



## A NOTE FROM PLAYWRIGHT JOSHUA HARMON

Before she died in April of 2018, my grandmother asked me to write about our family. I said I would (what kind of monster denies a dying woman her last wish?). Besides, I'd wanted to write about her for a while. Now I had permission. But permission is a long road from actually doing it, and once I did, how would it feel to put something so nakedly personal into the world?

Fortunately, I didn't have to grapple with that question for long: the pandemic struck in 2020 and theatre shut down. It's hard to remember, but in those first months, it seemed it might never be safe again to put on plays. I realized I could write the play, honor my promise to my grandmother, and all without having to suffer the consequences of actually doing it! A win-win. So in the quiet, isolated fall of 2020, I went back through old letters and recordings, wrote a first draft, and promptly put it away. But then theatre returned, and I was faced with a dilemma: I wanted to keep working on the play. I wanted to bury it on my hard drive. I wanted to bring it to life. I wanted to make sure no one ever saw it. In other words, ambivalence. What to do?

Feeling uncertain, I turned, as I often do, to Joni Mitchell-- my north star. In a documentary about her life that I've seen too many times, she said, "I was demanding of myself a deeper and greater honesty, more and more revelation in my work in order to give it back to the people where it goes into their lives and nourishes them and changes their direction and, you know, makes lightbulbs go off in their head, and makes them feel and, you know, it isn't vague, it strikes against the very nerves of their life and in order to do that, you have to strike against the very nerves of your own."

That cri-de-coeur pushed me to keep going, and guided me through rewrites, rehearsals and previews. Whatever the personal cost, I too demanded of myself greater honesty, more revelation. The result? Audience members-- strangers-- come up to me after the play to share their own stories, of recently deceased parents and grandparents who hurt them, or loved them-- or both, of siblings they no longer speak to, of addictions that damaged their relationships. Those exchanges have made it all worthwhile.

What's more, despite the subject matter, making the play was a joyful experience. Led by the gifted and deeply collaborative Trip Cullman, our brave threesome--Joanna Gleason, Jeanine Serralles and Andrew Barth Feldman-- transformed what had been painful into something new. I guess that is what art can do, not only for an audience, but also for the people who make it.

It was painful. It was joyful. I feel lucky to have been able to release it into the world, and I thank you for your consideration.

Best,

Joshua Harmon