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A Dramatic Interpretation of Jake's Women

In an Educational Setting

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A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Communication

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Professional Communication

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by

Douglas W. Reiser

December 2012

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Committee Member, Patrick Cronin

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Keywords: Acting, Technique, Relaxation, Imaginary, Emotional, Preperation

## ABSTRACT

A Dramatic Interpretation of Jake's Women In an Educational Setting

by

Douglas Reiser

The area of investigation in the *Jake's Women* thesis resides with the actor's preparation in the portrayal of a character who struggles with the pain of loss and betrayal. The acting technique explored centers around the psychology behind the emotional and physical aspects of acting. The results rely on the thoughts and feelings of sensitivity in the actor's body. Development of an actor's inner technique and outer instrument is explored and implemented. An actor's belief in the body to produce effective imaginary people or place within a scene rests in the actor's ability to allow his or her instrument to create real-life emotion. This process of belief is accomplished through the trained technique of relaxation exercises, thus, giving the actor the discipline to concentrate on the process of creating a believable character. The human condition becomes the central focus in the honest representation of a man suffering to forgive and forget his troubles.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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My gratitude goes out to the cast of *Jake's Women* for showing incredible vibrancy, cunningness, honesty, truth, and warm voices that created a presence never to be forgotten. You share my same commitment and desire to embrace cultural diversity with a passion that captivates audiences with pure excitement and entertainment, provoking laughter and intense emotion. I respect the time, energy, efforts, and commitment from you all to make *Jake's Women* remarkably exquisite.

Thank you Pat Cronin for picking up the phone when I called the ETSU Theatre department expressing my desire to you that I was interested in getting a masters degree. You are the man that gracefully laid out my grad school options, unique opportunities, and world of possibilities for an extended future in the world of theatre. You are truly an inspiration. Thank you Bobby Funk for being an influential actor, director, and teacher. You are the consummate actor's director by letting our words speak to our bodies, allowing organic physical actions to take place. You have given me a new found confidence with an ability to be a better actor by listening and trusting myself. Lastly, thanks to ETSU's entire Communications Department for giving me a chance. The faith you have in me shows the trust and hope I have in myself to be a better person. I thank you all for your hard work and inspiration that will never be forgotten.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Since childhood, I have been caught up in the glamour of celebrity and the fame that comes with it. I never thought too much about the craft but have always been intrigued by the attention it brings to the general public and the media. It was not until my teen years that I discovered there are techniques behind the art of acting that can prepare you for life as a working actor. I was advised to train young, develop self-discipline, and find a technique that works for me. As Hull (1985) states, "those who begin training while still young have an advantage because of their greater flexibility and susceptibility" (p.10). As a faculty member of the Lee Strasberg Theatre Institute, Hull was "the first and only instructor ever asked by Strasberg to organize and teach the course 'Understanding of the Method'" (p.3). Hull taught actors on many different levels ranging from community theatre to professional theatre. The classes she instructed led many actors and directors in specific training to hone their craft.

Generally, young people have the ability to learn the emotional, mental, and physical aspects of acting faster than older people. To train young means there is a stronger foundation for growth in the present and also into the future. This was important to know because I was serious about pursuing this career as a profession.

Most of the business is based on looks, but you need talent to back those looks up if you plan on having a long, illustrious career as an actor or even a short but fulfilling one. One never fully retires from acting. An actor must be strong-willed to persevere in a business that is based on looks, who you know, who's your agent, what you've done,



what you can do for your employers, and, lastly, your talent. Notice how talent was listed last on my short list of requirements. For talent to be considered last is one of the unfortunate truths of the entertainment business. My words of advice are to be prepared, be mentally and physically sharp, and observe the people around you.

In the entertainment business an actor needs to have good talent representation or at least someone who has faith and trust in you. An agent or talent manager is someone who submits your headshot, resume, or portfolio for film, television, or theatre projects you may be considered for. The casting director or producer, are the ones who matter, and request criteria is based upon your looks, body type, sex, and talent. They work hard to get you the right auditions so the people that matter in the business can see you. To succeed as an actor, you also want to meet the writers who are constantly successful at getting their projects out there for the producers. Whether its television, film, or theatre, it is your job to get to know as many people as possible by getting your face and talent seen. Even if you have a talent agent or manager, it is your job to get up every morning and make phone calls, do follow ups, do your mailings of headshots and resumes, take acting classes, and network with as many people in the business as you can. It does not help you to hang out with other actors who are out of work and complaining that they do not have a job. You need to be around people who are motivated, auditioning, working, optimistic, and positive about their career as actors. Also, stay fit by going to the gym. Working out was a ritual of mine when I first moved to Los Angeles. I was told by other professional actor friends of mine that this is a requirement you must fulfill, if not for an agent or producer, but do it for yourself. I was in the gym 4 to 5 days a week working out

with various celebrities and working actors. Your body is your instrument, as Hagen (1973) states, “if we understand the necessity for developing an inner technique as well as our outer instrument” (p.22). Uta Hagen was an actor and drama teacher who originated the role of Martha in Edward Albee’s famous play *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. Hagen was passionate about acting and taught us that a people must treat their instrument with the love and respect it deserves. This will make an actor mentally stronger and psychologically ready for the challenge of a highly competitive business.

I discovered I wanted to pursue the career of an actor at the age of 16. This was a time in my life when I had to make a decision on what I wanted to do with my life. The decision on what my major would be at a university or college was a complicated decision to make. I really had no idea what sparked my interest or the desires I had inside of me to pursue acting. I spent my whole life watching sports and playing tennis, basketball, and fencing competitively. I was never good enough in any of these sports to take my talents to the next level, knowing my size would be a hindrance. I knew it would take a tremendous amount of skill and luck to make it as an athlete. My self-confidence seemed to lie internally. I instinctively felt sensitive to people and other people's emotions. According to Strasberg (1965), “talent in the actor, means that he is endowed with sensitivity” (p.171). The sensitivity in me was clear but not known until I discovered there was a block within my inner self. As Strasberg said, “sensitivity or emotional response can be present and yet be a problem because the actor cannot control it” (p.172). The emotional instinct I inherited from my mother became a recognizable characteristic within my family. I knew, subconsciously, there was something in the

world that could stimulate my inner thoughts and feelings. Ultimately, that understanding brought me to the world of acting.

As a child, there was always something burning inside of me, an internal place with an instinctual feeling that was yearning to be explored. I had an emotional block that prevented me from expressing my true feelings. My father silenced my emotions in the confines of my home due to the repression I endured. The missing element in my life was my inability to communicate at a level I knew I was capable of doing. I have worked hard at trying to fill a void by taking a road to a place untraveled, unexplored, and untouched. That internal place would eventually be fulfilled by my decision to pursue acting. Acting is defined by “the art of acting or representing a character on stage or before cameras” (Acting, 2012). There is nothing in life comparable to the ability to express an emotion from the inner depths of one's soul before a live audience. We can truthfully say to achieve honesty in acting is the ability to feel one’s impulse and belief with truth.

### **My Acting Technique**

In preparation for an acting role, the actor must have a sense of truth and honesty to make the character believable. To trust oneself in the findings of inner truths in the portrayal of a character, an actor needs to find the reality by working from the inside out. This is accomplished by personalizing the imaginary actions of the role until it is believable. In his influential book *An Actor Prepares*, Stanislavski (1975) claims, "awakening a sense of faith in the reality of your sensations in a process called justification of the part" (p.122). The actor must be able to rely heavily on belief and truth

as coexisting components for an actor to create the character and live the part. The actions must be convincing to the actor as to convey a real life situation to the audience.

My acting technique is based on “the method” developed by Lee Strasberg, pioneered by Constantin Stanislavski, first Artistic Director of the Moscow Art Theatre, home to the “top performers in the world” (p.65). At the age of 16, I was introduced to Method Acting by John Flood, who at that time in the early 1970s, was the only young black man studying with Lee Strasberg. Flood taught me, as did Strasberg (1965), “the human being who acts is the human being who lives” (p.78). The difficulty with this notion is finding a way to believe and convince oneself to be effective in the imaginative work. This begins the process of creating the moment in which the imagination starts to work. As Strasberg states, “the imagination to the unconscious and the subconscious is the strongest lever in artistic work” (p. 82). This means the deeper the feelings and emotions are pushed into the soul, the stronger the impulses will be once the actor permits himself to deal with the suppressed emotion. The willingness to trust those feelings, go with the scene, and make the audience believe is essential for the actor. According to Strasberg (1965), “on stage the actor cannot be one-third actor, one-third critic, and one-third audience. He must be ninety-percent actor, a little bit critic and a little bit audience” (p.84). If I go on stage 100% actor, than I am allowing myself to not have control over my actions and the actions of my fellow cast members. The key is to have complete control, and if an actor does not have it, then problems will arise.

The “method” is an acting technique used to train actors through relaxation, sense memory, and affective memory. It enables an actor to draw upon emotions, memories,

and personal experiences. These exercises help to relax and immerse the actor into the character, developing a real-life thought or emotion. Through internalizing the emotions, the actor cultivates the external emotions such as developing facial expressions, tones in the voice, and changes in physical movements. According to Hull (1985) “the method is a composite of the acting processes great actors have employed over the centuries to help them conquer the various problems that arise in performance” (p. 10). The Method finds the truth in an actor’s behavior engaged in illusory circumstances. As defined by Krasner (2000), “it trains the actor to make demands on the body through the use of imaginary stimulation, so that the body reacts naturally and creatively” (p. 5).

For an actor to perform, he or she must enter a state of relaxation. The relaxation process can be performed by sitting in an armless a chair or lying on the floor, depending on the actor’s comfortable state. According to Stanislavski (1975), "this process of self-observation and removal of unnecessary tenseness should be developed to the point where it becomes a subconscious, mechanical habit" (p.93). The objective is to concentrate on your body by moving your arms, legs, neck, and face in slow, controlled movements, breathing into those tense areas of your body, getting your body into a “rag doll” state. You must remain fully relaxed and concentrated. The point is to be aware of your body and rid yourself of any tension you may have. As Strasberg states, “the actor is an instrument that pays attention” (p.85). The actor must fully believe in the process if relaxation is to begin before the natural process of substitution. The process of substitution requires an actor to be specific in his or her personal choices. According to Hull (1985), “when the objects and people specified by the playwrights are vague and

abstract to the actor, he or she can substitute objects or persons that have personal meaning” (p.155). This will create the useful material for the actor to bring to the text and subtext of the play in which the action was written. Relaxation will uncover the true personality of him or herself in the character, encouraging the emergence of an actor that is confident, and open to respond and react to the given circumstance in the scene.

### **Purpose of Thesis**

The purpose of this thesis is to record a critical adaptation of *Jake's Women* based on an acting experience in a collegiate production. The setting for student actors and designers involved with the production of *Jake's Women* support that experience. The actor's preparation includes specific ideas to implement important objectives within the play as collaborator and the way the actor functions within the context of the play. One belief that is explored is the belief that greater collaboration allows the actor a sense of authority and responsibility within the working process. In the chapters that follow, I document the application of these techniques to the rehearsal process as well as analyze their strengths and weaknesses in the educational setting.

This first chapter touches on my opinions regarding my acting style and the role of actors in the production process. Chapter 2 focuses on the history of the play and playwright. I then move on to give an analysis of the play and the main character in the play, Jake. Chapter 3 includes journals of rehearsals, performance, the process and discoveries of working with actors in a collaborative setting. Lastly, Chapter 4 sums up the process, talks about what worked and didn't work with the director, the acting, technical decisions, and the overall effectiveness of the production goals.

## Discoveries

Every time an actor steps on the stage, a new discovery is found. Whether it is the moment before the curtain goes up or when the lights go on, you are ready to act. The beauty of performing in live theatre lies in the talent of the actor. According to Strasberg (1965), “technique can lead to real experience on stage, but that experience springs ultimately from his talent and his human nature, not from the technique himself” (p.130). Whether physical or psychological, this technique comes from personalizing choices that will give the actor room to explore the reality of the scene. As Strasberg states, “personalization is a technical device that gives the actor concentration through remembering carefully and concretely an actual person as a model for the character the actor is portraying” (p.131). The result of personalization is behavior that emotionally opens the actor up with relevance to the nature of the scene and the reality behind it. The focus becomes all about the actor and the given circumstance of the scene.

When the lights come on the stage for the first time, the stakes are high. It is the responsibility of the actor to be prepared and ready to begin constructing the foundation of the play. For instance, in the opening scene of Act I in *Jake's Women*, Jake is sitting at his desk talking on the phone. The preparation behind this type of technical scene involves truth in the logic of the phone. The material is in the dialogue, but the delivery of the lines must be truthful and relay a believable message to the audience. The trick is to convince the audience a phone conversation is taking place and the words of the playwright are logically spoken and make sense. As Strasberg (1965) claims, “the actor must constantly respond to stimuli that are imaginary, yet this must happen not only just

as it happens in life, but actually more fully and expressively” (p. 78). The task for the actor is to fully recreate the reality of the scene, leading up to the real-life emotion while avoiding mechanical issues that lead to blocked senses, which are needed for actors to react naturally to imaginary stimuli.

There is the involvement of discipline that an actor is required to master in his or her career, in particular, preparation. As Strasberg (1965) claims, “preparation incites the actor a logic of thought and feeling and behavior so that he is not limited to the conventional tone or characterization that tends to arise from too immediate of what the words suggest” (p. 133). The dialogue asks for a frustrated and annoyed Jake, listening to the verbal communication of his sister Karen, responding with acerbic tone of words. The main objective for me, as Jake, lies in my preparation and the work that leads up to the first lines spoken in the play, “Hello?...Yes, Karen, I’m working...No, I’m not always working, I’m just working now...Okay, I’m working every time you call, what is it?” (Simon, 1990, pp. 7-8). The tone of Jake's voice has defense written all over it as the exchange of words may feel uneasy to the audience, sensing irritability. Shortly after this scene, Simon's writing becomes lighter when Maggie enters and they reminisce about the first time they met. This opening scene demonstrates the attitude of the play and the literary technique of Neil Simon bringing extreme high and low variations of emotion within each scene of the entire play.

Neil Simon brilliantly dictates the moment of feeling within the context of the play, energizing the ability of the actors and the audience to listen. The power of dialogue in performing the monologues on stage in front of a live audience creates an



intimate dimension of emotions. This is a feeling only I, as the actor, can explain. I never play to the audience but speak to them. For instance in the first monologue of Act I, Jake faces the audience and explain to them “reality is a bummer. God, how much better writing is” (Simon, 1990, p.12). This monologue continues into an expression of the man Jake and who he really is. Jake explains the importance of his writing and the little room he spends most of his time in being “a slave to the thing he loves” (p.12). Jake becomes a slave to his is writing, which is the basis of all his current real-life problems with his marriage.

The desired connection between me, the actor, and the audience is to have empathy and identification with my character. This becomes the true sphere of the actor in revealing the soul of oneself and unveiling the soul of the character. For instance, Strasberg (1965) claims, “the way an audience reaches out to me when I am presenting a character who is alive on stage” (p.213). For example, within each of Jake’s monologues, there is an emotional contact with the audience. There is the willingness to unveil layers of the mind that gradually uncovers the mask protecting his soul—this present state of vulnerability within myself and within Jake. As confirmed by Hagen (1973), “in order to reveal what’s at stake for the character on the deepest level and allow for pertinent communication with the audience, I must make my ultimate expression *more* vulnerable in life” (p.214). This expression comes with the strength and specificity of character choice. For instance, one of the most tender moments in the play is Jake's scene with Julie and Molly in Act II. In this scene Jake's first wife, Julie requests to see Molly. In

Jake's mind, he complies and an emotional scene develops. What results is a highly emotional scene where actors and audience experience loss, forgiveness, and redemption.

With the character, I worked on the external aspects, specifically the vocal and physical state of Jake. These technical areas included my exploration of the New York accent. I made a conscious decision to not over accentuate a New York accent but to let the regional dialect come naturally. This process helped expose itself as the rehearsals progressed and matured into a place where I felt comfortable with myself sounding like Jake. I did not want to force an accent to be Jake but to allow myself room for my natural New York accent to reveal itself in an unforced way.

I was able to do this by placing my focus on Jake's vulnerability. He is a wounded soul who has become a soulless man. I explored his erratic behavior, disorderly articulation of language, and projection of verbal sounds. As Hagen (1973) says, "you will not be heard if your verbal actions are general and don't reach their mark on the actors' side of the footlights" (p.214). I felt Jake was always present just outside of the main light. There were hints of his physical presence in center stage or where the spotlight shone, but due to his erratic behavior, it is difficult to pinpoint a specific place, other than his desk, where he may reside for a lengthy period of time. Jake's desk was placed on a platform stage left, creating for me the sense of Jake looking down on everyone from his perch. The feeling of Jake always observing others from above was accomplished with this setting. Also, there was a chair placed downstage center where Jake would end throughout various points in the play as his security place where he could take himself out of hiding behind his desk, away from his writing and exposed to the

audience. It was in this chair we could see a more relaxed Jake, stationed in one place and not running from one side of the apartment to the other, frantically chasing a real-life or imaginary person. Jake found comfort in this chair, a place of exposure not a place of refuge, like his office represents.

The intimacy of the set and space inside the theatre made the communication with the audience a lot less technical. The physical movements on the stage were contained in the confinement of the apartment. This sustained the communication for the duration of the play, from the moment the play opened to the final curtain. There was no exit for Jake, but a touching of Jake and Maggie's fingers, symbolizing the joining of two souls at the end of the play that marked the transfiguration of two people coming together after years of emotional difficulty. This was Jake's exit, finally, after two acts and 2 1/2 hours of emotional turmoil, torment, and self-reconciliation.

This symbolic and touching moment between Jake and Maggie is just one example of the privilege we actors have by living in the moment on stage. This is the kind of moment that transcends any experience a human being will have in one's lifetime. The reality of being in the moment and manifesting intellectual choices in the character communicates meaningful dialogue with the audience. As Hagen (1973) eloquently states, "bring an audience the revelation of the failings and aspirations, the dreams and desires, the negative and the positive aspects of human beings" (p. 222). Our goals as actors should be set with the commitment we have as artists to bring the humanistic foundation of real emotion and understanding to the moment of intimacy. *Jake's Women* encompasses all of these things with vitality, passion, and truth.

## CHAPTER 2

### RESEARCH

#### **History of Jake's Women**

When Neil Simon's name is attached to a play's title, it usually means it will be a hit to audiences and critics. Neil Simon started writing *Jake's Women* in the late 1980s as a semi-autobiographical story reflecting his life as a writer in New York City. Simon turned his life into material, baring the naked truth about his private life in his play *Jake's Women*.

In March 1990, *Jake's Women* premiered at the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego with critical reviews high enough to give Neil Simon a reason to close the play after only 1 month. This was the first time in Simon's career as a writer, having already written 24 plays that he has ever closed a show. As a result, Simon began rewriting the play before any attempts were made to bring it to Broadway. Simon rewrote most of the play, and according to Churnin (1991), Simon said "the play is 70% rewritten." This was because the audience and critics claimed they did not know enough about the lead character Jake. In his response below, Simon discusses the transformation of his title character.

"All he did was react to the women in his life, who were badgering him, trying to get him to open up... So I introduced the device of him talking to the audience. Then he became the fullest, richest character in the play, because the audience knew things I never thought I would reveal about Jake—and possibly about myself."  
(Simon, Paris Review)

This critical change of adding personal monologues creates Jake as the centerpiece of the show. Jake is constantly engaged in real and imaginary conversations

with the women in his life: his dead wife Julie, current wife Maggie, daughter Molly “at twelve and twenty-one”, his therapist Edith, and his sister Karen. Jake's character transformed from someone not only reacting to the women in the play but also connecting to the audience.

In March 1992, two years after its San Diego premiere, *Jake's Women* finally opened on Broadway at the Neil Simon Theater, starring Alan Alda, Helen Shriver, Joyce Van Patten, Kate Burton, Brenda Vaccaro, Talia Balsam, and Tracy Pollan (Molly at age 21). As reviewed by John Simon (April 6, 1992), "Jake's Women has the three benchmarks of a Simon success...full of genuinely funny one-liners; it has an excellent cast, savvily directed" (p.106). The cast, consisted primarily women, had over 150 years of acting experience in film and theatre between them. Jay Binder, casting director in New York, helped to create an ensemble of actors who seamlessly portrayed characters with the physical and emotional depth of Neil Simon. The women Jake is surrounded by are real, imaginary and varied by age as well as their mental, physical, and emotional traits.

With this, a couple of reviews explained the meaning of *Jake's Women* and the reason behind the truthful emotional challenges Neil Simon was going through in the most critical time of his life. According to New York Times reviewer Richards (1992) “from the evidence on the stage of the Neil Simon Theater, any man would be fortunate to know and love them. Jake, however, holds them at arm's length. Jake holds the world at arm's length. Jake is no damned good at intimacy” (¶ 6). The warmth and sensitivity written into each character helped Neil Simon come to terms with his truthful material.

The emotions were playfully exposed by Simon in each scene and every word uttered by the actors. The New York Times reviewer Frank Rich reviewed *Jake's Women*, "the play is essentially a rueful footnote to *Chapter Two*, Mr. Simon's breezy piece of fifteen years ago in which a young widower bounces back from mourning with remarkable agility once he meets a new dream girl" (Rich, 1992). *Chapter Two* revolves around Simon's remarriage after the death of his first wife. As a result, *Jake's Women* is the sad revelation of Simon finally coming to terms, after 10 years, of this loss and finding the comedy within his own thoughts. This play becomes the designated place where the body of the text furnishes the outcome to Simon's as a form of therapy.

The review of *Jake's Women* was comparing the play to that of a talk show about "men who hate women who love to hate women" (Rich, 1992). According to Weale (1992), "*Jake's Women* is another of those Neil Simon plays, like *Chapter Two*, in which bits of autobiography adhere to an uneasy mixture of comedy and soap opera" (p.23). This was a conscious decision well thought out by Simon that punctuated his style of writing. In *Jake's Women*, "there is a running gag about his writing their lines, even when they appear to break away from their potted speeches to puncture him with sharp one-liners" (p.23). This writing style plays into Simon's technique of creativity by incorporating reality with imagination and finding the comedy in a drama filled with the loss of a loved one.

In 1994, a couple of years after the Broadway premiere of *Jake's Women*, the Arena Players Repertory Theater in Long Island staged the play. New York Times reviewer Frank (1994) writes, "The overall effect of following Jake's self-absorbed quest

for self-revelation is similar to reading a three-dimensional pop-psych self-help manual” (¶ 7). Furthermore, Simon’s psychological dilemma was misinterpreted as maniacal and self-serving as opposed to an intimate connection with the audience engaging an important story.

The play still struggles to excite the audience by Jake delivering "more monologues than dialogue in the play, an intentional and interesting stage device" (Frank, 1994, ¶ 6). The audience was hard to please and found the "monologue" device incorporated by Simon incredibly boring. The audience interpreted from Jake’s monologue that he is a man acting disagreeable, always in a position of attack and single-minded within himself. This type of behavior acts a device in the psychology in the mind of a particular kind of actor that can relate to the audience, as a man you want to root for. As noted by Frank (1994) "it takes an actor capable of radiating warmth and intelligence to fill Jake with that intangible something that would appeal to all the women” (¶ 8). According to Frank (1994), “not only does a warmth-radiating actor allow Jake to be sexy, intelligent, and willful, but it also permits the women to play various aspects of an idealized "perfect" mother, an abundance of good advice, and plenty of love” (¶ 5). The women of Jake's life are summoned and present monologues about him, “painting the portrait of a sensitive and self-consumed Jake” (Frank, 1994, ¶ 8). The problem the audience at the Arena Players Repertory Theatre had with this production was with Neil Simon's writing, in which “we always seem to be laughing at someone, rarely with them” (Frank, 1994, ¶ 3). The audience found Jake’s monologues to be interesting decision by Simon but tiresome as the play moves along to a climatic ending.

## **History of Neil Simon**

Neil Simon is considered one of the world's most popular and successful playwrights. Simon was born in the Bronx on July 4, 1927, just before the Great Depression, and grew up in Washington Heights at the northern end of Manhattan. He was the younger of two sons born to his father, Irving Simon, a garment salesman, and his mother Mamie. His father would abandon the family for long periods of time, causing financial and emotional problems that made life very difficult for them. To cope with this abandonment, Neil Simon would give his family routine checkups with his toy stethoscope, which gave him the nickname Doc (Geitner, 1981). This was Simon's therapeutic way of finding a remedy for the emotional distress of his absent father while living through the pain of separation anxiety. Thus, Simon began writing comedy to provide laughter, a lifetime achievement for which he is most famous.

At the age of 16 Simon "attended New York University briefly from 1944-1945, enrolled in the Air Force training program and went on to the University of Denver (1945-46) where he began his career as a writer for the Army camp newspaper, the Rev-Meter as a sports editor" (Weitzman, 2011, ¶ 3). Soon after, he joined the Army where he began his writing career working for the Army's newspaper influencing "his most significant writing job in the early 1950s when he joined the staff of *Your Show of Shows*, Sid Caesar's landmark live television comedy series, with some of the best comic minds in television working for it including Mel Brooks, Woody Allen, Larry Gelbart, and Carl Reiner" (PBS Master Series, 2000). During that time period, Simon won Emmy Awards



for the 1956 and 1957 seasons of the *Sid Caesar Show* (Geitner, 1981). In an interview, Simon responded, “when I walked into *Your Show of Shows*, this was the most talented group of writers that up until that time had ever been assembled together” (PBS Master Series, 2000).

Neil Simon was nominated for several Emmy Awards for his television writing and moved to the theatre, where he quickly established himself as America's most successful commercial playwright. He accomplished this successful playwright status by creating one hit after another on Broadway beginning with *Come Blow Your Horn*, in which took Simon 6 years to write. In a review by Fahri (2006) Simon claims “he found the title for *Come Blow Your Horn* from one of his daughter’s nursery rhyme books, saying it turned out to be a so-so play that was turned into a so-so movie with Frank Sinatra” (¶ 9). This film would mark an illustrious beginning to many of his plays adapted to into films for years to come.

It was Simon’s older brother Danny, also a writer on *Your Show of Shows*, who brought Simon into the business and played a major role in his writing. It was his older brother Danny who divorced, moved in with another divorced man, and became the inspiration for *The Odd Couple* (1966), one of Simon’s most enduring successes. Although Danny began writing the story, he eventually handed it off to Simon, who soon after made it a popular show on Broadway. Soon after came the 1968 film version of *The Odd Couple* that starred Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau. The show was successful, well-received, and gave us the popular television series that soon followed.

During the 1966-67 season Simon had four shows running simultaneously with *Barefoot in the Park*, *The Odd Couple*, *Sweet Charity*, and *The Star Spangled Girl*.

During the 1970-71 Broadway season, theatre-goers saw *Plaza Suite*, *Last of the Red Hot Lovers*, and *Promises, Promises*. Critical acclaim slowly arrived for Simon despite the fact that he had had more hits than any other American playwright. The critics were harsh in their efforts to continuously discharge him as a writer of slapstick comedy and gag jokes.

In 1973 Simon finally found a major voice in comedy but entered a low period in his life, when his wife of 20 years died. Later that same year, he met and married his second wife, actress Marsha Mason. After 4 years, his 1977 play *Chapter Two* was considered one of his finest works. *Chapter Two* represents the grief of a newly remarried man trying to get his life back on track after the death of his wife. This was followed 2 years later by the two-character musical, *They're Playing Our Song*. Simon created a portrait of an individual and his family with his autobiographical trilogy of *Brighton Beach Memoirs* (1983), *Biloxi Blues* (1985), and *Broadway Bound* (1986) in which Simon found his greatest critical acclaim. Five years later Simon was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1991 for *Lost in Yonkers*. "His writing variously exposed the delicacy of the human psyche and made people laugh at themselves" (Weitzmann, 2011, ¶ 5). Some of Neil Simon's best-known plays include, *Plaza Suite*, *The Out of Towners*, *Rumors*, and *The Goodbye Girl*. Simon is a great writer, born with the incredible ability to integrate comedy and drama in everyday life situations. He has written dozens of plays and film scripts for major motion pictures that have been produced in many languages.

Neil Simon has written 28 plays, earning him more hits in the theater than any other American playwright. Simon has won four Tony Awards, two Emmys, numerous Screen Writers Guild Awards, and the Pulitzer Prize for drama. He has been showered with more Academy Award and Tony Award nominations than any other writer and is the only playwright to have four Broadway productions running simultaneously.

Talking of Neil Simon, the actor Jack Lemmon, star of *The Out of Towners* said, “Neil Simon has the ability to write characters — even the leading characters that we’re supposed to root for — that are absolutely flawed. They have foibles. They have faults. But, they are human beings. They are not all bad or all good; they are people we know” (PBS, 2000). At the Kennedy Center honoring Neil Simon with the Mark Twain award in 2006, actor Jason Alexander commented on how Simon is constantly working and rewriting scripts. Alexander is quoted as saying, “Simon got a brainstorm sitting quietly in a back room when the play *Broadway Bound* previewed twenty years ago one day, and a 25-minute scene was vaporized from the play. He's not only a great writer, he's a great cutter” (Fahri, 2006, ¶ 13). Throughout his 4 decade career, Simon's success came in exposing an honest and truthful portrayal of his American spirit from his own life experiences. Simon is truly adored and respected by his peers with the material for his plays, which took place in the working-class New York neighborhoods he knew very well as a child. According to PBS (2000), “one of Simon’s great achievements has been the insightful representation of the social atmosphere of those times in New York”.

For almost 40 years, Neil Simon has refreshed the stage with touching stories and animated characters, but his greatest gift has been the ability to bring humor from the

lives and distress of everyday people. As quoted in the book by Koprince (2002), Simon once told a group of fellow playwrights, " I don't think I'll ever give up writing because if I tried, I couldn't. When I walk past my study it pulls me in like a magnet, and there I am" (p. 138). Simon's study gives him a sense of security and control that provides him with a strong foundation to observe the outside world, acting as a "voyeur" in the privacy of his own space.

According to the Paris Review (1992), "by any measure—quantity, quality, popular success, renown—Neil Simon is the preeminent purveyor of comedy in the last half of the twentieth century" (¶ 2). Simon is considered one of the most popular and successful playwrights the world has ever seen. In the next section, we get a closer look at Neil Simon in a rare interview.

### **Neil Simon interview with James Lipton**

In 1992, James Lipton, host of the Bravo television show Inside the Actors Studio, and the Paris Review conducted a Neil Simon interview. Edmund Gwenn answered director John Ford's 'What is dying like?' with a reflective, 'Dying is easy. Comedy is hard.'" (Paris Review, 1992, ¶ 2). This quote naturally symbolizes Simon's years of hard work, as the ultimate writer and provider of comedy. For a candid look at Neil Simon and a footnote to the history of Neil Simon, here is an excerpt from the interview that will surely excite your ears.

#### **SIMON**

Sometimes I start laughing—and I've had moments in this office when I've burst into tears. Not that I thought the audience might do that. The moment had triggered a memory or a feeling that was deeply hidden.

That's catharsis. It's one of the main reasons I write the plays. It's like analysis without going to the analyst. The play becomes your analysis. The writing of the play is the most enjoyable part of it. It's also the most frightening part because you walk into a forest without a knife, without a compass. But if your instincts are good, if you have a sense of geography, you find that you're clearing a path and getting to the right place. If the miracle happens, you come out at the very place you wanted to. But very often you have to go back to the beginning of the forest and start walking through it again, saying, I went that way. It was a dead end. You cross out, cross over. You meet new friends along the way, people you never thought you'd meet. It takes you into a world you hadn't planned on going to when you started the play. The play may have started out to be a comedy, and suddenly you get into a place of such depth that it surprises you. (Paris Review, 1992)

SIMON (cont'd)

That, more or less, is what is funny to me—saying something that's instantly identifiable to everybody. People come up to you after the show and say, I've always thought that, but I never knew anyone else thought it. It's a shared secret between you and the audience (Paris Review, 1992).

JAMES LIPTON (interviewer)

Has psychoanalysis influenced your work?  
(Paris Review, 1992)

SIMON

Yes. Generally I've gone into analysis when my life was in turmoil. But I found after a while I was going when it wasn't in turmoil. I was going to get a college education in human behavior. I was talking not only

about myself; I was trying to understand my wife, brother, my children, my family, anybody—including the analyst. I can't put everything in the plays down to pure chance. I want them to reveal what makes people tick. I tend to analyze almost everything. I don't think it started because I went through analysis. I'm just naturally that curious. The good mechanic knows how to take a car apart; I love to take the human mind apart and see how it works. Behavior is absolutely the most interesting thing I can write about. You put that behavior in conflict and you're in business. (Paris Review, 1992).

SIMON (cont'd)

I have this office. There are four or five rooms in it and no one is here but me. No secretary, no one, and I've never once in the many years that I've come here ever felt lonely or even alone. I come in and the room is filled with—as corny as it might sound—these characters I'm writing, who are waiting each day for me to arrive and give them life. I've also written on airplanes, in dentist's offices, on subways. I think it's true for many writers. You blank out whatever is in front of your eyes. That's why you see writers staring off into space. They're not looking at “nothing,” they're visualizing what they're thinking. I never visualize what a play will look like on stage. I visualize what it looks like in life. I visualize being in that room where the mother is confronting the father (Paris Review, 1992).

LIPTON

Your introduction to the first published collection of your work is called “The Writer as Schizophrenic.” The word observer comes up repeatedly in your conversation, your interviews and especially in your plays. Have you always seen

yourself as an outsider, an observer? (Paris Review, 1992)

SIMON

Yes, that started very early, when my parents would take me to visit family. They'd offer me a cookie or a piece of fruit, but no one spoke to me, because they knew I had nothing to contribute. I wasn't offended. I just thought it was the accepted norm. And that led me to believe that I was somehow invisible. (Paris Review, 1992)

This interview depicts the personal truth of the intimate nature of Neil Simon's true character. This self-reflective account depicts the real events that take place in the story of *Jake's Women*. Simon talks of how he observed people as a child and the world around him. In *Jake's Women*, Jake confides to Maggie "I don't observe because I choose to" (p. 98). The act of writing alone in his office became his therapy, his passion and his rite of passage to observe people from the inside out. A few lines later, Jake brings a little humor when he answers Maggie's revelation that he made her an observer as well. Jake asks Maggie, "so why doesn't your observer run off with my observer and you and I can stay here for a while?" (p. 98). The result becomes an example of Neil Simon the observer and the survival he finds in being a writer. The significance behind his writing as a constant growing experience produces honest portrayals of the characters in his plays, specifically, *Jake's Women*.

### **Character Analysis**

The process of creating a character requires an internalization process that relates to the actor portraying the role. The "actor's analysis" of the character must be very specific and personal to the character. To accomplish this, an actor must use the 'magic

if' to analyze and create a new imaginary identity in finding the truth of reality by taking inventory of one self (Hagen, 1973). It is the actor's job to speak in first person so the actor can identify with the character on a more intimate level. The actor must ask himself or herself important questions like: Who am I?, Where am I?, Where am I coming from?, What am I doing?, What do I want?, and Where am I going? These are useful questions to remember when you are working on your relationship to the character and the events that led up to the scenes in the play. These questions will provide the actor with all the information an actor is looking for to make the character real. All an actor needs is one of them to work to be useful.

The discipline of making notes on character becomes the essential tool needed to identify with the role being portrayed. This personalization process prepares the actor to be specific in substituting the relationships with the other characters in the play. The physical and emotional state of the character you portray is the initial step in the process of concentrating on your character. As stated by Strasberg (1965) "personalization is a technical device that gives the actor concentration through remembering carefully and concretely an actual person as a model for the character the actor is portraying" (p. 131). It is through this process that the actor creates meaning of the dialogue articulated. The accent and/or dialect will come to you as second nature once the actor is fully aware of the character being portrayed and the physical state of being created. This process is the overall technique that actors need to be aware of when internally and externally adapting themselves into a role. As Hagen (1973) suggests, "the actor should find the questions in the play and solve them with identification. Whether he uses real or imaginary



experiences, or both, is unimportant as long as he can believe in them and tap them when he needs them"(p. 157). The actor should explore these questions about his or her role to fully examine the nature of their character.

As an actor, when I first get a copy of a play or script, I read it three times. My first intention is to understand the story and the play's given circumstances. The second read is to focus attention on the relationships between the characters and the play's stage direction. The third read, I focus primarily on my character and the super-objective of the play. The super-objective is the "central idea or theme of the play that is the main action or spine of the script" (Hull, 1985). It is the motivating strength behind the actors intention to get what he or she wants as the most important aspect of the given circumstances in the relationship between the characters. These steps provide me with a clear understanding of what I need to work on as an actor. This process helps me to identify with the character, to be more specific with the material before the rehearsal process begins, and to personalize of the character.

As I read *Jake's Women*, the challenge for me was being aware of the imaginary and real situations. Neil Simon wrote illusory actions in the play as a result of the neurotic nature in Jake's mind during this critical time in his life. The problem's I faced with submerging myself into Jake's head was knowing he was mostly internalizing thoughts while constructing imaginary conversations with his sister Karen, daughter Molly, wife Maggie, dead wife Julie, lover Sheila, and therapist Edith. The ability to understand, manipulate, and personalize Jake's world was an incredibly challenging journey to experience knowing the reality and imaginary worlds are separate entities

within the same world. Making a connection to the characters in each scene, whether real or imaginary, demanded physical and mental endurance in finding the end result.

The crafty writing of Neil Simon in the specific context of the play made each scene seem as if there would be no end result. It is the skill of the trained actor to adapt to illusory situations with as much imagination as possible. According to Strasberg (1965) "all you can do is feed your imagination; so long as you are making an effort to carry out the logical behavior of this character" (p.139). With this, Jake wants control of his life but gaining this control is beyond his control. To achieve this sense of believability, Strasberg states, "the result of leaving yourself alone will very likely be the freeing of the unconscious mechanism which will begin to put forth all the material you have accumulated" (p.139). The most important thing for the actor is to make certain to hold the belief that the real and imaginary situations are truthful. Once this is accomplished, the actor has successfully carried out duties in the real existence of the character.

The answer is defined by Hagen (1973) as "secret laboratory work, and must stay secret. This is essential homework that need not be discussed with the director, fellow actors and playwright" (p.157). The choices I made were specific regarding the mental and physical state of being of Jake as well as the relationship to each of the other characters in the play. I made substitutions with the other characters in the play, whether the actual person, the smell, taste, touch, sound, the sight of something specific or even a personal object in every given scene. Hagen (1973) defines substitution from the Webster dictionary as "the act of putting a person, place or thing in place of another

serving the same purpose; to take the place of" (p.35). The amount of emotionally charged scenes in *Jake's Women* required myself as the actor to be specific in my substitutions. Specific substitutions have to be achieved in order to make each scene meaningful, real moments and believable to the scene and to the audience.

In *Jake's Women*, Jake is a fictional writer who lives in the Soho section of New York City. He has lived in New York his entire life and writes about his own life experiences while letting his imagination take over his past and present lives. According to Hagen (1973) "I use substitution in order to 'make believe' in its literal sense - to make me believe the time, the place what surrounds me, the conditioning forces, my new character and my relationship to the other characters" (p.35). The imaginary situations are created by stimulating one's thoughts and feelings to trigger an emotional response. As an actor, I use sensory exercises to help me achieve the most real and truthful emotion in the given circumstance of the scene.

The creation of real emotion is a perceived response to the substitution providing the character to live in the moment with truthful action. As stated by Hagen (1973), "because of the enormous importance of the five senses, there should be continuous work on heightening and sharpening them" (p.64). This is accomplished by paying close attention to his or her senses on a daily basis, opening oneself up of emotional blocks that allow your mind and body to receive the heightened capabilities of your senses freely. According to Strasberg, "if the actor must demonstrate great affection for another but such feelings do not arise out of the playing of the scene, the performer may substitute the face of someone he does love onto the other actor" (Krasner, 2000, p. 50). These

feelings are driven by moments of honesty and truthfulness that help the actor develop organic realism to his or her instrument, making the emotions believable to other actors as well as the audience.

According to Koprince (2002) "Simon portrays Jake as someone who is consumed by his work, who is emotionally isolated, and who is so busy observing life that he frequently fails to participate in it" (p.133). The marriage to his present wife, Maggie, is on the rocks, and he can't stop having conversations in his head with the women in his life, including his dead wife Julie. This inability to let go has been affecting his current marriage resulting in Maggie filing for separation from Jake to give them some time apart in their relationship and for him to choose between reality and fantasy. According to a New York Times review, "Jake and Maggie stand accused of extramarital flings, of being a workaholic as he writes compulsively, she climbs 'the corporate ladder', of spending too much time apart, three to four months a year" (Rich, 1992, ¶ 3). It is Jake's daughter Molly who represents the only rational conscience he has in life that gets him through the difficult emotional situations.

From the beginning of the play, the only thing Jake seems to control in the are imaginary characters in his mind. Throughout *Jake's Women*, Jake's own imagination rebels against him in which he eventually can no longer produce quality writing. His writing is suffering just as much as his personal life. When his wife Maggie threatens to dismantle their marriage, Jake relies on the imaginary representations of the women in his life, each one providing unique and sometimes unsettling insight into his psyche. As stated by Konas (1997) "Jake's sense of himself as a unified whole is fragmented by his

disconnection from Maggie, a disconnection very much like the one he tells of having experienced with his mother" (p. 175). The seclusion, isolation, loneliness and dark reality is what really drives the play. Simon has often compared himself to Jake as someone who has the irresistible urge to write (Koprince, 2002). This connection between Jake and Neil Simon represents a unique bond that forces the audience to believe that *Jake's Women* is autobiographical.

The source of Jake's inner conflict stems from several problems. Throughout the play we learn that Jake is selfish, focusing on himself more than anyone else, and is easily distracted by his thoughts. Jake's days are illuminated by his late wife Julie and hides the secret of a short-lived love affair he had with an actress. In the beginning of the play, Jake has yet to tell his wife, Maggie, of his affair to make himself believe he has also committed adultery. In an attempt to end his inner turmoil, Jake imagines having a conversation with his sister, igniting the beginning of a whirlwind of psychological trouble. According to Koprince (2002), a reviewer for Time called *Jake's Women*, "Neil Simon's most nakedly autobiographical play," not so much because this experimental drama makes use of events in the author's own life, but because the play offers acidly 'self-critical' portrait of the writer himself" (p. 138). The context of the play demonstrates Simon as someone very much like Jake who lives constantly his life observing life rather than participating in it. He is the quintessential voyeur of his own life and those who are affectionately close to him.

## **Play Analysis**

*Jake's Women* is a two-act play, different from all of Neil Simon's other works. This expressionistic comedy-drama revolves around Jake, who suffers with a psychosis by seeing "representations" of the most important women from his life: his daughter Molly (at age 12 and age 21), his late wife Julie, his current wife Maggie (from whom he is currently separating), his sister Karen, and his psychoanalyst Edith. This neurosis of Jake's, seeing false representations of important women from his past and present, provokes him to interact with them by making him re-enact key scenes from their relationships. Jake is working extremely hard to save his marriage while going through a separation from his current wife Maggie. These are his efforts to come to terms with the death of his dearly loved first wife Julie, 10 years prior, so that he can get on with his life. *Jake's Women* is a psychoanalytical exploration of the problems Jake is having in his real and imaginary life. The search for human connection becomes the main objective for Jake and the primary subject of the play.

The entire action of the play takes place in Jake's New York City Soho loft apartment. This intimate setting and confined space gives Neil Simon the chance to engage the audience in a unique opportunity to experience the action on stage up close and personal. As stated by Konas (1997), "the stage itself creates an unusual subject position for the individual audience member, set up to alternately 'be' Jake's external, objective reality, and the internal subject reality of Jake's mind" (p.177). Simon does this by breaking through the fourth wall as he decides to make Jake talk directly to the audience, inviting the audience into his world. This is the best way for the audience to

understand the character Jake and his relation to other people. According to Konas (1997) "Simon's expressionistic approach is made clear in the opening stage directions, which reveal that the drama takes place both in Jake's apartment and in his mind" (p.133). Jake's apartment is nominal with no sense of place as he imagines women appearing and disappearing in his mind. This happens throughout the play as he is interrupted by real life events. As determined by Konas (1997), "the psychoanalytic assumption behind Simon's staging seems to be that since the mind is composed of configurations of relational objects, the best way to understand yourself is to understand your relations with others" (p.175). While dealing with the inability to write productively, he must resolve these issues before he can continue with his writing.

Neil Simon says, "if I meant it to be autobiographical I would have called the character Neil Simon. He's not Neil, he's Jake. That gives you greater latitude for fiction. It's like doing abstract painting. You see your own truth in it but the abstraction is the art" (Paris Review, 1992). Simon simply means the play is based on certain real life incidents that happened in his life but not specifically in the order of how they occurred. Neil Simon has a brilliant way of letting the audience into the mind of the character by revealing inner truths with honest and truthful conviction as he sees it. According to Koprince (2002), "the purpose of expressionistic Jake's Women is a self-analytical play in which he invites the audience to share in the mind of the writer" (p.10). The play becomes a therapeutic study on Simon in the mind of Jake to permanently rid himself of the denial he has been feeling since the death of his first wife.

Jake's monologue is a personal technique of Simon behind getting inside the inner thoughts of himself as the writer and as Jake. These thoughts are not always articulated on the stage by his writing technique but created by Neil Simon in *Jake's Women* with the purpose of giving the audience the ability to get inside his head. As stated by Konas (1997) "the narrative of *Jake's Women* is driven by the main character's attempts to recover from the relationship with his mother. Its plot hinges on themes of separation, rapprochement, disconnection and reconnection"(p.177). The play is about loss and the trauma that comes in dealing with oneself, accomplished done by the exploration and deconstruction of critical moments that drive the play.

The play opens with Jake on stage sitting at his desk typing on his computer in his office. Jake, the protagonist, introduces the other characters as he skillfully comments on the serious subject matter blended with tactful humor. Jake is quick tempered from the beginning of the play and it gets strengthened as the play moves on. For example in Act I, Jake explains to the audience that his sister Karen is the one person he can call on when he needs support.

JAKE: My sister Karen is no wizard but she is family. Married, divorced, went to NYU Film School. Made a three hour student film of her, just sitting on a kitchen chair called, "Loneliness"... But she'll be on my side. Loving, caring, encouraging, sympathetic, because that's how I'll need her and that's how I'll make her. (Simon, p.13)

This scene elicits laughs as Simon writes Karen entering the stage dressed in 'outlandish Bette Midler in concert' costume" (Frank, 1994). With this description of Karen, Jake establishes an intimate relationship with the audience by sharing his



innermost thoughts by creating a playful connection between himself and his sister.

*Jake's Women* is about connection, so by doing this, the separation is no longer there as Jake constantly refers to the audience by creating these two different realms of reality and the imaginary. As quoted by Norman N. Holland in Konas (1997), "reality is a failure of imagination" (p.177). This quote is clear and precise in Act I of *Jake's Women* when Jake reveals the issue he is having as a writer in controlling imaginary people as opposed to real people and one who alienates from the world. Below is an excerpt of his monologue.

JAKE: Reality is a bummer. God how much better writing is...That little room up there is eight by ten feet but to me it's the world. The universe! You don't get to play God, you get to be God!...The downside? You get to be a slave to the thing you love. Eight hours go by up there in ten minutes and that ten minutes is captured forever on paper...but the eight hours of your life is gone, and you'll never see those again brother...How much living have I missed the last thirty years?...And is creative pleasure better than real pleasure?...We're all writers in a sense aren't we? ... You're driving in your car to work, having an imaginary conversation with your wife. She says this, you say that, she says that, you say this. She's so damn stubborn and intractable - only she's not saying it. You wrote it! You're bright, witty and clever and she's a pain in the ass. (Simon, p.12)

Jake's monologue defines Jake as a man desperate to have complete control in his life, allowing no one to say or do anything he doesn't like. This gives us the right of passage into his mind as he writes his own interactions with other people on a personal

level. According to Brian Rhinehart, "imitation allows us to rewrite the drama of everyday interaction with those around us, and is, as Jake suggests, something we all do constantly" (Konas, p.178). The imitation Jake acts in his monologues changes his past interactions, showing us that as protagonist of the play, he gets lost in 8 hours of writing, but does not want to miss out on what is happening in the reality of life that surrounds him. Jake has the need to isolate himself from the real people where he can create dialogue for his characters. According to Koprince (2002), "in real life, however, the protagonist enjoys no such feelings of control" (p.136). From an analytical point of view, Jake is gaining creative pleasure by controlling the outcome of his relationships to his loved ones, but is losing "real" pleasure because this control is not possible with real people. As stated by Konas (1997) "Jake's internal struggle to cope with the schism between omnipotent thought and external, objective reality is seen numerous times throughout the entire play" (p.177). Simon creates this tension in the play by Jake's need to control his world and the people in his world with an outcome that doesn't always go his way. An example is Jake's struggle to deal with the differences between imagination and the reality creates tension in the play by displaying Jake's driving need to control his world and all the people in it. Jake, instead of succeeding, is being rejected of that control, unable to predict the outcome. Tension is reflective in Act I, in a scene between Jake and his daughter Molly at age 21.

OLDER MOLLY: Why don't you talk to Edith?

Come on talk to her?

JAKE: Analysts don't work nights. That's when they have their own breakdowns.

OLDER MOLLY: I don't mean really talk to her.

Make up that you talk to her.

JAKE: Some session. I make up Edith, the questions and the answers. What's the point?

OLDER MOLLY: Complete control. Your favorite thing in life.

JAKE: It isn't really. It's being at the mercy of others that scares me. Been that way since I was a baby. (Simon, p.28)

Jake compares himself to when he was a child writing about the experiences he had at a young age and writing was the only way he could express the relationships he had with others, more specifically, his family. According to Konas (1997) "Jake, as a child, in order to achieve mastery in its relations with others, interacts with its own representations of external reality (of mother, father, siblings), thereby producing for itself at least the illusion of control over a sometimes harsh environment" (p.178). This interaction with representations of his family members as he sees them in his mind as a false sense of control Jake created as a child. Jake reveals this in Act I when he hangs up the phone after a conversation he has with his daughter Molly.

JAKE: Molly knew what was wrong without me even telling her. She knew me better than I knew myself ... I have a theory that wisdom doesn't come with age. It comes at childhood, peaks around eighteen, then slides slowly down the scale into adulthood ... Parents express their anger by saying, "You ungrateful brat. You'll never amount to anything" ... But kids are creative. They express their anger by going to school and drawing a picture of you with the head of a gargoye. (Simon, p.48)

The objective reality in this statement by Jake explains Neil Simon's intention as a situation involving the lack of control Jake has over two separate conscious minds. The connection Jake has with himself as a child and as an adult is clear and apparent. Thus,

in this next scene, a critical part of the play in Act I, when Jake calls on his sister Karen to help him as he confides in her that his marriage is in trouble.

JAKE: I think Maggie is getting ready to leave me.

KAREN: Don't tell me, Oh, my God, no. Why? What happened.

JAKE: A lot of things that never should have happened.

KAREN: Alright, don't jump to conclusions...Don't try to guess what's going on in someone else's mind. I used to worry that Harry was going to leave me too.

JAKE: But he did leave you.

KAREN: Because I kept saying, "You're going to leave me one day, I know it. "It drove him crazy ...Besides, we had big problems. You and Maggie had eight good years together. She loves you, that I would bet my life on.

JAKE: She's been seeing another man.

KAREN: I'm such a bad judge of character. Are you positive Jake.

JAKE: It's someone new in her office. I don't know if he means something to her or if it's just a symptom what's wrong with us.

KAREN: What is wrong with you?

JAKE: Something stopped.

(Simon, p.15)

We immediately understand his sister Karen is aggravated by Jake's belief that Maggie is having an affair with a guy in the office. Jake admits to an affair with an actress he had a year ago before he expounds to Karen he will do whatever he can to keep Maggie and that he loves his wife. This conversation between Jake and Maggie sets up the action for the scene that follows later in Act I, where Maggie comes home after work to find Jake waiting to speak with her. This conversation turns into an argument leading

this scene to the climactic point of the play with Jake confronting Maggie about an affair she is having with the new guy in the office.

JAKE: Do you want out of this marriage?

MAGGIE: I have always wanted this marriage. I would give anything to go back and start it over from the beginning. But you only get one beginning to a marriage. (Simon, p.19)

Maggie then expresses her wish to stay with him, but then another argument follows with Maggie telling Jake he is controlling and selfish with his work, spending more time writing than spending time with her. Maggie offers Jake a proposition, which he detests.

MAGGIE: ...Okay. I have a first sentence for you, Jake...How separating for six months just to give us some breathing space?

JAKE: Separate for six months?...That's a lot of breathing space. That's as big as Arizona...How long have you been thinking about this?

MAGGIE: It just came up. More or less impromptu. (Simon, p.21)

Jake is not fooled by this discussion and is forced to ask her something he has been dreading for a long time now. This begins a transition of action that leads to Jake's destructive psychological behavior and stirs up the anticipated conversation that has been long overdue.

JAKE: How much does Michael Jaffe have to do with this?

MAGGIE: What?

JAKE: Michael Jaffe...Wrong name or wrong time to say it?

MAGGIE: What are you talking about?

JAKE: I'm talking about Michael Jaffe.  
MAGGIE: What about him?  
(Simon, p.24)

This interrogation by Jake forces Maggie to admit to the alleged affair but claims it was only one time and that it has stopped. Maggie's confession becomes another underlying issue in the fact that they both work all of the time and never see one another. Their argumentative conversation leads to the root of their marriage issues and reveals for the first time the problems they have had for a long time. This is the first time we understand, as the audience, the trouble in their relationship and where their marriage is heading.

In this scene, Jake has an imaginary conversation with his sister Karen, defending his intimacy and revealing the truth about himself. Jake's daughter Molly persuades him to talk to Edith, his therapist, who enters mocking Jake and his issues.

KAREN: Well, you're in a particular line of work, Jake.  
EDITH: (appears). He picks it because he likes to deprive himself.  
JAKE: (to Edith). Who asked you? If this is a session, Edith, I'm not paying for it. Charge it to Karen.  
(Simon, p.63)

The way Edith gives Jake useless advice by stating that he "likes to deprive himself", frustrates Jake. The objective in this scene with Edith is to quickly get constructive advice, eventually leading destructive thoughts in Jake's mind. One thing Edith succeeds in getting is for Jake to confess to the audience what he wants most, his dead wife Julie. The torment in this revelation of truth results in Jake telling the audience he has struggled to let Julie go.

JAKE: I haven't hung onto Julie...I swear to you, I have tried over and over and over to get Julie out of my mind. I never summon her up. She just bursts in on me. (Simon, p. 38).

This is followed by a self-induced confession to his dead wife Julie that she died in a car accident while driving Molly to camp.

JULIE: How did it happen?

JAKE: Don't you remember?

JULIE: No.

JAKE: How can you not remember that?

JULIE: Because I'm twenty-one. It hasn't happened yet...Tell me Jake.

JAKE: It was an auto accident. Coming back from Vermont. It was the end of June. (Simon, p.44)

The first time Jake imagines telling his wife how the accident happened shows the torment he is going through, wishing he could have been in the car with them the night of the accident. The guilt is overwhelming to Jake, he cannot forgive himself because he cannot accept the accident was not his fault. This is such a critical scene to show the audience how mentally anguished Jake really is. Jake's mind becomes more psychotic in this next scene where he discloses to the audience how imaginary women are appearing without his specific orders.

JAKE: No longer did I summon that Karen's, Edith's Molly's of my life to help brighten up the endless sleepless nights...Now they come on their own. Uninvited. Unsummoned. Unstoppable. (Simon, p.60)

This is an important part of the play, especially in Act I due to the neurotic nature of Jake. His mental state is being challenged up to this point, especially the relationship he has with his mother. Shortly hereafter, Jake's fear of castration is disclosed in the fantasy monologue about his "big toe, being sucked down the drain "(Jake's Women, p. 67). When Jake clearly connects her with some of his deepest fears: "his fear of abandonment (when he was five he awoke from a nap to discover that his mother was gone; his fear of being controlled (she used to tie him into his high chair with a rope)" (p. 67). This is the point of the play that begins the transcendence of the play where Jake's behavior becomes more erratic. He is freely admitting to the dysfunction of not trusting his mother, due to abandonment.

Furthermore, his current real-life girlfriend Sheila arrives at his apartment. She is the only real life person in the scene when Jake's insanity begins to build. Jake engages Sheila in a strange and dark conversation, chasing Sheila out of the apartment after Jake sees the imaginary Maggie appear in the room mocking Jake from behind the back of Sheila. Jake grows angry with Maggie, frequently yelling at her, provoking Sheila to run terrified out of the apartment. This scene is important in two ways: it propels the slow process of the emotional rollercoaster ride Jake will take to fix his marriage, and it leads Jake to conjure up more imaginary scenes. Jake's form of therapy is seeing scenes that aren't really happening: this is Jake's apparent writing style, writing therapeutically while in imaginary therapy himself.

In the opening of Act II, the play begins with a fantasy Jake, wishing his marriage with Maggie was like it used to be. This hallucination plays into the psychotic mind of



Jake and begins with Jake sitting at his computer typing imaginary scenes. Maggie enters seductively and expresses her wish to be with him again. The quick scene ends abruptly when Maggie leaves, laughing in his face. As we leave this fun fantasy moment, we are brought into an emotionally touching scene in Act II when Jake imagines his dead wife Julie and his daughter Molly meeting for the last time.

JAKE: We're all writers in a sense...that we all create imaginary scenes and conversations. "There's not one of you who hasn't thought...of what it would be like to talk to your father who died five or twenty five years ago. Would he look the same? Would you still be his little girl?...Or the boy you loved in college who married someone else. What would your life be if he proposed to you instead? ...You've played that scene out. We all do it."  
(Simon, p.89)

In the scene that follows, Jake calls up an imaginary game in a scene with his daughter Molly (at age 21), and his dead wife Julie. This is where we begin to see an act of redemption for Jake to start letting go of the death of Julie.

MOLLY: I didn't ask to play it. You brought me here. You brought Mom. You bring us together after eleven years and you give us ten lousy minutes together. What is that? Why did you do it? It's so damn cruel.  
JULIE: Because I asked for it, Molly.  
MOLLY: No, you didn't. *He did*. He brought us here. We can't get here until he thinks of it. (To Jake). So what are you going to do? It's *your* goddamn game, *you* get us out of it.  
JULIE: Molly, don't.  
MOLLY: Why don't you leave well enough alone? What is it you wanted to see?  
JAKE: I wanted to see you both happy.  
MOLLY: By doing the impossible?

JAKE: Not so impossible. I saw you both laughing, together again. It made me so happy to see that.

MOLLY: I think you're the one who doesn't know it's a game. So what happens to us now? Do we go back to some corner of your mind and wait till Mom's next birthday to hear the second installment of the Years That Never Happened?

JULIE: Jake, stop this, I don't want to hear anymore.

MOLLY: He can't stop it. He loves it too much. He'll never let go of it. He'll sit in this house all alone, afraid to get on with his life because this *is* his life. Isn't that right, Dad?

JAKE: So everyone tells me.

MOLLY: Then please let go of this.

JAKE: I will, eventually.

(Simon, p.92)

Jake's imaginary conversations with Molly and Julie in Act II involve a family reunion, representing an honest approach for Jake to finally let his dead wife go in respect to save his current marriage. Molly and Julie's reunion represents an honest approach for Jake to finally let his dead wife go respectfully in a way to save his current marriage. Julie warns Jake to beware him to not glorify her, as the future is undetermined.

JULIE: "I don't want to be a shrine. I don't want to be a touched up photo in a family album. I want to be me because even a memory deserves self-respect" (Simon, p.83).

This scene not only encourages imaginary Julie to encourage Jake to stop playing games but to move on with his life. The process of acceptance begins in this scene of *Jake's Women* with Julie. According to Koprince (2002) "In Act II, when Jake imagines a tender reunion between his deceased wife, Julie, and their now grown-up daughter Molly, he is especially struck by his artistic detachment, asking himself: "If I can create this intimacy, why can't I experience I in my own life?" (*Jake's Women*, p.88). Despite his

emotional isolation, Jake makes it clear that he writes because he needs to write and because writing gives him the only security that he has ever known.

JAKE: "I don't observe because I choose to. I'm not alone because I prefer it. I'm not a writer because I'm good at it. I write to survive. (he explains to Maggie near the end of the play). It's the only thing that doesn't reject me. My characters are the only ones I know who love me unconditionally, because I give them life. Do you love me unconditionally Maggie?"

MAGGIE: I'm not that selfless. And you didn't give me like Jake. My mother did. And I like you much better than I like her.

JAKE: Do you? Funny, you look about ten miles away from where I sit.

MAGGIE: No, Jake. I think we're so close. I swear. I think we're only an inch or two apart. (Simon, p.98).

Jake's amazement that he must explain to Maggie that his choice to be a writer has been "both a curse and a blessing - a natural calling from which he can never really escape" (Koprince, p.138). It is clear Jake uses writing as his therapy. Jake and Maggie's communication builds from this understanding and moves to reestablish their relationship to the point where it used to be. At the end of Act II, with the final disappearances of Julie, Molly, Karen, Edith, and Sheila, Jake is finally able to reconcile his and Maggie's relationship. Jake expresses his feelings to Maggie.

JAKE: ...That until I cross those two inches, until I can understand the concept of those inches, we'd always be in trouble.

MAGGIE: You know something, Jake. Even though we've just been tough on each other, this is one of the best talks we've ever had. (Simon, p. 99)

*Jake's Women* concludes with the renewal of Jake's, the protagonist, marriage and also accentuates Jake's process of rediscovering who he is. When Maggie returns to Jake's apartment in real-life, she is willing to work out the couple's differences. Jake finally comes to terms with his issues and agrees to emerge from the depths of his seclusion and join Maggie in the real world. He recognizes within himself that lifting the self-inflicted seclusion is an extremely difficult process for him but a necessary one to take.

This amazement by Jake that he must say this to his mother if he is to bridge "those last two inches" that seem to separate him from Maggie. "Jake needs to bridge the gap in order to come to terms with the relationship between him and his mother" (Koprince, 2002, p.139). This scene is relies on the central focus of *Jake's Women* about the internal life of Jake, a successful, middle-aged writer dependent on the women in his life and in denial about the dysfunctional relationship he had with his mother. During Jake's transformation, he says "I love you...and I forgive you!" (p.102). In the John Simon (1992) review, he quotes "I think we have to forgive those we love before we forgive ourselves" (p.102). This is the beginning is the beginning of the next phase of his marriage, representing the salvation he had been looking for in the past 10 years. The revelation for him to see his dead wife is ascended and finally dealt with and erased. He confides in his daughter Molly and she is the one who really helps him move on and deal with the loss of Julie.

MAGGIE: ... I'd like to stay and work out those last two inches together, Jake. Is that alright?

JAKE: Yeah. That would be great.

(She starts up towards him.)

JAKE: No! You stay there! I'll come down to you.

MAGGIE: Are you alright?

JAKE: It's a ten mile drop from here to there.

(Simon, p.10)

In this last scene of the play, written in the stage direction by Neil Simon reads (like God and Adam reaching out in the Sistine Chapel). According to Koprince (2002), "this tableau refers back to Jake's omnipotence as a writer but that, as Brian Rhinehart notes, also "elevates Jake and Maggie's reconnection" on the stairs to the level of religious epiphany"(p.140). This ending punctuates Simon's expressionistic writing style and his view of love as "life-giving and redemptive" (Koprince, p.140). The final scene accentuates the reaching out of two people in love to make the bond between their marriage, a divine and eternal connection.

## CHAPTER 3

### JOURNAL

#### **Journal of Rehearsal Introduction**

The script for *Jake's Women* was given to me in late April 2011. Opening night was scheduled for September 8, 2011. It had been in my possession for a roughly 2 months before our first rehearsal. Due to my demanding grad school and family schedule I was unable to work much on the script until the end of the spring semester. The 105 page script lay in my office waiting for me to courageously pick it up and begin the acting process of analyzing the character, Jake. My first thoughts were about the amount of dialogue I had, and secondly, how was I going to memorize all of these lines in such a short period of time. The first rehearsal date was scheduled to be August 15, 2011, and opening night September 8, 2011. That is 18 days, roughly 3 weeks of rehearsal on a 1/2 hour play with 105 pages of dialogue, six monologues, and scenes with seven different women. We had only three dress-tech rehearsals. Luckily, this is not a tech heavy show. The play takes place in one room, Jake's apartment, and I spend most of the time at my desk or center stage either sitting in a chair or crossing the stage addressing the audience.

#### **The Rehearsal Process Begins**

Bobby Funk, the director of the play, notified us that the rehearsals will begin by blocking them immediately. This is the first time I have ever skipped a table read and gone straight into blocking. The way I have been used to working is by having a few table readings before we get on our feet to begin the blocking of a play. We have 18 total

rehearsal days, 3 hours a night for a total of 62 hours of blocking, tech and dress rehearsals. That is not a lot of time, especially for me being the lead character with 105 pages of dialogue. I am on stage the entire length of the show, aside from the 15 seconds when Jake decides to use the restroom in Act II.

My preparation was done with a lot of focus, relaxation, preparation, and listening to what the other actors-characters are saying. Listening is the most important part of acting, especially true in live theatre where your performance relies yourself on yourself being in the moment. Always remember to know your lines and hit your mark. The stress of memorizing lines goes away after the first few rehearsals. The lines will be there and comes with the blocking knowing what you are saying and where you are saying it. This is when the journey of working the scenes really begins. The wide-range of emotions I go through playing Jake revolve around the loss of his dead wife Julie, the separation he is going through with his current wife Maggie, and the struggle he has with the betrayal of his parents at a young age. Jake is dealing with all of this insanity at once and builds as the scenes progress. The foundation of this emotional ride starts the moment the lights come on in Act I to the closing scene in Act II when Jake and Maggie come together in a dramatic ending. The emotional arc is going to take me on a psychological journey that I have never experienced before on stage. My approach is to use sensory exercises to recreate past experiences in my life and allow my relaxation to enable me to concentrate on each moment. This allows myself to develop a personal attachment to the scenes and characters in the play, developing the relationships in every scene of the play. I have a lot of the same experiences as Jake in my past that I can draw from.

August 15, 2011

On the first day of rehearsal, I had a tremendous amount of confidence bundled with an incredible amount of nerves. Bobby's directing strategy from the beginning of the rehearsal process was to work on blocking. I knew, as an experienced actor, this directing approach was unconventional because we did not have an initial table read. I was prepared for anything going into the theatre. As I walked onto the stage I showed an air of confidence. I felt it was my duty to demonstrate to the ensemble cast my theatre experience with strength, trust, and collaboration. This was the first introduction to my fellow cast-mates and would speak volumes as to what direction the first week of rehearsals would go. I have a lot at stake with my ego here as the lead actor. My creative work needs to produce to the highest level. Not only is this my actual fifth wedding anniversary to my "real life" wife, but I never met Cara Harker, the actress playing the character of Maggie, my second wife in the play. I felt great and ready to work as soon as I walked into the theatre. I heard of Cara and knew her involvement in the theatre-dance program prior to my meeting her, but that was it. We hit it off well in our first rehearsal together for Act One. I felt the chemistry between us was enough to get us to that place we needed to get to, as a married couple, in a short amount of time we had in rehearsal. That is one of the rare moments in theatre, and we found a foundation to build on. The reading felt natural, engaging, real, and full of trust. The scenes we worked on together included many levels of emotions such as the first time the characters meet, the cheating, and their separation. These marital issues are full of intense emotion involving serious consequences. Cara and I managed to use manifest our own personal lives and



experience to get to those "places" very quickly. The overall affect for the evening was the pleasure in observing young actors who take acting seriously and training young.

August 16, 2011

This rehearsal included four more actresses, all of whom I had worked with before as their acting teacher, so I knew what they were capable of as actors. I felt a sense of confidence knowing with the skill sets in these girls that they would make this process go smooth in the short amount of time we have for rehearsal. The beats or scenes covered in the rehearsal process included important moments with the therapist Edith and dead wife Julie. The entire rehearsal focused on the blocking. The action with Jake and Edith required a lot of movement crossing from stage left to stage right. The scene is pretty technical to the point where certain lines had to be said and heard by the audience downstage left on a platform where Jake's desk will eventually sit. We had to use our imagination with the blocking because the set had not yet been built. This scene has a particular kind of energy that requires a consistent rapid-fire dialogue. The comedy lies in the words so the action needs to be quick and fluid. My comfort level was strong and comforting with Edith due to the comedy in this scene, which should get a lot of laughs. The scene with Julie is a touching scene where Jake imagines his dead wife Julie in Central Park and desperately wants her back, the way things were. Jake says "and I lay there looking up at the sky, wondering what the rest of our lives would be like...And I want the rest of our lives...Can you get me Julie Edith"? This cry for help and representation of Jake's pain represents the pain he cannot rid himself of. The reason he is seeing a therapist. Jake has false realities of rewriting his script of life. This was our

second rehearsal and the actresses are open, energetic, and experienced enough to give me the ability to do the things needed for everything to fall into place. I appreciate the cast for being great listeners, true professionals and always on time, ready to work. This will set the tone for the making of a great show.

August 17, 2011

Kacy Tiller (Molly at age 21) and Hannah Hasch (Molly at age 12) play my daughter in the play. When I saw them for the first time tonight, there was a glimmer of excitement in their eyes to be in the show and begin rehearsal. That was a pleasure to see and comforting to know their dedication to the theatre. I have worked with both of them before, so I know their work and feel confident they will bring a truth and honesty to their roles. They both look believable playing my daughters at two different ages. The casting by Bobby Funk was specific with what he had in mind for the roles and well thought out. This scene we rehearsed tonight was the final scene in Act I. This was the moment in the play where I feel emotionally deflated and dejected from the split with my wife Maggie. It involved a great deal of care with Bobby to make it look real, make sense, and captivate the audience. The two Molly's are the rational representations absent in Jake's reality. The emotions are flying high and finally crash to a harsh reality that will make you cry. This rehearsal required a lot of patience to understanding the relevant impact this scene has going into the mind of Jake and into the second act of the play. We spent a lot of time getting the actual look of the scene down where it looked picture perfect. We were very keen on setting up the scene so the audience would feel the sadness that is going on with Jake, his daughter and the struggling marriage with Maggie. Jake plays a

name game with Molly where Maggie's name constantly appears in his mind. From an actor's standpoint, I felt the need to work on sense memory moments from my past. I have been through a similar situation from a long-term relationship where the struggle and pain hurts, as if will never go away. I was able to relate to the scene and the emotional recall required to live in the moment.

August 18, 2011

Tonight's rehearsal involved only Cara (Maggie) and myself. We felt very comfortable with each other after only meeting each other for the first time on Monday. Cara is extremely talented and an absolute professional. She is a dance teacher at ETSU, but she is an incredible talented actor who works her butt off. Cara and I were really hitting it off well on a personal level, which translated into the scene. We are both on a certain professional level, which made it easy for us to listen to each other and play with the characters wants and needs. She gives so much as an actor with her ability to listen well, her subtlety and ability to give you a truthful emotion. I am thankful to Bobby for doing a great job casting her as my wife in the play. Our blocking went well tonight. There are lots of emotions to play in these two scenes we blocked tonight. We covered many areas of the characters relationship during these two scenes and it felt great for a first rehearsal.

August 19, 2011

I was looking forward to this monologue night with Bobby. I was anxiously anticipating this night due to the various levels of emotions involved in the six monologues in the play. This was the first time I performed them or even read out loud to

anyone. I was a bit nervous and didn't know what to expect. We were the only two men in the theatre, aside from the stage manager who had the script in hand. I was not off book for four out of the six monologues. I had been working on my monologues for about a week, so the process of working through is still fresh. This is the most monologues I have ever had in any role of my career so far. The monologues are fun, engaging, and real life stories that I feel personally connected to. They are past and present life stories that affect the events leading up to my current experiences happening in the present. These monologues have been worked on to the point where I felt a personal connection to them in my own life. There is an organic quality about Neil Simon that is unique and honesty in his writing that evokes a brilliant combination of subtle humor and real-life drama. The dialogue does the talking for you. The skill comes in the delivery of the lines. I enjoyed the process of telling the stories as they were written and didn't focus too much on dissecting the dialogue. They warranted an honest delivery of personalization, letting the words speak for themselves. I simply read the last two monologues in Act II from the script. I hadn't worked on them at all up to this point in the rehearsal process.

August 22, 2011

In my preparation for tonight's rehearsal I drew upon an irritable moment in a past relationship that I felt my character could benefit from in the scenes I have with Edith and Karen. The psychological effect of my emotional memory exercise was serving me well, so I decided to go with it and see where the feelings would take me in the scene. The feeling I had was one of the worst things that could possibly happen to me right in that

moment. The feeling I was preparing for requires close and intimate attention without any outside distractions. I had a difficult time walking without constant irritability, substituting the feeling into the mind of Jake. This made for an interesting physical character choice for the role of Jake, who is constantly walking around his apartment inventing imaginary conversations with the women of his life. This feeling of irritability brought a sense of realism to the character and I seized the opportunity to use this feeling as an overall specific choice for my physical state of being in most scenes of the play. The scene with Sheila in Act II involves the most physical action so I was able to channel the feeling with intense energy.

August 23, 2011

I truly regretted the phone call I made to Bobby this morning, but I had to cancel tonight's rehearsal due to the poison ivy spreading into my groin. I lay naked in bed all day with my script next to my side. I was working on the scenes we were supposed to rehearse tonight that included Kacy Tiller (Molly at age 21), Hannah Hasch (Molly at age 12), Janette Gaines (Edith, therapist), Julie, and Cara Harker (Maggie). There was a lot of material to cover, but I needed to rest. This was the second and last rehearsal scheduled for these scenes before tech-dress rehearsal in 2 weeks. My nerves were starting to really set in. There was a lot of work we were going to miss tonight. I lay in bed most of the day trying to maintain my sanity seeing my poison ivy getting worse. I had a difficult time concentrating on much of anything today, let alone try to memorize lines and do character work. This was not a good day to miss rehearsal because we were coming off a weekend where we had no rehearsals scheduled. We had 2 1/2 weeks

before we opened the show. Every night is critical for scene work and blocking, especially for me because Jake in every scene of the play.

August 24, 2011

This rehearsal is vital to the relationship with Jake and dead wife Julie. Jake is working very hard to rationalize with himself that Julie is dead and is never coming back. The scene needs some work. I worked on playing a certain distance between the characters. This is because Julie is an imaginary person in the scene. The difficult task is making the scene believable to the audience. We worked on the scene when Maggie and Molly meet for the first time. This was the first time we rehearsed this scene, so we felt off with the relationship between us all. I felt like I needed to lighten the mood with Jake. The line where Maggie says she would "rather get sick" and go to a Chinese restaurant if it meant pleasing Molly, who loves Chinese food. Jake says, "good get sick, she would love that". This line will get a lot of laughs. It's all in Neil Simon's writing. This playful scene fits nicely into Act I when he reminisces about the time Molly and Maggie met for the first. This comes after Jake's monologue about how much of a good kid Molly is. He confides to the audience that Molly has qualities in a person he has never been able to find in another "human being".

August 25, 2011

The program info was due tonight, including bios. There was no request for headshots to be placed in the program or in the lobby of the theatre entrance based on the low budget we were dealing with involving the building of the set. There were posters of the production advertised around the campus and the local newspaper. I made it to the

theatre tonight still in a lot of discomfort and pain. I had to work through it and deliver a solid performance for my supporting cast tonight. They included Julie, Karen, Maggie, Molly at age 21, and Molly age at 12. All I could remember was sitting down as much as possible when I wasn't slow walking through the blocking. The scene with Julie went well. We connected with each other in the moment where she tells me we made love last night. Savannah brings such exuberant energy to her character she makes it easy for me to react naturally in our scene together. The pacing in the scene with Karen and Edith needs to be picked up. The comedy is there in the writing but it lacks the energy it needs to relay the frustration Jake is feeling. The scene is followed by a monologue in which Jake talks about "mother abandonment" in a detailed explanation of a time when he was 5 years old. This explains the dysfunctional relationship he has suffered his entire life with his mother and the torment he has endured for his entire life. Immediately after, is followed by a comedic scene, with Sheila, in which we worked on solely the physical action of the scene. At this point in the play, Jake is losing his mind. This scene sets up a climactic moment in the play he gets past. This is at the height of his psychosis in which he needed to come to terms with. We ascend into his talk with imaginary Maggie where he confronts his inability to face his real self. This rehearsal covered extremely important relational issues of the play and heightened levels of physical activity that brings us to a turning point in the play where he begins to come terms with the loss of his dead wife and the reality of the current situation with Maggie, his current wife. To be honest, I couldn't wait for the rehearsal to be over. I couldn't do the physical things I wanted to do so I

managed to just get through the process. We got out early and I headed home to get some rest.

August 28, 2011

We focused on the last 25 pages of the script. The end of the second act needed a lot of work since we haven't had a read through of it. We are supposed to be off book in a couple of days, which concerns me. I am nowhere close to being off book on most of the first act. We have had very little time to rehearse, so I asked Bobby to push being off-book until Thursday, which is our first tech rehearsal. He understood my concerns and agreed with me to give me a couple more days to work on lines. The strategy for tonight's rehearsal for me was to work on my connection to the last monologue of the play. I have barely looked at it knowing how vitally important it is for me to understand its message and the impact it is going to have on the audience. I understand Jake, the trials and tribulations he has endured throughout the play and his entire life. With this, I can only trust myself that I will be relaxed and open to reacting naturally to the given circumstances in each scene.

August 29, 2011

This was the first time we are blocking the scene with Jake and Sheila. This scene has the most physical energy in the play. Jake has completely lost his mind and frightens Sheila out of his apartment. We worked on the physical action of the play more than the emotional.



August 30, 2011 – Act I off-book

Bobby Funk requested for us to be off book in rehearsal. I was sincere and honest with him that there was no way I was going to be off-book. He understood my honesty and allowed me to have script in hand and or call for lines when needed. The one scene I felt was a complete disaster was my last monologue in Act II where Jake talks to his own voice inside his own head. Jake thinks his mother is talking to him, but in reality it is himself finally coming to terms to forgive his mother. This is the moment of redemption for Jake. I struggled with the real sense of emotion and psychosis in the mind of Jake. My energy overtook my body so the physical and emotional action became external. I did not internalize an ounce of dialogue, as it became a nervous utterance of words that had no meaning.

August 31, 2011 – Act II off-book

The tempo of the show was set right from the start with my opening line “did you forget something?” This scene was designed by Bobby Funk to have a soap opera feel filled with melodrama. The comical beginning to Act II catapults the rest of the play into a circus of emotion and analytical discoveries into the mind of Jake. The Sheila scene in Act II where Jake is really losing his mind needed some attention. The choreography of Jake spinning Sheila around as he checks out her physical presence needs some more rehearsing. The scene is physically technical, especially when Maggie enters the scene as an imaginary figure, attention must be closely paid to the movement. This high tempo scene ends with Maggie provoking Jake to scream the line, “go on keep talking, you’ll never leave this room alive”! The importance of this scene with real Sheila and

imaginary Maggie is that it ends with Jake finally starting to realize within himself the understanding the trust he has within the characters he writes, but he has difficulty trusting people in the real world.

September 1, 2011 - Tech Act I

We ran the entire Act I tonight. We call this a stumble through where we work out all of the kinks. The one scene that needed to tighten loose ends on was the scene with Sheila. This is largely due in part to the physical action of the scene. Jake has a lot of extraneous movements where there is no more room for error. The scene is very specific in the choreography, which explains the point of neurosis Jake is currently experiencing in the play.

September 2 - Tech Act II

The three scenes that stood out for me that needed work was the scene with Sheila in Act II, the scene with Julie and Molly and finally my monologue at the end of the play. The Sheila scene required physical movement that requires choreography when I see her "warm flesh and blood". Her character is a "real person" and I soon realize the reality of my own insanity when she runs out of the apartment screaming due to Jake's erratic behavior. I soon her around and strategically touch various parts of her body to show myself and the audience that she is real. Because this is not a tech heavy show, tonight's rehearsal was primarily working on the final monologue. I recorded my voice a couple of days ago to coincide with the last scene of the play where I am sitting at my desk hearing my own voice of reason. The challenge for me was remembering the important cue words of the last monologue to signal the sound designer to play the audio response of dialogue. By the end of the night, we worked out the technical difficulties.

September 5, 2011 - Dress-Tech

Tonight was our first dress-tech rehearsal focusing solely on Act 1. We focused entirely on Act I and ran it like an actual show with no stopping. This gave me no time to work on specific scenes I needed help with. This rehearsal gave me the freedom to explore my character and relationship with the other actors. I thought the rehearsal went well and felt the energy level was consistent throughout the entire Act. I felt more confident with the monologues, more specifically worked on talking to the audience. Neil Simon wrote this style of Jake talking to the audience in the play to get them involved. This tactic brought Jake and the audience closer together. I refer to the audience as I'm telling my stories, sharing my most intimate thoughts and feelings.

September 6, 2011

The second dress rehearsal was Act 2. The energy level is much different from Act II. We start off the second Act with a scene involving myself (Jake) and Cara Harker (Maggie) in a fantasy that really kicks the show into high gear. For me, this scene sets the tone for the rest of the play. Cara Harker (Maggie) came out with such wonderful energy crawling on the floor garnering a lot of laughs when she says the line 'praying to God that you haven't rented out my half of the bed or somebody else's sops dish isn't sitting there in my soap dish? Her brilliant delivery of the one line in her mini monologue get the audience going on the right level of energy.

September 7, 2011

This was our first dress rehearsal of the entire play. We ran of both Acts I and II as best as we could. We have 3 days prior to opening night. I had in the back of my

mind that I could have used another week of preparation considering we had only 2 1/2 weeks to get off-book. Tonight, those 105 pages of dialogue “set in like cement”. That line is in Act II when Jake is revealing to himself and the audience the dysfunctional relationship he has with his mother. The responsibility to perform effectively with seven different women was the ultimate challenge. The dialogue evokes tears and laughter in this comedy-drama. The brilliance of Neil Simon and his writing is evident from the opening scene till the last word of the play. The intensity is there and the actors need to be ready and listen to one another to ride the tempo of the play. My focus tonight was to set the tempo early on in the opening scene and let the cast go along for the ride. The comedy rests in the dialogue, which evokes tears and laughter. This was a stumble through of lines, tech, and blocking. The entire cast hit their marks with energy and commitment. There were lines dropped in a few places, myself included. In the scene with Julie I forgot the line where I am explaining to her that she is not really here, but imaginary. I am so caught in the moment and in awe Savannah Arwood’s timing in the moment of our scene, I got lost in her emotion. I need to work out those kinks in the scene so it flows more smoothly. This needed to happen right away since opening night is tomorrow.

### **Journal of Performance**

September 8, 2011

Tonight is opening night of *Jake's Women* and felt like another dress rehearsal for me. The house was packed with a fun audience, but I thought my energy started off a bit slow. I arrived to theatre 1 hour before the start of the show. I sat in an armless chair in

the dressing room to perform my relaxation exercise. This allows the mind and body to calm my nerves and focus on my concentration. I focused my concentration on areas of the play where I kept forgetting lines. The first one was in Act I, the first scene with my sister (Karen) played by Kelcey Warner. The line was not critical but bothersome to me as an actor. I know that in live theatre there are never two performances that are the same, but the two lines I kept forgetting were consistent. For instance, in Act II, the scene with Edith and Karen kept me challenged because of three-way dialogue happening simultaneously. There is a lot of dialogue going back and forth where Jake is beginning to lose his mind and question his sanity. This was one of the few areas where I keep having a mental block. In Act II, the telephone scene with my daughter (Molly at age 21) Kacy Tiller and my dead wife (Julie) Savannah Arwood was another place where I kept forgetting a line or two. It took a lot of time rehearsing that scene because there was a lot of going back and forth in dialogue with Julie and the phone talk with my daughter (Molly at 20). For me, it was more of a physical issue I was having. I believe it is more difficult to do scenes where there is a lot back and forth dialogue with two different actors than it is to memorize a page and a half monologue. With a monologue you can create a certain flow and maintain the rhythm. With two and three person scenes, there is a more critical approach that requires a certain timing to maintain the rhythm of the scene. The final scene with (Maggie) Cara Harker, my wife, is another place where I was having some difficulty remembering lines. We only rehearsed the scene once so there was obvious concern there. I missed the line where I say “am I that different?” This is the moment in the play where Julie is really looking at my physical features and noticing

my age difference in my hair, face, and midsection. I get so caught up with the intense action of the emotion in my mind, it wanders into a surreal state. There has been so much emotional dialogue in the action of the play up to this point and for some reason I kept forgetting these one-liners. The beauty of Neil Simon's writing in *Jake's Women* is that there is so much dialogue and a lot of emotions in many different scenes, if there comes a time when a line is dropped, the action covers. We had 3 nights of dress rehearsals, including tech. I felt confident in my physical abilities, but the performance of *Jake's Women* tonight felt like a dress rehearsal.

September 9, 2011

Before the show, I was informed that the Communications Department faculty, including Pat Cronin, was coming to the show. I felt a rush of energy in the dressing room. I was ready to do my thing and throw every emotion and physical action I had on the stage. Of course, this all had to happen within the context of the play. The play has been well blocked by Bobby Funk, action emotion of and out into the audience. I promised myself there will no room for error. I knew the moment I relaxed the performance would go well. The performance went better than I thought and the audience responded with laughter and sadness. It felt as if they understood the punch line jokes and sincerely felt the sadness in the serious scenes. As an actor, I felt as if I succeeded in accomplishing most of what I have worked on up to this point. I was elated by the audience reactions and their ability to follow the real imaginary characters scene by scene. Bobby Funk, the director, was especially pleased and his comments meant more to me than anything else at that time. We worked so hard for such a short period of

time to accept anything less than an approval from the director that the show was anything but a triumph. The moments of the play worked and fell into place that night at the right time. It was a great feeling considering the limited amount of rehearsal time we had.

September 10, 2011

This is third night of performance and my wife is coming tonight with some close friends of ours that have never seen me act. To be able to perform in front of my wife and also show our friends the talents I have that they have never seen gave me a rush of excitement. I was ready to demonstrate to the audience my ability as an actor. I sat in my dressing room doing my relaxation with a concentrated state of mind on the physicality of my character. There were some things I wanted to work on in the first scene of the play and my scene with Sheila. My state of mind had a burning feeling to get on stage get to work. I know in the back of my mind that in the rehearsal process, I have moments to work on as far as line memorization. This is always an overall feeling an actor has. I feel ready to show off my physicality as the character I have worked on. The emotional state of mind I have carefully constructed within my soul is ready to seize the moments as they come. My goal is eliminate tension or use it to my advantage.

September 11, 2011

I had an emotional start to my day honoring the WTC victims from the 9/11 attacks and thinking about the emotional journey the past 10 years I have had and the jolt that shook our country. This day was an important, life-changing day for me to manifest the stability of myself as a human being. The millions of Americans feeling a spiritual

uplift in emotions today rejuvenated my soul and energized my mind. It prepped for this day to help me work on a few areas of the play involving family relationships, kinship, and ties to those people close to me. My relationship to my family is important to my soul and sensibility as a human being. The strength of my ability is not so much within my family relations but is formulated by the relationship I have with my mother. This is reflective in *Jake's Women* when, in Act II, Jake talks about "typical Freudian abandonment" from his mother. This triggered the character work I revolved around my life and the multiple relationships I have had each woman creating an emotional concoction of surreal and real situations. This play travels deep within my own life and manifests itself into my life as a New Yorker. The many connections I have with the character Jake and Neil Simon have been ironic and therapeutic. *Jake's Women* is an example of my life imitating art with the absolute truths and honest statements shared within the play can be taken with a grain of salt or taken with a heart of gold. Every time I step on stage, I am transported back to my co-op apartment on Park Avenue South. This was the last place I called home in New York City before I moved to Johnson City. For me, this is a dream role I would someday like to revisit on a New York stage. I would do this in a heartbeat. Thank you, Bobby Funk and Patrick Cronin, for making this a reality for me.

September 14, 2011

We had a brush up rehearsal tonight, which went exceptionally well. My technical acting problem areas were scattered throughout the play. The first area I focused on was the telephone call in the very beginning of the play in Act I where I am



arguing with my sister Karen about making dinner plans. Phone calls are very difficult to pull off in the opening of a play because of the ability to make it believable enough for the audience that I am actually talking to someone on the phone. The imaginary person has to be clear and very specific to make the conversation sound believable. I personalized my sister that I am very close to in real life. We talk a lot on the phone about a lot of things that pertain to family issues. For some reason, I had a challenge with this conversation and of hearing my sister's voice. The conflict for me was I did not listen to what I was saying so my reactions were slowed and not as real as they should have been. This affected my ability to remember the lines. This translated into dialogue that, in my mind, was not as believable as I would have liked. It is a critique of myself that bothers me throughout the rehearsal process and the entire show.

September 15, 2011

A funny thing that happened occasionally in different areas of the play was the inconsistency in calling the girls by different names. There was a scene where Janette Gaines (Edith, therapist) and I have are talking about my problems about my inability to get my dead wife (Julie) out of my head. This is a major reason for the separation with my current wife Maggie. I am supposed to say, "It's my fault Julie died and Maggie's leaving?" Instead I kept switching their names around saying "It's my fault Maggie's dead and Julie leaving?" This is a critical mistake that happened in rehearsal only, thank god. That is a major mistake that you do not want to make in front of a live audience, ever. That changes the entire meaning of the play. In a scene in Act I with Kelcey Werner (Karen) I called her Julie during a conversation. I remember calling Julie "Maggie" in an

intimate scene in Act II about me bringing my daughter back for them to meet in an imaginary situation. Again, this was during rehearsal and I worked hard at consciously fixing it before opening night. The actresses in the play with me are so talented and knew the script so well that they covered for me brilliantly. The dialogue in *Jake's Women* moves so freely and fast-paced that these mistakes can and will happen.

### **Talk About the Process**

When the lights are on, your actions dictate the moment of feelings and the ability to listen. There is much to learn from working with many different actors. The wide range of experience and skill sets can be helpful for an actor of any level. This exemplifies the importance of collaboration in an ensemble cast, working closely with each other, stimulating thought and igniting action to perform new ideas. This comes with discipline, as Funk emphasizes the cast to agree to be obedient in compliance with each other's creative ideas.

The problem playing Jake, the main character onstage in every scene, is that I could not step back, sit, and watch the other actors rehearse. It was difficult for me to give constructive criticism without being in the moment. There is still so much to learn from being on stage, listening and reacting. The power of performing on stage in front of a live audience creates a dimension of emotions that only the actor can explain. The privilege of living the moment on stage is the reality that transcends any experience a human being will have in one's lifetime. It is about being in the moment and recreating an imaginary reality with real life situations. The creative power Funk established as director rectified my ideas into action as he orchestrated precise movement within the

emotional context of the play. He helped us create the subtext by defining the technical nuances in each scene. After all, *Jake's Women* is an actor's play as a production that is the director's show. Funk knew precisely what he wanted from the set, to the blocking to the overall intention of the play.

From an actor's standpoint, I could relate to Jake and where he was from in New York City. I grew up in Jersey City, New Jersey, which most people consider the sixth borough of New York City. I began to explore the accent and dialect of the region. My relation to the sounds and tones of the people in the Bronx were different from the neighborhood where I grew up, but being from the New York area enabled me to simplify the process of creating accent. According to Strasberg (1965) "the actor's imagination is never aroused if his effort remains fixed on the level of the words" (p.178). The use of imagination drives the real meaning behind the words and the accent will come out of that.

In the beginning stages of the rehearsal process, my accent sounded like a male-chauvinistic Italian guy with no substance of sensitivity. I was only exploring with different accents to see where it would bring me. There was comedy in the accent but it came across as offensive. During the rehearsal process I naturalized the accent by not thinking about the accent as much but making it more real to the character by not overemphasizing the voice. I focused more on the dialogue and the intentions of the situations, allowing the accent to come naturally. My sensibility of the location of the play as being in New York and the surrounding areas allowed me to adapt to the specificity of the role. There are many different dialects, especially in the five boroughs

of New York, but this dialect has to be specific due to the distinct differences in the accents the play presents.

There are six monologues in *Jake's Women* in which I addressed the audience. Neil Simon intentionally wrote Jake talking to the audience to create an intimate connection with the audience. For Jake to speak out loud, specifically recognizing the emphasis of his feelings in the moments of his life in the scenes, led the audience to empathize with his current crisis. The content is relevant to the situations Jake is feeling so I am experiencing in the real and imaginary life I am living in. As Hagen (1973) states "whether the monologue deals with plot or character problems (even if by the author's graces the character is allowed in his eloquence to know more about himself than he actually might in life), or even if the character talks aloud to himself because he is insane, a monologue will always be words representing the character's thoughts or a part of his thrust" (p. 119). I was able to express my feelings and thoughts in the monologues to the audience with intimacy and truth. The monologues were dialogue not meant to be spoken out loud but spoken in a soft, storytelling tone set to enhance the audience in becoming a part the play. The result is becoming a part of the humanistic reality created in the moment.

Jake has the handicap that belongs to writers in life preferring "creative pleasure" at his computer or laptop to real pleasure. Jake is a guy who speaks out loud to get his feelings heard and his own thoughts expressed. According to Rich (1992) "has characteristics that portray him as being selfish, but he has feelings that torment him, making him emotional and susceptible to a psychological dependency of women when

Jake says, 'reality is a bummer' (Simon, 1990, p. 12)". To come terms with the inner voice of his neurotic subconsciousness, Jake has been seeing a therapist named Edith. Jake is constantly refuting every piece of advice she gives him but he still consciously needs to see and talk to her sees as another form of therapy other than his writing. Jake has Molly (his 21 year old) daughter who speaks to him rationally and intelligently. Molly represents the only stable figure in his life and he listens to her. She is the only stable element in his life that makes him see things with a rational lens and a clear state of mind. These are the two rational figures in Jake's life that act as his conscious.

I have developed a keen understanding of Lee Strasberg's method acting technique and made constructive use of the exercises over the last 20 years. My belief in the method was induced by the belief I had in Strasberg's purpose of making the actor bring imaginary objects to life. Strasberg's belief in sensory objects comes from the state of mind of the actor. According to Strasberg (1965) "certain things that are part of the environment of a particular event are not emphasized by the author, but they must be created imaginatively by the actor in order to play the scene" (p.126). The actor's body needs to be consistent by working with acting exercises and methods that require discipline and consistency.

The refinement of my acting technique came in my studies with Lorraine and Dianne Hull. They were the only people given permission by Lee Strasberg himself to conduct a "Strasberg Method" acting class outside of the Lee Strasberg Theatre Institute's in New York and Los Angeles. I met with Lorraine and Dianne Hull after reviewing their book titled "Strasberg's Method". The mother-daughter tandem had been given

permission by Lee Strasberg to run a private acting studio and teach the "method". With the guidance of the Hull experience, I have documented a brief account of the areas of concentration applied by their studio and has influenced my craft as an actor. Listed below are brief and detailed descriptions of Lee Strasberg acting exercises I have implemented into my process as an actor presented by the Lorraine and Dianne Hull Acting Studio in Los Angeles.

First, the process of relaxation is an applied before one can act. As stated by Strasberg (1965) “when he is relaxed and thinking or paying attention about something, or when random thoughts move through this consciousness, impulses pass without interruption into pure expression” (p.88). The focus of the exercise is to rid the body of tension in one’s voice, body, face, and appearance. This frees the body of habitual movements into revealing pure emotion with expression and without interruption. Once the body enters the relaxed state of being, the process of concentration is triggered into believing what he or she is doing.

Second, my acting process involves concentration, which is the guide to impulse and belief. According to Strasberg, (1965) the actor who has enough belief and will to follow his impulse is usually concentrated” (p. 94). This begins the process of the actor to liven up imaginary feelings and make them real. In keeping with Strasberg (1965), “the actor cannot really think on stage unless he is concentrated, and he cannot be concentrated unless he is really thinking on stage” (p. 94). The state of being relaxed and concentrated assists the body to limit mental activity that will manufacture muscular tension. The power of concentration is the necessary responsibility the actor has to

maintain and combat tension. Most of the time, when tension is relieved, the imagination and senses are open to many creative interpretation of the character. Furthermore, the emotions or intentions are not directly related to the play but act as a relinquishing component of the actor's creative conscious. When this is achieved for the actor, true concentration is accomplished.

Every human has different levels of sense memory that occur on a daily basis, which comes with dealing in object's not being present, arouses our senses. According to Strasberg (1965), "concentration is fostered by exercises dealing with objects in sense memory, that is, without the actual objects' being there" (p. 99). The sense memory aspect of preparation is to experience stimulation of the five senses. These areas are the sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch in which experiences are relived. As Hull (1995) states, "it means creating an inner life of a character, including a character's ongoing thoughts, sensations, perceptions and emotions" (p.10). This is also accomplished by incorporating affective memory in which an actor chooses a personal experience with discipline of applying specific intention, excluding anything general with the purpose of establishing truth and honesty. The achieved result is by recreating all aspects of your performance giving your performance a stable body of reality, as opposed to creating faulty emotions (Hull, 1985). The ability for actors to listen creates an effectiveness to become believable and not "act", just by learning your lines but creating a life inside oneself for a lifetime of growth into the future of one's craft.

Another technique used for the basic act of listening comes with improvisation. This is another technique enabling the actor with the ability to concentrate. Stanislavski

and Strasberg uncovered the truth that actor's use of unconscious memory allows the actor to work creatively rather than produce mechanical work (Hull, 1985). The actor must be able to free his or her instrument of what his body and mind develops in forced habits. The use of memory in improvisation is essential to understanding the entire process that goes into this process of acting. The improvisation technique was not used in our rehearsals for *Jake's Women* but was suggested to use as a technique, if needed. The idea of repetition was the most effective tool implemented in the rehearsal process with the director Bobby Funk as well as the other cast members.

I have been exposed to many different styles of directing in my experiences as an actor. Having worked with various directing approaches and having the ability as an actor to be able to understand the sensibility in a director's mind, my acting has greatly improved. Furthermore, working with director Bobby Funk has presented to me a process of strategy. He designed the rehearsal schedule in a way that worked for every individual working in the production. He understood the limited time we had to work with and knew exactly how to accomplish what he set out to do, simply by beginning with the blocking of the play. The play was broken down in beats as a way to facilitate the rehearsals to define each person's role. Funk made sure each actor was called on a specific night and available. He made sure the actors called to rehearse and not stand or wait around. There was no time wasted in rehearsal and I respect that professional approach, even in an educational setting. This process helped with Funk's understanding and acting experience to go along with his directing. Funk had confidence with his knowledge of both sides of the profession. The effectiveness of Funk's approach showed



us he was ready for the work that lay ahead and road it took to get there. His directing authority worked for the collaboration of the show. The ensemble cast of eight actors appreciated and thanked Funk for being a team player. He trusted the actors and made everyone's time useful. Funk's vision was to design the set, paint the picture and orchestrate the show in a collaborative manner.

## CHAPTER 4

### EXPERIENCE

#### **Experience Introduction**

During the fall of 2010, East Tennessee State's presented to the Bud Frank Theatre a staged production of Neil Simon's *Jake's Women*. The cast of *Jake's Women* was comprised of Jake and seven supporting characters, five of whom were undergraduate students from East Tennessee State University's theatre and dance department. There were two professional actresses with years of experience: Cara Harker (Maggie), an assistant dance professor at ETSU, and Janette Gaines (Edith), actress and director at the Jonesborough Repertory Theatre as well as enrolled ETSU student. The rest of the cast consisted of: theatre major Savannah Arwood (dead wife Julie), theatre minor Hannah Hasch (Molly at 12), theatre major Kacy Tiller (Molly at 21), theatre major Kelcey Werner (Karen), and theatre-dance major Danielle Mumpower (Sheila). This cast of women represented the crux of talent that perfectly fit the casting for *Jake's Women*.

The undergraduate talent was cast through auditions held by the ETSU Division of Theatre and Dance. ETSU offers a BA degree in theatre as a major for those students interested in pursuing the performing arts as a career. The College of Arts and Sciences also offers Theatre as a minor. As Theatre majors in a competitive program the cast members are serious in their pursuit of acting and gaining experience due to the strength of the invaluable acting and stage opportunities offered by the department. There is a balance of learning about the business, the audition process, and the focus on preparing for acting professionally outside of academics. This balanced type of education is

valuable in introducing actors to important information such as actor's unions and the rules and steps one needs to take to eventually get union representation. The importance of a balanced education is to address policies aspiring actors must follow when they qualify and when they are working as professionals in the business.

With this talent and knowledge, I have been exposed to a theatre department with a mature mind, positive attitude, and confidence to seriously treat the business of acting as a profession and not just a hobby. One of the leaders of the theatre department is the director of *Jake's Women*, Bobby Funk, who cast the play. The casting decisions were based on experience and character type. Type casting is the idea of an actor strongly resembling the characters physical and emotional identity. The final judgment was the actor's determination and professionalism. The cast understands the process, respects the theatre, and has the vision to make the play come to life. The goal with this production was to prepare the educational actors with the opportunity to work in a professional atmosphere, work with Neil Simon's dialogue, and be engaged in the emotional activity of the plays intention with the audience. This experience gives the cast and crew a clearer understanding of the process with individual goals in mind. The commitment of the cast and crew defines the point of view of the director to make this collaboration a success.

This cornucopia of talent in *Jake's Women* provided a strong foundation for a play that required a vibrant cast with energy and commitment to work in a collaborative environment. Neil Simon wrote this play without the collaborative intention, but it turned out to be an ensemble play far more than just Jake's. As an actor, the growth as a

performer and understanding of the psychology behind the search for mental clarity comes from the understanding of the circumstances in the play. More importantly, when the cast consists of exuberant actors hungry for a dynamic representation of theatre in its true form, the results are 2 1/2 hours of ethereally satisfying theatre. The play reminded me of how important is it to embrace the craft of acting as an ensemble and the power in which it can grow. With this collaboration, I learned to adapt to an ensemble cast with a tremendous amount of confidence and presence on stage. As Hagen states (1973), "every actor must demand total discipline of himself if he really means to be an actor" (p.19). This self-discipline resided in a cast that was easy to work with, captivating me with their physical presence on stage and their ability to listen.

As an actor-driven play, the more talented cast trusted everyone and believed in each individual's choices, creating an environment where everyone was able to grow from the collaborative experience. As Hagen (1973) says, "a very gifted actor may be surpassed and outrun by a lesser talent simply because he is lazy, buck-passing, superficial - an actor settling for the easiest choices" (p.19). That was not the case in this production of *Jake's Women*. There was no ego and no showmanship, only a communal effort compounded of trust, dedication, seriousness, mutual respect, and honesty necessary to believe in the show's success. As Hagen says, "we must serve the play by serving each other; an ego-maniacal 'star' attitude is only self-serving and hurts everyone, including the 'star'" (p.19). This attitude is sharpened when an actor trains young, showing focus as an example of discipline.

This show had an enormous amount of discipline and collaborative effort from everyone involved. The confidence and poise in the talents of the student actors represented the influential leadership of the theatre department comprised of exciting up-and-coming talent in the business was clear in this production. The production of *Jake's Women* created a collaborative environment where every second of the show required deliberate action with poise and efficiency. This presented a challenge for the cast to be on time and ready to work. I gravitate towards this type of production, which lies heavily on the sensitivity of the women and the emotions they deliver. The sensitivity and empathy they performed in their characters were focused on the responsibility of being honest with their acting choices. The feeling on stage was safe, loving, and empowering. I realized that no matter the theatrical setting, whether educational or professional, an actor should never take the other actors and crew for granted. The crew works exceptionally hard, solving problems and coming up with constructive solutions as quickly as possible.

During the duration of the play, I was able to portray the physical action of the character Jake very well. He is a man that is an emotional wreck due to the loss of his first wife and the separation he is going through currently. I worked on using this mental state of mind by focusing on posture. I felt that Jake needed to feel weak in the shoulders and upper body, giving him the look of someone worn down, which he is. I did a lot of hand movements, craning of the neck and humping over as I sat and paced across the stage during my monologues. This was a conscious physical decision I made for the character, and it worked. Jake says, "I am a man at the end of his rope, with no rope to

hang on to because of my wife just took the rope with her...I don't know, I used to fantasize about romance, lust and power, now I am into humiliation" (p. 60). This is a man who is about to lose everything and it shows in his present physical state. I created hand movements within each scene that symbolized the feeling of need. These movements were subconsciously designed to encompass all of the above-mentioned emotion in the monologue. The reaching out for real-life interaction with Maggie in Act I and Act II involves her maintaining her distance from Jake. This distance remained throughout the entire length of the play until the end of Act II when his hands are finally able to reach out and touch Maggie. The romance returns with the touching of their hands, illuminating the love and affection they have for one another. There is a similar situation with Jake's girlfriend Sheila in Act II. The hands symbolize the reaching out for love and affection. The purpose was to describe the physicality of acting in addition to talent and emotive abilities of the actors.

### **Process Summary**

The collaboration in *Jake's Women* was unique for me. With this production, we had only 3 weeks of rehearsal, including tech and dress for a 2 1/2 hour show. Given the limited amount of time, the rehearsal process was fast-paced and short. The director, Bobby Funk, set the blocking, telling us exactly where he wanted specific action to take place on stage. He created the detail of the scenes in the performance space of the set. Two of the actresses in the play had dance experience, so they were able to choreograph three scenes in the play involving specific movements. This incorporated the collaborative efforts inspirational to the director, giving Funk the ability to look at the

overall picture of the play. He gave us the freedom to make our own choices, allowing us to move freely on stage within the construct of the blocking. This style of directing was useful considering the limited rehearsal schedule for a 2 1/2 hour, two-act play.

As an actor with years of acting experience, I felt this was disruptive to the process. I was not accustomed to skipping an initial table read with the other cast members before the blocking process. The first read is standard in any type of production, educational or professional, but having experienced actors in the cast helped the situation in this unconventional process. The collaborative efforts of the cast and crew helped make the intimacy of the scenes a distinct bond of creativity. Hagen (1973) assertively quotes Stanislavski, "love the art in yourself, not yourself in the art" (p.20). There were no actors who were in the production of *Jake's Women* for their own self-worth. These were actors with a passion for the play and who took the artistic process seriously. The cast was comprised of actors who take pride in the profession as a career. This is the reason why *Jake's Women* was a success as a professional production in an educational environment.

### **What Worked, What Didn't, and Why?**

The first area I would like to cover is the hours of rehearsal we had each week. This was not an Equity show so there were no set union rules as to how long the rehearsals had to be. The director Bobby Funk set up a 3-hour rehearsal schedule for each night. Those were his guidelines and we followed them accordingly, sometimes meeting for 2 hours. Funk trusts the actors to come to the theatre prepared and not overworking the actors to the point of exhaustion. This is due in part to the students class

schedules and other production hours spent by the crew, such as Will McCall (stage manager), Scott Koenig (lighting and sound technician), and Christine Waxstein (costume designer). We had to adhere to the educational class schedule and averaged 15 hours of rehearsal hours a week, typically Monday through Friday for a 3-week period before opening night in the fourth week.

Bobby Funk's specific rehearsal schedule was sent out in advance to help alleviate any potential conflicts the students may have had with the rehearsals. This was to avoid having actors standing around and not making use of their time. The schedule was broken down into beats strategically set when each actor was called to rehearse so they were ready to work. For example, "block Act I, beats 1 and 3." Funk's detailed rehearsal schedule was very clear on how time was going to be spent on each scene. He set the schedule so actors were only called when they were needed, even if an actor had one or two nights off during the week. The guidelines he used were like that of an equity union show to create a professional atmosphere and a respectable environment. This specific type of scheduling is an example of what the experience is like to work with a director who understands the mindset of collaboration in a professional environment.

On the nights of the performance, Funk incorporated the standard policy of any theatre contracts, professional or amateur, with actors arriving 1 hour before call time. This is traditional for actors in educational theatre, meaning the actors must arrive at the theatre no later than 1 hour before curtain call, the opening of the play. Funk recognized my Actors Equity union status and gave me 30 minutes before curtain call time. Regardless, this should be a standard policy acknowledged in any working environment.



The hour or 30 minutes before call time is used for the actors to get into costume and makeup, check their props, do character preparation, warm-ups, or whatever action of training needed to get ready. It takes a few minutes to check their props, conduct a 10 minute relaxation or warm-up, and get themselves into character to prepare for the performance. Furthermore, the director, stage manager, and sound and lighting designers check their notes and also call the actors to their places. This has always been my ritual as an experienced actor, whether I'm in an educational or professional working environment.

### **KCACTF Respondent's and Professor's Comments**

On September 17, 2011, *Jake's Women* was critiqued by Iverson Warinner, a Professor of the Communication and Theatre Arts program at Spalding University in Louisville, Kentucky. In a limited engagement run, Warinner attended the 7th out of 8th show on Saturday, September 10. Here are the critical assessments of his thoughts on *Jake's Women*.

### **Written Acting**

Iverson Warinner:

The acting ranged from well executed characters to those characters who were less realized. Doug Reiser (Jake), Kacy Tiller (Molly, age 21), and Savannah Arwood (Julie) created highly interesting and believable characters. My suspension of disbelief was only challenged when the pacing went awry in Act I. Danielle Mumpower (Sheila) portrayed a highly entertaining and enjoyable alternative to Jake's typical choice of wife. Although there were hints of Jennifer

Tilly and Jean Hagen in her character, she did manage to pull off the emotionally and mentally lacking sex goddess. I would recommend that Danielle work on greater control of her higher vocal register, as often, her voice would lose incomprehensibility in the higher ranges. Kacy Tiller (Molly, age 21) and Savannah Arwood (Julie) showed remarkable consistency and intimacy in their roles as mother and daughter. Their Irene Ryan nominations are well deserved. Hannah Hasch (Molly, age 12) showed a remarkable ability to make us believe that she was raised by Maggie, as she portrayed being raised by Julie. Both were raised by the same father, but different mothers, and the difference was subtle, yet obvious. I really liked Janette Gaines (Edith). I thought the comic nature she brought to the role and her comic vocalizations were right on. I would have enjoyed seeing her stretch her character more to fully recognize her comic potential. The actress playing Jake's sister Karen did an adequate job of playing Jake's sister. However, her lack of physical and vocal expressiveness set her apart from the experience of the other actors. (Warinner, 2011)

### **Written Choice of Play**

Iverson Warinner:

*Jake's Women* was an outstanding choice. The actors are required to react and interact to real characters and imaginary characters during this production. This provides each actor with a unique opportunity, an acting clinic, so to speak, to have continuous conversations with both the real and imaginary characters in many scenes, especially in Act II. I would certainly recommend this play for any

undergraduate and/or graduate university who want to give actors a real test of creating real proper reality for varying characters. Especially noteworthy was the scene in Act II between Jake, Sheila and Maggie. With stronger actors in several of the supporting roles, this could have been quite a contender in the regional festival. (Warinner, 2011)

### **Written Design Elements**

Iverson Warinner:

The scenic and design elements contributed greatly to the production. Scott Koenig set design and an execution gave Jake's apartment a lived in look, yet serviced the quick and effective entrances and exits of the imaginary characters. I enjoyed the raised portion of the apartment as Jake's creative cave for his imagination. Thus set him apart, and helped with the quick identification of the characters that were real, and those who were in his imagination. The color palette of the lights, along with the set, created a warm ambience that immediately invited the audience into Jake's world. I also thought the tension among the different set pieces we're also interesting, and reflective of Jake's often disturbed, imagination. I do wish the pictures we're hung with a bit more precision, but I can see how the choices did add for more mental confusion for Jake. I felt the choice of the same palette as the set and the lights, often allowed the characters to be lost on stage. I would have enjoyed more bold colors for Sheila, Edith, and Karen, as often costumes not only should play into the overall palette, but should help define the characters. I appreciated the costume designer's explanation of her

costume choices, especially her love for patterns, but the tan and beige colors would have helped with some bolder colors for other actors. Another idea that could have helped the audience identify the real vs. the imaginary characters would be a subtle, but consistent accent for the real characters, and another for the imaginary one's (Warinner, 2011).

### **Written Direction**

Iverson Warinner:

Bobby Funk's direction was well conceived and realized for the play. Mr. Funk also used the width of the stage to his benefit. Many of the more intimate scenes were played on a bench stage right, especially those with Molly and her mother, and the two Molly's. Center stage playing area was reserved primarily for conversation between Jake and his real wife, Maggie, while most of the comic and highly active, energetic scenes were played stage left. The imaginative casting of Doug Reiser, an Equity actor, in the role of Jake, also provided rich and deeply personal interactions with the other more experienced stage actors as well as those with less experience. Casting Cara Harker, a professor of dance as Maggie, also provided the audience with some lily and highly emotional exchanges Mr. Funk also lay a distinct pacing for the play, which reflects vintage Neil Simon, and although the pacing was off in Act I, it was dead on in Act II. (Notes: I talking with the cast and crew afterwards we discussed discordant pacing in Act I. The actor playing Jake acknowledged that he was the pace setter and realized his pacing was off and had a conversation with himself during the act break to reset

the rhythm for Act II. Mr. Funk should also be acknowledged for his hands on approach to directing. He set the basic blocking, rhythms, tone, and characters, and then set back and let the actors act. I truly admire that approach to university directing (Warinner, 2011).

### **Written Tech Elements**

Iverson Warinner:

Finally, the execution of the design elements, were kept well on cue. William McCall called an excellent, tight show, and should be recognized for his work. Cues, entrances, were right on target, and never interfered with the pace of the show. The costumes were fresh and stylish enough for the concept she was trying to achieve (Warinner, 2011).

The critical review of *Jake's Women* was very good. The cast of experienced actors led to the creative character choices led by the Bobby Funk's direction, strong in his delivery of the blocking that set the tone of the play. The ensemble cast was strong in the overall evaluation. Warinner commented:

...with stronger actors in several of the supporting roles, this could have been quite a contender in the regional festival. With this, I truly felt the cast worked well together and displayed honest emotion in the imaginary and real scenes that existed throughout the play. There was an energetic chemistry between the characters, more specifically between Jake (Doug Reiser) and Maggie (Cara Harker) in the opening scene of Act II.

The witty choice Bobby Funk to play this imaginary scene as a soap opera was strong and worked well. In Jake's head, Maggie comes crawling into the apartment admitting to being wrong about everything going on with their marriage as Jake sits at the edge of the desk humorously playing seductive husband. This scene is followed by a monologue where Jake admits to his thoughts being uncontrollable and unstoppable. The humor lies in the dialogue and the witty choice of Bobby Funk's physical action that sets tone for the rest of the play. The play lay in the hands of the actors thanks to Bobby Funk's trust in the professional attitude and commitment of the cast and crew. (Warinner, 2011)

## **Response**

The overall critical notes of Iverson Warinner *Jake's Women* were very good. The physical action is one of the main ideas I agreed with Mr. Warinner as one of the strong points of the play, particularly in Act II in the comedic scene between Jake and Maggie. *Jake's Women* is a physically active play, so for the production to receive positive feedback regarding that particular aspect of the play is inspiring. The physical energy drives the play and picked up in Act II as a footnote to counteract the melancholy end of Act I.

Warinner noted *Jake's Women* as an excellent choice of a play to perform in an educational setting. This play provided the actors a unique opportunity to work together in a collaborative environment, and challenged the actors to listen to one another in real and imaginary situations. The actors were forced to listen and react to one another in a production that moved at a steady pace.

As for the costumes, the costume designer dressed the women in healthy, vibrant tones to counterbalance the neutral colors of Jake's wardrobe. The choice of Jake's wardrobe was perfectly chosen with different shades of brown, green, and darker blues. They were descriptive in his style as a man in torment and worked well together to visualize the psychology in the mind of the character. The lighting design by Scott Koenig set the mood of the play, creating a soft mood. Koenig's set design counteracted the lighting mood with a technique of confusion and disarray. His choice of hanging pictures on the wall stimulated a cold environment with a masculine look. There was no evidence of anything feminine in the set which gave the ambience of an isolated man unable to identify with the outside world. The feeling of the set was stimulated even further with Koenig's decision to construct a raised platform where Jake's deal would reside, separating him from everyone else. The set design features were visually pleasing but effectively conveyed isolation and a sterile environment. As a result, the actors responded well to the dim looking set and lit up the space onstage with energy, vibrancy, and efficiency due to the confidence demonstrates in their physical movements.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### **Approaches, Techniques, and Lessons Learned**

*Jake's Women* is a highly collaborative play within an educational theatre space. The play's director, Bobby Funk, demonstrated this environment by giving control to the actors. He had the authority to direct and treat the show as a professional theatre in his choice of blocking the show in advance. This approach gave the actors freedom to develop strong choices for the characters without giving too many notes after every performance and every show. This freedom allowed the creativity of the actors to discover new things about the relationships of the characters and heightened the educational experience comparable to working in a professional theatre environment. The importance of this approach in theatre showed the trust he had with the cast and the experience to engage everyone in a collaborative atmosphere, important in establishing a professional environment. We did not have time to block the play based on the actors' choice of movement but allowed the actors to move around the stage within the blocking of each scene. This type of blocking technique worked for the actors, giving us a more specific task in finding the complexity of the scene within a certain space. Furthermore, this technique limited our extraneous movements onstage by keenly defining our choices within the specifically confined setting. Our ability to find our movements presented an opportunity for the actors to discover our own problems, work through them, and make the necessary corrections with Funk's necessary guidance.



Bobby Funk had a vision and he trusted the actors to bring his inspiration of *Jake's Women* to an enlightened experience. I heard various audience members say this was the best show produced on the Bud Frank stage at ETSU. The collaborative efforts of the director, the stage manager, costume designer, lighting designer, and cast made this possible. The success was in the talented abilities of everyone involved and their desire to achieve excellence to the best of their abilities. The primary focus was to make it a professional theatre experience, which showed in the commitment of the actors and the crew. The active participation created a memorable experience important to the theatre.

The success of *Jake's Women* stemmed from a diverse group of actors and crew dedicated to the preparation before the rehearsals and show every night. As an ensemble production, having specific discussions with Funk, the actors were strong enough in those choices to justify the discoveries made in the preparation process. This process empowered the actors in creating real-life and imaginary situations believable. As in *Jake's Women*, Simon wrote the play with both of these situations. This created a challenge for the actors to work together and explore the responses and reactions of the complexity of the situations. According to Hull (1995), "onstage, real-life reactions and behavior must be created in response to imaginary stimuli" (p.40). Thus, the test was making the reality of the onstage experience real in the life a play written with real-life and imaginary situations within the play. This was accomplished in the efforts of the cast in the collaborative work and "training of him or herself to make these imaginary objects real as they would be in life, so they will awaken the proper sensory, emotional or motor

response" (p.41). Acting is an art that deals with experience and working together with everyone involved brought new growth for the entire cast and crew.

The most satisfying thing is when the actor has created life without indicating or imitating but emerging with the capability to perform a real experience onstage. Without this, the performances of *Jake's Women* would have resulted in a make-believe production of the thoughts and feelings in Neil Simon's mind in the context of the actions and words written in the play. It was the ability of the actors at ETSU in the cast of *Jake's Women* that constructed realism and a foundation for a strong future in the theatre and dance department. The commitment and open-minded collaboration made *Jake's Women* a success.

The advice I can give to actors is to train young and discipline their instrument to work in collaborative productions like *Jake's Women*. It is from these experiences that will inspire growth in the spine of the actor and the given circumstances in each scene of the play. As stated by Hull (1985), "the actors 'instrument' is his own body and impulses" (p.18). The actor's duty is to trust these impulses get what the character wants. There is psychology behind what the mind thinks, is a theme in *Jake's Women*. The interpretation of this psychology resides in the actor's ability to find the motivating power inside the characters intentions.

There were many examples in *Jake's Women* where Jake's intentions were to forgive and forget his troubles, but he can't find the answers to do it. Throughout the play Jake revealed to himself and the audience his desire to seek forgiveness with his family and resentment towards his mother. It was not until the end of the play in Act II when he

finally comes to terms with the overall objectives of the play. Jake had three main objectives: the catharsis, the miracle, and the bolt of lightning. With these three objectives: Jake can finally deal with the betrayal of his parents, which led to his catharsis; the miracle in getting rid of the imaginary voices in his head; and the bolt of lightning in Jake received when he forgave his mother and Maggie comes back. Jake goes through many desperate scenes to seeks out forgiveness and finally finds it when his three goals become realized. The discoveries of truth painted an honest portrayal of a man who struggled with an intense pain of loss. It was through a series of painful events and situations that created elements of the human condition that was the ultimate theme of the play.

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