

*Once Removed*

by  
Paul W. Kruse

featuring the voices of  
Barbara Kruse  
Karina Kruse  
Lydia Kruse  
Seven Sexton  
Diana Hershey  
Jane Fisk  
Jerome Mayne  
John Mayne  
Jeff Mayne  
Dolores Fairbanks

©2020 Paul W. Kruse  
(608) 386-8301  
paulwkruse@gmail.com  
www.paulwkruse.com

Represented by Samara Harris,  
Samara Harris Literary Agency  
(773) 852-2262  
sharris@samaraharris.com  
samaraharris.com

**Development Collaborators**

Mason Rosenthal

Adil Mansoor

Stephanie Kent

I-Chia Chiu

William Kiley

Amelia Birkholz

**Special Thanks to**

Michael Rohd

Carra Martinez

KJ Sanchez

## INTRODUCTION

BARB

Hatch Arts Collective presents Once Removed, a documentary play written and performed by Paul Kruse, featuring the voices of Barbara Kruse, Karina Kruse, Lydia Kruse, Jane Fisk, Jerome Mayne, John Mayne, and Jeff Mayne

PAUL

Hi Jane, this Paul Kruse calling, I'm Barb Kruse's son.

BARB

Hi, this is Barb.  
with text from Diana Hershey, Seven Sexton, and Twyla Ring.

JEROME

Oh, hey, how ya doing, Man?

PAUL

Hey, I'm good!

JEROME

Give me a call.

BARB

Hi!  
Once Removed was written in collaboration with Adil Mansoor and Mason Rosenthal.

BARB

Good morning!

PAUL

Good morning, how are you today?

BARB

This audio production was directed by Adil with sound design and editing by Aaron Landgraff.

JEROME

Hello, this is Jerome.

PAUL

Hey.

BARB

This story involves some descriptions of sex, AIDS-related death and mourning, and a description of suicidal ideation.

JANE

This is Jane, you've reached my voicemail.

PAUL

I was supposed to call you back.

BARB

You can find the full text of this play at [www.paulwkruse.com](http://www.paulwkruse.com).

SENSITIVE

PAUL

The first time I said, "I was gay," to another person out loud.  
 I was on the phone.  
 I was absolutely terrified.  
 I'm sure I actually said something more like, "I think I'm gay."  
 Or "I think I might be gay."  
 Or "There is a very distinct possibility that I might not be straight."  
 But it, actually--it could have been the first one.  
 I am braver on the phone, generally, I'm more myself.  
 I like the way your voice sounds through a receiver.  
 It's kinda small and metallic  
 like everyone I love is a friendly robot who lives very far away.

As I'm recording this, I'm alone.  
 I'm wearing a pink shirt.  
 Pink is my favorite color.  
 We're in a pandemic.  
 Hopefully, by the time you hear this, the pandemic will be over.  
 But, lately, I've been feeling very lonely.  
 I've been trying to call my mom more.  
 At this point we talk maybe once or twice a week.  
 If you saw me and my mom together  
 you would notice that we both have very large noses.  
 Our family orthodontist once told me that we have what's called a pronounced  
 dorsal hump, possibly from past trauma.  
 Mine comes from when I was thirteen--I dove head-first into a five-foot  
 swimming pool to impress my then girlfriend's friends.  
 My mom's nose comes from when she ran head-first into her classmate Cheryl  
 Beck's front teeth.  
 I think that was at a Girl Scout meeting.  
 It's like my mom and I share a genetic accident.

There is a bright orange rotary phone  
 in the basement of the house where I grew up.  
 For me that like the iconic phone.  
 It's installed on a wall near a bookshelf that's full of photo albums.  
 In the back of one of these albums,  
 there is a picture of a family of blonde Minnesotans.  
 It was taken some time in the late seventies or early eighties.  
 I'm not totally sure when.  
 But they are sitting on a deck next to a picnic table.  
 The sun is shining. It kinda looks like they just had lunch.  
 These are my mom's cousins.

(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

She likes to say all their names together,  
and it's pretty clear why.  
Their names are Jim, John, Jane, Jeff, Joe, Jerome, and Jake.  
Jim, John, Jane, Jeff, Joe, Jerome, and Jake.  
I kid you not.  
Their last name is Mayne, which is spelled like the state,  
but instead of an "I," there's a "Y."  
Jeff Mayne, the middle brother, is the only one missing from this picture.  
And I'm actually not sure where he was, when they took it.  
But I can't stop thinking about him.  
As far as I know,  
Jeff and I are the only members of  
our extended family who are gay.

Jeff and I both grew up in the Upper Midwest of the United States.  
Jeff was from a town called North Branch in Minnesota,  
which is like about an hour north of the Twin Cities, depending on traffic.  
I grew up in La Crosse, Wisconsin,  
which is about three hours south of that on the Mississippi River.  
To give you a sense of what it's like to grow-up in the Midwest,  
The other day I accidentally ran into my kitchen table  
And my first instinct was to apologize to it,  
even though I still feel very resentful.  
We're working through it.  
So yeah, the Midwest, it's a place where arguments happen through smiles,  
cheese is absolutely a food group,  
and you enter most rooms with some sort of apology.  
I'm second oldest of four boys, which is not as impressive as seven siblings,  
but it's not too bad.

As I get older, my life looks less and less like my brothers'.  
They all have wives and kids. They own their homes.  
I always knew my life would be different,  
even before I knew I was gay.  
Growing up, I was more likely to play make-believe than football,  
I loved the color pink way more than the other boys.  
And I had my senior picture taken holding an actual sword.  
My mom says I was sensitive.  
I felt like I was never totally sure how to be in my own skin.  
And I still feel that way sometimes.  
I wonder if Jeff felt that same way.

Jeff and I never got a chance to meet.  
He left home in his twenties. He moved to LA,

(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

and when he was there he contracted HIV/AIDS.  
 He then moved back to live with his mother, my great aunt Dolores.  
 He died in her house in 1993 at the age of 31.  
 I wonder if my mom was thinking about Jeff, when I came out to her.  
 The more I learn about Jeff,  
 The more I want to lay my life down next to his and compare.  
 Do we share any genetic accidents?

*A phone rings through the receiver.*

*It rings again.*

*It rings again.*

BARB

Hi.

PAUL

Hey.

*Karina sounds.*

BARB

Hi.

Hi.

Go drink your water.  
 I'm talking to Uncle Paul.  
 You want to say hi to him.

KARINA

Hi, Uncle Paul.

PAUL

That sounds like a Karina to me.

BARB

It is a Karina.  
 She has rosy cheeks and cold fingers.

PAUL

Karina, were you outside?

KARINA

Mhm.

And then I got cold.

(MORE)

KARINA (CONT'D)

And I I I I got a whole shovel of of of of of snow  
and then then I I shoved it into my face.

BARB

She had--  
Yep--  
She was shoveling with Grandpa  
and she got a whole shovel of snow,  
and she threw it--  
was going to throw it on the snow pile  
and it all went in her face instead.

*Paul laughs.*

PAUL

Was that--  
Was--

BARB

Now she's a snuggle bunny.  
Karina, I'm going to talk to Uncle Paul,  
I have to tell him a story.  
Can you just stay right here cuddled in your blanket?

*Karina nods (I assume).*

BARB

Okay, and I'll warm you up.

PAUL

Um,  
Will you--

BARB

Yeah.

PAUL

Will you tell me--  
Okay--  
What were--  
What were all their names?

BARB

So, it was Jim, who was--  
Jim was my age.



PAUL

Yeah.

BARB

John.

And then Jane.

And then Jeff.

And then Joe.

And then Jerome.

And then Jake.

And then Jeff and Joe both passed away.

No.

Jeff and John both died.

PAUL

How did John die?

BARB

John had a heart attack, I think.

When he was like in his really early forties.

So, just died at home.

PAUL

Will you tell me a little bit more about--  
about Jeff?

BARB

Yeah.

I mean I can--

I can tell you about Jeff, when I was young.

Cause I I--

Jeff and I would hang out and play together, a lot.

So, I hung out with Jane.

And then Jeff was always kind of around.

You know.

Y--

Jeff--

Jeff fit better, I think.

With--

With me, you know, hanging with me,

and and, not so much with his older brothers,

I mean, going out and playing sports,

I mean, you gotta think,

okay,

(MORE)

BARB (CONT'D)

this is back in the sixties.  
So, I had a nice relationship with him,  
I mean, even though he was probably three or four years younger than me,  
but, you know, we we had fun.  
And we laughed.  
I remember laughing,  
oh my--  
Oh--  
with Jane and Jeff,  
we just had a lot of fun.

PAUL

Mhm.

BARB

So, I have good memories of that.  
And then, you know, like  
I don't have memories of Jeff in high school,  
cause, you know, everybody just kind of does their own thing,  
and I think at that time Jeff was probably--  
I don't know,  
I don't know how his years were.  
I can only--  
Anything I say would be pure speculation.

BARB

At some point he headed out to San Francisco--  
or LA--  
He went to LA.  
And that's where he stayed until he came home, um--  
And,  
And we knew at some point he got sick, and that he had HIV.  
But nobody talked about it.  
Nobody had a language to talk about it.  
Nobody understood.  
I don't even know.  
I--  
Yeah--  
I think that, yeah--  
I knew that he liked guys.  
I guess that's what I knew.

PAUL

Can I as--

(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

How--

Um--

I'm--

And I have a trouble remembering for myself--  
but how did you first understand that that was a thing?

BARB

Well, what do you mean, when you say that--  
that was a thing?

PAUL

Like, that gay people existed.

BARB

Oh, with Jeff probably.

PAUL

Who explained it to ya?

BARB

Well, I don't know that I--

I think that's--

I don't know who, Paul.

I don't know.

But--

Maybe in high school, I'm sure I wasn't--

I'm sure I heard that--

Welllll, when we were growing up, I think--

You know, um, the language in the sixties was anybody--

It was "fag."

You know, so I can hear my brothers--

Doug just saying about people, in general--

They would call people--

"Oh, he's a fag."

PAUL

Yeah.

BARB

And not, just cause that was a bad name to call somebody,  
or accuse somebody of that.

So, I was probably in high school, you know.

My--I developed an understanding of what that word was.

And, you know--

It didn't--

(MORE)

BARB (CONT'D)

My understanding did not go very deep.  
It was probably two or three sentences.

*Barb laughs.*

BARB

So--

PAUL

Right.

BARB

So that carried over to Jeff, I would imagine.  
Because that's when--  
That's when that was happening, you know.  
It was like.  
We were all becoming aware of this AIDS epidemic, I think is what it was called.  
And everybody was starting to--  
you know, then there's that first how--  
if you studied Sociology, you know,  
there's that--  
and I haven't--  
but that panic, you know like:

*Barb gasps big.*

BARB

You know, what is this disease that, you know--  
is contagious?

*Karina or Lydia sounds in the background.*

BARB

So then I think he started worked for a limousine company when he was out there.

PAUL

Yeah.

BARB

And then I think he drove for Diana Ross a few times.  
And then I think she hired him to be her personal chauffeur for a chunk of years.

*Lydia and Karina sounds in the background.*

BARB

Yeah.

PAUL

Oh, that's really funny.

BARB

Isn't that fun?

Yeah.

*Lydia and Karina sounds in the background.*

BARB

You know, I just kind of lost so much track of him.

So, I don't know. I don't know how he--

My cousin Jane would love to talk to you about him.

PAUL

Yeah, do you think--

BARB

I could--

PAUL

Do you think I could get in touch with her?

BARB

Oh, absolutely.

Yeah.

Oh, you'd love Jane.

She'd love to talk to you.

*The recording ends.*

PAUL

Jane is Jeff's older sister and my mom's cousin.

She is the only girl out of the seven Mayne children.

I have no memory of ever meeting her before writing this play.

People tell me she sounds a lot like my mom.

*A phone rings through the receiver.*

*Laughing.*

PAUL

Sorry I missed ya! My ph--

I saw your call and then my--

(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

I was--  
I messed it up.

*Paul laughs.*

JANE

No--  
No worries.  
How are ya?

PAUL

I'm good.  
Thank you so much for making time for this.

JANE

Yeah.  
No. It's-- It's it's kinda cool,  
You sound like your dad to me.

*Paul laughs.*

PAUL

I'm--  
I'm told that.  
I'm told I--  
Yeah.  
Did my mom mention at all the reason I was hoping to talk with you?

JANE

She just mentioned that you wanted to learn a little bit more about--um--  
Her cousin, my brother, Jeff.

PAUL

Yeah.

JANE

Okay, I'll try not to swear or anything like that.

*Paul and Jane laugh.*

PAUL

You can--  
You can absolutely swear.  
There is nothing wrong with that.

JANE

No.

No no.

Your ah--Your mom's always been pretty real--  
pretty real, you know, not a lot of pretenses, as far--  
to me anyway--as far as I'm concerned.

And that's important to me.

That's--That--You know.

Life's too short for a whole bunch of garbage, if you ask me.

PAUL

What are your memories of my mom growing up?

JANE

Oh, gal--

My frame of reference is that--

as I got older,

I realized her family was different in that--

you know my parents fought and we didn't have a ton of money and--

But, you know, as a child you don't--

young child--you don't really--

You don't know.

So, I recall that--

You know--

Gal, how lucky, you know, they-- they have a nice house and it seems like  
enough.

They have enough of whatever, you know.

Enough--

Enough.

Um.

Cause there were times when we did--

you know--

didn't have enough.

During some of my mom's crazy--crazy times.

And your mom was always just super kind and caring and ah inclusive  
of of me the younger cousin you know.

My folks were, they--they--they ended up getting divorced when I was about  
thirteen so they--there was some fighting.

My dad was an alcoholic, a workaholic alcoholic.

And it turns out my mom was bipolar, but undiagnosed--

PAUL

Oh, wow.

JANE

until she was seventy.  
It was horrible.

*Jane laughs.*

PAUL

Oh yeah.

JANE

It was horrible.  
Yeah--Yeah.  
Then I--  
Then I honestly just did a lot of raising of her children--raising of my siblings.

PAUL

Yeah.

JANE

So, I cooked three meals a week.  
And, you know, did all the--  
Did all the parenting.  
But you don't pick, you know.  
We--  
None of--  
Ah--as kids we don't pick.  
You know, how our families are,  
or how are parents are and--  
um--  
It took me a long time to realize that,  
that is was just kinda the luck of the draw.  
I had nothing to do with it.

PAUL

After Jane and I talked,  
she put me in touch with her and Jeff's younger brother, Jerome.

*A phone rings.*

JEROME

Hello, this is Jerome

PAUL

Hey Jerome, This is Paul Kruse calling.

JEROME

Oh, hey, how you doing, man?



PAUL

Hey, I'm good. Hey is now (Jerome laughs)--is now still a--

JEROME

I tot--

PAUL

Oh, sorry, go ahead.

JEROME

Yeah. totally forgot. But I'm glad I'm glad--I'm here.

PAUL

Yeah, no worries is now still good.

Or we can we can try another time too, if that's better.

JEROME

No, no, let's ah, let's chat, man.

PAUL

Can you share some--any memories you have of Jeff growing up?

JEROME

Um, I always thought he was cool.

I mean, me and Jeff and John had some things in common  
and pretty much that was music.

I remember Jeff being, you know, a singer,

I felt like he--he watched out for us, you know--or me or us, you know.

And then, I think I emulated Jeff a lot.

PAUL

Mom, what did he look like?

*Lydia and Karina sounds in the background.*

BARB

Ah, he was tall and thin, and--

yeah, wiry.

I just--

PAUL

Mhm.

BARB

I just remember his laugh.

We just laughed so much--just fun.

Um.

*Lydia and Karina sounds in the background.*

BARB

Yeah.  
Probably pretty sensitive.  
Ah, Kinda had brown hair.  
Had sort of a pointed chin, and a little bit of a--  
You know his dad had that--  
You know, like where his chin was sort of, kinda--  
maybe he had a bigger overbite, chin was kind of tucked back a little bit, um.

PAUL

Yeah, yeah.

BARB

He had dark eye brows, dark eyes.

*A phone rings.*

JANE

He was pretty sensitive.

JANE

He always had super,  
you know, super short hair and he was this skinny--skinny little guy,  
and he had just the most giant eyes.  
You know, I recall that as a--hmm,  
you know I suppose he was maybe five or six or seven he would be really  
frightened when the--  
like tornado siren would go off,  
or there'd be a storm,  
and, you know--his eyes would just get as big as saucers.

*A phone rings.*

JEROME

I remember, maybe because it's relevant, um, now.

PAUL

Yeah.

JEROME

I remember that he had, a pink-tinted glasses  
and clogs, ah, in high school

(MORE)

JEROME (CONT'D)

and I was never in high school when he was  
I was, you know, five years younger.

*A phone rings.*

JANE

We were at your grandma and grandpa's house.  
We were at Shirley and Warren's

PAUL

Yeah.

JANE

one holiday of some kind.  
And Jeff had a pink shirt on.  
Now this is, you know, the eighties, and, um, my mom was all mad,  
"Why do you have like wear a pink shirt, just throw it in my face that you're gay."  
You know, that really bothered her.  
Of course, the big Catholic--you know--thing.

*A phone rings.*

JEROME

I think it came up because somebody called me that,  
or somebody told me he was and I asked about it.  
Um, and I think I remember him saying something like,  
"Well, do you know what that means, or you know what that is?"  
And he's like, "Well, you know, I like boys,"  
or, you know, whatever.  
And I'm like, I certainly knew what "gay" meant.  
Um, But I, I was just like, Oh, okay. Um, Wow, didn't, didn't know that.

*A phone rings.*

JANE

Well, I think she was, you know, embarrassed and, um, ashamed, at first.  
And, um, you know, wouldn't say, you know,  
"Oh, I--you know, my son," or,  
"Jeff's in California and, you know, living with his partner."  
I mean.  
She wouldn't have--  
That wouldn't have come out.

PAUL

Hmm.

JANE

You know, it would have been--

You know, we're going to visit Jeff and his roommate.

*A phone rings.*

JEROME

Ah then after that, I just remember, that's, that's was part of, you know, who--  
who he was.

And then, you know, going,

"Okay, I guess the pink sunglasses make sense now,"  
you know or something? I don't know.

COMING OUT

*A phone rings.*

PAUL

When did you--  
When did you know?

BARB

Oh I--  
I wondered if you were gay, when you were little.  
So, I always kinda held that.  
That just by--  
I don't know, just by...  
What?

I don't even know, Paul.  
It was more of a sensing.  
Oh--Well--  
You loved pink.  
That was a big deal.

*Paul laughs.*

BARB

Wow, what's that about?  
And then--  
You know, you just liked more non-traditional masculine, guy kinds of things,  
or behaviors,  
which was okay too--  
I mean, non-gay men can--  
I know non-gay men who--  
who have that same kind of likes and dislikes and--  
But at that time, again, you gotta--  
This is back in the--  
whatever, eighties--  
This was the thinking,  
You--  
Women loved you.  
All the mom's loved you.

*Barb and Paul laugh.*

BARB

It's--And you list--  
And again that doesn't mean that you're gay, but it's curious.

*A phone rings.*

JEROME

And then I remember hearing that one day his choir teacher, like, beat him up.  
Like, took him outside of the school and just,  
like, beat him up.  
And I don't know why.  
And I remember, I guess, at that time, you know, he was still wearing, you know,  
the pink glasses--because of course, you know, that means he's gay.  
That's what, that's what everybody figured that meant--

PAUL

wait. So do you think that that's why choir teacher to beat him up?  
Because he thought he was gay?

JEROME

I don't--I don't think so.  
I don't think so.  
Because I mean he was pretty fucking mouthy, you know.  
wouldn't be surprising if he mouthed off.  
In fact, I think that's what it was he he he, you know, he said,  
"yeah, J--you know, Jeff, be quiet."  
and he was like, "No!"  
or something.  
I think that was exactly what it was.

PAUL

Huh.

JEROME

And it just turned into something and then he took him outside and beat him up.  
Um.

PAUL

Oh my God.

*Recording ends.*

PAUL

When I said I was gay that first time,  
the person on the other end of the phone  
was actually *my* high school choir teacher.  
I'll call him Mr. Stone, but that is not his real name.

Mr. Stone started teaching at my high school  
(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

after the previous choir teacher died in a farming accident.  
 Mr. Stone showed up, a year or two out of undergrad,  
 not that much older than the people he was teaching at that point.  
 I know by the time I had him he was like twenty-four.  
 Everyone adored him--he was young and interesting and funny.  
 And he was the first openly gay man that I had ever met.  
 Which seems absurd right now.  
 I'm confident there were other openly gay men I had met.  
 But really I only remember Mr. Stone.  
 And openly gay is a relative term in this context.  
 He was a teacher at a conservative Catholic high school in a small Midwestern  
 city almost twenty years ago.

Over the next three years of high school,  
 Mr. Stone and I became really close.  
 I was beginning to suspect that I was like him.  
 I think he knew.  
 I drank up every ounce of his attention.  
 And then, he started to invite me over to his house, which was amazing.  
 First it was with friends, and then it was alone.  
 His was one of the ten or so phone numbers I knew by heart.  
 We talked on the phone a lot.

The night I came out to him I was laying on my bed,  
 and for some reason I was doodling this picture of a flower.  
 I have a really vivid memory of this picture of a flower for some reason.  
 We had just had the anti-gay unit in our Christian Morality class  
 And I remember that day Father Martin said that God makes us disgusted when  
 he's trying to teach us what to avoid.  
 He called it the "Gross Out Factor" of morality.  
 And he said that, you know, the disgust you feel when you imagined two men  
 kissing is God's natural way of letting you know that that's wrong.  
 And Fr. Martin made sure to connect being gay with HIV/AIDS.

And so this is all kind of like boiling inside me.  
 And I'm laying on my bed talking to Mr. Stone on the phone.  
 And I'm confident that I stammered for like an hour before finally drumming up  
 the courage to say,  
 "I'm gay."  
 And then I just burst into tears and was shaking.  
 And, when I calmed down a little bit, Mr. Stone said all of the right things.  
 I couldn't tell you what one of things are right now thought. All I remember is  
 what I felt. I remember feeling just cared for.

(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

I got even more attention from him after that,  
birthday cards,  
and little presents.

And at one point he got me this novel, which is called the *The Snow Garden* by  
Christopher Rice.  
Here's the synopsis from Goodreads:

BARB

"A shocking death exposes dangerous forces of seduction, obsession, and  
vengeance lurking beneath the idyllic surface of a prestigious New England  
university. When the wife of respected professor is killed in a tragic accident, **his  
secret student lover** Randall Stone fears the professor tried to avert career suicide  
by committing homicide."

*A phone rings.*

BARB

I had a dream about you.  
I told you about my dream

PAUL

Did you?  
What did dream did you have about [DIAL TONE]?

BARB

Yeah.  
Oh, one time I was--  
I found you and [DIAL TONE] in bed together--

PAUL

Oh my God.

BARB

This is when you were in high school.

PAUL

I don't--

BARB

And.

PAUL

Mom, I don't think you told me about this.



BARB

Yeah,  
And then--  
It was a real profound dream.  
And--  
It was like, I came up some steps and there you were, and--  
You were under the covers.  
And then, you know, I kinda threw the covers back,  
and you were both in there--  
I mean, you were both fully clothed,  
nothing was happening,  
you know, physically or sexually or anything,  
but it was--the the the message that came from my dream was:  
"Paul's trying to figure this out."  
That's what came out of the dream.  
Either [DIAL TONE] said it,  
or you said it,  
or you were just trying to figure this out.  
And that [DIAL TONE] was maybe a companion on the journey.  
So that was maybe my take-away from that dream.

PAUL

Yeah.

BARB

And I felt--  
I felt good about that--  
I felt like, "good, because I don't think I'm equipped to do this."

PAUL

No.  
You know.  
He was in some ways.  
And then in other ways  
he was a guy in his mid-twenties trying to figure out his life.  
And, when--

BARB

Yeah.

PAUL

You know,  
when I came out to [DIAL TONE],  
he he suggested that he and I should have a relationship, and then I--  
nothing happened--  
I said, you know, I said no--  
but I felt like, I kind of had to play the adult with him.

BARB

Yeah, good for you, Paul.

PAUL

Well, yeah.

I think it--

I think that that did damage though,

I think that that's not what a seventeen-year-old person is supposed to--  
supposed to do.

*Paul laughs.*

BARB

Well, what do you mean when you say did damage?  
To you?

PAUL

Yeah.

BARB

Or to your relationship?

PAUL

To me.

To me, that that messed me up for a number of years.

BARB

Oh, that's too bad.

PAUL

Yeah.

BARB

Yeah, wow.

PAUL

I--

And then--

BARB

Maybe that's when I had the dream?  
Maybe that's what--

PAUL

That might have been--  
That might have been what that was about yeah.  
Because it--

BARB

Yeah.

PAUL

really what the effect was,  
was that it equated, um--  
and I really think this is true across the board--  
like gayness with badness.

*Recording ends.*

PAUL

If I'm gay, am I like Mr. Stone?  
Am I a teacher who would sleep with his student?

For years I tried to make all this okay--like it was just a part of growing up.  
And Mr. Stone and I stayed friends.  
And I do hope he knows how much he meant to me, how much he helped me.  
But the truth is that he hurt me too.

I laugh and smile when I am most uncomfortable.

*A phone rings.*

PAUL

What do you remember about the day that I came out to you?

BARB

Well, was that when we were eating at that restaurant?

PAUL

Yeah, I think it was the--

BARB

(laughing)

What--

Is that--

Okay--

And I said to you, "Tell me what you learned about yourself this last year."

PAUL

(laughing)

That's my memory of it too, yeah.

BARB

That's my memory of it too.

*Barb and Paul laugh.*

PAUL

It was the Hmong--

BARB

Well--

PAUL

Hmong Golden Egg Rolls.

BARB

Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's right, I remember.

Um,

I remember it.

But I--

It was a confirmation of what I think I already knew.

And then there was also--

But then--

then--the--

You know--

The--

A worry piece, like--

"Oh man, what does this mean for you in your life  
and what's life going to be like and--"

This isn't--

It's hard, you know.

But--

But I--

But--

There's so much I didn't know.

And now I know that--

I don't know, is it that hard?

*Paul laughs.*

BARB

It's life.

It's you.

It's who you are.

PAUL

Yeah.

BARB

It's like--

(MORE)

BARB (CONT'D)

Things that were different--  
I mean, that was a while ago, and--

PAUL

Yeah, no I--

BARB

I understand y--

PAUL

I--  
I'm--

BARB

I've evolved.  
And you've evolved.

PAUL

I just remember there also being a pretty significant mem--  
ah--  
um--  
fear.  
Like fear.

BARB

Yeah, you know, gay guys are getting beat up,  
and hurt,  
and physically and verbally, and--  
So, I worry about that, you know.  
So, I'm really good at worrying about the things that statistically, probably aren't  
going to happen.

PAUL

Were you thinking about Jeff?

BARB

I don't think I thought a lot about Jeff.  
No.  
Because I--  
Paul, Jeff's life was so removed from mine after we got done growing up that--

PAUL

Right.  
Right.  
That that didn't--  
that connection--

BARB

I don't--

PAUL

didn't happen.

BARB

No.

Although, it did then mean--

probably, if anything, it was like--

Well, yeah, I mean--

This, you know--

Is this--

Is it a genetic--

Do people, you know.

Is sexuality a genetic thing?

PAUL

Mmhmm.

BARB

Um.

And if, then, you know.

I don't even.

Is it?

I don't know.

But--

I did, you know--

There was Jeff, so--

And then I think on--

I don't think there's anybody on my dad's side that I can think of who might have been gay,

PAUL

Yeah.

BARB

off the top of my head.

So anyway, so then you try to start putting pieces together and understanding things.

PART OF THE DEAL

*A phone rings.*

PAUL

When did you know that Jeff was gay?

JANE

When he moved to California.

PAUL

Gottcha.

JANE

Then it.

Then it just seemed to be more clear and, you know, we would talk and um--

Now mom and I would go and visit him.

I bet--

She and I went a couple of times anyway.

And stayed with h--

you know, he and his ah partner at the time,

We stayed in this--

It was the empty mansion, we called it,

because it was a beautiful home,

but it wasn't fully furnished, when we were there.

And mom said,

"Well, you don't think they're sleeping together, do you?"

*Jane and Paul laugh.*

JANE

I said,

"Ah, yeah, yup, mom, I do.

Yes. They are.

That is part of the deal."

PAUL

I have no idea what it was like for Jeff, when he first moved to LA.

But after high school, *I* went to Chicago to go to undergrad.

It is a familiar story.

I am the innocent Midwesterner. I went from a small town to the big city.

for me it was complete culture shock.

I went from rooms where it was radical to say that

abortion might be permissible, if someone's life was in danger,

(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

to rooms where I was regularly handed condoms.  
Now, I had never seen a condom.  
And at first I thought they were candy.  
I wonder if it was the same for Jeff,  
I imagine that going from North Branch, Minnesota  
to West Hollywood in the early 80's must have been wild.

I graduated college in 2008, right in the middle of the Great Recession.  
And at that point I applied for something like sixty jobs.  
It was around that time that I got my first cell phone.  
It was a flip phone from Motorola. And it really came in handy,  
because I would be out every weekend until like four a.m.,  
getting twenty-something drunk,  
first at college parties and then at the gay bars.  
And then I would be in church every Sunday.  
I think, like a lot of people that age, I was trying to figure out--  
in some of the most unhealthy ways--  
how the pieces of me fit together.

When Jeff was in his early twenties, he met Diana Ross.

*A Diana Ross song plays.*

JEROME

He was her driver. He was our driver for something--for some event and he met  
her and then they became friends and then he lived at her place for a while,

PAUL

Really? I didn't know that.

JEROME

Yeah in the guest house there. And I think I heard that he got kicked out because  
he was having boys over. And, and there was just no visitors allowed, you know.

PAUL

Um, Okay, so now I would love to hear Yeah. So you made this choice to move to  
Los Angeles?

JEROME

Yeah, cuz I was gonna be a rock star.

PAUL

Hell yeah.



JEROME

And um, and that's where--and that was the perfect spot.  
 And, you know, I always have had, I had always had a connection with Jeff,  
 he lived out there with, um with Eric, um, his boyfriend at the time. And, um, he  
 you know, he said I can move out there live with him for a while.  
 You know, it was a one bedroom apartment. I mean, it was barely bigger than a  
 studio. It was right on the edge of West Hollywood.

PAUL

Oooo, Okay. Oh man, you were right in the thick of it.

JEROME

Oh, yeah. Yeah, it was right there. I mean. Oh, yeah. Um, right, right there. I  
 mean, there's a Laugh Factory on the same block. So we were a half a block off  
 sunset, northeast Sunset on Laurel Canyon. We just hung out a lot. You know,  
 we--I got to go to all the bars with them. Just--it was just so fun. Everything was  
 so fun all the time. And Jeff never had any fucking money. You know?

But yeah, And I worked with his company, with the company that he worked for  
 Center Stage Marketing, and they did product placement in motion picture and  
 television. He would be the one calling, you know, different brands, different  
 companies, Coca Cola, you know, um, dos equis so it was pretty cool. But I  
 remember Jeff, you know, flying all over the place all the time. And just how cool  
 that was that he was just Jet Set Hero Traveler and I knew every different way to  
 get to the airport from Hollywood.

PAUL

No one would have called me a Jet Set Hero Traveler, like Jeff.  
 The coolest I ever felt was  
 one night some friends took me to this warehouse party in west Chicago.  
 I got very drunk,  
 as always,  
 and then I got really high.  
 And the person who owned the warehouse was this gay guy in his thirties.  
 And I thought he was so fascinating.  
 I made sure I was the last one there.  
 And the first time I had sex was on a mattress on the floor of a warehouse,  
 totally unprotected.  
 I should have held on to some of those condoms.

I woke up in the morning  
 I looked around at that huge concrete space  
 and then I had a meltdown,  
 I just absolutely had a meltdown.

(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

I felt sick.  
 I left quickly.  
 I didn't understand why I felt so terrible.  
 And then it clicked.  
 Suddenly I was back Christian Morality class in high school.  
 It was the "Gross Out Factor."  
 And there was a voice that was telling me,  
 "You had unprotected sex. You are HIV positive."  
 Because that's what happens to gay people, when they have sex.  
 I continued to have what I now know is an anxiety attack  
 for the following three weeks.

And I have this really distinct memory:

I'm sitting on the L.  
 I was on the red line, heading south.

And then, I lean my head against the window.  
 And I remember that it was raining.  
 And as it rained, the rain beaded down the plexiglass as stops rolled by.

And I made a deal with God.  
 I said, "If I am negative, I will become a priest."

After some furious online "research" I learned that a PCR test could accurately  
 tell me my HIV status without having to wait the normal amount of time that you  
 would wait to hear results.  
 So, I spent \$293 on a PCR test.  
 I got the results back, and they were negative.  
 I cried with relief.

I am embarrassed to say all this now.  
 For so many reasons.  
 I'm not positive.  
 I am part of a privileged group of people who fully expect to be healthy.  
 I fully expect to live past 31 and well into old age.  
 And, while there are still challenges,  
 many people who are living with HIV, live long and happy lives. I know that now.  
 There is already so much shame around being HIV positive.  
 I don't want to add to it.  
 But my fear of being positive was so great that, while I was on that train,  
 there was another part of the deal with God.

Yes, if I'm negative, I will become a priest.

(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

But if I am positive,  
I will walk in front of a bus.  
It could look like an accident.

This is the closest I ever came to making a plan.  
I decided that it would be easier to die  
than to tell my mom that I was HIV positive.  
Sex and sickness were the same in my mind.  
And coming out didn't fix that.

A few weeks after that.  
I got a response from one of my job applications.  
And it was for a job with the Jesuits, who are an order of Roman Catholic priests.  
God had accepted my deal.

It's at this point where my and Jeff's stories go in different directions.  
I think about how vastly different my life could be,  
if I had been born at the same time Jeff was.

POSITIVE

*A phone rings.*

PAUL

Did you and Jeff talk on the phone a lot, when he was in LA?

JANE

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, you know, in the day it was long distance, you know,

PAUL

Yeaah.

JANE

It wasn't cell phones and--So, um, a lot? No. But ah routinely? Yes.

PAUL

Yeah.

JANE

I do recall when he called me and told me he was HIV positive.

PAUL

Oh yeah, what was that like?

JANE

Yeah, well, it was scary, because, at the time,  
it was a death sentence.

You know, you didn't know anything different.

And, um,

I recall he, um, took the disease on as a project.

And he went to every appointment and did all kinds of research,

And, of course, this is before the internet, you know.

And he--he, you know, would bring his little briefcase and--

(cough)

and tell them what, you know, what kind of cocktail he wanted to try,

and treatment he wanted to shoot for and--um--

He went over every bill with a fine-toothed comb,

because he had a cap--

I'm going to say of a million dollars

or something on his his health insurance policy.

And, of course,

with all kinds of medication and treatments that can go pretty quickly.

And I remember being at--ah--one of the places that I stayed with--

at, when I went to visit him and just the--

just the huge amount of pills--

PAUL

Yeah

JANE

Huge, huge, huge amount of y--of pills.

PAUL

Yeah.

JANE

You know, various cocktails and,  
you know, of things.  
I didn't sense a lot of thinking and feeling about it, no.  
You know, some frustration at that end, you know,  
and and emotion at the end,  
just, you know, damnit,

PAUL

Yeah.

JANE

you know. Damnit! This is--This is going to take me out--

PAUL

Yeah.

JANE

kind of thing, not ah, not gonna--not gonna win.  
And he liked to win. And he liked to be right.

PAUL

It's hard for me to imagine life during the AIDS crisis,  
to be out and grown during those years,  
was to fight a deadly disease day in and day out,  
going to the funeral after funeral of friends, lovers, and chosen family.  
I can't imagine looking around in my mid-twenties and realizing that no one I  
knew at the beginning of that year was still alive.  
I don't know the smell of an AIDS hospice.

Before I knew I was gay, AIDS was like a cloud of worry very far away,  
like a war somewhere in the world that I would never visit.

One of the places that war was fought was at Doug's House in Austin, TX.  
I lived in Austin, when I started writing this play,  
and Doug's House is a hospice home for people with HIV/AIDS.

(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

It opened in 1989 to offer a place for people with AIDS to die, many of them gay men. And It's named for Doug Key, an AIDS activist in Austin. Doug died in 1991, two years before Jeff.

The hospice care workers at Doug's House are some of the most remarkable people I have ever met.

They were on the "front lines" of a pandemic long before 2020.

I asked my mom to help me read an interview I did with one of these hospice car workers.

Will you read for this part?

BARB

Mhmm.

PAUL

Yeah, the Diana part.

BARB

Okay, I might go off script a little bit here.

PAUL

I was gonna say, yeah. Feel free to editorialize, because I I did editing with this anyway.

BARB

Okay.

PAUL

So yeah.

BARB

I'm Diana Hershey, you know, like the candy bar.

The people at Doug's house are awesome.

In general, people in hospice have more of an understanding of your feelings.

We support each other.

Doug's house has been there since the 80's.

It was strictly an AIDS hospice at that time, because everyone died.

But in the last five years or so, with the medications getting so much better--

and so many less side effects--

less people are dying.

I was raised with the idea that death is a normal part of life.

(MORE)

BARB (CONT'D)

My mom was on the board with Dr. Kübler-Ross.  
And I knew right away that being with the dying was sacred--  
That was something that I wanted to do.  
I wanted to be a part of that process.

PAUL

When Jeff moved back to his mother's house from California,  
The Post Review, which is North Branch's local newspaper,  
ran two articles about his struggle with HIV/AIDS.

BARB

This is from the first, which was published on October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1992.

About 150,000 people have died of AIDS-related diseases in America, and more  
than 1 1/4 million people have tested HIV positive. Some of these people live in  
Chisago County. One of them is Jeff Mayne. He lives in North Branch with his  
parents when not at home in California. He is gay, Jeff has AIDS.  
He has come to terms with his sexuality.

PAUL

"It is not a choice."

BARB

he says solemnly.

PAUL

"Homosexuality is no more a choice than are blue eyes or brown hair."

BARB

Addressing the choice theory, he continues,

PAUL

"If I could push a button, I would. Who would want to be or choose to be  
discriminated against at every turn?"

BARB

And he has come to terms with AIDS.  
Here there is a choice. Jeff says,

PAUL

"I decided to make this disease my full-time job...to manage it."

## BARB

Managing is a tough job. It's a daily challenge. But Jeff takes it one day at a time and takes each day's challenges head-on....  
 The round-the-clock regimen, however, is what makes Jeff' managing AIDS a full-time job.  
 His nutrition supplement is fed intravenously when he sleeps--it takes eight hours. Upon awaking at about 6 a.m.,  
 Jeff detaches that IV and hooks up another medication to control his eye infection. This one takes about an hour to drain.  
 He then begins another two-hour session with an IV--this one to protect his good eye.  
 Finally freed of the IV tubes, Jeff must inject himself with two shots to boost his white and red blood count.  
 As the day progresses he starts another IV at 3 p.m., another at 9 p.m. and then the cycle begins anew with the eight-hour nutritional IV when he goes to bed.  
 But with this cycle, Jeff focuses on being well, on living with AIDS, and not dying.  
 It costs \$25,000 a month.  
 But more on that next week.

## PAUL

Around the same age that Jeff found out he was HIV positive, I was working in fundraising for the Jesuits.  
 During that time, I began the very long process of becoming a priest.  
 I had my end of the deal with God to keep up.  
 In the very early part of that process of even deciding to become a priest, you go to what is called spiritual direction, which is kinda like religious therapy.  
  
 I met with this old Jesuit priest named Bill Creed.  
 Part of Fr. Creed's mission was to offer spiritual guidance to people experiencing homelessness in Chicago. And as a result nothing could shock Fr. Creed.  
  
 We met twice.  
 I remember Fr. Creed kindly sitting with his arms crossed over his belly, looking at me through thick glasses and over a white beard.  
 And he asks me about my relationship with God.  
 And so I talked and I talked and I talked about my anger with the Church, and I talked about how I think I might be called to be a priest.  
 But, if I'm being honest, I do sometimes struggle to believe.  
 And then at the very end, I mentioned that I might be dealing with some homosexual tendencies.  
 Our second meeting followed the same pattern.  
 I talked about the corruption in the Church, about the misogyny, and about how, actually, if I'm being honest, I am praying less and less.  
 And then finally, Fr. Creed stopped me and he raised his hand.



BARB

Thank you so much for sharing all of this.  
Most of what you've said is this up here.

PAUL

He held his hand up in the air.  
And then he said:

BARB

And it's all bullshit.  
The Church, politics--  
high-pitched noise.  
I haven't really heard you say anything real--from down here.

PAUL

He touched my stomach, and he looked right into my eyes, and he asked:

BARB

Why are you here?

PAUL

I didn't know what to say.  
But he went on:

BARB

I think you're a gay man who has not really dealt with being gay.  
It's clear that you've never had any healthy gay role models.  
The Church has failed you in some important ways.  
You shouldn't be a priest.  
You have to deal with yourself first.

A GOOD DEATH

*A phone rings.*

JANE

When he moved home from California to die, essentially,  
Um,  
Ah, he moved in with mom and Jerry,  
and um, she was substitute teaching a little bit then,  
and they stopped calling her to teach.

PAUL

hmm.

JANE

Um,  
because, you know,  
"Gal, there's someone with AIDS living in your home  
and we just don't know what to do with--"  
That wasn't really spoken, but that was her--  
her assumption of it--

PAUL

Yeah.

JANE

Of, of why she wasn't getting called anymore.

PAUL

Yeah.

JANE

And my children were probably--  
oh let's see.  
Bob was born in eighty-one.  
So, Bob was, you know, eight or nine or ten, when Jeff came home.

PAUL

Yeah

JANE

And Andy was a--  
Our other son was a couple years younger.  
And, you know, we talked to them at length about, um, about AIDS,  
and you know,  
some people have ah,

(MORE)

JANE (CONT'D)

you know, marry wives and are--  
 marry women and have--  
 are, you know, are are attracted to girls and some are attracted--  
 some people are attracted to boys.  
 And Jeff, you know--  
 Jeff is gay.  
 And he has a--  
 a very--  
     (cough)  
 you know, a very sad disease.  
 And he isn't gonna live forever.  
 And, um, so, they got really close with Uncle Jeff.  
 And ah, he, of course, was doing all kinds of treatment and stuff,  
 while he was living with mom and--  
 You know, of course, loosing weight and--  
 um--  
 but he was just fanatical about protecting everyone else.  
 And--  
 Um--  
 Mom and Jerry had some kind of wood floors.  
 And um, we were--we were there and my, you know, my young kids with me, and  
 he's like,  
 "Wait! Everybody stand still."  
 And he thought there was a spot of blood on the floor.

PAUL

Oh. Wow.

JANE

Um, and it it was water.  
 It was just a wet spot,  
 but he wanted to be sure that everyone was,  
 you know, protected, and was safe and stuff.

Ah, my youngest brother got married, I believe in august of ninety-one.  
 And Jeff died in January of, or so, of ninety-two.

PAUL

Jane later corrected this.  
 The wedding was actually August of ninety-two.  
 And then Jeff died in ninety-three.

*Jeff singing begins in the background and grows louder  
 throughout the next part.*

JANE

So, six-ish months or so.  
And, you know the, you know the Our Father song that's sung at lots of  
weddings?  
singing  
Our Father,  
Who art in heaven.

PAUL

Yes. Yes. Yes,

JANE

(singing)  
Hallowed be--  
(speaking again)  
Yeah that, okay, that.  
So, Jeff sang that the at the wedding of my brother  
and some other songs too, but--  
Um, at at one part there's some pretty high notes and his little neck was so--  
so skinny.  
And he's just--  
belted that out.  
It was so awesome.  
He sang the whole thing  
and you could see him hanging on to the microphone stand,  
so that he would,  
you know, cause he was pushing all that breath out, so he wouldn't pass out.  
And fortunately, we have a horrible video of it,  
because my husband was the videographer.  
And a fan was blowing over the, the old VCR thing,  
you know, at the time.  
But, ah he did, did get video of him singing it at the rehearsal,  
because he hit the high notes at the rehearsal,  
and he didn't quite hit it at the wedding.  
But it was really awesome to see.

PAUL

Jane actually shared that video with me.  
Jeff is singing.  
And he's holding on to the microphone and swaying back and forth.  
His brothers Jerome and John are sitting behind him.  
And there's a dark line  
that runs from Jeff's cheek up the side of his nose to his eye.  
At first I thought there was something wrong with the video.  
And then I realize--I was seeing his cheek muscle under his skin.  
He'd lost so much weight by this point.

BARB

(reading for Diana)

We're coming up on 500 souls at Doug's House that have passed away since 1989.  
 The early AIDS hospice work that I did was in the late 90's.  
 I worked at a sixteen-bed hospice house in Long Beach, California.  
 The AIDS cocktails of medications were toxic.  
 Also, they were difficult to take.  
 They were time sensitive, and they were sensitive to the food you ate.  
 A lot of the people who came in just were done.  
 They didn't like the side effects from the medications.  
 They were just done.  
 But your--  
 Um, your first cousin once removed's story--  
 What was his name, Paul?

PAUL

Ah, Jeff.

BARB

Jeff.  
 Jeff, yeah.  
 Most of the people who came to us,  
 did not have any family support.  
 Most of them were similar to the clients that we have now at Doug's house.  
 There was just nobody there for them at the end.

PAUL

Jeff was super lucky.

PAUL

Yeah, he was really, really lucky.  
 Especially coming from Minnesota--  
 from an area that's not known to be tolerant at all.  
 I remember talking to the owner of my hospice.  
 He was probably sixty.  
 He told me that all of his friends were dead.  
 He was like the last man standing.  
 And that was not an uncommon story.

PAUL

Okay so at this point Seven Sexton, who is Diana's co-worker interjected.  
 And he said:

I have to interject here. Do you ever have fears that, when you die, everyone that  
 we took care of will come and we'll have a reckoning of sorts with them?

BARB

Nooooo! I have not had that fear.  
I think you should put this in your play.

PAUL

Okay, just allow me to go with this here for a second without interruption.

BARB

No guarantees.

*Paul laughs.*

PAUL

Like maybe I caused someone pain.  
Or maybe I said something--either intentionally or unintentionally--  
that affected their death or hurt them in some way.  
Or maybe I even brought them joy.  
And I have to like account for this interaction that I had when I die.  
Even if it was fifteen seconds long,  
I don't know if it's something that helps me cope at work.  
But I feel like all of the people that died there are actually helping the people that  
are currently passing away.

PAUL

Fr. Creed was right.  
And he probably saved me from a very unhappy life.  
I quit the Jesuits.  
I got a good job teaching video production.  
And I began to find a Queer community in Chicago.  
I got my first smart phone. It was a iPhone 4.

And then in 2012, I left Chicago.

A few of my friends of had moved to Pittsburgh.  
And they told me what they paid in rent,  
and I decided in about a day that I would be moving to Pittsburgh.  
I moved without a job.  
And I had a general idea that I would write plays.  
And that first year is rough,  
but it got better.  
And it turns out that I really like writing plays.  
The friends that I meet in Pittsburgh became my second family.

I went on a six-hour first date with a guy,  
who became my first long-term boyfriend.

(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

I was happy.

BARB

(reading for Diana)

Dying is almost like birthing.

And we use terms like "labor" and "transitioning."

When someone is "transitioning," the body processes are slowing down.

It may go on for days, or even weeks.

Or it may only be hours.

They are probably still conscious during the transition period.

Urination has stopped.

The respiratory system is shutting down.

They will breathe normally for a while,

and then they will stop breathing maybe for ten or fifteen seconds.

As they continue to transition, the periods when they stop breathing get longer,  
as long as about a minute.

I don't believe that they are suffering at that time.

There is no air hunger.

Because everything is shutting down.

The feet are getting purple--the fingertips sometimes.

And sometimes the lips are getting bluish, because circulation is shutting down.

Usually it's pretty gentle, especially if we are medicating, you know, for comfort.

Most people want to be comfortable.

Occasionally you get somebody who wants the least amount of sedation possible,  
who wants to be there.

*A phone rings.*

JANE

Jeff died in the middle of the night.

Um.

When Jerome, ah, the second from the youngest--

He flew home from California.

He was still living there.

And ah,

You know, we were pretty sure Jeff waiting for him to come home.

And they--

you know--

He became a little bit more lucid, when Jerome came and talked to him for a little bit.

And then Jerome--

Of course, was upset, as we all were, and emotional, he went to Mom's basement and was playing a song he had been writing about Jeff.

And ah, Jeff heard the music.

He said,

"Oh, who's that" you know "Who's that playing?"

So, that was ver--that was pretty cool.

JEROME

Huh.

*Paul laughs.*

JEROME

I never heard that. Ah, maybe. I knew that but i i don't remember hearing that's.

PAUL

Yeah.

JEROME

Yeah, that makes sense.

PAUL

Yeah.

JEROME

Yeah, I mean, I don't I don't remember that part. I do remember playing it on the piano downstairs.

PAUL

Mhm.

JEROME

Um. And he--his bedroom was right above that. And um--

(MORE)



JEROME (CONT'D)

Oh, yeah, I forgot all about this. I remember playing it.  
And I told him, "Yeah, I wrote this song or, you know, whatever."  
He's like, "Yeah, I know, I heard that."  
And, um. So I played it their remember.  
He was hardly, um, lucid, just barely.  
And I remember him just saying,  
"Oh, yeah, yeah, no, that was really nice.  
Yeah. Oh, yeah. That's that's really nice."

PAUL

Hm.

JEROME

You know?

PAUL

Yeah.

JEROME

Wow, heh, yeah, that was, that was a tough one.  
I remember--  
I remember him dying, um

PAUL

Wow. Really? That moment?

JEROME

Yeah.

PAUL

What do you remember?

JEROME

Um, that I was sleeping in the room below his room.  
Um, Oh, man, I can't, I haven't thought about this for a long time.  
I heard him say, "Hey, you know, you better come up here, um.  
Something's happening."  
It was something like that.

PAUL

hmm

JEROME

And, ah, Wow.  
And ah--

(MORE)

JEROME (CONT'D)

He, you know, he got up there.  
 And I don't remember if he looked at me or, or whatever.  
 But--  
     (cough)  
 I remember him take--  
 you know, exhaling,  
 you know, for the last time.

PAUL

Yeah

JANE

I just laid with him in his bed for a while.  
 Cause I just didn't want him to be cold.  
 We decided that that coroner should wait until my kids woke up.  
 And then my husband brought them over,  
 so that they could say goodbye to him too.

JEROME

And um, man, I remember  
 immediately, ah, thinking that--  
 ah, uh oh--  
 thinking that he won,  
 because I mean the virus can't live in this body anymore.

PAUL

mhmm

JEROME

It can't. And so he won.  
 But, you know--  
 hell of a price.  
 You know, and I but I didn't think about that at the time.  
 I just remember thinking  
 he won.

BARB

    (reading for Diana)  
 The people who die well have met their end of life tasks.  
 "I love you."  
 "I'm sorry."  
 "Please forgive me."  
 Those are really important phrases.  
 People who have peace with their family, with their friends,

(MORE)

BARB (CONT'D)

peace with God--whatever that means to them--  
generally have what I would call a good death.  
The people who die hard--  
and I have seen this over and over--  
are the people who are angry and bitter, and filled with un-forgiveness  
or aren't willing to be forgiven.  
They have a lot more physical suffering, pain, agitation.  
And they die hard, kicking and screaming, you know.  
Many of them in pain, and many of them with what we call terminal agitation.  
I know that it's a physiological thing,  
but it just seems to be accompanied so often by this emotional, spiritual pain.

*A phone rings.*

JANE

Yeah, it was crazy.

And then, oh my gosh.  
We were--  
Our our little local funeral director, you know--small town.  
His name was Digger.  
I mean, of course, you know.  
Wouldn't you say, Digger.

PAUL

Yeah.

JANE

So.  
So, and Digger had a terrible stutter,  
just a horrible horrible stutter.  
So, here all of us are.  
Um, my, you know, brothers except Jeff.  
We're in there planning the funeral and planning--  
Picking out caskets.  
And, Digger is stuttering up a storm.  
We're all exhausted and punchy from no sleep.  
We're just cracking up and snorting  
and then we realized the the funeral guy has two different shoes on.

*Paul laughs.*

JANE

Like, are you kidding?

(MORE)

JANE (CONT'D)

You know, like one black one blue, but they're both loafers.  
And so we were laughing and laughing and I even--  
we were testing out--um,  
or looking at the caskets.  
But I decided I needed to test it and make sure he--  
you know, Jeff would be comfortable enough in there.

PAUL

Yeah, of course.

JANE

So, I got in one.

*Paul laughs.*

JANE

The-- and then the boys held it down.  
So that was--  
Yeah, it didn't work out so--

PAUL

You got in one!?

JANE

good for me.  
Yeah.  
Yeah.

PAUL

Oh, Jane.

JANE

Yeah,  
kinda crazy.

Oh, the funeral was awesome.

PAUL

Yeah.

JANE

I was going to go into it and then I thought, oh that sounds kind of maudlin, but--

PAUL

(laughing)  
No. I want to hear about it.

JANE

We really threw great funerals.  
We just throw great funerals.

*Paul laughs.*

JANE

And um,  
We--  
at the last minute in it--  
When Jeff was in California, one of the things he did--  
I--Probably for the longest of the time he was there was he owned a limousine company.

PAUL

I heard a little about that.

JANE

Um,  
He drove for, somebody--  
Diana Ross, I guess and her children.  
And so, here we are, like the night before the funeral and we realized--  
he would be really ticked off if we didn't have a limo drive us to the church.

*Paul laughs.*

JANE

So, somehow we found--  
We scraped up some crappy limo.

*Jane laughs.*

JANE

And we had a nice, nice limo ride,  
but Jeff and John and Jerome all sang together at various times.  
Jerome was too young at my wedding,  
but Jeff and John sang at my wedding.  
And, um, They did a lot of that kind of thing.  
So--  
Jeff and--  
or John--  
Excuse me--  
Jerome played at the funeral the song that he wrote for Jeff.  
Um, that he was playing,  
you know,  
that Jeff heard the night he died.

*Music starts playing the background.*

PAUL

Yeah, yeah.

JANE

So, John played some music too.  
And then they had an empty chair with a--  
with a rose on it,  
because that was for Jeff,  
because he, of course, was there.

BARB

It was so cool, cause his brother, you know.  
John played piano, and he played just some really cool--  
Elton John music and--sang, John sang.  
It was, yeah--It was--It was a beautiful, sad, funeral.

PAUL

So, do you think the Elton John--like is that like coded, the Elton John thing.

BARB

Is that like what?

PAUL

You know--

BARB

Oh, recorded?

PAUL

Coded.  
I mean. Does it mean--That is--I don't know, I--  
Just cause Elton John is kind of a gay icon.

BARB

Oh, is he?  
Oh, I didn't even know that. No.

PAUL

Um.

BARB

Yeah, no, I guess I never--I didn't even know Elton John was gay.  
Is he gay?

PAUL

Yeah,

BARB

Was he gay?

PAUL

He's he's he's he's pretty gay.

BARB

Is he?

I don't think I even knew that.

*Paul laughs and the music fades.*

JANE

We all went to--

I think to the little local American Legion after, I feel like.

And I remember--

and a lot of his friends were there from out of town and stuff.

You know, and then the stories started to come.

Alcohol was being served, and stories were flowing, and it was really a nice-- kind of--

kind of a nice time,

nice cathartic time.

There was a story that I think his friends told.

Probably at the funeral was where I heard it the first time was, ah--

They were all, a bunch of them went vacationing--

And I feel like it was Mexico.

Um, and some lavish, you know, place.

They were at some lovely, lovely resort or something.

And ah, Jeff had--

They all had tons to drink, and Jeff did as well.

And he was trying do something at the front desk, you know,

change his room or who--

you know, something like that.

And, of course,

they weren't speaking ah English enough that he could understand in his drunken state.

And he sat down on the middle of this marble floor and said,

"When I'm I--

When you're in my country,

you speak my language.

And when I'm in your country...

YOU SPEAK MY LANGUAGE!"

*Jane and Paul laugh.*

PAUL

Oh my god.

JANE

So, the world just needed to revolve around him.  
And, you know, that was--  
that was kind of just,  
"Oh, that's typical Jeff."

PAUL

What do you think Jeff would be like, if he was alive today?

JANE

You know, I would like to think he would be, um,  
laid back and and loving.  
But, you know--  
He'd probably had had a heart attack, if he hadn't died of AIDS, because  
he was pretty intense, pretty intense about everything.  
And, if things, you know, didn't go his way, or ah and-- and--  
A lot of my brothers are like this and--  
and if I have to be honest, I'm similar too, in that, um,  
we're all kinda drivers.  
And,  
"Get on the bus, because we're going.  
This is where we're going.  
Oh, you don't like it?  
Oh, you're gonna fire me?  
Well, I'll--" you know, "I'll quit first."  
Most of everybody works for themselves.  
The rules really don't matter, just--  
They're for other people, they are total not for any of the Mayne kids.

PAUL

Hmm.

JANE

You know, totally not.



HIS MOM

PAUL

Jane and I met in person the summer after we talked on the phone.  
I was home visiting my parents.  
And we made a plan to meet at a coffee shop near North Branch.  
She offered to bring my great aunt Delores, who is her and Jeff's mom.

I'm sorry the audio quality is so poor here.  
The only thing I had with me was my phone.  
On the recording you'll first hear me, then you'll hear Jane, and then Delores.

*A noisy coffee shop.*

PAUL

Did he actually drive Diana Ross around?

JANE

And her kids.

DELORES

Oh yeah.

JANE

I think probably more her kids than Diana herself.

DELORES

Well, we came--  
He drove here from Californian and picked me up in her limo.

JANE

Oh, I forgot about that.

PAUL

What a trip!  
So you drove across the country in Diana Ross's limo.

*Paul Laughs.*

DELORES

In her Limo!  
And then we got to New York and we stayed at a motel--hotel then in New York  
and we went to see her studio and--

PAUL

Uh-huh.

DELORES

And--

On--On, um, what's that park?

PAUL

Um, Central Park.

JANE

Central Park?

PAUL

Yeah.

DELORES

Central Park!

She had an office building--three-story office building.

And we toured that.

PAUL

Yeah.

DELORES

And I met Diana Ross there.

PAUL

What was she like.

DELORES

She was having her nails done.

Oh, I know what I was going to tell you.

When he first came home, um, he wasn't sick in bed--

PAUL

Yeah.

DELORES

--then. We would go around and talk to, ah, first responders and, ninth grade classes in school about living with AIDS.

PAUL

He would really?

DELORES

Yeah, he and I would go around--

JANE

Together they would go around.

PAUL

Oh, I didn't know that.

DELORES

Yeah.

PAUL

Yeah.

JANE

Didn't you speak to some priests groups or something

DELORES

Oh yeah.

JANE

or some kind of church thing.

DELORES

I did I spoke to a--

JANE

Catholic

DELROES

Some group.

PAUL

Yeah.

DELORES

of priests about living with AIDS. And at that time I kind of figured there was a lot of that in the clergy, you know. In a--that sometimes they may--became a priest because they could hide there.

I would tell them to be careful.

You know, for one thing, to know what you're doing.

I wanted them to be scared.

PAUL

Yeah.

DELORES

I really did. And they were.

And Jeff would talk about it and I would talk about.

And they would talk with us.

PAUL

Hmmm.

DELORES

And that was just really--it was good for me to do that.

PAUL

Yeah.

DELORES

I felt good doing that and Jeff did too.

So, we did that for--oh--until he couldn't any more, you know.

PAUL

That's really healing for me to hear you say these things.

DELORES

Oh that's good.

PAUL

I feel like I have a a little more of a history.

DELORES

Oh that's good.

JANE

Sure.

PAUL

Yeah, so thank you.

DELORES

Oh, you're welcome.

I'm happy to do it.

You know, I love to talk about him.

PAUL

His generation like is--

What that generation went through is why I'm alive, you know.

It's that--those struggles, you know, made it possible for people like me to be alive and to have a good life.

DELORES

So, I remember the last Christmas and he wanted to take a bath that night.

So, I put a stool in the bathtub.

And, ah, um, he sat on the stool in the bathtub and I washed him.

And that was my biggest thing before he died that I was able to be with him at--in that way. That he was just my little baby boy again, you know.

PAUL

Yeah.

DELORES

And that was something.  
I will never forget that.  
We were listening to Christmas carols and he was, you know, I was washing him.  
I figured that that was a gift that God gave me for him.  
God was Good.

PAUL

Yeah

DELORES

Jeff was happy.

PAUL

Yeah.

DELORES

And I didn't--  
I didn't disown him.

PAUL

Yeah.

DELORES

You know, he was my boy and we all did the whole family.  
You know, Jeff was gay, but my word he was--  
Jeff used to tell me about, when I would go out to LA for a party or something--

PAUL

Yeah.

DELORES

--with him.  
And the kids would come up to me and would be so surprised that I was there and  
Jeff's mother, because a lot of their mothers had nothing to do with them.

PAUL

They didn't.

DELORES

They sent them away.

PAUL

Yeah.

DELORES

And they were just so--you know--  
(MORE)

DELORES (CONT'D)

happy that Jeff had his mother.

*A phone rings.*

PAUL

When you're little, you look at your parents and their siblings  
and you see possibilities for older versions of yourself,  
living lives that could be yours one day.

BARB

Good morning!

PAUL

Even if those lives are versions that you want to avoid, they're possible.

Good morning, how are you today?

We imagine our lives through other people.  
It's different for Queer people.  
We look up and it's hard to see ourselves  
in our families,  
in our schools,  
in old photo albums.

BARB

Feeling that deep sense of--  
Where do I belong and who are my people.

PAUL

If you're told that you don't exist often enough,  
part of you starts to believe it.

JANE

He was pretty sensitive.

BARB

He was tall and thin.

JEROME

I always thought he was cool.

BARB

Probably pretty sensitive.

PAUL

It takes work to learn who are you are,  
to find and to create your history.

BARB

Just filling in that history.  
That I knew about, but didn't really know many details about.

PAUL

And so when I actually find older versions of myself,  
men like me from where I grew up,  
I want them to be perfect.  
And no one is perfect.

BARB

You know, to hold those memories and that experience,  
and what do you do with it?

PAUL

I wish Mr. Stone could take care of me the way I needed him to.  
I wish that Jeff had never been a drunk, obnoxious American tourist.

BARB

How do you forgive, whatever the forgiving has to be  
of yourself  
of all the people who let you down.

PAUL

And I wish Jeff had lived long enough for me to know him.  
I wonder what coming out would have been like with someone else to talk to.

BARB

We have to transform our pain, either that or we're going to transmit it.

PAUL

I wonder if I could have made his life better.

I only know him through glimpses of other people's memories.  
And, to be honest, I'm not sure that we would get along.  
But Jane is right:  
you don't get to choose, it's the luck of the draw.

And the truth is that, despite all this, I owe these men  
and so many other people--  
a deep debt.

Flawed as we all are, they are the reason I have a full life.

(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

I'm being *sensitive*.

BARB

I'm looking outside at a blue-sky day.  
It's beautiful.

PAUL

I left Pittsburgh after five years.  
I moved to Austin, Texas, for grad school,  
where I actually met the hospice care workers at Doug's House.  
It's also where I started writing this play.

I was 31.  
And Jeff was 31, when he died.

BARB

I think it's important right now for you in your life to be telling Jeff's story  
because I still--  
because you're searching for your own story.  
And that maybe that--the story of Jeff might help to become an anchor for you  
as you--as you search for--  
for answers, I guess, to this--to this question  
of, really,  
who am I in this picture?

Does that make any sense?



### CREDITS

#### PAUL

Thank you for listening to Hatch Arts Collective's production *Once Removed*, a documentary play written and performed by Paul Kruse (Copyright 2020), featuring the voices of Barbara Kruse, Karina Kruse, Lydia Kruse, Jane Fisk, Jerome Mayne, John Mayne, and Jeff Mayne with text from Diana Hershey, Seven Sexton, and Twyla Ring.

*Once Removed* was written in collaboration with Adil Mansoor and Mason Rosenthal. This audio production was directed by Adil with sound design, editing, and original music by Aaron Landgraff.

Development support for *Once Removed* was provided by UT Austin and the Eugene O'Neill Foundation. Production support comes from the Arts, Equity, Reimagined Fund managed by PACE; The Heinz Endowments, The Opportunity Fund, The Pittsburgh Foundation, and the PNC Charitable Trusts. Special thanks to Stephanie Kent, I-Chia Chiu, William Kiley, Michael Rohd, Carra Martinez, KJ Sanchez, and Amelia Birkholz.