

VOICES FROM THE BATTLEFRONT

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original cast
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HOPE House
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Voices from the Battlefield was developed in collaboration with HOPE House of Norton, Virginia.

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Director's Note

Voices from the Battlefield is performed as one part of a 4 ½ hour workshop on domestic violence. The entire workshop is conceived as performative. Its order is as follows.

- Participants gather; informal greetings. (10 minutes)
- In front of the play's set, a middle-aged survivor of domestic violence tells her personal story in her own words. She is followed by a young survivor of domestic violence who tells her personal story. (20-25 minutes)
- *Voices from the Battlefield* begins. Seated upstage left, separate from the set, are the two women who have just spoken. They witness the play, which is performed by two Roadside Theater actor/singers and four community volunteer readers, who have rehearsed their parts. (45 minutes)
- Lunch is served on-site. (45 minutes)
- The workshop participants reassemble and are broken into groups of 10. Roadside Theater and Roadside-trained volunteers conduct story circles with each group. The personal stories that the participants tell about domestic violence are prompted by the earlier performance. The stories are told within a specific Roadside story circle structure that reinforces trust and builds empathy. (1 hour)
- Break. (15 minutes)
- Workshop participants reassemble and chosen representatives from each story circle present to the whole group thoughts and reflections generated by their group's circle, followed by a facilitated discussion about what actions individuals and the community can take to end domestic violence. (1hour)
- Informal goodbyes. (10 minutes)

Production History

The performative workshop and the play, *Voices from the Battlefield*, was first produced by HOPE House, a women's shelter in Norton, Virginia, with a cast that included two Roadside Theater performers, three staff from HOPE House women's shelter, and a member of the HOPE House support group for survivors of domestic violence. The audience was composed of public school teachers, social workers, and law enforcement officers. Based on reports of its effectiveness, the workshop was then commissioned by the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice for its state-wide in-service training for 100 social workers, probation officers, judges, lawyers, and police officers. Roadside continues to produce the play and workshop for communities in central Appalachia. In 2003-2004 five productions were commissioned.

Playwright's Note

Voices from the Battlefield relies on personal stories and original songs as well as culturally specific, traditional and archetypal stories and songs. With the guidance of the playwright and using Roadside Theater's community cultural development methodology, non-Appalachian communities can find their own stories and music to create their adaptation of the play.

Place and Time – here and now

Cast

Two Women – one middle-aged, the other young – both survivors of domestic violence (not actors)
Readers 1-4 – female, non-professional with personal experience of domestic violence
Kim – female, trained actor/singer

Ron – male, trained actor/singer

Stage Setting

Downstage right – three high wooden stools beside each other at an angle; in front of each stool is a music stand with script.

Upstage center – a banjo and guitar lean against a black wooden box; several feet downstage left from the box is a rustic wooden bench.

Downstage left – directly across from the three wooden stools on a black platform is a plain, wooden chair with a script on its seat.

* * * * *

The workshop moderator welcomes the audience and introduces two local survivors of domestic violence (one middle-aged, one young), who each tell their personal story in their own words. After their tellings, which last 20-25 minutes, the Two Women take seats upstage left, separate from the play's set.

Cast enters.

KIM

Good morning. I'm Kim Neal. This is Ron Short. We're a part of Roadside Theater. We hope you're ready to hear some stories and music this morning because that's why we've come up here. Mabel and Tiffany (*indicating the two women who have just told their stories*) will let us know how we're doing.

RON

But we're not going to have to do it by ourselves because we got some folks here who are going to help out. This here's . . . (*introduces Reader 1*)

READER 1

And this is (*introduces other Readers*). We're going to be reading you some stories that Roadside collected from the staff of a domestic shelter and the women who come in there -- the victims and survivors of abuse.

READER 2

I'd just like to say that this is not what we usually do for a living. In fact, we're a little nervous, but as long as we have our papers here, we'll be o.k., I guess.

KIM

Now we're not just going to talk the whole time. We're going to sing too.

READER 3

Oh no, you didn't tell me I had to sing! Everyone of us is in trouble now!

RON

That's o.k., you can just hum along. Looks like this bunch has had so much coffee and doughnuts they won't know the difference.

Banjo begins softly.

READER 1

You know, women have been telling stories here in the mountains for a long time. But some of our stories haven't often been told right out in public like we're doing here today.

READER 2

Because some stories are hard to tell . . .

READER 3

. . . and some stories are hard to listen to.

Readers 1-3 walk stage right and sit on stools. Reader 4 walks to stage left and sits on chair. Ron and Kim remain downstage center.

KIM & RON

PRETTY POLLY (*traditional, accompanied by banjo*)

Polly, Pretty Polly,
Come go along with me!
Polly, Pretty Polly,
Come go along with me!
Before we get married
Some pleasures we'll see.

He led her over hills,
And dark valleys so deep;
He led her over hills,
And dark valleys so deep;
Polly mistrusted
And she begin to weep.

Willie, oh Willie,
I'm afraid of your way.
Willie, oh Willie,
I'm afraid of your way.
I'm afraid you'll deceive me
And lead me astray.

Polly, Pretty Polly,
You're guessing just right.

Polly, Pretty Polly,
You're guessing just right.
I dug on your grave
The best part of last night.

He led her a little bit further
And what did she spy
He led her a little bit further
And what did she spy
But a new dug grave
With a spade lying by.

She fell down before him
And pleaded for her life.
She fell down before him
And pleaded for her life
O, let me go a single girl
For I won't be you wife.

Polly, Pretty Polly,
That never can be
Polly, Pretty Polly,
That never can be
Your fast reputation
Means trouble for me.

He stabbed her in her bosom
And her heart's blood did flow;
He stabbed her in her bosom
And her heart's blood did flow;
And into that hole
Pretty Polly did go

He threw a little dirt o'er her
And turned to go home
He threw a little dirt o'er her
And turned to go home
Leaving none but the little birds
To weep and to mourn.

It's a debt to the devil
That Willie must pay
A debt to the devil
Willie must pay
For killing Pretty Polly
And trying to get away.

KIM

Now the story about Pretty Polly is a little bit different from that song.

RON

See, in the story this new feller had moved into the same settlement where Pretty Polly was living, and he was a-courtin' Pretty Polly. He finally got her to agree to meeting him out in the wilderness late one night.

KIM

But that night, when Polly went to where he told her to meet him, why, he wadn't no where around, so she clumb up in a tree to wait for him.

RON

Went off to sleep up there . . .

RON & KIM

. . . up in the forks of that tree.

KIM

And when she come to, there was that man, but he was diggin' . . .

RON & KIM

(She sees RON digging) . . . what appeared to be a grave.

KIM

Polly decided to keep real quiet and watch him and see what he was doin'.

RON

That man kept on a-diggin' with that spade . . .

KIM

. . . and it kept a-lookin' more . . .

RON & KIM

. . . and more like a grave . . .

KIM

. . . 'til finally Pretty Polly was shore that's just what it was.

RON

Most of the night he dug. Kept a-lookin' around for Polly. About daylight he finally give up on her coming and he left.

KIM

Polly clumb down outta that tree and hurried on home.

RON

But the very next day that man come up to Polly's house and he asked her, "Why for didn't you come?"

KIM

She told him some story or other, like she hadn't been there the night before.

RON

"Why don't you come up to my house for dinner tonight?"

KIM

"I can't. And anyhow I don't know the way to your house."

RON

"I'll mark the trail if you'll give me some ashes to spread behind me."

KIM

"Well, I can do that, but I'll not be there tonight, nor will I be there tomorrow night, but I'll be there on the third night."

RON

But now the very next morning, Polly started out a-followin' that trail of ashes. It led to a house setting out all by itself in the wilderness.

KIM

She peeked around and saw that there wadn't no one there, so she went right on in.

RON

The table was all spread like someone was fixin' to come to dinner.

KIM

Polly was sorta hungry.

RON

She thought she'd take her a little bite. She picked up a piece of meat and started eatin' . . .

KIM

tasted all right but she couldn't figure out what kind of meat it was.

RON

She eat it and started to pick up another one . . .

KIM

. . . but it looked too much like a person's hand, so she, put it back --

RON & KIM

. . . real quick!

KIM

Then she got to poking around and started to look in this door. All at once she heard a voice say,

RON (*as Parrot*)

"Don't go in there, Pretty Polly, or you'll lose your heart's blood."

KIM

It liked to have scared her to death, but when she looked around, she saw it was just an old parrot bird a-settin' there. She tried the door, but it was locked. After a little she started to go up the stairs. But the parrot said,

RON

"Don't go up there, Polly, you'll lose your heart's blood."

KIM

She went on up anyhow and went in a room at the top of the stairs there and they's queer bloody-lookin' stains all over that room. She started to leave then, but she heared somethin' comin' outside, sounded like a woman a moanin', and the parrot started to squawkin',

RON

"Hide, Pretty Polly, or you're the ninth that'll be."

KIM

She run and had just got under the stairs . . .

RON

. . . when in come that man a-draggin' a woman.

KIM

It was her cousin.

RON

That woman was a-fightin' . . .

KIM

. . . tryin' to get away . . .

RON

. . . she reached up and grabbed the stairpost. That man brought out his sword and just whacked her hand off . . .

KIM

. . . her hand fell right down into Polly's apron.

RON

He drug the woman on up the stairs . . .

KIM

. . . and Polly could hear him a-murderin' her.

RON

"Run Polly, or you're the tenth shall be. Number ten! Number ten!"

KIM

"Oh, don't tell him I've been here, please, spare my life's blood."

RON

Then she run home. The next week they was a corn shuckin'. Ever'body all around come to it. An' that man, he was there, and Pretty Polly . . .

KIM

. . . she was there too.

RON

That man walked right up to Polly again and asked her, "Why for didn't you come to dinner? I fixed you somethin' special."

KIM

Polly, she never said nothin'.

RON

Finally they got that party rolling and they started . . .

RON & KIM

. . . tellin' jokes and riddles.

KIM

"I got a riddle."

RON & KIM

They all asked her to tell it!

KIM

Oh how my heart did break
To see what a hole the fox did make.
All night up in that lonesome pine,
I thought I'd be number nine.

RON

When Polly finished telling that riddle, that man looked sorta pale. But ever'body else was tryin' to figure out the answer and asked Polly what it was?

KIM

Polly 'lowed as how she'd answer it . . . later on.

RON

Well, they got to tellin' . . .

RON & KIM

. . . jokes and dreams.

KIM

Polly allowed as she "had a dream. "

RON

They all asked her to tell it!

KIM

Polly told as how she dreamed the other night that she'd gone up to his house, following a trail of ashes. They wasn't nobody there, but a parrot. In my dream, I went on in the house an' eat a lady's finger. That man came in a-draggin' a woman, it was my cousin, and he cut off her hand with his sword an' then he murdered my cousin. And the parrot said, "Run, Polly, run, or you're the tenth that'll be."

RON

When Polly finished tellin' the dream, that man looked paler still. Then Polly reached down into her apron pocket and pulled out that dead woman's hand . . .

KIM

"The sword cut the hand you see, but Polly puts it on the fox's knee."

RON

And when that man seed that hand, he fainted.

KIM

And Polly then told how it wasn't a dream, but true, and what the answer to the riddle had been.

RON

Them people laid holt on that rogue and arrested him . . .

KIM

. . . he's put to death,

RON & KIM

hung, you know.

KIM sings

(accompanied by banjo)

Ladies and gentlemen, I'll bid you farewell.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'll bid you farewell.

For killing Pretty Polly, I'll soon be in hell.

Kim (speaking)

And a good place for him too.

Ron and Kim move upstage center. Kim sits on bench, Ron stands.

READER 1

I live at Hope House. I am here because I am not now, and have never been, safe with the people I love. I have physical wounds, but more than that, I have a broken, bleeding heart. I can only say that something is really wrong when women and children have to leave in the middle of the night to live with strangers because home hurts, because love hurts.

READER 2

We are of all kinds . . . middle income, upper income, lower income, quit school in the 8th grade, college educated, no children, some children, beautiful, plain.

READER 3

We are the women you walk past every day. I've often heard people describe the typical battered woman as weak, pitiful, uneducated, and of lower income. I've heard people say "those" kinds of women can't be helped and it's their problem, let them deal with it. It's not just their problem.

READER 2

Think about it for a minute. You probably come in contact with us or our abusers or our children more often than you know.

READER 1

Have you ever worked with someone who just could not seem to get along with anyone? Someone who blamed everything that went wrong on someone else? On you? Have you had a child in your classroom who bullied and beat the other children, or one who stayed off to herself and just couldn't seem to make friends?

READER 3

Have you ever been in the WalMart and seen an angry adult jerk a two-year old child by the wrist so hard that the child flew up past the adult's waist than crashed to the floor?

Kim begins singing from bench, rises and moves upstage center.

KIM

GREENWOOD SIDEE (*traditional, a capella*)

There was a lady lived in York.
All alee and lonely.
Fell in love with her father's clerk
Down by the Greenwood sidee'o.

She loved him up, she loved him down
All alee and lonely.
Loved him till he filled her arms
Down by the greenwood sidee'o.

She bent her back against an oak
All alee and lonely.
First it bent and then it broke
Down by the greenwood sidee'o.

She bent her back against a thorn,
All alee and lonely.
There she had two wee babes born
Down by the greenwood sidee'o.

Then she drew out her wee penknife
All alee and lonely.
There she took those wee babe's lives
Down by the greenwood sidee'o.

She wiped the blade against her shoe
All alee and lonely.
The more she rubbed, the redder it grew
Down by the greenwood sidee'o.

Then she returned to her father's hall
All alee and lonely.
Saw two babes a playing at ball
Down by the greenwood sidee'o.

O' babes, o'babes if you were mine
All alee and lonely.
I'd dress you up in scarlet fine
Down by the greenwood sidee'o.

O' mother, o' mother, when we were yours
All alee and lonely.
Scarlet was our own hearts blood
Down by the greenwood sidee'o.

O' babes, o'babes it's heaven for you
All alee and lonely.
O'mother, o'mother it's hell for you
Down by the Greenwood sidee'o.

Reader 4, seated in chair on platform, stage left, rises, faces audience, and reads.

READER 4

Those big, white hens I saw walking around in my cousin's yard the other day reminded me of something that happened one night when I was, oh, about five years old.

On that evenin', Dad was awful angry with my cousin when he left our house, but he couldn't find her, and night fell while he was a huntin' for her. A bootlegger lived in between her and us so Dad made a stop there. He always started drinkin' when he was mad enough to fight.

When he brought that moonshine home, Mom started crying. She begged Dad to pour it out. He told her to hush, that he was gonna burn every living one of 'em out. Then he finished-off the half-pint and left the house.

Hours later he come back and kicked on the back door. Mom opened it and there he stood, smeared from head to toe with blood. In each hand was three, headless chickens. He come into the kitchen, slammed the hens down on the table, and told her to have the water hot when he got back."

Mom asked him where he was going. He just stared at her.

"I'll show them. They think they can hide from me and get away with what they done. I'll show them what I can do."

After he left, Mom built up the fire in the cookstove and put water on to boil. She was nervous and scared, and us kids got scared too.

Next time Dad come in, he was loaded down with chickens. He had some tied together and slung over his shoulders. He was carrying some in his hands. Some had heads. Some was headless.

He dropped that load on the floor and sent one of my brothers running outside to bring in the washtubs to scald the chickens in. Then he gutted 'em, threw 'em in a blue enamel canner, and ordered Mom to cook 'em because he wanted chicken and dumplings.

He put the feathers in the stove and burned them. The smell made me sick. I'd seen folks dress hundreds of chickens, but I'd never heard of burnin' the feathers. So, I asked Daddy why he was doing that.

“Hesh up! Anybody could be around this house listening to every word we say. I’m burning the evidence, and if you don’t shut your mouth, I’ll split your brains out with this poker.” He slammed down the poker hard, and I ducked and run out of the room.

Days later, our house still reeked of burned feathers, and chicken and dumplings.

Until the day my father passed away, the fear of him that was planted in my heart that night took root, branched out, and grew much, much larger than life as he created one frightening incident after another for me to grow up on.

Reader 4 sits as guitar begins. Ron sings standing, upstage center.

RON

PRAY FOR THE CHILDREN *(accompanied by guitar)*

We are living in a country where the young are sacrificed
There are those who hold no value in the beauty of a life
There are children in this country who are suffering and in pain
‘Cause nobody’s caring for them, only God knows all their names.

(Chorus)

Let’s pray for the children -- pray for the children
In God’s eyes they’re pure and perfect, every one’s a precious sight
If we thought more about them, we couldn’t live here without them
Pray that God will send the healing to help them make it through the night.

See the little child who’s crying, she can’t see the reason why
That Mom and Daddy can’t be happy, they can’t learn to stop their fights
See the little boy who’s hurting, he’s been abused and left alone
It’s time to open up our eyes, and think about what’s going on.

(Chorus)

Let’s pray for the children -- pray for the children
In God’s eyes they’re pure and perfect, every one’s a precious sight
If we thought more about them, we couldn’t live here without them
Pray that God will send the healing to help them make it through the night.

(Tag)

Pray that God will send the healing
To help them make it through the night.

READER 2

I guess that if there’s anything more painful than to see a woman come in to the Hope House, who’s been beaten physically and emotionally, it’s the child who’s by her side, who’s been through the same thing.

READER 1

I don't think there's anything in the world like a child -- the gifts that a child brings. A child sees everything, hears everything, remembers everything. And they act upon it.

READER 2

A lady who had been abused really badly came into the shelter one time with her 3-year old daughter and 15-month old son. This particular day, the woman was holding her little girl, and a staff member was holding the little boy on her lap. The girl had asked to do something or another, and the mother had said no. Well, she just threw a fit. She was lashing out at her Mom, yelling and hitting her. The little boy was looking out the window and heard the commotion. He turned and saw the little girl beating on his mother, and he leaped out of the arms of the woman who was holding him, ran straight to them, and began beating on his sister and crying. Fifteen months old.

READER 3

The only place I felt safe when I was a kid was outside in the woods -- close enough to the house where I could hear if something was going on. Then I wouldn't be trapped inside, you see.

READER 2

I felt safe near a window, because in my mind, if I heard Daddy killing Mommy, I could go out the window. I always had a plan.

READER 1

I was the oldest so he mostly came after me first. I'd hide in the closet and knock on the wall to warn my brothers when it all started, and they'd be ready.

READER 2

We had a big, long hallway in our house, and one night I heard him start down it, and he was really mad. He was beating on the walls with his fists so hard the whole house was shaking. And I thought this is it. He's going to kill us tonight.

READER 3

I heard footsteps comin' to my door in the night, and I grabbed for the butcher knife I kept underneath the spare pillow on my bed. I clutched both my little hands around the big handle and waited. But he didn't come in. I collapsed in a heap, my heart was beating so hard, and I thought I just can't live like this anymore. I picked up the Bible and it happened to open on Ezekiel, and there was a verse that said something about God destroyin' our fear, our traps, and our enemies. Well, it didn't look like God was going to go in there and slay my Daddy. But maybe He would slay my fear, stop my shaking. Maybe He would love me.

Reader 4, seated in chair on platform, stage left, rises, faces audience, and reads.

READER 4

I remember one time when me an' my little brother was out in the woods galloping around on our stick horseys with our pint-size dog, Tiger, runnin' at our heels, an' we got thirsty. So, we went to

the spring for a drink. We passed the dipper back'ards and for'ards, 'tween us, then we led the horseys to the spring so they could get a drink.

Right then we saw a brown snake was a-swimmin' 'round in the spring. Well, we wasn't scared of that snake 'cause we knowed a water snake wasn't poison. We poked at it with our stick-horses for awhile, then we flipped it outta the water.

It landed smack dab on Tiger's back. Tiger leaped on it. That snake wrapped itself around Tiger and they rolled round an round on the ground with Tiger a-squallin' ever time the snake struck him. You couldn't tell where one ended and the other started.

We kept throwin' the snake back on Tiger ever' time he got loose from it. When the snake finally got stuck on Tiger, we prized it off him, kilt it, and throwed it up in a tree like we always seen Daddy do.

By then Tiger was actin' plum quare and was so swelled up that he looked more like a fat, little pig than our dog. He was staggerin' round like he was drunk.

We run to the house and told Mommy that a water snake bit Tiger and something was wrong with him!

Mommy took one look at him and told us to go git Daddy!

We run so fast our feet didn't touch the ground 'til we reached the cornfield Daddy was a-hoein' in. When he seen how scared we was, he got scared too.

We told him what happened and lit out back to the house.

When Daddy seen Tiger he was sure it wasn't no watersnake what bit that dog. Right off he wanted us to show him what tree we throwed the snake in.

Daddy throwed rocks up in the tree to get the snake down. Then he stretched it out on the ground in front of us, and told us to git down closer where we could see its head.

He made shore each and ever' one of us knowed the difference between a copperhead and a watersnake.

Guitar music begins, Kim and Ron sing as they move downstage center.

KIM AND RON

WEDDING BELL WALTZ *(accompanied by guitar)*

Run and tell Momma she'll never believe
Her little girl is going away.
Run tell Poppa surely he knows
That every little boy grows up one day.

(Chorus)

We'll dance, dance the Wedding Bell Waltz
Dance all our cares away.
Dance, dance the Wedding Bell Waltz
'Cause we're getting married today.

Run tell the preacher, come quick as he can.
There's a woman down here in love with a man.
And there's a man down here who's ready for a wife.
Together we're starting out a new life.

(Chorus)

Kim and Ron return upstage center as Reader 3 begins.

READER 3

When I first met my husband, he was so good to me. He brought me flowers every day. He took me everywhere I wanted to go. Bought me all kinds of presents. I felt so special and pretty. I looked in his eyes, and all I could see was my own reflection. When he asked me to get married, I thought I'd died and gone to heaven. Everybody said he was a good boy, and my Mama just loved him.

READER 2

I guess he put me up on a pedestal so high there was nowhere to go but down. Not long after we got married, he started getting jealous. I tried to be careful, you know, not do anything to make him that way. But it didn't help. It seemed like he just got worse and worse to the point that I wasn't allowed out of the house unless he was with me -- not even to go visit my mom and sisters. I thought he would get over it after we had children. He was a good man. He worked hard.

READER 1

I don't know where I am going
I don't know where I've been
I thought my life had a purpose
But I look around and see none.
Maybe I have never existed.
Maybe I am no one.

READER 3

People don't know the shape you're in. They just don't know. The police don't know. They turned a blind eye for so many years until here lately. They have the abuse law to enforce now. That's great, but they should have done that 20 or 30 years ago. But when I get so low I think I can't stand it, I usually get a book and read it or crochet, keep my mind occupied you know. You can't give up and you can't just sit there and tell people over and over what it was like because people can't understand. Nobody does except for you that's been through it too. When you try to tell, some calls you a liar. Some just flat out don't care.

READER 2

The only reason I stayed with him was for my kids. I left him once but my family didn't help me as much as I thought they would so I stayed 15 years longer than I should have. I couldn't have no fun. I couldn't talk to no people. He got jealous. When my boys was teenagers, they'd bring home friends with them, and my husband would accuse me of sleepin' with ever one of 'em. And he's done that ever since I've knowed him. Now that's awful. Your husband don't even trust you. Especially when you didn't do anything to cause it. All three of my children hate their dad. I always feel bad about that.

READER 3

I had the kids and they were little. My kids were more important to me than myself. I've done without to support them. My husband would go and buy expensive things for himself, and we'd have to do without. I had to wear my clothes until they became rags. Sometimes my mom would give me some clothes of hers, but she didn't have much herself. Today I can get anything I want, but I don't want it. I'm not used to it. I feel guilty just from going to buy me a pair of shoes.

READER 2

If there's one thing I'm worn out with, it's people saying to me, "Well, why don't you just leave," like they think I want to live in all this pain and misery. Do they ever ask, "Well, why doesn't he just stop?" I think that would be a better question to spend your time thinking about. "Why doesn't he just stop?"

READER 1

One time my husband beat me so hard he broke several ribs and my eyes swelled shut. I couldn't get out of the house to get to the hospital. Besides, I was so ashamed. I didn't want anybody to see me like that. The worst part was going to bed with him that night. When he was finished, I lay there beside him until I could tell from his breathing that he was asleep. I got up and got his gun, and I was going to kill him in his sleep, for I knew that that was the only way I'd have a chance. But I was crying so much, and my eyes hurt so bad, and I couldn't hardly breathe with my chest hurting like it did, that I just sat down on the floor and gave up. I thought, he'll wake up and see me with this gun and he'll take it and kill me and this will all be over. But then I thought about the kids. If I was gone what would happen to them? I put the gun away and got back in bed. Every time he touched me, I wanted to throw up.

The next morning I knew I had to get out. I gathered the children, put a few things in a bag, and called the shelter. I'd talked to them about a year before. I knew what to do – I just never could do it. I had to leave everything I owned, everything -- pictures of my family, Grandma's dishes, the kid's dog. It was like my house burned down, and I couldn't have all the familiar things I was used to anymore -- except it was still there, you know. But I knew he would never let me have anything out of the house. He always told me he would take the kids. I just prayed that wouldn't happen, but if there was any way to take them, I knew he would. And if there was any way he could kill me, I knew he would do that.

READER 2

My daddy's a preacher and he's been real mad at me because I won't go back with my husband. He says I need to forgive him and give him another chance. Well, that's what I've been doing for four

years, and it's about got me killed so many times I can't count. I just don't think my daddy understands that he could lose me, that my husband will kill me. I think that's too hard for him to think about.

READER 1

I think, aren't we the most wonderful people in the world because we take all this abuse then turn around and forgive them like Jesus does. Well, maybe we don't exactly forgive them, but we stay with them or go back to them and take care of them like nothing ever happened.

READER 2

Let me tell you something, sister, we are not their redeemer. Jesus is, and he gave his life for them, so I don't see why we have to give our lives to them too. Yeah, we do have to forgive them, for our own selves -- for our own healing -- but we don't have to die for them. It's like it says in Proverbs, "The prudent see danger and take refuge."

READER 3

I say that if you think you are like Jesus by staying in a situation where your life and your children's lives are in danger, you are wrong. Jesus gave His life that all of us could live. He wants us to make sacrifices only to the glory of the Father. Giving your life to an abuser is hardly glorifying the Father in my book. There's no glory in it.

Kim and Ron begin singing from upstage center, rise, slowly move downstage center.

KIM AND RON

WINGS TO FLY *(a capella)*

One day, the Lord will come
And give me wings to fly
Then my heart will soar
And carry me over the mountains

Like a hawk, I'll rise above
Life's toils and treacherous snares
I'll shake this earthly form
And touch the face of God

The wind shall bear me homeward
The rain shall cleanse my soul
The sun shall dry my tears
And I shall weep no more

KIM

There's a story about when our people first came to our mountains.

RON

There's a story they tell about that time when there was a boat wreck and everybody on it was drowned except one man.

KIM

This feller was lost and give up any idea of ever findin' his way back to his own people. He'd been months and weeks all by hisself.

RON

He come upon a deer, killed it. He looked around for some shelter, a place to build a fire and cook up his deer. He spied a cave off in the distance, so he started dragging that deer over to the mouth of that cave.

KIM

The entrance to that cave was all wore slick like somebody . . .

RON

. . . or something . . .

KIM

. . . had gone in and out of it right regular-like.

RON

That man, he took some notice of this . . .

KIM

. . . but he didn't pay too much notice, 'cause he was all tired from luggin' that deer around, so he just went on in.

RON

Got him some sticks and a fire started . . .

KIM

. . . and commenced to broil that deer.

RON

It was just about done, when all of a sudden right behind him he heared a great big . . .

KIM (*as hairy woman*)

. . . "GROWL!"

RON

. . . looked around, and there stood a . . .

RON & KIM

. . . great, big, hairy woman.

RON

Now let me tell you that feller was scared. That woman must a-been seven . . .

KIM

. . . or eight foot tall,

RON

. . . a-standin' there with a deer throwed over her shoulder.

KIM

She was lookin' at that man and lookin' at that fire.

RON

I don't reckon she'd ever seen a fire before . . .

KIM

. . . or a white man neither!

RON

Well, that man, he didn't know what to do. So he just reached over, pulled off a deer leg, and reached it up to her.

KIM

She hesitated for a little, sniffed at it, then she took a bite out of it—and then she gobbled that whole thing up in one bite.

RON

Then she tore a whole haunch off the deer that she was a-carryin' and throwed it over to that man, wanted him to cook it up. Now as that white man was a-startin' to put it on the fire, he heared another growl,

KIM

. . . a long, low . . .

RON (*as hairy man*)

. . . "Growl!"

KIM

Looked up and there was the hairy man!

RON

That white man, he knowed he was goner for sure . . .

KIM (*as hairy woman*)

but the hairy woman jumped on the hairy man and they fit and rolled over and over, and fit. 'Til finally, the hairy woman killed the hairy man.

RON

So that white feller, he just stayed on there at the cave. Atter awhile, he just took up with the hairy woman—lived with her you know. When she'd go out a-huntin', she'd carry him out with her and set him on a log while she kilt all the game and drug it back to the cave. That feller had it made, didn't have to do nothin'! Year or so passed and that hairy woman . . . well, she had a . . .

KIM

. . . "baby."

RON

That feller he'd stay at the cave and mind the baby while she hunted. He was a-teachin' the baby and the woman to speak his own language.

KIM

Then one day while the hairy woman was out huntin' game, some people from that man's own country found him.

RON

He knowed this was his only chance to get back to his own people, and he wanted to take his baby with him, but them fellers told him "NO! A half-hairy baby will never make it in our country!" He begged them to let him take the baby, but they wouldn't hear of it. So he left that woman and his baby, got down to the boat, and, as they's a-shovin' off, they heared a growl. Turned around . . .

KIM (*as hairy woman*)

. . . seed the hairy woman a-runnin' towards them with her baby in her arms. She waded in a-screamin', but the water got too swift and deep and she couldn't go no further . . .

RON

she held that baby up over her head . . .

KIM

. . . like she was a-sayin' for him not to leave, "On account of our baby!"

RON

The man he was a-cryin' and a-motioning her to go back. Tellin' her, "I got to go!"

KIM

That woman let out a big growl . . .

RON

. . . and tore that baby clean in two . . .

KIM

. . . and flung one half of it out to that desertin' man, and a-huggin' the other half . . .

RON

. . . she turned away and walked on back to the cave.

KIM

People say that's one of the oldest stories in our mountains—and there are some still telling it today.

READER 3

The first time I heard it, I couldn't hardly figure out what I was supposed to think.

KIM

Well, I'll tell you, all I want to know here today is, *Which half are we?*

Guitar begins.

READER 1

We thank you for listening to our stories. Now they're your stories too.

Readers and the Two Women witnessing the play move downstage center to join Kim and Ron.

RON

We're going to sing one last song. We'd like you to join in with us on the chorus.

All

ONE DAY WE SHALL BE FREE (*accompanied by guitar*)

When I heard the music ringing
When I heard the voices singing
Made me raise my eyes looking for a song
Found my voice and I sang along

(Chorus)

One day, we shall be free
One day, we shall be free
Ain't you got a right, to the tree of life
One day, we shall be free

We better listen to the voices
Telling us what we need to know

Where there is a song, there is hope
Make a difference before you go

(Chorus)

There's a way to live your life
Find something to believe
Then sing the truth everyday
The truth shall make us free

(Chorus)

THE END