut off.*]

DIANE

[*Glowering at BILL*] The way some people can't ever relax. They work *all* the time and expect everyone else to be workaholics! [*Blows out candle, gets up and sets it under stool.*]

JEFF

The budget. Why should I have to buy candy bars out of my personal money? It's what I eat! Other people don't pay for their own food.

GRACE

[*Sheepishly*] The use of bad language.

ALEX

[*Directed at GRACE*] No shit?!

CHERYL

The way some people *talk* so much.

DIANE

The *endless* team meetings. The fine art of beating dead horses.
[*ALL laugh.*]

ALEX

The team meals. Let me spell it out for you: V-E-G-A-N.

GRACE

The sticky lids on jelly jars.

BILL

Too many long distance phone calls.

JEFF

Having to lead team worship.

ALEX

Having to *attend* team worship.

JEFF

Having Alex lead team worship. [*ALL laugh.*]

DIANE

[*With false piety, in southern preacher mode*] Dear Goddess, God, Essence, Spirit, Christ, Life-Force, Earth-Puppy, our Inner Rhythm, be with us this day...

[*ALL laugh loudly.*]

DIANE

In the West Bank we do a lot of laughing. We have to.

The Israeli settlers—the extremist, far-right of the Israeli political spectrum—are so deathly serious. It can start to suck you under if you're not careful.

If you don't know what settlements are, well they're little Israeli cities or villages set up on Palestinian land. Some settlements are old, going back a few decades, and others are relatively new. The new folks might just walk in and erect their tents right in the middle of some Palestinian family's olive grove—uprooting hundred-year-old trees in the process, or they might squat in abandoned buildings in the city, taking over whole neighborhoods in due time.

The way settlers see it, this is *not* stealing. [*Adamantly*] They are descendants of Abraham, and God gave the land west of the Jordan River to Abraham. So they should be able to come take whatever Palestinian land they so choose. It doesn't matter who lives on it, or what violence is required to take it. God *wants* them on the land. End of discussion.

CHERYL

So I go back home for a break. My mom wants me to go see her new pastor, she's worried about me, you know. And I try to be sympathetic. She's my mom, for heaven's sake, and she's really trying to support my work. So I go to see the guy. I'm trying to explain to him about Mañe and his family.

He puts his elbows on his knees and leans toward me like he's really leveling with me. "Cheryl," he says, "Do you think the man was secretly involved with the drug trade?"

GRACE

After years of working in Hebron I can tell you, the settlers' attitude is *not* representative of the Israeli people. Settlers are sort of...well...different. And they get lots of slack. All kinds of political clout.

Try to imagine this: The settlements, which overlook some of the most marginalized villages in the Middle East, and—at least in areas other than Hebron—some of the most over-populated land on earth...the settlements, right next door to this, they're like *Palm Springs*.

ALEX

When I try to talk to my parents about CPT, we always come around to Hebron. It's just so hard for them to believe; the news they hear about Israel in the US is so biased. CPT is just too political my parents say, too pro-Palestinian.

One time they had this long-time friend over for dinner, and he started asking about CPT. He's taken many trips to the "Holy Land". He interrupts what I'm saying and says: "You know, Alex, (he has these searing blue eyes, like one of those Sunday School Jesuses) I have been to Israel many more times than you. And I have never felt safer than when I am in Israel."

I don't even know what to say to this! How many hours did you stay in Gaza, I want to ask? How many Palestinians did you talk to? Buddy, you were too busy buying little plastic crosses on the Via Dela Kmart!

DIANE

You know...Palm Springs, that posh community in southern

California? That's the settlements—*no kidding*. Several of them look like golf resorts, full of immaculate yards, well-irrigated lawns. Shopping emporiums and copious Starbucks coffee houses. And for most of the past several years, Israelis are given incentives by the government to live in the settlements. I'm telling you, that has got to be the best government-subsidized housing in the world!

ALEX

Did you hang out in the settlements, dude?, I want to ask this guy. Nice roads, nice gardens, huh? Did you check out the guard towers? How 'bout the barbed wire? Hey, glad it made you feel so safe! This guy, I am *sure* he ate at McDonalds while he was in the "Holy Land".

CHERYL

While I was home, I started reading about post traumatic stress, I saw a counselor a couple of times. I was in pretty bad shape. CPT suggested that, after my break, I should go to a less-intense project. A team was doing some accompaniment work on a native reserve in Ontario, Canada.

I'd made a commitment, to CPT I mean. But I just didn't know if I could do it. Man, I didn't want to flake out. On my break, I just slept. All I could do was sleep. Who was I kidding? Me, the valiant peace worker—what a joke.

ALEX

You know, sometimes I get so angry. We're trying to support poor farmers in Colombia who are choosing nonviolence, or Palestinians who are saying "No more violence!" But I'm like an inferno of violence inside. And I see these peoples' situations, and they're so grave. I mean, isn't it crazy *not* to defend yourself against violence, even if you have to be violent?

It used to seem so clear to me: Nonviolence is the answer! *But*

now I don't know shit! You know, these farmers in Colombia—they are teaching *me*. 'Cause I don't get it anymore. I came here thinking I had all the answers figured out. [*Shakes his head.*] *Shit.*

[*ALEX picks up his guitar and starts playing "Riverbottom" by Matt Schaaf (recording and tablature available from playwright upon request). Volume trails off during instrumental interlude, and ALEX keeps playing it very softly throughout the next several lines.*]

GRACE

CPT has been in the West Bank for over ten years, but we started working in a Palestinian village called At-Tuwani just a couple of years ago. 2004.

School-kids from another village called Tuba can only walk to school in Tuwani by passing a settlement—Havat Ma'on—and settlers weren't letting them pass. They were threatening children, throwing stones and shoving. Kids were getting hurt.

So we started work in Tuwani, walking the children to school.

DIANE

Eventually, after settlers continued harassing the children and attacking the internationals accompanying them—several of whom were seriously injured, the Israeli police responded. They said *they* would accompany the Tuba kids. Most days they do, but they are *very* inconsistent and disrespectful to the children. We monitor them, confront them when necessary. Sometimes the police don't show up, or don't wait for the children to approach the Jeep—to come out of hiding. Often the police bully them.

GRACE

We started accompanying shepherds in the area too. Some of

these shepherds have land deeds clear back to the Ottoman Empire. But when Palestinian shepherds come near the settlements, the settlers become violent.

[ALEX sings chorus of “Riverbottom.” Trails out to soft instrumental interlude again, with GRACE continuing over the guitar music.]

One day I went with a team member to accompany the shepherds. A few settlers had been patrolling from a ridge overlooking the pasture. Three days in a row they stood there, guns pointed at the shepherds, at us CPTers.

But on this particular day, no men came out on the ridge when we arrived. It was a clear sky day. Chilly, but nice. I noticed spring wildflowers in the grass.

[ALEX ends music abruptly.] Then, in the corner of my eye... A whole group of settlers from Ma'on, coming toward the shepherds. They were led by Benjamin, the man who'd kept his gun on us the past three days. He was bulky and short, *very testy*.

[BENJAMIN enters from side and walks to front and center of stage. As he enters, GRACE rushes to center stage to meet him, and as she does, SUE, wearing red CPT hat, races in from backstage with video camera to document the encounter.]

BENJAMIN

[Runs in, making “shooing” motions with arms; Talking to everyone before him, presumably shepherds.] Get out of here, you trespassers!

[GRACE stands in front of him, blocking him with her arms away from her sides, pointed downward. SUE is filming.]

BENJAMIN

[*To GRACE*] You are aiding criminal conduct! You are trespassers!

GRACE

These men just want to graze their sheep. They will not threaten you.

BENJAMIN

[*Right in her face*] These terrorists want to kick us out of our land, the land of our fathers. Get the hell out of my way. [*Tries to step around GRACE, but she sidesteps to block him again and again. He stops, bends down, and starts picking up (invisible) stones, throwing them. Continues yelling (mimed).*]

GRACE

[*To audience*] By this time, the entire crowd of settlers is throwing stones. For the most part, they stand back. The shepherds remain a cluster in the field, unbudged. I try not to flinch, or dodge the rocks that keep hitting me—in the side, on my legs. I try to focus on Benjamin, without turning my back to the settlers. At one point he spits in my face [*Unflustered, wipes spittle off of her cheek and wipes hand on sleeve.*]

[*SUE balances camera on her shoulder, still filming. Pulls cell phone out of back pocket.*] Sue is calling the police on our cell phone.

BENJAMIN

Who the hell are you calling? You think the authorities will help you while you assist criminals? [*Continues to mime cursing.*]

GRACE

[*To audience*] All of a sudden I see Sue fall down [*SUE mimes getting hit by a large stone on the side of the head, and the impact and shock cause her to fall to ground, dropping phone.*]

As she falls I notice a military Jeep pull up, as well as policemen—the settlers must have notified the military before coming out. Should I go to Sue or should I remain with Benjamin?

He starts toward Sue and I stand between them. The soldiers are still distant and cannot see us. Benjamin kicks Sue in the leg and I try to cover her [*GRACE crouches down like she is covering SUE, who is curled into a ball.*] Benjamin kicks me hard in the back, then rushes toward the shepherds. [*BENJAMIN rushes off stage.*] The settlers follow him.

[*As GRACE speaks, she gets up slowly, helps SUE to her feet. SUE dusts herself off, grabs phone & video camera (which she had been curled around), and trots offstage in direction of BENJAMIN. GRACE stands facing audience as she tells rest of story.*] My back doesn't even hurt at first. Adrenaline, I suppose.

Sue and I make it to the confrontation right as the soldiers *casually* get out of their Jeep. Settlers are screaming at the shepherds, some are kicking sheep or shooing them away. They insist that their families have a right to this land. They are not leaving.

With soldiers present, we know Benjamin won't attack anyone, but there are many settlers harassing the shepherds. Sue hands me the video camera and places herself between the settlers and Palestinians. As I am filming, I approach the soldiers, try to tell them what took place.

“Leave the area!” the commander tells me. “This is a closed military zone!” But I don't leave.

These settlers came here to make violence, I say. Please send them home. It is your duty to protect these shepherds. They

have a right to graze their sheep. We will file a report about this at the police station.

“Leave the area or you will be arrested,” he says. It is a common threat. Soldiers use it all the time. Declare an area a military zone, demand that we leave.

I cannot leave unless you provide protection for these men, I say. It is a risk, but I take it. He demands to see my passport.

Then...

an Israeli policeman approaches and places me under arrest.

[Walks off-stage with hands held, as though cuffed, behind her back.]

[Jewish instrumental music rises in the background. Photos of burning candles could be flashed in slow-succession on the scrim. Lasts about fifteen seconds, then music fades out as DIANE starts talking. Photo of candle remains.]

DIANE

When I meet settlers like Benjamin, I try to imagine their story. So much hatred, so much fear, doesn't arise out of nowhere, you know what I mean?

How many of these settlers had family members persecuted in Europe during the war? How many heard firsthand accounts of places like Auschwitz? What was it like for Benjamin before coming to Israel? What was his experience—a Jewish man in eastern Europe? How many settlers know the impact of terrorist bombings on the families of those who are killed?

It is mind-boggling how much pain is represented in this one little strip of geography. And the pain and anger keep cycling through generations, like dirty, infested water. New enemies, ...same old hurts.

BILL

In Iraq I meet family after family who are tired—the threat of house raids by US soldiers, the imprisonment of their sons without charge, the violence on the streets and the fear of getting caught in the crossfire, all the US corporations getting rich off the occupation. In Iraq, the US is creating enemies faster than Saddam ever did.

ALEX

[In angry tone] Once on the Opón, in Colombia, I met a young para. His name was Pablo. We got to talking about peace. He told me how guerrillas had kidnapped his parents when he was a little boy, and how they threatened to kill them. He said, “Since that time, I have never known peace.”

MARIA INEZ

I have met many Colombian women
who mourn their husbands.
Victims of guerrillas, victims of paramilitaries.
So many victims, and so much anger.
But I also meet the women who refuse,
refuse to teach hatred to their children.
Refuse to pass along the wounds.
They are the heroes.

[More photos of candles are added to the one already projected, as a recording of loons begins to play. The stage is almost dark.]

CHERYL

[Steps down off the stool. Lights her candle and sits down next to it, cross-legged on the floor.] I ended up in Grassy Narrows, Ontario, a native reserve where CPTers are providing accompaniment for a blockade. The community is resisting clearcutting on their treaty lands; logging trucks haven't shown

up for weeks, thank God. It's very quiet.

[Talks slowly, as if tired. Long pauses.]

Almost too quiet.

There's so much time to think, you know?

[Listening to loons] Out in these woods, with the loons.

They've had a hard time keeping CPTers here.

[Laughs] We're generally not so good at sitting around.

Just two of us here now. Friends from the reserve come and visit us, but they're busy with duties at home, their work. They really appreciate us being here, supporting them and everything.

But God, it's quiet.

It seems like the more time I spend thinking, the darker it gets. I'm just so...I don't know, ...anxious, I guess. I've had a cold for months. ...Nightmares.

I worry that maybe I'm a failure.

Like I let my Colombian friends down cause I couldn't do it.

The work, I mean. CPT.

But I just can't envision going back to my old life, either. Not after Colombia.

After what I've seen.

I don't really know where I'm goin'. *[Blows out candle.]*

[Pause] Hey look,...the northern lights. *[Looks around.]*

DIANE

CPTers accompany school kids in Hebron as well as At-Tuwani.

I guess I have been involved in school patrol for about three years now. And sometimes, you know, when a group of us CPTers are walking along with a few Palestinian kids, trying to keep settlers from throwing rocks at them, ...I think of Ruby Bridges. You know, the black girl who was the first non-white

kid to attend the Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans?
Took a whole entourage of National Guardsman to protect Ruby
from the screaming crowds of angry white folks.

She prayed for those people and forgave them. But would I do
the same? I think of these Palestinian boys we accompany. Will
they forgive? Or will they join the fighters, hurl stones at the
settlers, at the soldiers who bulldoze their neighborhoods?
[Pause] Will any of these children become suicide bombers?
[Images of candles disappear.]

GRACE

[She walks back onstage, with her hand on her side.] I was
released the same afternoon as the arrest; wasn't treated badly.
The shepherds were thankful for our accompaniment. They had
grazed their sheep; they had resisted the settlers. But when they
found out I'd been hurt, there was an *outpouring* of condolence
in Tuwani.

It was almost embarrassing. These people have lost so much.
They are injured in little and big ways all the time! And so much
attention for a bit of back pain. I tried hard to take care of
myself, so I would mend. In public, I always acted stronger than
I felt.

BILL

Human rights organizations started pulling their workers out of
Iraq as more and more non-Iraqis were being kidnapped. Didn't
matter if they were humanitarian workers or foreign contractors.
Our Iraqi neighbors warned us not to go out, and definitely not
to venture out of the neighborhood. They were always looking
out for us. They would come visit, bring us food they'd
prepared. But it put them at risk.

We were plagued with boredom.
Idleness is worse than crisis any day!

I kept thinking: *What am I doing here?* My family wants me home. And what am I doing? Playing cards in Iraq. Playing cards, for God's sake! I'd go out to get groceries and my life would be in danger.

JEFF

Our team has friends in Iraq, the Al-Jabouri family. Their sons were all home one night—the eve of a Muslim holiday. They were sleeping all over the house, the men with their wives and children, when they heard a loud banging, screaming men's voices. The patriarch of the family ran into the front room brandishing a gun, ready to protect his children from bandits. He was spotted through the curtains holding the gun just when he realized it was Americans outside.

All of his sons were running into the room when the soldiers started shooting. The family dropped to the floor. Every time one would rise to open the door, the shooting would begin again. Eventually soldiers beat down the door and beat two of the sons. They pulled women out of their bedrooms in their night clothes—a very shameful thing for Muslims. Traumatized the children.

They smashed up the interior of the house looking for evidence before realizing they had the wrong house. They were looking for some guy up the road.

Still, that didn't stop them. They arrested *all three sons*. They were all held in Abu Ghraib prison for several months. Never charged. Never compensated for the damage done to their home.

It's like the Iraqis...they're treated as less than human by many of the occupation forces.

DIANE

You know, I wish I could say that CPT was totally different than the rest of the world, that there was “No racism here”! But sometimes that’s the hardest thing, experiencing racism—subtle maybe, but still racism—on the team. It’s so blinding, you know. People really can’t even see what they’re doing.

Sometimes, it feels like some of my teammates don’t even hear me.

In Hebron, the settlers like to call us Nazis. Such a *terrible* word. We have to just block it out. “Nazi nigger,” they say to me. I don’t know why, but that really stings. ...It just hits me, you know?

JEFF

I got to know the Al-Jabouri family when I and another teammate were helping locate the sons. We advocated for their release from prison. It eventually came...*eight months* after the raid.

But every time I go to their house, they treat me like a king. Me, an American—I am treated like one of their own sons. They say, “We know you are not like your government. We know the American people are kind.”

GRACE

I had to leave Tuwani, go back to Hebron. My back got worse and worse. Some mornings I could hardly move. I didn’t even know how I would travel home on a plane, the pain was so bad.

JEFF

[*Stands up and walks to center stage. Stays there till end of Act One.*] It was a Friday when I heard that Sarah had been kidnapped.

BILL

[*Stands up.*] When I told my wife about Sarah, she demanded I come home.

So unlike her. It was just too close—someone we knew, someone we'd worked with.

I had to stay. Jeff was beside himself, the whole team trying to support him. I was crawling out of my skin in those days—cooped up in the apartment the way we were.

But I had to be the stable one. I told my wife NO, I would not come home. She tried not to show it, but she was angry.

CHERYL

[*Stands up.*] There's a tendency around here for people to put emotions aside: *I'll deal with my feelings on my own time.*

Right now it's just about the work. Even with team worship, regular check-ins. Most CPTers are North American, and North Americans are pretty into efficiency, "effectiveness". *There's no time for emotions!* It's pretty dysfunctional, if you think about it.

I was trying to hold it all in. Not to burden my teammates. But it was leaking out my eyes all the time. Just leaking and leaking.

JEFF

I was really scared...and grieving. I couldn't even know if Sarah was still alive. I was pretty worthless, but I couldn't go home, couldn't leave Iraq. God, I felt like a fool. Part of me thought: why did you get your heart involved?! Stay detached—that's the key!

But the other part of me was like: what were you thinking? You should have relished her. You should have taken every moment with her as a gift. Yes, from God! Spent as much time with her as possible. You wasted your time. Dammit, you are a fool!

Screw all that stuff about dedication to the work. We don't help make peace in the world by denying what we feel! That's not peace!

[Long pause as he gathers himself.] The NGO Sarah worked for started pulling all their people out of Iraq. Unlike CPT, which has a policy not to negotiate with kidnappers, her NGO was negotiating.

[Pause] Nine days since she was kidnapped. Ten days. Eleven days. *[Pause]* Still no Sarah. *[Lights go black.]*

INTERMISSION

Act Two

[Scenery: The set for Act Two is minimal. Projected onto the scrim could be combinations of colors or less simply, slow time-lapsed video of plants/flowers dying and blooming, dying and blooming. Other images from nature (slides) could be used. The imagery should be suggestive of persistent regeneration in the midst of death.]

As Act Two begins, there are no stools on the stage. DIANE kneels, praying, at a small prayer bench on a mat, downstage left. At downstage right is a one-person tent. ALEX is inside the tent, lying down, though he is invisible to the audience.

After the lights come up, DIANE rises, takes a bow (as when entering/exiting a church) and signs the cross. She walks with head down to center stage.]

DIANE

The Monastery of the Holy Spirit, a Trappist retreat center not

far from home in Atlanta—set out of the way like a secret little paradise. When I come here I stay in a guesthouse with other *sojourners*. Eat enough of Brother Tom's curried rice to last a year [*Laughs*].

But breaks go so fast. [*Pause*] It's crazy how little time one gets to think. On project, I mean. It's just constant. The work, trying to get along with your teammates and make sure everyone's surviving. Seems like reflection runs thin at times.

Here, I can think. [*Stretches out arms and inhales deep breath.*] It's like a hospital for the soul, I guess. Clears up the confusion. [*Laughs*] ...Actually, I just scratch the surface.

It's so convoluted. ...I've been working in At-Tuwani more. ...I just don't know if it's enough—what we're doing.

In Hebron, the violence is pretty clear. We see it, we confront it. But Tuwani is different. The shepherd communities we accompany...they almost seem to be dying. The settlers scattered poison all over the hills around Tuwani several months back, put dead chickens in the wells. They have poisoned the sheep. The shepherds just keep losing more. Every week someone loses a sheep, a lamb...sometimes even a child. Poison has gone everywhere—the water, the soil. For subsistence farmers, the losses are huge.

I don't know what is going to happen to them. I just sit with them and try not to cry—like I'm at some vigil for the dying.

It is so convoluted...

ALL [*Other CPTers speak from backstage, joining DIANE*]
Who will take responsibility for these acts?

DIANE

The authorities—they do nothing. No compensation for losses. No investigation. The Israeli army keeps demolishing *houses* in Tuwani! They say the Palestinians don't have a right to build there! Really, they're making space—to put up a military base.

But our friends in Tuwani, they are on the brink of devastation.

So what do we do? *What do we do?* The people...they are so tired. [*Walks back and stands in one of the positions upstage.*]

MARIA INEZ

[*Enters and walks to center stage. Looks out at audience as she begins to pray.*] Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven.

Have mercy on the Earth, dear God.
Have mercy on the land and it's creatures.
On the farmers and the food they grow.
On the chickens we eat and on their eggs.
On the plantains, the beans, the yucca,
have mercy, oh God. On the fish that swim
in our waters, and the fishermen.

Deliver us from evil, God.
From the poisons people carry in their hands
and in their hearts.
And deliver us from the temptation to ingest poison
into our own bodies, the poison of hatred into our minds.
Kindle in us your love.

JEFF

[*Slowly enters, walks to center stage as MARIA INEZ finishes. Begins speaking when she is done and as she walks to take a position upstage.*] At night I get pictures in my head of the men holding Sarah. They are terrible images [*closes his eyes,*

shudders]. I don't know what is being done to her, so my imagination assumes the worst. And then I am thinking these things as I walk down the street. Every Iraqi man looks like those men in my head. And, I feel this *hatred*. Not toward anyone in particular—just this general hatred.

God, it is so sick. It is no different than some racist general who thinks: “what the hell, we'll just waste a neighborhood or two...who cares, they're just Iraqi kids!” [*A huff of disgust.*]

My friends, the Al-Jabouri family—their hearts are heavy for me. Everyone has heard somehow—you know, that I love Sarah. They bring me fruit, ask me over for tea. But I hardly leave the house. I don't want to be away if a call comes. [*JEFF remains standing at center stage, looking out at the audience.*]

[*Lights go dark with just a spotlight over the tent, simulating night. Jungle sounds play in background. TWO COLOMBIAN PARAMILITARIES, wearing camouflage and carrying machine guns, enter and walk around front of tent. They walk around back of tent and ALEX unzips it, addresses audience. As he talks, they search the entire stage area, ignoring the CPTers, then search ALEX's backpack next to the tent.*]

ALEX

This one night... The paras had been seen in the Opón, not far from one of the villages we accompany. So we slept out that night, near the entrance to the community, a little ways from the houses.

When I heard the footsteps outside, I just froze. I knew they were there. But I was like...immobilized. [*Paras rifle through ALEX's bag.*] They were going through my things. I stayed as still as I could in my sleeping bag, hoping they wouldn't hear a rustling. I thought they could hear me swallow.

I should have been thinking what to do, to protect the community, but all that was going through my head was: *God, I don't want to be tortured, I don't want to die.* I didn't even think about my teammate in the other tent. [*PARAs take ALEX's bag and exit.*]

[*ALEX hangs his head. Silence for a couple of seconds.*] I heard them walk off. I heard them lift my bag first. I didn't even care then that they took it. I was...relieved. They walked away, away from the community—into the bush.

You know, maybe they left 'cause they knew CPT was here. They would have seen my hat. They know who we are. *Damn, I thought, they have my hat.*

I sat there wondering if my teammate was even awake. I was so fricken relieved. But what would I have done if they had walked toward the houses? ...God, I didn't sleep one minute that night. Didn't go to my teammate. Just lay there frozen. A million questions in my head. [*Stays seated there cross-legged in front of the tent, head bowed. Lights go black.*]

JEFF

[*Light comes up on Jeff. Muffled sound of mortar explosions in background, followed by machine gun fire.*] Insurgent attacks had increased those weeks in Baghdad. It was really hampering the team's work. No one could get around—so many checkpoints. On one trip through the city, we passed through ten checkpoints. We were in regular conversation with partners about whether to even stay in Iraq, whether we were helpful. We were Westerners and worried our presence could put our neighbors at risk—if some group targeted us.

But I wasn't leaving Iraq, not if Sarah was there. I wouldn't leave. I wanted to see her the *day* she got freed; I wanted to tell her how I felt about her. ...*If* she got freed. ...It had been fifteen

days.

[Pause] Then, one afternoon, the call came. [Bill walks in with a cordless phone in his hand. Looks at ground, then at JEFF.]

BILL

Simon at IMT just called. Sarah is free. She's...on her way home—to Connecticut. She is doing well. *[Reluctantly places his hand on Jeff's back. Pats his back. Exits.]*

JEFF

[For several seconds of silence, JEFF displays a mixed reaction of relief, shock, joy, and sadness. Finally he speaks...]
Connecticut. *[Stands stoically for a couple of seconds, then is overcome with pent-up emotion. Sits down with knees up, elbows on knees, head in hands. Muffled sounds of mortar explosion and siren, fading out to silence.]*

[Lights shift off of JEFF and onto downstage left, to which GRACE walks, entering from the right. JEFF stays in position, looking down.]

GRACE

They practically knocked me out with painkillers and put me on a plane! I was home in Indiana with my sister, pretty much getting the queen's treatment. Physical therapy every other day, a long back rub!

I got lots of visitors, some good press. People wanting to interview me about the attack and everything—the state of things in Palestine. It was a good opportunity to talk about it, I guess. I wanted people to know about Tuwani, what's happening to the people there.

The doctors aren't sure how my back will heal up. There's the best case scenario and the worst, then everything in between.

...Best case scenario, I will heal up just fine, be a spring chicken again. Or I could end up living with pain. That's the worst—if the problem doesn't work itself out, and if surgery won't help.

The hardest thing is thinking about leaving CPT. It has been my life for a long time now. [*Shrugs*] I just don't really know what else I would do. [*Takes position on stage.*]

BILL

[*Enters from stage left and takes GRACE's spot.*]

I understand my wife's concern, my *sons'* concern. But I can't deny the fact that I feel called to this. It's not some heroic delusion, ...not anymore. I admit I started out in CPT with heroic delusions. But I no longer think the people here need me because I'm strong, or quick-on-my-feet, or articulate. It's not that. For every strength I bring to this work, I bring two weaknesses. I am a blind-sided white man...[*humbly*] and I know it.

But it's more that I *need* to be here, because I can't *not* be here. That's how a calling is. It pulls at you until you cannot help but follow it. Even if everyone else thinks you're crazy...or arrogant.

ALEX

I went home on a break. Every time I did public speaking, there were people treating me like a hero. Maybe they always did, but this time I really noticed it. [*Mockingly*] *Oh Alex, we salute you!* All I could think about was my body frozen in that tent, the courage all leaked out of me. I felt like such a sham.

I mean, I guess people like to have heroes...and I suppose it could be argued that they should heroize CPTers rather than some army general who sits at a desk and sends poor young men out to die for him. But still it gives me the creeps, you know? And isn't putting someone on a pedestal just a cop out? Yes, a *cop out*.

It's strange, but I just wanted to be back in Colombia. It was, like, I couldn't be myself back home—everyone thinking I was some kind of hero. When I'm in Colombia, people aren't inclined to put me on some pedestal, to make me their poster boy for peace. We're all just muddling through together, you know, in very human ways.

ALL

We do the best we can.

[CHERYL walks in as lively Mexican music slowly rises, still quiet enough for her to talk over.]

CHERYL

I remember in Chiapas, Mexico—I worked there a couple of months right after joining CPT, just before Colombia—we would go dancing together in the evening, our team. It was the most freedom I'd ever felt! Warm San Cristobal nights, buzzing with tension and passion. Being away from home, from all the expectations of my parents, the people I'd grown up with. It was almost...euphoric. *[Music rises to a loud volume.]* Ah, I would just dance! *[Goes over and pulls ALEX out to dance with her. They dance with abandon, laughing, for about a minute. As the music fades, ALEX twirls her, and she swings across stage while the lights shift to MARIA INEZ, who dances (very well) up to the front of the stage. Cheryl takes a position on the stage, ALEX collapses in front of the tent. The music continues playing very faintly in the background.]*

MARIA INEZ

[Dances a few steps before talking.] The CPTers on our team, in Colombia—they are mostly from Canada and the US. It is a challenge for us to communicate. Such different cultures! North American Christians are sometimes so, ...how do you say it? ...*Stiff.*

Colombians tend to be passionate. We are full of *la vida!* In Colombia, we tend to express things Americans keep to themselves—anger, love. [*Shrugs*] It gets to be complicated.

My greatest difficulties in CPT are relating to other team members. Ironic, since I am so close to the violence here. Colombia is my *home*. Yet, the number of times I have had my actions misinterpreted by teammates—oh, more than I can count! ...And yet the greatest joys, too, come from them—from working together for peace.

ALL

Working *together* for peace. [*During this line, the music fades out to silence.*]

CHERYL

In Grassy Narrows, my doubts just deepened. Living with the native people there. ...Where I live in the US, you just don't see native people around much—very rarely. But there I was in Canada...confronted with my own racism *head-on*. Here are people still being stolen from, victimized in my backyard. [*Pause*] And to be honest, I hadn't given them much thought before. Who is perpetrating the violence in that centuries-old conflict? Insofar as I am a North American living off of resources stolen from native people—the perpetrator is...*me*.

It really threw me, you know? I thought I'd go to Grassy Narrows and get a break from Colombia, have some time to think and heal. It just took me deeper into the questions.

JEFF

After Sarah was freed, my emotions took a dive. It was so weird. Oh course I was happy she was safe. But then all the doubts crept in: maybe I would never see her again. Maybe I had misinterpreted her cues and she really didn't care for me

much. She was probably surrounded by loved ones back home, her friends—bombed with interviews. I would have felt weird phoning her...so I didn't. What was I going to say? *Sarah, I thought I was going to die when you were taken. I love you. I've been waiting every minute for a chance to tell you this.* [Shakes his head.]

My teammates were losing patience with me. They couldn't understand. I should have been happy, right? I just kept to myself.

RETREAT LEADER

[Enters and heads to center stage, facing CPTers as she talks, loudly. RETREAT LEADER is a bit cheesy in her manner but not comedic.] I would like you all to form a circle here. You can sit on the floor. [Makes hand motion of big circle toward front of stage. All characters take off CPT hats and drop them on the floor, walk forward and form circle.]

GRACE

[To audience, as she's walking to the circle] Every other year, all the fulltime CPTers gather in Indiana from all over the world, for a fulltimer's retreat.

RETREAT LEADER [After everyone is seated and quiet] Now close your eyes and be quiet for a moment. [A few moments of silence. CPTers have eyes closed. Then, she speaks slowly.] I want each of you to think for a minute about something weighing on you. Something you are trying to control. Something that keeps you from being present in the now. [Pauses a few seconds.] Maybe it is a situation, a person. A decision perhaps.

Now, I want you to put your hands out. [Cups her hands in front of her.] Imagine that you are holding this thing. Pay attention to how much it weighs. Pay attention to how you feel as you are

holding it. Be mindful of each emotion. [*A moment of silence.*]

I want you to notice how this thing you hold draws you away from the people and experiences around you, not just now but in everyday life. Notice how your hands are full. [*A moment of silence.*]

All together, I want each of us to take the thing in our hands and place it in the middle of our circle—letting go, ...realizing the burdens we hold are out of our control. Go at your own pace. Let go. [*After a second, she sets her load down, and others begin to follow.*] This symbolic laying down is a reminder of the action we must choose every day—letting go, emptying our hands. You can shake out the tension in your body if you'd like. [*Starts shaking out her arms, rotating her neck. Others follow.*] Shake it out.

Now I want you to stand up and take the hand of the person next to you. [*They stand and all hold hands.*] Close your eyes and feel the warmth of his or her touch. Be mindful how their hand feels in yours. Be mindful that the people next to you have emptied their hands to take yours. [*Starts singing song and CPTers join in, moving around in circle with hands held...*]

ALL [*Tune is very similar to church song "Love, love, love, love. Christians this is your call..." Tune may be improvised.*]

Round and round we go,
we hold each others' hands,
weave our lives in a circle.

The day is done,
the dance goes on.

[*After second time through, the group freezes in motion just as JEFF ducks out of circle, joining the hands of the people on either side of him.*]

JEFF

I know this is true...the letting go.

But it's so contrary to what we're taught growing up, as North Americans! Success is about making things happen—being “a mover and a shaker.” *Forcing* things to go in your favor. Even good things. *Activism*, for God's sake.

Peacemaking...takes so much reprogramming. Emptying, letting-go, forgiving, waiting, being still, *not* reacting, *not* scapegoating. [*Pause*] It is hard work. [*Laughs a tired, almost light-hearted little laugh.*]

[*Circle of CPTers goes around singing song one more time as JEFF stands there. At end of song they disperse. The RETREAT LEADER exits and the CPTers sit casually on the floor near one another. One person moves the tent offstage before taking his/her place. A few of the CPTers give each other hugs before dispersing from the song circle. Someone pats Jeff on the back as he walks past. Alex picks up his guitar out of the tent and takes it with him to where he sits down. From this point on, when CPTers speak, they are talking to each other as well as the audience, listening and reacting to one another, though they are not necessarily together in time & space.*]

CHERYL

After fulltimers retreat, I went home, never to return to CPT. I just couldn't go back to Colombia ...*or* Grassy Narrows. So much to sort out. ...So burnt out [*Shakes head*].

I spent a lot of time resting, a lot of time in quiet. It was so hard not to obsess. My failures kept looping over and over in my head. *You are too weak. You are fastidious. You are just another spoiled North American.* Or I would blame CPT, all the things that should be done differently. All the reasons people like me get burnt out.

I spent time journaling. ...It was weird. I kept remembering all the things that brought me into CPT in the first place. I had lost touch with them, to tell you the truth—[*Smiling in a self-depricating way*] lost touch with the *idealism* of my youth. [*Serious*] I decided to honor it. To honor it by not discounting my efforts...however imperfect.

BILL

[*Taking cue from Cheryl and speaking to her.*] I remember vividly my “conversion experience” as a peacemaker [*Laughs*]. It is so embarrassing I’ve really only told my wife. [*CPTers smile and look interested. BILL tells story with smirk, like he’s half embarrassed, half enjoying the attention.*] It was when I was in college.

I was never much of a practical joker, but this one time I played a practical joke. ...My parents, they had this possum living under their porch. I went to college in my hometown, so my dad called and asked me to come over and catch it for him. I got it with this live-trap. It was a huge possum, *bursting* out of the edges of this trap. [*Smirking*] And it got the wheels turning in my mind, you know?

Well, I took it back to the dorm to plot some practical joke with a couple buddies of mine. They were both Puerto Rican, great guys, both on baseball scholarship. We thought about letting it loose in the girl’s dorm or something, ...but we didn’t want to traumatize the animal.

So we came up with another plan. In the center of the school’s atrium, in the Student Union, is this nice terrarium, surrounded with glass. It’s full of beautiful plants. Well, we thought we’d let the animal loose inside the terrarium, give everyone a little amusement when they saw it inside the next day. We’d even leave the trap sitting there, to make it easy for the groundskeeper

to get it out.

So from the roof of the Student Union, the guys lower me down with a big rope. It's about ten o'clock at night. I am holding the trap in one hand and the rope in the other. I get down there and let out the possum. It walks over to some nice plant—seems happy enough. Mission accomplished, right?

Well, then I go to get out. My friends are pulling and pulling on the rope, and I'm trying to scale these walls of glass to get out. ...And I *can-not* get out. Not for the life of me.

Eventually, we are so worn out we give up. I tell them where they can find a big ladder at my dad's place, tell them to come back with it and get me out.

All the while I'm sitting there waiting, I am scared spitless that my dad's gonna find out. My dad's a gruff character. Not one to cross. I am worried I'll shame him if I get caught. I'm having second thoughts, worrying about the animal. ...Seems like it takes forever with the ladder.

Anyway, they finally arrive. They lower down this big ladder and get me out. I strap it back to the top of my friend's pickup to take to my dad's, while my friends head off to the dorm.

So I am driving along with my dad's ladder strapped to the top of this truck, when two police cars pull up behind me. I'm thinking: *How could they know about the possum?* We were so careful! There was no one around.

Well, as it turned out, my dad saw my buddies, “damn Mexicans” as he put it, getting in their truck and driving away from his house with the ladder. He called the police.

So here I am at the side of the road accused of stealing my dad's

ladder. Well, I had to tell the cops everything. ...The whole time I'm not even scared of the law, not scared of trouble at school. I am scared of my father. ...Well, the police escort me home to make sure I tell my dad the whole story—which I do.

[*Pause, emotional.*] You know what? My dad didn't give a damn about the prank. He almost acted proud when he was talking to the cops. *Boys will be boys*, you know? But after they left, he came down hard. "What the hell are you doin' hanging around with Mexicans?!" he said, so angry I remember his spittle hitting my face. "No son of mine's gonna be friends with a *spic!*"

[*Long pause*] I don't know. Everything just looked different to me after that day. ...It was like I saw things differently.

[*Pause*] Violence isn't just something people do. It is *inside* people. ...I never saw my dad throw a punch in his life. Not once. But that day my dad was the most violent man I knew. ...I just felt it. I *felt* it. ...I knew I didn't want to be like him. Whatever it was that animated that ...hatred in him—I wanted nothing to do with it.

Violence is not something you can end with war, by having bigger guns than the other guy. War fuels the fire. But the fire—it is in peoples' hearts.

GRACE

I remember when I became a pacifist. Sounds funny: "when I became a pacifist." I mean, I was raised Mennonite, was raised a pacifist.

But in school, me and the other Mennonite kids would get teased a bit. It wasn't that bad, really. We just looked different. We were an easy target.

But one day I hauled off and slugged this big kid Billy Nestler right across the jaw when he made fun of me. We were on the bus, on the way home. It seems kind of funny if you picture it, me in my calico dress and Mennonite bonnet. Everyone on the bus laughed at Billy.

But after that, his teasing got worse and worse. He had it out for me after that. I knew I had made it much worse by responding the way I did—by hitting him. He *hated* me after that. I had never known what it felt like to be hated. I so wished I could go back and undo what I'd done. But I couldn't.

And by throwing that punch, I had lost...my identity. I never knew I would miss it until that happened. Oh, I wanted it back.

CHERYL

Well, my story's not nearly as interesting. I was converted at a school rally. In college. I had joined an anti-sweatshop group. Didn't know much about the issue, to tell you the truth. Our group hosted a blacklisted union worker on a tour of the States. Her name was Rosita Gonzales. She had worked in the *maquiladoras*, or factories, south of the border since she was fourteen years old. Hearing her story changed my life. I think she was the bravest woman I'd ever met. The guards tried to kill her after she organized a union. ...She sewed garments for my favorite clothing store at the time. I haven't shopped there since.

DIANE

When I'm in Hebron, sometimes Palestinians will ask me "Why do you come here?" They can't fathom why North Americans leave our comfortable lives to try and support their struggle.

It is *good* to be here, I try to tell them. Many people in my country are starving for meaning. When they come to this place, the West Bank, and see what's happening here, ...when you welcome them, they realize there is something important to

struggle for, something more important than anything they've ever been a part of.

ALEX

Among my friends, back home where I went to college, it's popular to be anti-war. It's a *cool* club to belong to. But it's not how many people think about it—being a pacifist. It's not about being right and being superior—even though I *do* believe nonviolence is the better way. It's that nonviolence is humbling. It's damned *humiliating*! You have to be strong enough for humiliation, ...and assaults to the ego are always more painful than assaults to one's bodily person.

To be honest, I'm not so sure I'm ready for it. When I'm insulted, I'm angry, dammit. I'm *violent*. How can I call myself a pacifist?

MARIA INEZ

When I was a little girl, my brother was killed by a guerilla. He and my father were stopped at an illegal checkpoint, a stop to collect a tax from farmers going to market. My father refused to give them his name and one temperamental guerilla pointed a gun at my brother and shot him.

My father adored Hector. He was his treasure, his *tesoro*. The eldest child. When my brother was killed, I didn't understand that he would never come back. My other siblings and I went on playing, being kids. Maybe we were *choosing* not to understand. But my parents, they were devastated.

I remember my father being drunk—stumbling through the house and pawing my mother. She would cry in the middle of the night when she thought us children couldn't hear her.

But my mother taught me never to hate. She taught that until people learned to let go of their hatred, it would be like an

invisible monster ravaging them their entire lives. My father died when I was a teenager—alcoholism. My mother never stopped loving him, even though she remarried soon after. She needed someone to help with us kids. [*Pause*] But I know my mother forgave her son's murderer. And *she* lived.

JEFF

I guess I became convinced of nonviolence in college. Studying moral philosophy.

You know, sometimes I wonder: what if I didn't go to college, what if I didn't have the professors I had? What if my path had taken a different course?

In Baghdad I cross paths with US soldiers not too far from my age. I usually tell them about CPT's work, ask how they're doing? I always think: *I could be this guy*. Just one different step along the way and I could be in his shoes.

The soldiers always say they're bloody tired, they want out of there. A few of them will tell you what George Bush can do with his stinking war. ...But they feel stuck. They know they're in a big mess now.

When I have a conversation with a soldier and we really connect, that's a high point for me. In CPT, that's a *good day*.

BILL

For me a really good day is when we help a family find a relative in prison, ...when their relative is freed.

MARIA INEZ

For me? It's being in the villages, with the women. Laughing with the women who just go on laughing.

CHERYL

I guess sharing-circles in the roundhouse were highlights—in Grassy Narrows. The friendship, hospitality. The fry bread!

DIANE

In Hebron it is also a good day when I've connected with soldiers. Sometimes a wall just comes down between you and some other person. Someone lets you see behind their eyes for a moment, and you see where their longings are kept, what is kindling in their soul. Maybe you get to blow on those little sparks and make them grow.

ALEX

Doing public actions with Colombian partners in Barranca and Bogotá. Supporting union workers threatened by death squads.

GRACE

Probably being with the women, in the kitchen, with the children. Helping a family rebuild a demolished home. Those things stand out for me.

[After a short pause, ALEX picks up his guitar and starts picking the song "Singing For Our Lives." DIANE hums along, then sings, while the rest of the group sits and listens, some swaying a little to the music. After the song ends, the group slowly gets up and exits.]

[JEFF enters holding letter in his hand.]

JEFF

[With a smile] I got a letter. From Sarah. She sent it here to Baghdad with no return address on the envelope. I can't believe it didn't get opened—or lost! That would be my luck! ...She said she heard I'd been "quite concerned" about her.

She says *[reading from the letter]*, "Maybe you can visit sometime when you're back in the States." *[Just stares at the letter smiling. Looks up, then back down at the letter. After*

pause...]

She's not coming back to Iraq. [*Pause. Walks to other side of downstage.*] But...I think I'm staying.

[*Another thoughtful pause*] The way we do this work, you know—it's three steps forward and two steps back. All the time. Never fails. We're going to fail sometimes ...It's part of the cycle—the way life is, you know? Things dying and being reborn, ...getting stronger. But you have to keep going on. God is in the whole cycle—not just the blooming part.

GRACE

[*Enters. As she and subsequent CPTers enter, they form a line along the front of the stage.*] I had to retire from CPT. At least for now. I've got my medical team back home working on my back. In the Fall, I will join an intentional community in the Minneapolis area. I'll continue doing peace work. [*Shrugs*] I'll just be in a different place.

All in all, I served over ten years in CPT—seven of those years in the West Bank. [*Pause*] It was good work.

ALEX

[*Enters*] I'm starting my second term with CPT, fourth year in Colombia. And with more questions than ever! In a way, it is good. ...I have a lot to learn. At least now I know it.

BILL

[*Enters*] I went back home for an extended break. Now I'm back in Iraq. In two months, on a delegation, my wife will come. ...I have been in Iraq for almost three years now. In CPT almost six.

CHERYL

[*Enters*] This Fall I start a Masters in Latin American Studies.

University of Michigan. Someday I suppose I'll teach.

I served CPT for four years altogether. Four years—four years I could never regret even if they were the hardest of my life. Even if I wasn't cut out for CPT [*Shrugs*].

DIANE

[*Enters*] I've been working in Hebron for most of five years. A stint to Iraq in there somewhere. But Hebron—it's home.

There's a common Arabic saying here: *inshallah*. It means: God-willing. ...I hope to work for CPT for many more years...*inshallah*.

MARIA INEZ

[*Enters*] I have been working for peace in Colombia most of my life—with CPT for five years. I will *continue* to work for peace in Colombia. It is what kindles love in me. ...Like St. Teresa of Avila said: "Do whatever most kindles love in you."

[*Pauses, looks down then up*] ...whatever kindles love. [*Turns around and exits, and the others follow. Lights go black.*]

END