

Fall 12-18-2014

Through the Eyes of the Homeless

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Recommended Citation

Soto, Aisha M., "Through the Eyes of the Homeless" (2014). *University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations*. 1946.

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“Through the Eyes of the Homeless”

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Film, Theatre and Communication Arts
Creative Writing

by

Aisha M. Soto

University of New Orleans

December 18, 2014

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Introduction

Homelessness is the state of being homeless or, as defined in Webster's dictionary, having no home or permanent place of residence. How many of us think about people who are homeless on a daily basis? How many of us know the number of homeless people in New York, the United States or worldwide? Do many people assume the number is miniscule? Are the majority of people too self-involved and preoccupied to be concerned about homeless people? Surely, they are noticed at some point, especially when they are sleeping on benches, on the subway, sitting by the sidewalks, walking while pushing their belongings in some type of shopping cart if they are lucky enough to have one, or panhandling by the intersections. These are some of the situations where the general population takes notice of homeless people because it cannot be avoided. Nevertheless, the interaction is brief and easily forgotten just as if it had never happened. Everyone goes on with their day and even though many people might wonder how and if they could help, the thought is brief and again easily forgotten.

The plight of the homeless is never ending and to this day unresolved on a global scale. The statistical figures of homeless people throughout cities, countries and continents are astronomical and the figures continue to rise. According to an estimate by the United Nations Commission of Human Rights, there are 100 million homeless people throughout the world. As indicated by a report from the U.S. Department Housing and Urban Development, "On a single night in January 2013, there were 610,042 people experiencing homelessness in the United States, including 394,698 people who were homeless in sheltered locations and 215,344 people who were living

in unsheltered locations.” In major cities, the number is enormous. New York is estimated to have 60,000 homeless people and 22,000 of them are children. At least 56,000 homeless people sleep in shelters every day in New York, according to NGO Coalition for the Homeless. In Los Angeles, an estimated 53,798 people are homeless, as indicated by the 2013 Homeless Assessment Report. However, the most eye opening and disturbing figures are from Manila in the Philippines. It is said to have the highest rate of homelessness in the world. An inconceivably large figure of 1.2 million is estimated to be homeless in the Philippines, and they are mostly children. These are only three examples of how the tragedy of homelessness continues to be overlooked and continues to prevail as an indisputably perplexing challenge.

My question is how can awareness be raised and people’s eyes opened to understand and relate to the condition of the homeless? At first thought, what is conceived when a homeless person is present or passes by is that they are drug addicts, mentally unstable, uncaring and irresponsible individuals who would rather live on the streets than work or freeloaders who want to get what they can from others. On the other hand, when there is a personal tie to a homeless person, everything changes. It is real because it hits home. In writing and presenting this piece, I wish to bring forth awareness to the reality of homelessness. Often, it is a heartbreaking realization that sometimes there is little that can be done to help individuals who decide to live on the streets. In spite of those who do not accept help, it is an essential and predominant necessity to give assistance to those who truly need and want it.

My inspiration for *Through the Eyes of the Homeless* came from two critically acclaimed female playwrights; Eve Ensler and Ntozake Shange. After having read Eve Ensler's script, *The Vagina Monologues* and Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When The Rainbow is Enuf*, I came to appreciate their style and process. Indeed, both scripts helped to shape the form and style of my own creation.

Eve Ensler interviewed over two hundred women regarding their views on sex, relationships, and violence against women. Each monologue deals with some aspect of the female experience. Each year, a new monologue is added discussing the various current issues affecting females in current society. Ensler empowers females by allowing them to address a variety of concerns, observations, or different aspects of their vaginas vocally. Ensler's play has inspired V-Day where thousands of productions of *The Vagina Monologues* are staged to help raise money for shelters, local groups, and crisis centers helping to stop violence against women. In 2003, Ensler added in another monologue dealing with the plight of women in Afghanistan under Taliban rule. The monologue is titled, "Under the Burqa."

Ntozake Shange had a similar notion when creating her poetic monologues. The renowned *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf*, has won an Obie Award and received nominations for Tony, Grammy, and Emmy Awards. "The play, or "choreopoem," became an instant classic. Performed by an ensemble of seven African American women, the play is comprised of monologues, movement, and poems that together describe the pain and struggle women face

because of racism and sexism.” (poets.org) Shange’s use of color and movement throughout her production inspired my use of fabric, sounds, and poetic style in my script. Shange has openly admitted her play was inspired by her own real life events. She addresses issues regarding HIV/AIDS, rape, suicide, and domestic violence. Through dramatic poetry, Shange expresses the many struggles African American women deal with throughout their lives from childhood into adulthood. Both of these women inspired me at a profound level due to the fact that their work specifically concerns societal issues affecting women globally.

When faced with the challenge to create an original thesis project for my master’s program, I wanted to address a problem that affected the masses. I knew I was going to write, direct and produce a show. However, at that time, I was simply uncertain of the topic. After months of contemplating multiple ideas, I was suddenly struck with the notion of a homeless theme. I was at a stop light in Orlando, FL and a homeless man walked up to my car window and asked me for money. I shook my head no and did not roll down my window. It was at that moment that I realized that I had become desensitized to the poverty epidemic within the United States. In retrospect, as I reflected on the homeless man, I began wondering about the circumstances surrounding homelessness. I did not understand why anyone would want to live that kind of life and not fight for more. I had many questions and thoughts regarding the situations and dire events that had brought the homeless to this unusual lifestyle. I was truly interested in the responses, and so decided to ask those who were currently engulfed in the cycle of homelessness.

I came up with the concept of interviewing homeless women. I chose to interview women because I felt they would be more approachable and open to my inquiries. I wanted to learn why, how, and what put these women in such a state of disarray. I was interested in learning what experiences had forced them to choose a life of struggle and misery on the streets. Like most people, I had a preconceived notion about what might have happened to drive them into this circumstance. Most people assume the cause is drugs, alcohol, job loss, lack of education, and/or a disability. What was fascinating to learn was how much more insight and depth there was to each of their stories. Yes, some of those assumptions were true. However, society fails to understand or even ask the reason why? Why was there a drug addiction? Why did they lose their job? Why did they start having children so young? There were so many questions that I felt compelled to ask and to stop assuming what seemed as the obvious answers.

After figuring out the logistics on what was required to hold these interviews, I was finally able to partner with the Coalition for The Homeless of Central Florida. I was allowed to interview nine women and record our conversations. I comprised twenty questions for the interviews. I formalized a permissions waiver that each of the interviewees had to sign which stated that I had ownership of the material obtained during our interviews. What I did not foresee, however, was how unprepared I was for the emotional journey that I was about to embark upon while obtaining my research for *Through the Eyes of the Homeless*. I interviewed one female at a time during a span of approximately two months. There was never really any private location we could meet at, so we spoke in any unoccupied locations within the shelter. At one point, I was interviewing in the cafeteria, other days in the lobby, and in one instance, we had to go

outside to the back of the building and bring our own chairs. The only rules I had to uphold were that we had to speak in a public location, and that the women could stop the interview at any point they felt uncomfortable.

My first interview was difficult because I was incredibly nervous. I always started the interviews by introducing myself and explaining the purpose of our meeting. Some of the women were excited about their stories being turned into a play. Others would say, "As long as someone learns from my mistakes, that's all that matters". Either way, I was astounded by how much information these women would disclose to a stranger.

At times, I felt terribly consumed with guilt due to thinking that I was prying into their most intimate memories. I doubted the initial reasons why I began this project. Who was I to be asking this information? I constantly reevaluated my actions and intentions because of the inner struggle I was experiencing. The stories I listened to sounded as if they were out of a fictional novel scenario where one could not imagine actually surviving. This affected me profoundly, and so I decided the most important obligation to this project would be to tell these extremely personal stories with the utmost respect to those who opened their hearts in sharing them with me.

I remembered that we laughed together, cried together, and while listening to their stories it became less of a formal interview and it felt like two friends sharing experiences. Some interviews were easier and more comfortable than others. Some women made an effort to make *me* feel comfortable while others were very cold and factual. Others were more concerned with my possible judgment, but it was my duty to

make every woman feel safe. I needed to remain unbiased and convince the ladies to believe this was a judgment free zone. My sole responsibility at this time was to listen.

I held the majority of all interviews in the evening, and each interview lasted roughly two hours. Prior to heading home, I would force myself to wind down by driving around the neighborhood. I would try not to think about what I had just heard and experienced. Some of these interviews were incredibly intense. I would leave the Coalition with their nightmares haunting me. I have read and edited this script countless times and unfortunately it never gets any easier. Each story has become so personal and iconic to me. When revisiting each monologue, I am reminded of those faces and voices behind them all. I relive each interview with every edit or rewrite that I make.

I have always understood my responsibility was to retell each memory in such a way, that it compels audiences around the world to identify with what they do not know or what they fear. Each story resonated inside me, and I was empathetic to the woman sitting directly in front of me opening up her heart. Each woman's story became a character and that character would slowly develop with each line she told. It was remarkable to recognize how differently each story unfolded, and how dissimilar they spoke. Some women had prominent accents and others spoke using religious references. Two women were still battling their addictions, and I witnessed their struggles from time to time. However, there was one commonality amongst all the women and that was some form of heartbreak and despair. The disappointments they experienced led many of them to engage in self destructive behaviors. They told me stories of heartbreak and pain caused by many of the men in their lives which included

their husbands, boyfriends, and sometimes their fathers and even grandfathers. I listened to stories regarding all forms of abuse from the men these women all trusted. Several of the stories expressed the abuse was the main reason for these women to feel forced to leave and either go into hiding or the streets. In one way or another, all of these women were mistreated and fled into their own form of survival mode. This sudden escape often led them into another world of hurt, abuse, and misfortune.

I recognized very quickly that women around the world could possibly relate to what these women had struggled with in their own lives. Every female in some way has dealt with a form of anguish or a form of mistreatment. When I began editing each interview, the common factor of despair and mistreatment amongst the interviewees became the most important aspect for this play. How can I relay each story in such a way that it would resonate for each and every single member of the audience?

I immediately realized how difficult cutting down these interviews would become. The interview process was only the beginning; now the hard part began. I had the information and their stories, but how would I piece it all together? The first task was to get every interview transcribed. Once I had all the text in a hard copy format, I read through each interview. The text included the interviews in their entirety. I had to cut through all the unnecessary text and copy/paste all the responses in the form of several large paragraphs. In total, I was left with nine extremely large bodies of text that needed to be analyzed. Many of the replies did not make any sense without the questions attached to them. Within the permissions waiver, I had each interviewee sign off on granting me rights which allowed me to edit and rearrange their responses. I read each

paragraph aloud listening to the sounds and rhythms of each monologue. I had to hear the voices of each female and remember the emotional attachment she had when retelling her story. My job was to figure out how to cut those responses in order to recapture the same emotional quality, while at the same time, engaging the audience.

At first, I refused to change any of the women's words or rearrange them. I wanted to maintain the virginal quality of each piece. I realized after editing the play several times, I had no other choice but to change some of the verbiage for stylistic purposes. Eventually, I had nine monologues, nonetheless no idea how I was going to cohesively hold them together. Each monologue could have been its own play. I struggled with how to connect each of the female's stories with the exception of the blatant fact that the women were all homeless.

I actually considered creating a setting in an actual homeless shelter where the women were participating in some form of a counseling session. I envisioned each woman sharing her experiences in a group therapy setting. I would conclude the script on a more positive note by fabricating a future for these women outside of the shelter. After many feedback sessions and write-ups, I decided against this idea. The play is not written in the style which uses a typical three act structure. There was still a missing variable to be written; I was just uncertain of what it needed.

My next thought was to create a narrator who would introduce, as well as conclude the play. The narrator would represent my voice within this piece and actually give reason and account to the audience on why it was created. I added in two scenes. The opening scene allowed the narrator to introduce the piece. The narrator's job was

to entice the audience with several self-reflection statements. She would then sit back down and watch the production unfold. We would see the narrator enter once more upon the conclusion. Her concluding monologue would culminate in a question and answer session including actors and audience members. This revision was given many criticisms by my professors and classmates. Several readers stated the stories were powerful enough to stand alone and the narrator was not necessary. They also argued that it was not a conventional play and did not need a conventional opening or closing. At the time, I disagreed because I wanted my perceptions to be an integral piece of the script, and I felt a narrator was the best choice to do this.

It was not until two years later that I realized my critics were right. Each monologue was powerful enough to send its own message. Someone once told me, “Don’t worry about writing in your voice; your voice is heard throughout the play within each edited and crafted monologue. You and these women are the play.” After hearing that, my approach to this script was completely different. I was so concerned with the process of writing the play that I did not realize how enthralled I had actually become in writing it. However, there was still something lacking. I deleted the voice of the narrator and her concluding statements. Therefore, the monologues had to stand for themselves.

I work-shopped this piece over the summer in 2014 while studying abroad in Cork, Ireland. All of my classmates agreed that the play had substance, but needed more body. It wasn’t until I was challenged by my professor to continue to revisit the script and add to it that I realized what I needed do. My first addition was a concluding

monologue that voiced my reaction to homelessness. I finally came to understand what the script required. I had never told my perspective on homelessness or my interactions with this misfortune. I created additional lines and labeled them ensemble. These particular lines allowed the women to either read the text simultaneously or one line at a time with the discretion of the director. This created a more dramatic effect for the audience. The ensemble text would represent a voice of unity amongst the women, thereby, connecting all the characters throughout the entire play. I realized these lines gave me an opportunity to connect with the women and their stories. The ensemble lines allowed my voice to be interwoven throughout each monologue. There was no need to bring in a fifth character because the women were the narrators, the writers, the actors, and the universal female. They each represented my voice, as well as their own.

After realizing this, writing the concluding monologue from my own personal interactions regarding homelessness came naturally. The concluding ensemble monologue represents my own interaction with a homeless teenage girl on the streets of Cork. She couldn't have been more than sixteen years old. I would see her daily when walking to and from our reading sites. I actually contemplated interviewing her and including her story within my play. However, after deciding to move forward with the interview, she seemed to have had gone missing. Unfortunately, I never had an opportunity to meet with her again, and often times wondered what happened to her. Within this concluding monologue, I addressed my observations of passerby's interacting with the homeless teen. I also had an opportunity to observe a fellow classmate's reaction to a very common phrase of, "spare change please". My classmate became hostile and very combative with the teen. She immediately turned defensive,

acting as though she was being robbed. When the girl replied back, “I hope you always have spare change,” my classmate responded with a very obscene gesture. I captured the reactions of strangers and also of people I knew when asked for money. It was quite an interesting interaction to witness. Everyone became incredibly uncomfortable while being approached with the simple phrase “spare change please”.

The introduction is a second ensemble monologue explaining my own personal relationship with the societal issue of homelessness. I wrote about a dear and close relative of mine who is homeless. Now, it has become a personal and emotional experience because my family and I are still being affected by the decisions made by this individual. Through this piece of work, I have incorporated my memories of this person on the streets of Manhattan, New York. Through my voice and imaginations, I relay the hardships, trials, and tribulations that he has experienced during his journey as a homeless person. The introduction was read aloud by multiple female classmates and to listen to it was chilling. The unification of four female voices is simply powerful. I wrote the introduction using the same poetic style I use in the conclusion of the script. I felt this only appropriate for a piece as unique in quality and style as this one. Most importantly, I relate the experiences of the homeless ladies that I interviewed. Their stories were truly heartbreaking and consuming. The courage and perseverance that it takes to battle each day in a world that compels survival of the fittest is extraordinary and requires a great amount of adaptability. To survive on the streets requires skills and inner strength, thus, I feel a deep respect for these ladies and view them with the highest regard for all that they have endured. Especially, how they have persisted in their quest to live, even though the journey has been insurmountable.

When reviewing the entire project from start to completion, I can honestly say, *Through the Eyes of the Homeless* is a play about ten women and their plight. It illustrates their dealings with everyday issues of hurt, disappointment, abuse, love, and hope. I believe the true impact of this play is the undeniable prayer for help and hope within each monologue. Despite the horrors that are unveiled and released through hidden secrets, the undertone of betterment is truly resonating. My own expectation for this play is simply to strike awareness and understanding in the eyes of the people. It is my objective to have each audience member leave the show with a completely different perspective on homelessness. Homelessness seems to be one of those taboo societal problems the world chooses to turn away from because of lack of awareness. I believe it is fear of the unknown that keeps us blind, deaf, and dumb about certain issues. After all is said and done, I am simply asking anyone who reads this play, watches it, or hears it to listen to each voice carefully and the message it conveys.

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Author's Notes

This play is a series of monologues linked together through various stories told by actual homeless women. Actors' movements, vocal qualities and facial expressions should change with each varying character. The play should look like an avant-garde dance sequence. It is written for a cast of four. All actors must be female. They should be within the age range of 18-50 years old. Each actor portrays the stories of multiple real life women, becoming a total of two or three different characters. The characters should all have very distinct qualities. Different vocal or physical sounds made by the actors are recommended, as the monologues are recited. Every actor should use a transparent silk piece of fabric, which coincides with her character's color. Audience interaction is highly recommended.

Special Note

Whenever the term ensemble appears in the script, it is an indicator for the cast and director to treat these lines, as if they were for a Greek chorus of sorts. The lines may be shared, chanted, sung, broken up, etc. How these lines are specifically delivered is at the discretion of the production team unless otherwise indicated. Ensemble lines should be used as a tool for dramatic effect.

Characters

*Woman in Red
Woman in Blue
Woman in Gold
Woman in Purple*

Setting

Present Day

The play is adaptable to any location. This play is written to work in different intimate venues, i.e. small museum, coffee house, warehouse, any raw black box space with proper lighting and sound.

*“Through the Eyes of the
Homeless”*

Lights rise

The actors are amongst the audience. Lights begin to reveal one actor at a time. They each move from the audience, in and out of disturbing positions throughout their space. They all freeze in postures of distress for the start of each monologue.

All actors are dressed in black.

Prologue

ENSEMBLE

I think I saw you...

riding the 6 train, on my way to grand central.

I think I recognized your curls,

...our curls... that pretty brown hair

our hair...

Was that you?

Sitting on the corner of 86th and Lex,

Please stop shivering.

....Change for coffee, tea?

...I think I saw you...

on the bus, cross town.

The smell of urine radiated all around me.

Remember when mom yelled at us...

take a bath,

No... hide... she won't find us.

Were you there?

Did I see you?

On my stoop.

Was that you?

waiting... waiting...waiting...

For me?

For us?

You?

I think you smiled at me?

That beautiful smile.

Gleaming.

Radiating.

Shining, light, hope, hurt and pain.

It's sad now.

Did I just past you?

...in my cab,

...on the east side?

By the Village...

Where have you been?

...please find me.

Keep searching-

For you.

For me.

For us.

I think I saw you.

Walking through Central Park last night.

you asked...

Spare change please?

It's me! Is it you?

... please talk to me.

Mom mentioned you were on "*vacation*"...

...how long this time?

8 months.

...Why?...

Beat

I hate "*vacation*"!

Was that you?

By my side,

strolling

through

traffic.

...please walk with me.

I think I heard you... laugh.

...In a dream?

My dream or maybe yours?

You giggled and our laughter became one.

Grandpa's Little Secret

Woman in Blue's face is completely veiled from the audience. Her raw like sense of innocence is similar to a child's.

WOMAN IN BLUE

In a childlike voice

I left home when I was a child.
I was in State's custody for ten years of my life...
From the age of 8 to the age 18.
I have sisters and brothers that lived around me,
but I gave myself up...

ENSEMBLE

Why? ***(Repeated, while Woman in Blue continues speaking)***

WOMAN IN BLUE

I gave myself up voluntarily to the State when I was 8 years old because my dad
used to abuse my mom physically...
...and when my dad walked out,

...my brothers and sisters took over.

Woman in Blue begins to play with an imaginary doll.

So when I was 8 years old and thought I was old enough to make my own decisions,

Turns to Ensemble, unveils to speak directly to them.

...I was tired of seeing the abuse

ENSEMBLE

She was tired of the abuse...

abuse...

abuse...

...abuser....

WOMAN IN BLUE

So one night, I walked down to a shopping center,

I reported myself as an abandoned child to the police department.

At that time, it was a little bit of a wrong thing to do because my dad was a cop.

He was a cop for 47 years before he retired.

So I called myself...

Reported myself an abandoned child...

and when I gave them my last name...

they knew that I was my dad's daughter.

Adult voice begins to come out.

So they picked me up at the shopping center and they took me back home where I lived and my family came outside, at that point I got hysterical because I was really scared.

Morphing into her inner child, all the while combing her doll's hair.

You know, at that time police officers were there to not only serve, but to protect, they weren't allowed to leave anyone at any situation where they're scared to be.

So they gave me a choice whether to stay with my family or go with him...

and be under State's custody.

I chose to go with him instead of being with my family.

And that kinda left a scar on my family to this day.

I really don't have a relationship with them because I chose the state over them and it hurt them.

Aggressively combing the doll's hair. Women begin moaning underneath their veils.

ENSEMBLE

I was abused by my father,

I was abused by my grandfather...

All movement is frozen except by the Woman in Blue.

WOMAN IN BLUE

...his dad, not my mom's dad, my dad's dad.
The situation wasn't known until he was near death.

Ensemble mime out the following lines while she tells her story.

There was an episode that he came over one week,
and was choking inside my parent's house where I was.
I just stood in front of that chair and you know...
... at the top of my lungs yelled at this poor man.
...I HOPE YOU DIE!

ENSEMBLE

...die
...die
Die!

WOMAN IN BLUE

You.
Deserve.
To.
Die.

Another woman repeats this and continues to repeat, in a harsh whisper as the monologue continues.

I HOPE YOU SUFFER!

All women stop in sync.

Returning to childlike innocence and voice.

My mom witnessed this.
And it was kinda strange for my mom to see that because my mom is a churchgoing person, so for her to see her child acting like this, she just couldn't understand why.
Through me
is the way my parents
found out what was going on with Grandpa
and their kids.

Women all strike a different pose and freeze.

A Paycheck

Each female is heard making a painful low moan. Woman in Gold unveils herself slowly as she begins her monologue. She tells her story to each of the women. Each of them are still frozen in their positions. The women do not move until she touches them. The moaning stops, as monologue starts. Once each actor is touched they crowd around Woman in Gold and listen to her story, like a group of children. They all remain veiled. Woman in Gold sits on a chair down center. She becomes a mother who is telling her children a haunting fairytale.

WOMAN IN GOLD

A better life brought us here.
I have no family!
He has family.
He had his mother and his sister, but they moved out.
They went back to New York.
All he has right now is his brother.

The beautiful weather kept me staying here. That's about it and raising my kids.
My husband was brought here for work.

He was to manage the business.
Things didn't go that good...

Childlike giggles and whispers are heard from the ensemble.

and he tried to get another job because he wasn't making enough money.
He started making \$800.00 weekly for the family,
and then things was okay.
My husband was working and his job was seasonal you know.
In the summer it was really good...
and he made good money.
The month of January up until the month of April
that's when things started slowing down and he lost,
well he didn't lose his job because he was working,
but things was not good...
...as far as money.

Childlike giggles continue.

ENSEMBLE

money...
good...

money...

bad...

WOMAN IN GOLD

So they caught up...
the bills caught up.
Then it got to the point that we didn't lose everything
'cause we was able to put it in storage...
but when I found the letters saying that we had to move out...
It has come to the point where... I have mentioned to him –

ENSEMBLE

I want to leave,
I want to leave,
I can't take it no more.

WOMAN IN GOLD

Cause see the reason why we're here is not cause of drugs.
It's not cause of anything.
It takes one paycheck.

ENSEMBLE

To the audience

One!

WOMAN IN GOLD

...for you to back up on all your bills.

Ensemble hum slightly "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star"

That's why we're here.
If I could do things different....

Laughs

Oh...

Get a good job.

***Woman in Gold caresses one of the women on the face as she
kneels in front of her.***

I don't know,
so many things,

ENSEMBLE

a better life...

Women all strike a different pose and freeze.

Faith in God

Actors freeze on stage. Woman in Purple veiled, reveals herself. She is a pastor preaching to her congregation. She moves quickly back and forth across the stage. Her silk fabric is used like a preacher's scarf hung around her neck. She begins to speak to the audience. We hear throughout the monologue soft 'um hum', 'amen' or 'hallelujah' by the other actors on stage when they feel connected.

WOMAN IN PURPLE

Well,
I know this is where I need to be,
in the hands of God.
It'll be two years now ---
well, I've lived here before, eight years ago,
this --- this time -
it will be two years in February,
two years February 2nd approximately.
Didn't really come for the warm weather,
no because I like it here ---
I mean,
Philadelphia weather is betta, as far as the season's go,
but I feel as though this...
this...
is where God led me to be ---
for what I want to do in the future.

ENSEMBLE

Um-Hum.

WOMAN IN PURPLE

I'll just have to say I have a job to do.
Um-hum with women and children.

ENSEMBLE

Um-Hum.

WOMAN IN PURPLE

I've done teaching with pre-school age
as far as children,

and women,
as far as within this type of ministry.
Um-hum.

ENSEMBLE

Um-Hum.

WOMAN IN PURPLE

Because I feel
I said... I feel...
this is where God led me.
In the Bible it says,
there's a part where it says,
leave your mother

ENSEMBLE

Mother

WOMAN IN PURPLE

and your father

ENSEMBLE

Father

WOMAN IN PURPLE

and follow me...
so if there's something that God tells you to do,
and he says well,
you have to leave and do it.
It's not a tug as far as family.
I have to go where God tells me to go.
This is training for me.
Um-hum.

ENSEMBLE

Um-Hum.

WOMAN IN PURPLE

This is where I need to be for training

to do what I'm gonna be doing later.
If you're born again...
...and you know that your life is the Lord's... and he says okay.
I need you to come here,
learn this,
...and then when I say your time is up,
it's time to move onto that next thing.
I feel as though it's kind of winding up.

This is why we came here,
you know,
it's called infiltration work
where you have to lead from the inside out,
...so that's what led me to do the type of work that I do.
Um, um-hum.

ENSEMBLE

Um-Hum.

WOMAN IN PURPLE

I mean,
I have a church body that I'm connected to.
There's people there that I talk to.
Um, like I said,
if you want to look at it straight on,
then yes,
you can say,
I'm homeless...

ENSEMBLE

Um-Hum.

WOMAN IN PURPLE

cause I don't have my own place
but then if you know as far as being born again...
...what God's word says about you,
it's like,
I created this place for you to go through to be processed,
this is where I want you for this time.
Um-hum.

ENSEMBLE

Um-Hum.

WOMAN IN PURPLE

At first I didn't think it was necessary,
but now --- now,
I do see that it was necessary.
You don't have to go through everything that a person has gone through to minister
to them, but you can understand it better.
So I think I needed to identify,
so when I'm doing what I need to be doing,
I can say well,

I know how you feel.
I know how you feel!

ENSEMBLE

Um-Hum.

WOMAN IN PURPLE

It's just a period of time and it's going to be restored back to you.
If you can have a good attitude...
... and if you too can keep believing in God,
cause you know him...
it's just going to be for a little period of time.
So have faith in God!

ENSEMBLE

Amen!

Women all strike a different pose and freeze.

I took the Money

In one swift movement the Woman in Blue gets up and unveils herself to the audience. Walking down center she begins to free verse. She speaks her monologue, almost in a rap-like rhythm or slam poetry. Women freeze in and out of various positions on stage.

WOMAN IN BLUE

I ain't never been a criminal,
never been in jail.
My parents say I'm black-
a female.
I was a nobody,
couldn't do nothing.
No!
...no family,
I have no family!
A lot of bad shit.
Physical,
mental abuse.
Escaping reality
running away
trying to create my own reality
in the streets.
I lived mostly in the streets,
selling drugs,
fightin'!
Thank God

I never went to jail,
never got arrested.
Started to see murders,
bad things I left it.
Never used drugs.

I smoked weeeeeeeeeed.

***Hold the end of 'weed' like a song, pretending
to smoke a joint.***

I saw what it do to other people,
I never used it.
Grew up being told I was stupid-
a nobody.
Never got my diploma.
Just picked a spot on the map...
...and said I want to be somebody.
I turned around and just pick, pointin' at....
Came wit \$600.00 bucks in my pocket.
Wasn't makin' no money,
so I stopped it.
I was working doing odd jobs.
Worked washing dishes,
wasn't enough to pay the bills though.
I was making \$400-\$450 a month.
I couldn't pay for nothin'.
They wanted to train me at cookin'
but didn't have enough confidence.
I started to sell weed to make ends meet,
stayin' wit addicts and stayin' on streets.
Given people drugs to wash up.
Three years,
Three years too long.
I gotta a son.
I gotta a son,
not with me.
It was a rape...

ENSEMBLE

It
was
a
Rape!

WOMAN IN BLUE

Was on the streets
and this dude offered me \$1,000 bucks

and it was cold.
He kept saying,

ENSEMBLE

"I like me some big Spanish girls, Mami."

Ensemble get up and begin invasively touching Woman in Blue.

WOMAN IN BLUE

We was in a bar,
he pulled up in his car,
said he would take me to his home to talk.

Ensemble begin to moan.

He did his thing...
...and it was over.
I left.

I took the money...

I took the money....

ENSEMBLE

I took the money....

Sudden stop and Ensemble just falls... quiet...

WOMAN IN BLUE

Never really was the relationship type.
Not with men or women,
too cold.
When you been abused
you see life differently.
Growing up you learn to reprogram yourself.
When you are younger
somebody is programming you,
now...

...I reprogram myself.

Women all strike a different pose and freeze.

Love Me

Woman in Red speaks with a Caribbean accent and is completely covered in her veil. In a church she kneels down and begins to confess her sins. Ensemble position themselves like a choir and hum a church hymn throughout the entire piece.

WOMAN IN RED

I just couldn't take it anymore.
I just,
you know,
wanted to get out from underneath him
because he was ---
he's very controlling,
so I just wanted to get my independence,
you know,
I just decided to take a step of faith and leave.
It was emotional abuse really.
Yeah, not anything physical,
but just emotional abuse,
which is worse then physical,
you know,
years and...
...years of abuse,
just couldn't take it no more.
He just called me names.

Told me to do things like I wasn't good enough.
you know,
different things ---
just make accusations.

I didn't like, what he was saying.
I didn't like the way he was treating me.
He wasn't being a husband in any sense of the word,
just financially,
you know what I mean?
If I could have worked,
I would have done the same thing.

He wasn't doing anything for me.
His family life was real unstable.

His mother died when he was seven.
His dad was an alcoholic and
his dad used to abuse the mother.
Beat the mother,
then she abused her own son.
I don't know if it's something about his upbringing,
that led him to become the person he is...

...hardened!

He's that way with me.
All I wanted him to do was love me.
That's all I wanted.
I didn't want anything else from him.
I mean, some people marry for money.
Some people marry for good looks.
Some people marry for all kinds of different reasons,
a certain kind of social standard in society,
whatever...
educational background or whatever.
I didn't marry for any of those things.
I just married because I wanted him to love me.
That's all.
It didn't happen.
When I reached that point,
I said no, something has to be done.
That's when I left.
He was at work.
I asked a neighbor for a ride.

I explained the situation.
Told her I have to get out.
She agreed to give me a ride
I packed myself whatever I needed and left.
Didn't tell him where I was for like a whole month.
I didn't tell him anything
...and I had to leave my boy with him.

You know,
it's just ---
it's temporary –
no pain,
no gain!

***Stands up and unveils herself as she speaks her last stanza to
god.***

I have to do something.
I have to do something for the long run.
I know it's gonna work out.
It's gonna be pretty good.

I have to believe that.

Women all strike a different pose and freeze.

Judgment

Woman in Gold speaks to Woman in Blue. They are close friends who have started to confide with one another. Both women are young in age. The other women are frozen.

WOMAN IN GOLD

I lived in a tent with Ben when we had no one,
I had no one.
I just found out that I was pregnant.
That was actually my in-laws,
I hate to say,
their fault,
but they had a little house and they said that we could renovate it and move in there.
We started renovating it and gave up our apartment.
Afterwards they said,
No...
...too much strife there.

It's a long story,
but we ended up living with people...
...and then when we got done living with people,

we had no place to go,
so we lived in a tent
to not have to deal with nobody
cause they was judging us and being mean.
My parents were very ---
kept us in the house all the time.
Didn't let us have many friends and I never went campin'.
I never rode on a public bus until I met my husband,
so it's like all these things were so exciting to me.
And when we went camping
I was sick of living with people.
It was the most exciting,
romantic,
fun experience I've ever had,
cooking on the grill.
We bought us a nice tent with a couple hundred dollars.
We were in a camp ground,
so it's not like we were in the back woods with a bunch of homeless people,
but it was so much fun.

Then we stayed in a sleazy hotel,
which I always wanted to do,
so that was fun too,
you know...
it was like \$100-bucks...
...and you could hear the rats.
It was like out of a movie,
so yeah,
it could be a lot worse.
It could be a lot worse.
The biggest thing I've learned is the judgment thing,
cause...
I used to be so judgmental...
...and thought I was,
you know...
so much better than this person or that person.
I judged people for their sins.
Like she slept with this one or that one,
blah, blah, blah,
I was so judgmental.
So I think the whole experience has just taught me pretty much equality...
...and the fact that we are all equal.
It doesn't matter our state in life,
we are all people.
The homeless bum I saw peeing when I was walking down the street the other day,
he's still a child of God.
He might not know it,
but he still is,
so that's the biggest thing I've learned is really not to be so judgmental.
It's very humbling living in a homeless shelter.

Women all strike a different pose and freeze.

24 hours

Woman in Purple frantically starts her monologue. She holds a cigarette in one hand and begins by pacing back and forth, unable to be still, she shakes, jonesing for a pipe. Music is playing in the background. She incorporates the chair throughout the piece. Ensemble play the role of a drug dealer, tempting Woman in Purple in various ways throughout this piece. Women freeze in and out of various disturbing positions on stage.

WOMAN IN PURPLE

I'm not from here.
I'm from North Carolina.
...And ah,
I was working at the cleaners
I burnt my hand
 burnt my hand
on the job.
I think I burnt it,
they said they couldn't use me no more,
 ...so ah...
I ah turned to drugs and alcohol.
I was out there sleepin' on the streets.
I went into a depression.
This guy who came here from North Carolina he introduced me to more drugs.
Before then I wasn't doing no drugs,
wasn't drinking.

I smoked cigarettes but ah gave all that up.
 ...Yeah,
 you know,

ENSEMBLE

I was going from place to place.
I had nowhere to lay my head
I had lost my apartment.
I couldn't work.
I didn't have a job.
Started doing cocaine,
Smoking -
 CRACK!

WOMAN IN PURPLE

I didn't sell myself,
no hustling.
He was mostly doing that.
Bringing the fellas around I was laying with.
We'd been together two years
and evidently he was sneaking and doing drugs
while I was working.

ENSEMBLE

And then when I lost my job
I just went into a depression
and I caught him doing it one day
and I said let me try it.

WOMAN IN PURPLE

Did it for about four,
five months,
I didn't like it.
No.
No.
no....

I stopped before I really got started.

After getting high 24-hours,
seven days a week,
I just got...
tired!

ENSEMBLE

I had been really praying,
you know,
God...
...just lead me the right way.

But doing it 24 hours,
every night,
every day,

it really ---

WOMAN IN PURPLE

I stopped!

ENSEMBLE

I stopped before I got started
I just didn't like waking up the next morning
and not having a dollar to buy a loaf of bread.
Or a dollar to get me a pack of cigarettes.
Life is better than that,
it really is.

WOMAN IN PURPLE

I have three ---
I had four boys.
I lost one of my kids at the age of 15...
...he got killed.
My baby boy got killed.
A man shot him down.
The wrong place at the wrong time
him and his cousin,
they say the guy was schizophrenic,
but I don't care,
God didn't put nobody here to take a life,
no one's life.

They was just standing there and a guy walked up and shot him.
He was 15.
The man was 35.
The guy walked up and shot one time,

Loud stomps are heard. One by one ensemble fall dead in place.

he fell and then he turned back
and shot him four more times.

WOMAN IN PURPLE

It was kind of hard at the beginning...
...I was on drugs

and I had lost track that I had three more kids after the baby boy died,
but now ---
you know,

I've got essays that I wrote
and letters that I wrote them

to ask for
forgiveness.

I have nobody,
but -

God!

Nobody, but God and myself.

Now that I ---

I have forgiven myself for the wrong that I've done,
you know,
my only family is God.

Women all strike a different pose and freeze.

Dysfunctional Abuse

Women adjust their seats into a semi circle. All sit around at an AA meeting. Woman in Blue wraps her scarf around her neck and stands in front of her chair. The other women sit and listen.

WOMAN IN BLUE

I left at the age of 13.
I got pregnant at the age of 14.
I moved out because my family was dysfunctional....
Things that happened in the family that were, not normal at all.
My sisters ---
...some of my sisters,
just a couple of them allowed their family to be incesting their children, their boyfriends.

It was really bad...
so at the age of 13,
having to live with this man that my mom had moved into our home,
we lived with him for ---
I think I lived with him from the time I was five until I was 13,
so quite a few years,

ENSEMBLE

He was a PEDOPHILE!

WOMAN IN BLUE

We were sexually abused...
mentally abused...
for almost ten years.
My youngest sister was never touched.
She was so young.
I think she was five when he got arrested and went to prison,
but I...
I was 13.

My sister, KiKi, was 14,
No.
She was 15.
She was 15 and my other one was 17.

So I guess it was the teen years that he targeted on,
so they really received the worst of it.
The mental abuse was all the same,
but as for physical,
I think he had his choice of who his favorites were.
You know that kind of thing.

Who would talk?
Who wouldn't?

ENSEMBLE

Oh..., yeah mom knew.
She was told.
Um-hum.

She was told.

WOMAN IN BLUE

I think she was in denial.
Um, one time I said, Mom, didn't you know what was happening?
She goes, you know what...

ENSEMBLE

I'm not even going to talk to you about this.
I guess I should have just let DCF have you, huh?
Because that's who would have taken you if he didn't help pay the bills.
Would that have been better?

WOMAN IN BLUE

I didn't say anything to her.
I just cried and shut my mouth.
It was about three years ago she said this.
I was 23.
Yeah...
So I didn't say nothing to her.
And that just helped me stay away a little bit more,
you know,
keep my kids away from her!

I forgive her.
That's something that I had to do.
I had to forgive her... and I do.

But to bring my kids into that kind of atmosphere to raise them and to subject them to that, I won't.

ENSEMBLE

He died since then.
He's dead.

WOMAN IN BLUE

He passed away in '98, so right after he got out of prison.
They found evidence that he raped my sister above me.
My older sister above me,
she's --- she's the one that ---
well, she had to because she was hurt.
She had to go to the hospital.

My older three sisters, they were the ones that ran-a-way and moved in with their husbands, their boyfriends, or whoever they lived with, but they would always come back and check on us all the time.

She would always come back and say...

ENSEMBLE

You know, I know he's doing stuff.
Just tell me what he's doing.
Let us know!

WOMAN IN BLUE

Two of them would come and then all three of them would come. They would always come questioning or they'd bring their friends to come talk. DCF was sent to the school daily trying to get us to speak and my mom kept telling us don't say anything because if you say anything they're gonna take you and you'll never see me again. I loved my mom. I didn't want to --- I didn't wanta like never see her again, so, you know, I did exactly what my mom said even though these people were pressuring.

ENSEMBLE

Just tell us.

We can help you.

WOMAN IN BLUE

They promised,
but ---

I remember thinking and looking at this lady's eyes when I would cry.

Let me look ---

you know what?

I don't believe you, but I would cry because I felt so much pressure and it hurt so bad because I was torn,
you know.

I've come a long ways.

I mean, that's all my past.

I remember but I try not to...

Only if I need to like if I'm talking to someone,
if it will help somebody else,
then I'll bring it out.

I'll just tell you everything,
tell you how to get through it,
but other than that,
that's something that's totally cut off.
It's totally cut off from my children.

You know, the way I talk.

The way I dress.

The way I walk.

The people I talk to are like day and night.

I don't ever want to be like that again.

My kids ---

My kids will never...

ENSEMBLE

EVER!

WOMAN IN BLUE

have to see anything that I did, other than the wisdom.

Women all strike a different pose and freeze.

Sex, Lies & Alcohol

Woman in Red stands center stage to begin her performance. Smoking a cigarette and holding a scotch glass in hand with only water, she grips it like a relapsing alcoholic. She drapes her scarf around her shoulders as an evening shawl. Blues music underscores as she begins reciting her lines. Ensemble position themselves as bar patrons waiting to see the act.

WOMAN IN RED

My mother was an alcoholic,
and that tends to be the direction I run into when I'm
in a lot of pain...

...and

I want to escape that pain.
I'll drink.
Then it just makes---
instead of running to God where he can help me heal,
I ran to alcohol
...and lost my job,
...my home.

It seems to be my pattern.
I'll be doing really well.
I'll meet someone
and
I'll let that person become like my God.
Yeah, I'll put that person in charge of making me happy
and
when they don't
and
it falls apart,
then I'll...
fall.

This last one I thought,
I'm never gonna to have to look for love again.
This is it!

We're gonna grow old together.

We're gonna have a family together.

Yeah right!

This one I was actually cheated on,
and found out about it by accident.
I confronted him,
and he just started turning it around.
And everything got turned around,
you know,

where it was my fault
or I misinterpreted what I saw.
So I stuck to my guns,
and that's when he grabbed me by the throat
and hit me in the face
and bruised my arms up,
and my legs.

I had to get a temporary cap right here.
I was somewhere where he wasn't expecting me to be
and I got to see it with my own two eyes.
On top of everything else,
you know,
a lot of verbal abuse,
and then of course,

when I confronted him about it ---
when I confronted him about anything
he would get physical.
I guess that was his way of not having to deal with it,
sit down and talk about it.
It broke my heart.
I felt like my spirit had been broken,
...like I was just ready to give up,
until I just drank myself into oblivion.
Before that I married an alcoholic,

and he stayed in jail most of the marriage.
When I met my husband,
it was always real fun,
you know,
getting to know each other.
But I heard on a show one day,

a wife beater never brings his baseball bat to the first date.

I don't know why I keep attracting these people.
I don't know why,
because they're not showing me that side of them.
So I'm trying to break that habit because I'm getting too old.
You know I had a good career with Publix for 20 years
and that's the job that I lost.
Between missing work from being beat up
...or...
missing work from being hung over,
it just had happened so many times---
and they were so good to me.
But they finally had to,
you know,
put an end to it.

...Yeah,

I regret ever experimenting with alcohol.
You don't know who's gonna become an alcoholic and who's not.
You know,
you've got ten people---
ten 21 year olds out there.
A couple of them in that group are gonna end up being alcoholics,
but they don't know who it's gonna be.
And after you become one,
...it's too late.

Women all strike a different pose and freeze.

Noise or sounds from the actors are heard for the start of the following lines.

Epilogue

WOMAN IN RED

To the audience

I walk past her everyday,
on my way to and from this bar.
She just sits there...

with this cup in hand and torn clothes,
scarf on her head

WOMAN IN GOLD

...Spare change please...
Oh god,
don't make eye contact,
Did she see me...
Just keep walking and maybe she won't ask again...
... any change miss?
No.
No, I don't have any change.
I'm sorry.
At least none to give *you*.

WOMAN IN BLUE

Keep your head down.
No eye contact.
Walk faster.

Why am I so angry?

I pass her everyday.
scarf on her head,
...torn clothes,
...cup in hand.
...Spare change please...

WOMAN IN PURPLE

My friend just told me she flicked off a homeless person.
... just like that...
What does she want from me?
What's her name?
What's her story?

What does she want from *Me*?
I pass her everyday.
scarf on her head,
...torn clothes,
...cup in hand.

WOMAN IN BLUE

Spare change please?

WOMAN IN RED

...No!

What does she want from *Me*?

WOMAN IN GOLD

Nothing...

WOMAN IN PURPLE

Just...

ENSEMBLE

Listen!

End of Play

Aisha M. Soto has a lifelong career in the arts and education. She completed her undergraduate degree from Syracuse University with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre. She attended Nova Southeastern University and completed her first Master in Science degree specializing in Interdisciplinary Arts with a theatre concentration. Just recently, Ms. Soto finalized a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of New Orleans, majoring in Playwriting. She had the incredible opportunity to study all genres of the arts and humanities all over Europe from London, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Scotland, and Ireland having studied abroad eight times during in her academic career. Her worldly travels allow Ms. Soto to bring an eye opened perspective for diversity, culture, and the arts, into any professional and academic environment. Professionally, Ms. Soto is experienced as a theatrical director, theatre instructor, producer and now college professor for a total of eight years instructing all aspects of art, film, theatre and humanities courses for Valencia College, along with University of Phoenix. She has directed twelve full length productions, including musicals and dramatic plays. Ms. Soto has also had the privilege of working in the corporate events sector, producing events for Fortune 500 companies worldwide for a total of six years.