

ACT I

Place
The TV Room

Time
Fall

PROLOGUE

This is opening of all performances of the group performed at community centers and is presented by all women at the shelter.

(A drumbeat is begun by Marie on African Drum. Barbara begins Meltdown song. Talk song/spoken word. Beat underlies. Other women join)

BARBARA

(Song, rap/poem/song): THE MELTDOWN SONG)

SEE IT WAS ONE NIGHT, I WAS STUCK, STUCK AND ANXIOUS. I HAD BEEN TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH THINGS ALL DAY AND I WAS REAL TIRED. MY ARMS SANK HEAVY INTO THE BED AND THE REST OF ME, OF COURSE, AS WELL, AND I WAS HALF DREAMING, HALF SLEEPING. I SAW ELECTRIC LINES AND I THOUGHT I'M MELTING I'M MELTING. MY CHORE SELF IS MELTING. I'M HAVING A MELTDOWN. WHAT A GOOD NAME FOR A SONG I THOUGHT AND THEN I THOUGHT SURELY THERE MUST BE OTHERS...SURELY THERE MUST BE OTHERS...

(4 WOMEN enter)

ALL

SURELY THERE MUST BE OTHERS...

BARBARA

WHO MIGHT HAVE SIMILAR MELTDOWNS AND THEN I THOUGHT ALSO, OF COURSE, AS WELL ABOUT REACTORS AND THREE MISLE ISLAND AND CHERNONONO..NO...NO..

(Other WOMEN enter)

ALL

NO NO NO NO...

(As the MELTDOWN SONG progresses, women form a semi-circle and stand facing audience - moving with rhythm of the drum and acting as a chorus, repeating words of song as the spirit moves them - improvisational as in a gospel church service.)

CHERNOBYL AND MELTDOWN'S THAT CAUSE WHOLE CITIES TO EVACUATE. OF COURSE, WE KNOW THAT THIS IS NOT POSSIBLE AS THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH VOLUNTEER FIREMAN AND BUSDRIVERS TO HANDLE THE EVACUATION IF IT WERE TO OCCUR, CAUSE WHY SHOULD THEY ANYWAY? WHY SHOULD THEY ANYWAY....EVEN WITH HIROSHIMA WE STILL DON'T MAKE THOSE CONNECTIONS....

WOMEN

CONNECTIONS...

BARBARA

THOSE CONNECTIONS ARE ELECTRIC...

WOMEN

ELECTRIC...

BARBARA

CAUSE THOSE CONNECTIONS ARE ELECTRIC AND HANDLED IMPROPERLY BY THE UNTRAINED MIND THEY JUST MIGHT CAUSE A MELTDOWN OF OUR DEFENSES, OUR EMOTIONS AND WE MIGHT LEARN TO LOVE...

WOMEN

LEARN TO LOVE...

BARBARA

FORGET THAT...

WOMEN

FORGET THAT
FORGET THAT...

BARBARA

WE MIGHT STOP LEARNING AND JUST LOVE, STOP LEARNING AND
JUST LOVE, STOP LEARNING AND JUST LOVE JUST LOVE...JUST
LOVE...

WOMEN

JUST LOVE...

BARBARA

DEALING WITH REALITY AND AS I LAY THERE ON MY BED MELTING I
THOUGHT I'M MELTING...I'M MELTING..JUST LOVE?

WOMEN

JUST LOVE...

BARBARA

WHOEVER TOLD YOU LIFE WAS FAIR? AND NOW PRESENTING *VOICES
OF THE ARMORY...*

ALL

MELTDOWN IS THE NAME (CHORUS repeats)

THEATRE IS THE GAME

"

VOICES OF THE ARMORY

"

TO BE EXACT

"

IS THE NAME OF OUR GROUP

"

AND WE KNOW FOR A FACT

"

THAT THROUGH

"

CREATIVITY

"

WE CAN ADDRESS

"

CONDITION OF THE HOMELESS

"

IN OUR COMMUNITY

"

OF PARK SLOPE

"

BROOKLYN, NY, USA

"

(Women assemble in TV room)

KATE

It was cold. He didn't give me a chance.

CYNTHIA

I'm their mother. I love them. I know they need me.

KATE

She left me. I hated her a long time.

CYNTHIA

I never abused my kids. I sent them away, so they'd be safe. They didn't deserve to live like me. I never abused them. I left so I wouldn't hurt them.

BED 33

I don't talk much. I just listen. You can't trust people. I don't know why they are here.

CYNTHIA

It hurts my kids to see me like this.

I know a lot of people in this neighborhood think we're nothing but drug addicts and criminals, but we're nobody to be afraid of.

KATE

oh yeah?

JAMAICA

We are afraid of ourselves. I passed Miss Reynolds outside, standing like she does. She looks a little scary and then I laughed because she's too afraid to walk inside here and get warm.

BARBARA

She's so afraid to talk to anyone yet when she stands out there, she looks scary. People in the neighborhood are afraid. I was afraid when I first saw her. I knew I shouldn't be, but I was. I think that's what everyone is afraid of - that fear - that despair. Do you know what I mean?

LAURA

No.

JAMAICA

Yeah, afraid of truth

FREDA

Afraid of people who are afraid of their own shadows. She's so scared she's afraid to come in here; to walk down the street. The neighborhood thinks she's some bad girl.

KATE

We all got some bad girl stuff but it's more like bad times Just real bad times. And it get's crazy here. It's hard to keep it together. I'm just trying to keep straight. We need more

meetings here. Hey, there bed 33, How you doing? Sit right down and tell us a story.

BED 33

I just want a cup of water.

CYNTHIA

My father abused me, had sex with me. I can't really talk about it a lot, but it hurt me. I hate him. I thought about talking to him, but I just want to kill him.

KATE

We need some NA meetings right here. Yeah, we can all go outside somewhere else, but we need them. It's hard.

LAURA

It's a city shelter how do you keep the drugs out?
Can you expect women to rat on each other if someone is using?

FREDA

Yeah, sure.

MARIE

What about clean and sober dorms? So, a group can be supportive of the others. How can we help?

CYNTHIA

I was doing so well, and I was going to see the kids and everything and then I went off and I got messed up and I ended up in jail for three days and I'm thinking maybe I'm not ready to see my kids but they need a mother.

DEBY

I had really fallen and my boyfriend he was there for me when no one else was and he told me that I didn't have to fall all the way but he says all kind of things to me about what he's going to do to me if I leave him and he's just so jealous. Like the other day I told him I had to go down to the Welfare office and he went down and just sat there, watching to see if anyone talked to me. I love him, I really do, but he lives on the same block as my mother and that's where I left my son. I wish I never left my son there. My mother, she has a hard time, and she doesn't really have it together and if the social workers came and saw where my son was living, they would take him away. I know it. All I want is to be with my son, but I can't take him here and I didn't know what to do. My boyfriend wants me to marry him, but I don't want to because he just doesn't let me do anything and he is afraid whenever anyone talks to me and then he gets loud and it's scary. It really is, but my son could use a father. My son is the best kid. God gave me a great son, born drug free, he's so sweet and

smart and he doesn't have any problems, and he should get out of that house and have a father. A kid should have a father. But he scares me but then I think maybe we could get ourselves out of this welfare stuff. I love him. Don't get me wrong. There's a lot that great about him. He knows how to take care of his woman.

BARBARA

"His woman". It's like you're his possession. I hate that. Nobody owns me.

MARIE

He doesn't love you. He can't hit you and say he loves you.

I grew up in an alcoholic home. My father was an alcoholic, and he left home, and my mother raised us by ourselves, and it was a lot better than having him around. Yeah sure, I looked at other people's families and I thought wouldn't it be nice to have a normal family with a mother and a father but it's not if they are going to be abusive...

HELEN

You want to look like me. I lived with a guy who used to hit me whenever he felt like it. Get out. I'm telling you; he won't stop. Then I went to the dentist, and I can't afford to go back. He wrecked my teeth. I can't get a job until they look better. I can't look better until I get a job. I can't do anything. I want to go back to school.

JAMAICA

I had a problem this week and I just talked to my son today and he said, Mommy, I think Daddy found out where you are. I heard him say something about a shelter. See, I'm here because I was burned out but my husband, he would abuse me a lot and he is a police officer. When the neighbors would call because they would hear me scream, the police would come and they would see his badge and they would just say it's a family matter and go away and I don't want him to find me because he wants me back and I don't want to go back. That's why I can relate to a lot of what you were saying because my husband, he always wanted to control me. If I talked to anybody, he used to just get me in a corner and hit on me.

DEBY

I don't want to go back because he told me what he'd do to me.

BARBARA

What?

HELEN

That he'd kill her.

LAURA

You have to get to a Safe home. It's an emergency shelter where women who are in dangerous violent situations can go at any time. And if you are in the shelter and a victim of domestic violence you should let the workers know and they will mark your file confidential then your name won't appear. In this area we have Park Slope Safe Homes and Women's Survival Space.

JAMAICA

My son doesn't tell him, but he is in the middle because he is listening to his father all the time. I don't know what I did to him that he does this to me.

LAURA

You didn't do anything. No one deserves to be hit. I'll get the numbers.

CYNTHIA

They try to help. But I don't really know where to begin. I got to wait.

FREDA

Wait for what?

CYNTHIA

I left for a while. Got my check. Got an apartment. I'm trying to get it together. I need to find a way to get a job. But the jobs I get can't even pay the rent. Even waitressing you got to dress the part and I'm no cute thing. Somebody told me I talked like a drug addict. What's that supposed to mean? I guess I do. I guess I am. I am what I am. No use going further.

HELEN

I'd like to travel. In this calendar there are all these places I never heard of. Greece, the Czech and Slovak Republics, Africa. I'd like to see these places. It might be nice to go away.

BED 33

Do you want the truth? You got to have the truth of Jesus Christ...

JAMAICA

The truth is we can't help ourselves more than we are.
My mother abandoned me. My father abused me. My children hate me. What do you want? You think you can help me? You want to listen to my anger. Can you hear it? Really. Can you take it?
Give me a place to show it. You want bullshit or do you want the truth?

FREDA

The truth is they don't want us to get out of here. Homelessness is big business for the city. Do you know it costs taxpayers \$18,000 a year to keep us here, in one lousy \$40 cot and yet the apartment money they give a single person is only \$215 a month. Where can you get an apartment for \$215?

HELEN

And if you complain too much, they take away your tokens or give you an administrative transfer to another shelter. We don't have much a chance to make it better.

CYNTHIA

The truth is we can't even get toilet paper in the bathroom. Do you know what's that like? And there are boxes of it - people go home with bags of it- but we who live here can't even get it in the bathrooms. They had an inspection a few weeks ago, they had toilet paper in every stall. And no one listens and no one cares. We are treated worse than animals.

FREDA

I go to school during the week. I have one year to get my BA in psychology. I try to keep myself busy because people around here really bring you down. You wake up and feel like you can do anything and then a security person pushes you around and it's easy to give up... but I was in the army and I have an education so I understand discipline, but we're all like walking time bombs here. The one thing they are afraid of is smart women.

LAURA

Isn't everybody?

MARIE

Yeah, at work I complained about how the clients were not being treated right and my supervisor wrote me up for insubordination.

FREDA

My point is people are making money off us and we're not getting the services we are entitled too. All these catering companies that come to the shelters and we don't even get the food. It's gone before it comes to the residents, or we miss the juice or something. Think of it. That's a lot of apples and oranges. Somebody is making money.

BED 33

I wish they would leave so we could watch the T.V.

CYNTHIA

I tried to kill myself three times. But I'm not going to do it anymore. The third time my cousin was there, and she cared. she said, "Why are you doing this?" She really cared and maybe I do have something to say and maybe I can get it together, because there's got to be

a reason why it was three times.

FREDA

Why do we always got to talk about all this abuse. I don't want to talk about it. I don't even know you.

BARBARA

It's hard to get to know each other if we don't talk about our lives.

CYNTHIA

None of you look like you ever did any drugs or anything.

BARBARA

I don't want to talk about it. I don't even know you.

KATE

For the New Year they came in here and we painted these pots. We had dirt and seeds.

BARBARA

Wait a minute. I was trying to make a joke when I said I don't even know you. I don't think you got it. I don't want to reveal everything about myself either, but I have definitely had my struggles with drugs and alcohol. Many people in this community have drinking and drug problems. And abuse--domestic violence is everywhere. Last year 1,058 cases of domestic violence--mostly against women were reported at the 78th precinct. These problems cross all race and class boundaries. People don't want to talk about it though. People don't want to hear the truth. We hide from it behind closed doors.

LAURA

Our group is so we can get to know each other as women - to know our children - our families and support each other.

CYNTHIA

And we planted the seeds for, like, hope, for the New Year...you know, with our resolution.

BARBARA

And then I thought. We could paint more pots in the next few months and in the street festivals in the summer, we could be vendors, sell the pots and make some money. I know a street vendor who did this with the painted clay pots and another one who started out on the street selling instruments- that's where I got this drum. Now he has his own store on Flatbush Avenue. We could get one of them to come and talk about setting up a business.

FREDA

Yeah, and at the Christmas party she also sang, "Next year all our troubles will be away from here." I asked her, "What was going to happen next year?"

BARBARA

Okay, let's rehearse: This scene takes place in an apartment - two teenage children, a boy and a girl. The mother visits. There is a knock on the door, the son answers the door and is very 'cold' to his mother.

(Sheila plays the son, Robert. Mother is played by Helen and Tanya by Marie. Helen appears to be 'high'.)

MOTHER/HELEN

I've really missed you. How are you?

TANYA/MARIE

I'm fine.

MOTHER/HELEN

How's school?

TANYA/MARIE

It's okay.

MOTHER/HELEN

How are you doing, Robert?

ROBERT/KATE

Look, I'm not interested in seeing you anymore. Why don't you just go.

MOTHER/HELEN

I'm your mother. You can't talk to me that way.

ROBERT/KATE

Why not? You're not mother to me. You're just a drug addict. I don't care about you.

MOTHER/HELEN

You can't talk like that. I'm sorry I left you...

ROBERT/KATE

You're not sorry. You did just what you wanted to do. Get out

MOTHER/HELEN

Tanya, do you feel the same as your brother?

TANYA/MARIE

What did we do wrong? Why did you leave us? Were we so bad that you had to go take drugs and leave us? I wanted a mother. You know what I'm afraid of - that I'm going to be just like you because you're my mother.

MOTHER/HELEN

You didn't do anything. It was me.

ROBERT/KATE

You can say that again. And we don't have time for you anymore either. We get along fine without you. You come back and expect everything to be nice. it's not nice. I hate you.

MOTHER/HELEN

I'm sorry I left you. I'm doing better now. I'm not going to leave you. I'm trying to get my life back together. I got into this rehab program and I'm doing okay, and I want you to know I love you and I always loved you. I just didn't love myself. That's why I left. I hated myself and I knew it wasn't your fault. I had to leave. I did the best I could, which wasn't much, I know.

ROBERT/KATE

Just get out!

HELEN (breaking out of Mother role)

It happened to me that way. My kids said they didn't want to see their mother on drugs but then, I went to visit once and some money was stolen, and everyone thought it was me, cause I was the only one using. It was missing from my daughter's purse and that's when I knew my son-in-law was using too and that got me. That really got me. I knew I didn't take it. That really got me.

KATE (breaking from Robert role)

But you got to keep it to yourself. We were acting. You can't just stop and go off. We were doing something else. I understand your problem and everything. We all do. But they are here and we trying to work on a show.

HELEN

Can't you just let me talk?

BARBARA

Hey, it's alright. we are working with some very personal ideas here. It tricks stuff off and sometimes we have to get into our own lives. Every actor does it. This isn't easy work.

KATE

I just wanted to finish the scene. It happened to me too. I went to see my son and he did that, just like that. He gave me such a hard time. It was cold. He didn't give me a chance.

CYNTHIA

I'm their mother. I know they need me. I needed my own mother.

KATE

I felt the same way. I mean, my mother just left me, and I don't want to do that to my son. I hated her a long time.

CYNTHIA

They got me started. I shouldn't say that...nobody got me started. There's always excuses, and they don't want a drug addict mama. I don't want to be here either, but it's not easy to get a life back together. I'm not going to give up. I've got to keep trying.

FRED

We are not all drug addicts and criminals. We just don't have homes.

BARBARA

And what about why? -Why the abuse? -Why the drugs? -Why the no jobs? We got to talk about racism and sexism and classism. We got to talk about the politics that prevent women and particularly low-income women who are mostly Black and Hispanic from "getting it together". Is it racism?

FREDA

Of course. And racism is about money, always has been. Slaves were about money. It's mostly money. That's what I was saying about the apples and the oranges.

BED 33

And then she had us paint these pots. Can you believe it, painting pots?

KATE

Why am I here?

HELEN

Why am I here?

BARBARA

Why am I here?

JAMAICA

Why are you here? Don't you have something else to do?

BARBARA

I didn't want the women at the shelter to think the whole neighborhood was against them because there has been a lot of negative publicity and a lot of meeting about this shelter and I thought this would be a good idea and maybe we could help

JAMAICA

Can you help us get homes?

BARBARA

...sometimes I don't know how.

MARIE

This idea of getting our voices out to the community and maybe helping people understand there's nothing to be afraid of...makes sense to me.

BARBARA

Yeah, Voices of the Armory. It's the women in the neighborhood as well as the women in the shelter.

JAMAICA

I used to hate people like you, White people. I'm a Muslim. Then when I was in jail there was a white woman that kept saying hello to me and then I said one day for her to just leave me alone and she kept talking and wouldn't take no. She was in jail cause she killed her husband cause he use to hit her, every day, even when she was pregnant.

BARBARA

What about personal power? About women working together, to better understand each other - about supporting each other - that kind of power?

LAURA

We all live in the same community. There is a conflict in the community with the women in the shelter. We need to work together. We want to help.

BED 33

Help yourself.

MARIE

But I do, I am. I do this for me. Every time I leave here, I feel so much better. I get a lot out of this group. I talk about my feelings. It brings up stuff from my past that I need to remember. That helps me define what I want for me.

CYNTHIA

I thought you lived here.

HELEN

Me too. You're not one of us?

MARIE

What do you mean? I am one of you. I just have an apartment.

BARBARA

But I feel I'm one of you too, but I also have an apartment.

CYNTHIA

But you're white.

BARBARA

But I grew up being kicked out of homes. I understand poverty. but the assumption is that White people don't, and Black people do, and you assumed Linda lived here because she's Black and that I don't, because I'm White and I think this is important. It's racism.

BED 33

But you are not talking about my story. I want to be heard. I got to church. I believe in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ will save you from drugs and keep you on the right path. I want my voice in this play too. If everyone would go to church...you will be saved.
(Freda starts to leave)

BARBARA

Don't go.

FREDA

I have to. I know how she is.

BED 33

All I am saying, is that my voice, my voice should be in this play...

KATE

Yeah, but you are proselytizing again. We all have different faiths. You're always preaching about your way.

HELEN

She gets that way all the time. She's always telling us what to do.

BED 33

I am just telling you that if you would pray. Pray every day, you would not be in such trouble.

KATE

But you got to have it all your way. You think we all should do it your way. We don't want to.

BED 33

Jesus will save you. (to Barbara) I just want my story in this play. where is my story?

FREDA

Because this is everyone's story, not just yours.

HELEN

You only see yourself. we have different religions.

CYNTHIA

But she needs to express her faith.

FREDA

Yeah, but she goes overboard, and you got to listen to us. It's hard to take. It really is. I don't like to be told what I should be doing.

BED 33

But Jesus Christ says in the bible that...

KATE

I don't care. She doesn't understand.

BARBARA

You are right in that your voice should be here and next week I'll write the part for you, but what everyone is saying is important and sometimes we have to agree to disagree. I think the group is saying they don't have to accept your faith because they have different ways....

LAURA

And we have to respect those differences. Sometimes we disagree, but we got to still be able to listen to each other and respect the difference. Barbara and I had a fight the other day and we still disagree, but we had to learn to agree to disagree. But you're right, in that your faith, which is very important to you, needs to be in the play. I think spirituality is important to all of us in one way or another.

FREDA

We just have different ways of believing.

CYNTHIA

My faith is in myself to be drug free. I believe in the love of Jesus Christ too.

BARBARA

I believe this is a religious experience, seriously. Us talking here, being honest with each other and creating something together. That's my spirituality.

BED 33

I try not to talk too much because they make fun of my way, but I know my way is the right way.

FREDA

For you. Not for me.

LAURA

There is so much chaos, so much confusion. I'm going to scream. I can't take this all day. All day I work in the shelters. My clients don't even want to talk to me. I come home and my husband doesn't want to talk to me. The whole neighborhood is afraid. What are they afraid of? I'm just trying to get my life together.

JAMAICA

We all come here for different reasons. I was burned out of my house. I didn't have a place to go. But we try to help each other out. Some of us have jobs and can't go home because of fire or because, as in my case, my husband will beat me. I'm looking for an apartment and I work as a clerk but it's hard to find a place. That's why I'm here.

CYNTHIA

It was the crack that did it. Once I got started, nothing else mattered.

FREDA

Why did you start?

CYNTHIA

Nicky, my ole man, he got me started.

FREDA

Why'd he get started?

CYNTHIA

I don't know. It was there. He needed money. the neighborhood.

FREDA

Why was it in the neighborhood?

CYNTHIA

What do I know - why was it in the neighborhood? Nothing else was here.

FREDA

Why was nothing else there?

CYNTHIA

What are you a cop?

FREDA

That's my point. Maybe it is the cops or the FBI. Maybe that's it.

CYNTHIA

I don't know what you're talking about. Maybe that's it. Maybe that's what?

FREDA

I am talking about the politics of oppression, the government. why are there so many drugs in our communities?

KATE

I don't really know how to say it or anything, I don't know why, but I can relate to a lot of the things people talk about. I feel a power here. That's why I come.

MARIE

I do too. I didn't know what to expect when I got involved. I remember years ago the neighborhood wanted to work with the women here. I went to some of those meeting and they didn't want it to be a men's shelter. Now all of sudden, everyone wants an arts center and they don't seem to want to help or care.

LAURA

They say that's it's no place for people to live. We agree. Everyone should have an apartment and not have to live in an armory. Why can't the community provide a home for the homeless instead of just wanting people out because the women's presence threatens property values.

HELEN

I just want a job. Can't we talk about how we get a job? What we wear on interviews. I heard that you should only wear solids. Is that true? I think my mother told me that.

FREDA

I need help with a resume. Is it wrong to have a had written resume? See, If I had a typewriter.

HELEN

If you go to traveler's aide, they will let you use their typewriters.

BED 33

I'm not trying to tell you what to do. I just want my faith told in our story.

FREDA

Sometimes we got to walk away.

BARBARA

But it's that understanding that's cool, working together. We have got to be able to handle conflict and understand. If we can do it in our group, then maybe it's possible to...

FREDA

What? Change the world?

BARBARA

Let's do the scene again.

(Action freezes, Barbara's back is to audience - Laura steps in front of her and addresses audience).

LAURA

The truth. We come in here to have this group. A women's empowerment group. Barbara does this theatre thing. I'm supposed to be co-leading. I never know what to say. I feel disempowered. Invisible.

BED 33

(to audience.)

Do you hear me?

HELEN

Do they want to?

FREDA

Can it make money?

KATE

My hope for the New Year...Love is the only hope.
(Holds up pot) I made this one for my son.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT II

Scene 1

Place

TV Room, yet action shifts swiftly between outside locations. During scenes of the Group, the TV room is the setting. The main setting of the TV room remains throughout Act Two, however, the stage evolves to accommodate changes in the scene's setting: the community performances such as the church meeting room, hospital auditorium and the street fair; the Meltdown office, Barbara's apartment, ReUse Committee and community meeting rooms. It is important that the presence of the shelter TV room remains throughout, as in this is the heart and the soul of the play. Also, the community despite itself was unable to eliminate the presence of the women.

Time

One year later. Group members change in Act Two. Kate, Barbara, Cynthia, Laura, Marie remain from previous year. Sandra, Deby, Annie, Louise, Grace, Susan and Amana are new members. In Act 2 there are also addition of community members as audience, activists and CB6 and CB7 Chairpersons.

Scene One: includes the part of the Reverend which is played by an aging hippie type male actor. Community members/audience may also include males however casting limitations may involve actresses playing double roles.

It takes place in a church meeting room with many empty chairs, four audience members and the Reverend. The women have finished the presentation and are answering questions from the audience members.

(DISCUSSION WITH AUDIENCE)

KATE

Now I got my kids back and I'm doing the best I can. You got to do it for yourself because nobody is going to help you. It took me a long time. The case worker tried to help, but they don't really. You got to do it for yourself.

SANDRA

See, sometimes it's hard because, well, I'm a lot younger than everyone else here and sometimes you need to talk and be with people your age, but it's okay. We try to help each other. I'm just learning that I don't have to be just there for some guy.

REVEREND

I would like to hear from some of the residents what's it like living in this community and what the community can do for you.

KATE

I can tell you it's hard....

REVEREND

I would like to hear from one of the residents.

CYNTHIA

It's hard because sometimes it's...like in the play, the guards pick fights...although people are pretty nice here.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I was struck by the violence that was portrayed. Are most women at the Armory domestic violence victims?

SANDRA

No, I wouldn't say we all are.

BARBARA

Many women have stories that involve relationship violence, be it sexual, physical like domestic violence or rape/incest. Certainly, of the group that made up the play last year, what do you think? (to group) Some of you are pretty new to the group and I don't know your stories.

CYNTHIA

A lot of us got beat by boyfriends. That's a big reason for coming to the shelter, to get away. Or their girlfriends.

SANDRA

Who still hit them. Not for nothing but people get stressed at that place.

AUDIENCE

You need to speak up more and let us know what you think. I've been at many community meetings and we have always invited participation from the women, but no one says anything.

BARBARA

Community meetings where angry residents are saying the women are drug dealers is not an easy forum. I get scared at those meetings and I have had a lot more practice at public speaking.

That is what this program is, a chance for the community to hear some of the women from

the shelter. May I introduce to the cast, Luz Rodriguez from the Borough President's office.
Thank you for coming.

LUZ RODRIGUEZ

Thank you. It's nice to be here. I am here however, as a private citizen.

MARIE

And it would be great if a few more private citizens would care to come, but we thank you
for being here and all your questions and input.

LAURA

I have a questionnaire we would like everyone to fill out if possible before you leave.

Scene 2
(After the Performance)

KATE

Hey Barbara, I'd like to talk with you a second...

BARBARA

Yeah?

KATE

Can I have some cash. I can't get this check cashed today.

BARBARA

No, sorry. I told you we were paying with a check.

KARE

They got cash.

BARBARA

And they got less than you and you and I set this up this way a while ago. That's our
arrangement

KATE

I can't get the kids anything to eat.

BARBARA

I will give you five, but a deal is a deal. Tomorrow the bank is open, and you will have twenty.

KATE

Come on I need a little cash. These checks aren't any help. I got kids. I'll rip up the check. I have to buy the food and they never go hungry and the rent goes directly to the landlord, so I won't spend it.

BARBARA

The bank is open tomorrow. We agreed on this. I can't. Meltdown can't keep on paying cash. We need a record. You know you make me feel like rich white woman; when every time we are together you ask for money. I will try to create a job opportunity whenever I can, but I cannot just give you money. You are always going to need money and that's charity. Not that there isn't anything wrong with charity, but it's not helping you at this point. You need a job. You need to be independent, and I need to not feel like that's the only reason you are talking to me.

KATE

No, I don't mean to do that. You know you can trust me, and my kids love you. I told you before the I don't care what happens to me and you, but don't leave my kids. They love you.

BARBARA

Unfortunately, if something happens that you and I are not talking, then I'm not going to be talking with your kids. You are the mother.

KATE

(not looking at Barbara, losing temper) You don't know what I'm going through. You think I tell you everything. Sometimes...People put me through a lot. I don't owe you anything. (leaves)

Scene 3

Place

TV Room, the group

SANDRA

I kept the diapers on my baby two days. I couldn't believe my baby was dead. I was put on this medication and they thought I killed the baby, but I didn't believe it. Then later I got into this fight with my cousin. She called. She said I did it. I told her that I didn't, but she wanted this guy that liked me, and she came at me with this knife and I was ready for her.

DEBY

I didn't like the way that reverend; he was very rude to Kate.

SANDRA

Yeah, did you see that? He was only interested in what the women who lived here had to say.

CYNTHIA

Yeah, like she wasn't one of us.

DEBY

I got a job.

BARBARA

That made me very angry. What Job?

DEBY

They want me to play drums on Easter.

BARBARA

That's great. What drums are you using?

DEBY

They say they need a rehearsal and they are going to call me.

BARBARA

Let me know if you need to borrow the drum. That's nice you got a job even if he didn't shake my hand.

SANDRA

Yeah, did you notice that too. He shook all our hands, but he wouldn't shake Kate's and she was standing with me having a cigarette.

BARBARA

He didn't like me either. One of the written comments was that the director not talk. Laura and I were talking about how that's a kind of liberal racism. It's a little phony; assuming that the only people who have a right to talk about oppression are the ones on the bottom. That what I had to say didn't count.

MARIE

We are all in this together.

CYNTHIA

She was really angry. That's why she left for a cigarette.

BARBARA

Oh that's another thing. When we do these performances; the discussion is part of the

performance. I don't care what happens. I don't want people walking off the stage. We can support each other. Of course, if the choice is you are going to hit someone or start a fight but working together as a group. One of use will help you out. Don't leave the stage until the performance is over.

SANDRA

I want a larger part next time. Can I bring some poetry I wrote?

BARBARA

Yeah, let's work on it. Maybe this year we can write new material.

You can write new material. The play presented is based on the stories told last year. I think there is stuff you can relate to but maybe we can add parts based on your lives, if you want. When that audience member asked the question, I wasn't sure if you were prepared to tell your stories. Also, there is a confidentiality issue. What is said in the group may be too private for the play.

Every story in this play was approved for presentation by members of last year's group. Be aware that in the discussion you don't have to answer any questions that you don't want to.

SANDRA

When my baby died, I didn't want to believe it so I kept him with me and changed his diapers two whole days even though he was dead and that when they put me on this medication and after that I almost killed this girl for getting in my face. It was crib death and everything and they thought I killed my own baby. I just couldn't believe it., so I kept the diapers everything and the baby's father's mother found me. Then Later this girl who lived in the same building cause she liked my baby's father and she said I did it. I nearly killed her, and they had to pull me off her. So, I like to act because I can express myself and with my poetry and everything.

DEBY

I brought pictures of my sons.

AMANA

I have a picture too. I went to his party at the agency. I'll get it. Would you like to see it?

BARBARA

Sure, how old is he?

AMANA

Six, six.

Scene 4
(REUSE OF THE ARMORY COMMITTEE MEETING)

(The lights fade on the TV room, with a spot on Barbara. The residents exit the TV room as Barbara speaks. Marie, Laura, Grace, Barbara, ReUse Study Person, Chairperson and community members fill the hospital meeting room. A didactic presentation of the Borough Presidents Committee on the Re-Use of the Armory is being made.)

BARBARA

It wasn't an easy year for the group. I felt this year we did a lot more in terms of advocacy and attending community meetings, yet we were very unsuccessful in getting the community attend to performances. I became a member of the Human Services Committee of CB6 and attended all the ReUse of the Armory Study Meetings, a \$50,000 study initiated by the Borough President's Task Force - created as a result of the ever-growing community controversy regarding the shelter women. Our hope was that the community would know that professionals from the community were involved with the residents and advocating in their behalf; thereby increasing tolerance. I really thought that people would not be threatened if they saw us and the women: nor would they forget about the women in planning the maintaining and preserving of the historic Armory. Also, I wanted an audience.

(Barbara joins Marie, Laura and Grace who are seating in three folding chairs in the front row. 3 ReUse Study people are conducting the Public Meeting in a community room of a local hospital. The room is crowded with community residents and public officials. It is 8:00 pm on a Wednesday night. One member of the study committee has a flip chart and has been jotting down community input as they narrow down possibilities. There are charts and pictures of the armory taped on the walls from back to front of the room. The ReUse Study Person is a female architect from Pratt (a renowned Art institute/university in Fort Greene Brooklyn). She is dressed in trousers and a jacket. She has a manner slightly reminiscent of an old hippie, but has a clipped, smart, architecture-like appearance. As the meeting progresses there is a sense that she sees the hypocrisy, but she knows where her bread is buttered. She also sees the amazing possibilities of the building and sincerely hopes that an investor is in the audience so the efforts of the team will not be drawn in vain. All comments regarding the women were avoided if possible.)

REUSE STUDY PERSON

As you can see some ideas are going to be more practical than others. Mr. Molch's Health and Fitness Center would be included as a revenue generating idea, along with the sports center, ice skating rink, parking garage and swimming pool. All proposed ideas include at least part of the usage for the community albeit an alternative school, after school center, geriatric center and artists and writers' labs. There are many rooms that could be licensed to independent artists and nonprofits.

LAURA

With all due respect, I think the women's shelter should be included on your list as part of the plan.

REUSE STUDY PERSON

Well, as we said at the beginning of the meeting. All plans at present include the Shelter. Any other comments? (Helen, Marie, Barbara and community members raise hands)
Yes? (to a community member)

COMMUNITY MEMBER

I don't think we can possibly consider any of these plans if the shelter is going to be there. How can you expect a school to exist next to the likes of what we see going on here every day?

(Hands from Audience)

REUSE STUDY PERSON

There will be a separate entrance that will block the shelter space from the alternative school or other proposed working of the armory.

LAURA

(to Barbara)

oh yeah, seal them off - that ought to work.

COMMUNITY MEMBER

You cannot have kids in the same place as those women

REUSE STUDY PERSON

Please there is an order. We will call on everyone. Just raise your hand.

COMMUNITY MEMBER

My name is John McAllister and I live on 14th Street. This building is being destroyed by these women. The 14th Street Regiment Armory has historic importance and homeless shelter does not belong there.

BARBARA

My name is Barbara Rick and I am the Artistic Director of Meltdown which has had a weekly program at the Armory the past two years. Laura Thorndyke and Marie Nichols are social workers and teachers as well as community residents who are part of this ongoing project which includes the play Voices of the Armory which we perform with some of the shelter residents at various venues throughout the community. This is Grace Smith who is also a part of Voices and a resident at the shelter. There is an intolerance at these meetings.... As a progressive middle-class community, we have an opportunity to address the crisis of homelessness with creative alternatives and become a national model and not fall prey to destructive NIMBY attitudes.

GRACE

Can I talk? I live at the Armory and I'd like to say something.

REUSE STUDY PERSON

I will call on everyone I can, but we need to maintain order. Roberta did you have anything you wanted to say? (Roberta Sting is the Community Chairperson of the local Community Board. -CCP of CB6)

REUSE STUDY PERSON

I just think that we really have to stick to the agenda. We have talked more than enough about the inclusion of the women's shelter and we really need to move on. Many of us feel an alternative school can co-exist with the shelter, but we cannot possibly keep going back to this point.

COMMUNITY MEMBER

I think that idea of drug addicts mixing with school children is out of the question....

GRACE

You are not being fair. Excuse me, excuse me, my name is Grace Smith and I came tonight to talk and tell you what it is like to live at the Armory. I am not a drug addict. Do you know what it is like to live there?

REUSE STUDY PERSON

We did want to move on. I think it has been well recognized that the women will remain at the shelter. To date, the city is the only rent paying tenant.

MARIE

Can you please listen to what Ms. Smith has to say?

GRACE

All you people talking about what to do with us. We live here. This is our home. I lost my job and have been trying to find another. I get up in the morning and it is difficult to get ready and go out because the shower is in the basement and you have to be careful with your clothes. Some of the women are trouble but most of us are trying very hard to do the right thing and not cause any trouble. This could happen to anybody. I had a very good job and then I got sick and I don't like the way most of you are talking about us, because we want to work. I go to church and I go to school. We are not all drug addicts.

(As Grace speaks, Roberta looks to Barbara and indicates with a patronizing flick of her wrist at her neck for Barbara to "cut it off" and control Grace).

I mean that's all I wanted to say because someday it may happen to you. Homelessness is just two paychecks away.

ROBERTA STING

can we address the zoning issue with the parking garage?

BARBARA

It's important to realize that this is the first community meeting that a resident of the shelter has attended. Ms. Smith is not familiar with what happened at the last meeting or the form for that matter. *VOICES OF THE ARMORY* is not only a weekly meeting held at the Armory that is open to women of Park Slope, but a play that is being presented wherein the women tell their stories in the hopes of creating better understanding of the condition of homelessness in the community. Our next presentation will be the end of the month. I have flyers which I will leave for you. This is a forum that the women have chosen, and I think you will find it less threatening.

ROBERTA STING

I really must ask that we stick to the agenda.

(Lights Fade on the meeting and up on Barbara who moves center stage)

BARBARA

They really don't want to hear or know the women. Grace was not the agenda and knew nothing about Roberts Rules of Order. God, don't they know what a great thing it is that we have this performance; that the women have the courage to share their stories. Women at the shelters are so very disorganized.

ELSA CRABTREE
(CCP OF CB7)

Can I just talk to you a minute in private?

BARBARA

What would you like to talk about?

ELSA/COMMUNITY MEMBER

Do you know how ridiculous you are? Those women stand out there and solicit and sell drugs. We live in this community. You should see yourself sometimes. (She leaves)

BARBARA

The problem is everyone is so afraid, the women, the community. Laura once described me as fearless. That's crazy. I'm just too busy to think straight anymore. Marie kept up with a constant positive attitude. Laura moved upstate. Deby started using. Never did the Easter job. Sandra, the one with the dead baby came to one more meeting but apparently there was another fight and she was 'coded'-- forced to leave the shelter. We never saw her again. In group we talked a lot about what was happening in the community. I kept going to the community meetings. Then the RFP...

Scene 5

Place:

MELTDOWN OFFICE

(The office is a 2nd floor apartment that is used by two community organizations as an office. Once it was a small floor through apartment. It is brightly decorated, with photos of kids, paintings plaques, awards and newspaper articles tacked on all walls. Plastic American flags fall out of a painted coffee can filled with feathered flowers from a broken magic trick. Other toys scattered throughout. Musical instrument fill one corner. There are two bookshelves. The one, not belonging to Meltdown is very neat with information on community programs. This is part of the area designated to the Flatbush Business Improvement District (BID). Meltdown is the other organization sharing the office space. The Executive Director of Meltdown is spouse to Barbara Rick. Creativity abounds when entering the office space. There is a computer against one wall. A white fold up table is adjacent which is covered with proposal papers, etc...

Marie enters. Laura and Barbara are engaged in writing the proposal).

MARIE

Hey, Laura, How's the house?

LAURA

Hi. It's good. We like it.

MARIE

You still commuting? What's the name of that place you work?

LAURA

Project New Hope. (laughing) But, I'll probably be looking for another job especially after this proposal, I may need one.

MARIE

Okay. Fill me in.

LAURA

Department of Homeless Services has issued a request for proposals for private agencies to operate the Armory shelter. The way it looks to me is that the first part which is due in two weeks is the conceptual piece and we have that together based on our two years research and development with the voices of the Armory Group. We have identified problem areas, are familiar with the structure and organization of the shelter system, not to mention our professional expertise. My work with MICA clients and Barbara's as a medial social worker and your administrative talents with mentally retarded and developmentally disabled....

MARIE

yeah...yeah

BARBARA

Hey, it's gotta count. What we're thinking is a proposal in which we will all be directors. We also want to bring Kate in as a full-time employee, peer counselor, as a graduate of the shelter, so to speak and with the respect she has of the women there she will be great. She is writing part of this proposal as well.

MARIE

Wow. this is great. (Reading from papers on table) A non-hierarchical approach based on a women's centered philosophy. Keep that... and that this is an alternative treatment modality for women with drug and alcohol addictions. We offer a women's centered approach based on past research with the women wherein we listened to their stories, heard the pain behind the addictions. You need to edit this a little.

BARBARA

(at computer) Meltdown's proposal to operate the Armory shelter offers a creative alternative in which the women learn about themselves and are encouraged to share their selves with the community so that the community may learn from them.

LAURA

The second part involves budgets, size of organization, past experiences. We may be cut there. At work they feel pretty secure that they are going to get this contract as they just got another city contract for a shelter in Manhattan and of course they are a more established organization than Meltdown with a larger track record in drug and alcohol rehab and work with mentally ill.

Scene 6

HUMAN SERVICE COMMITTEE MEETING.

(The meeting is taking place in a crowded community room of a local police precinct. People sit in metal folding chairs arranged in haphazard rows - some stand in the back, a photographer is leaning against the side wall. ROBERTA STING, STEPHEN RIZZO, BARBARA, COMMUNITY MEMBERS)

ROBERTA

Welcome. Please sign in. (they pass sign in sheet) We are happy to have Steve Rizzo of the Department of Homeless Service with us today, as well as representatives of two of the organizations that have made the first cut, so to speak, in proposals that have been submitted by private organizations to operate the women's shelter at the Park Slope Armory.

STEVE RIZZO

We are very happy to be here. Thank you very much Ms. Sting. DHS would like to answer all your questions. We are committed to the belief the community input will be the key to success in all privatization plans. We are excited by the possibilities and with community involvement such as yours we feel we can make a difference.

BARBARA

My name is Barbara Rick and I am a member of the Human Service committee as well as director of Meltdown Inc. which for two years has had a weekly women's empowerment and advocacy group at the armory shelter. We are the only Park Slope community group that has a history of working with the women at the shelter. Her residents have, through Meltdown, been linked with other community groups and have participated in public forums in the community for two years addressing the NIMBY controversy and the condition of homelessness. We submitted a proposal which was rejected on concept.

ROBERTA

Barbara, this is not the place.

BARBARA

I realize this is dangerous, (photographer snaps photo) but as the only group that had a record working with residents the past two years, I seriously question your intent to work with the community, as we are from that community and submitted a proposal based on that work. Also, our rejection came with a very rude message by a Mr. Jones on our machine that our proposal was rejected. Our calls to find out why, have not been returned. Are there specific groups that you are grooming for privatization?

STEVE RIZZO

We have made our selections very carefully based on track records of the organization, expertise and most importantly community involvement. If you call Mr. Jones tomorrow, I am sure he will answer the question and no, we are totally open to new ideas.

(Scene shifts to Barbara in apartment, having a glass or two of wine, on phone with Laura.)

BARBARA

It is ridiculous. That was the hardest thing announcing to a packed community room that our proposal was rejected but I thought it was important that we be on record. This newspaper guy came over and snapped my picture. Then Jay called the next day, and that asshole said it was because we did not involve the community in our plan. I feel like I'm in the middle of a Kafka novel or something. The entire proposal is a community plan; remember what you said that at least they can't say the community didn't have a plan, if we did the proposal... so we did it and they are saying we have no community plan. Government double speak. They say they wanted community involvement. We are the only group who had been involved previously at the armory and had been for two years. We were not flakes. Of course, they are trying to make me look like one. We are professional social workers, teachers,

community members who have been volunteering our time for two years. We have demonstrated commitment to the women residents, and we know the women. But see, that was it! Our commitment was to the women residents which was not at all the commitment of the Department of Homeless Services or the community. People either made a living off the homeless or they hate the homeless who they thought made a living off them and did not really care about the wellbeing of the homeless. They were fearful, angry and indifferent regarding the residents of the armory. Meltdown challenged their beliefs, rattled cages as artists do.

That was the hardest thing announcing to a packed community room that our proposal was rejected but I thought it was important that we be on record. This newspaper guy came over and snapped my picture. Then Jay called the next day, and that asshole said it was because we did not involve the community in our plan. I feel like I'm in the middle of a Kafka novel or something. Our entire proposal is a community plan; remember what you said that at least they can't say the community didn't have a plan, if we did the proposal...so we did it and they are saying we have do not have a community plan. Weird governmental double speak. They say they wanted community involvement. We are the only group who had been involved previously at the Armory and have been for two years. We are not flakes; of course, they are trying to make me look like one; they definitely want to believe I am one. We are professional social workers, teachers, community members who have been volunteering our time for two years. We have a demonstrated commitment to the women residents, and we know the women. But see, that's it! our commitment is to the women, which is not at all the commitment of the Department of Homeless Services or the community. People either make a living off the homeless or they hate the homeless who they think make a living off them and no one really cares.... They are fearful, angry and indifferent regarding the residents of the armory. We challenge their beliefs, rattle cages as artists are won't to do...shit.

LAURA

The chance was so slim. Yet on actual experience in the shelter, I think we should have made the first cut. Now, we made enemies, DHS for one, CB6, not to mention Project New Hope. Thank God I left. Who was that woman who called you ridiculous?

I found out she's the chair of CB7. I'm really scoring points. It's really funny. I've never been great with rejection and here I am announcing it and getting my picture taken. I'm sorry that happened. Are you alright?

BARBARA

Oh, it's okay. Today a woman had a leg chopped off. She told me her one fear in life was that she, end up like this double amputee who was in the bed next to her at another hospitalization. She's been refusing surgery. Her leg is green and white, yellow, purple and black, the worst I've ever seen, and I've seen some horrible sights. The attending physician is thanking me for helping to get her to accept surgery. All the while, I am thinking that she is lying in Mary Dugan's bed, another double amputee that I convinced to go to a nursing

home because her son wouldn't clean her, and she was getting huge sores on her butt. Decubitus or I, I don't know. Every nurse's horror...My point is, it's all ridiculous. It is ridiculous. That lady is right, but she doesn't know why. But I am definitely alright. It's all relative, like the man said. I'm just getting drunk. How's the new job? I miss you at the group. Marie's been great though. She ran the group without me because I had to go to that other stupid meeting.

LAURA

Really? She's braver than me. If you weren't there last year, I wouldn't do it. I think the job is going ok. It's what I wanted, I think, but this work is hard. A 19-year-old girl came with her face slashed by her boyfriend and my staff is testing me. I think I have to let someone go.

BARBARA

How'd we get into this?

LAURA

I don't know you tell me. I have an idea. I don't know how it is going to work logistically. It may be impossible with your work schedule, but I thought of a way to get you up here. I always knew there would be a way to use the *Voices* Program, but I wasn't sure how. Our shelter has a contract to work with this other family shelter in creating a program on domestic violence. Ours is a DV shelter...

BARBARA

DV?

LAURA

Domestic Violence. The others are family shelters. They are individual cottage homes where there is reportedly domestic violence, so these workshops include family members, men and women. Some are abusers. The contract has been to have domestic violence workshops, but nothing previously has worked, and I have been talking with my director about a theatre program such as *Voices* that addresses the issues without being confrontational. I'm thinking that we could present the *VOICES* play in much the way it was in the beginning and before they know it, people would be engaged and analyzing the characters and the story....

BARBARA

Yes, I'm very interested.

Scene 7

THE GROUP

Helen, Grace, Barbara, Marie, Freda, Cynthia.

THE TV ROOM

BARBARA

I've got to tell you, I'm discouraged. CAMBA won the contract to take over the Armory...

HELEN

I thought they were closing this shelter.

CYNTHIA

What are you talking about? They are only moving us out and bringing in the crazies.

FREDA

We are the crazies.

BARBARA

They are not closing it. There was a request for proposals by the city for private non-profits to run the shelter. Meltdown applied but they kicked us out on concept which makes me angry but that's another story. I expected to be kicked out for not being a large agency. A group called CAMBA, got the contract. Church Avenue Merchants Block Association.

FREDA

Block Association? They've never been here.

BARBARA

They are a bigger agency than Meltdown. They made the first cut, of the three who made it, they were the only one with a women's centered approach, kind of. We support that. I invited them to come to our first performance and to this group, but they don't seem to be interested. I keep going to meetings. I feel like a thorn in everyone's side.

MARIE

But they have a wonderful program, and we really hope that they have the women's interest in mind. They seem to.

GRACE

They never came here. You are the only ones who keep coming back. Some groups come once but never come back. They didn't come even once.

BARBARA

I really believed that with the right publicity people would come. I really wanted an audience for our shown and felt that people would be interested.

(to audience)

There was a period of about 4 weeks that I felt the group was more disciplined than the previous year. Many women were interested in the content of the group, more talk than acting. The acting provided the context for these conversations. That's what's great about the work! Changes were made at the shelter from the city because of privatization and residents were helped to move out more than usually. Of course, the strongest members of the group moved on. That's what is hard about the work - you lose people as they get motivated - so the level of professionalism is limited. The shelter staff worked harder than previously. The controversy in the community continued and with CAMBA getting the contract, the changes were affecting the women.

We continued to have performances. Next it was the Hospital and then the summer festivals. New York Methodist Hospital was the best. A group from a rehab center was there and they got it.

Scene 8:

A PRESENTATION

Barbara, Kate, Deby, Audience Members, Other women from Armory Group.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I really appreciate the work, I see it like, your gospel. Many of us have similar situations, but it's not always easy to tell it... that's why, I was saying that it's a gospel.

BARBARA

Thank you. I guess that's what I meant about this being a religious experience.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

When you cried in the play, was that because you really lived that?

KATE

For me it really happened, not exactly those words. When she said, I hate you... See, that's what I don't want my son to say and I'm afraid...man.

DEBY

I lost it. If you hadn't come in, then I saw you crying and it's just too much...

BARBARA

The break is written in the play because whenever we did the improv the actresses would

identify and start talking about their own lives; that is a sign of good acting and also, that we are talking about something true. So, in writing the play, I wrote the break in, however since we aren't all that rehearsed the actresses still have trouble realizing that it's supposed to happen that way, and they think they are not acting when they cry and in a way, that's true too... Feelings in the scene are raw and at the root of so much of the pain behind the addiction.

Scene 9

THE GROUP

Freda, Helen, Barbara, Marie, Louise, Cynthia, Susan

FREDA

My thing is... I like my reefer. They want you to have these urine tests whenever they call it. I've been this way a long time.

HELEN

My knees are bad and I'm waiting till I get disability housing. See, most of those places are for single women.

LOUISE

They are going to start taking it out of your check to stay here. They open up all these SRO's and the city still gets your money and we get less.

BARBARA

Do you want to be independent, free of the system?

LOUISE

Sure, we do, but how you gonna do that when you don't have a job and don't have an education? I'm doing okay, I don't need it, but don't get me wrong, I have an education and I know how to use the system.

BARBARA

You are the system.

LOUIS

Maybe so.

MARIE

They want you out, but they make it impossible to leave.

BARBARA

One of the main purposes of the group is to increase understanding in the community about the homeless condition. Meltdown has tried to create a job training program, just a little, but it fails and sometimes it seems no one here understands what the group is about, just that it's

a way to get a little cash when the festivals come.

LOUIS

People gotta make money.

BARBARA

And there's nothing wrong with that.

MARIE

But *VOICES* is about much more than that. We are all neighbors; we need to learn about each other, and effect change in the community. What we are doing is working together to create something that might change people's minds. But it is more than money. Last year we had some *VOICES* people who just came for money and that's why they aren't here this year.

FREDA

I'm here. But I want money.

BARBARA

Yeah, you are and we're very grateful for that. And that's okay. I wish I could get the money and pay everyone all the time. I really feel this is the most important work anyone could be doing. Taking personal pain and transforming it into something positive for others in the community to learn from. It is serious important work. I just haven't been able to raise money for it.

Sometimes it feels like we're forcing ourselves on you, yet it is difficult to not get involved because we want you to know we care about you. We also believe this is an opportunity, a great opportunity to create something together.

SUSAN

Let me help you. I will volunteer my time. I will write a schedule, so everyone knows what is expected of them. You need a stage manager, then there are no misunderstandings when we go into production. People will know they can't come late. I will do that.

BARBARA

Okay. That's good. I thought it was important you talked about incest.

SUSAN

A lot of the women don't know; don't recognize that as the problem, but I know for myself it messes with your head.

BARBARA

Maybe in the fall we can focus on that. I have often thought we could talk more about it. Incest is mentioned but we don't get behind the surface.

SUSAN

I'll do it but only if you're there.

BARBARA

It won't work unless we are a more legitimate part of clinical services. It touches off too much. As a mental health professional, it wouldn't be ethical of me to just go in and open up wounds without making the connection to ongoing services. I can't provide it unless this work is recognized by the system, the shelter's clinical staff in this case.

SUSAN

We can help you work that system, that's something we can do.

Scene 10

(lights fade on group remain on Barbara)
(Barbara, Cynthia, Marie, Freda, Kate, Deby)

BARBARA (To Audience)

At the group we would inform the women of continuing community meetings and discuss difficulties in finding SRO's or family shelters. Many rumors were being circulated about people being kicked out. There was a need for the group as a focal point of frustration. March through June we had one performance a month. I paid small stipends for performances and attempted to instill the concept of job training at least with regard to the performances. Meltdown has had production work that was more than the previous year, we would pay the women for assisting with posters and parking signs etc.... I tried to be fair and hire those in order of commitment to the project. But the word got out and certain druggie behavior took over. I blame myself as I was working full-time at the Brooklyn Hospital and Meltdown programs continued to grow, at nights with the kids and the women, then the community meetings. I hardly had time for anything. We need better job training orientation. They don't get it because I don't really have the time to plan it; to explain it; to organize.

People arrived late to the 5th Avenue Festival, a few people arrived looking to read the play that had not participated before. They badgered me for couple dollars. I inadvertently paid one person and not another. I had to get change and went into a store as I come out, I see Deby whack Maria across the face. This is the middle of the performance area at the Fifth Avenue Festival. We had finished reading the play, a very messy performance. The teenagers were to perform next. I was dressed like a clown.

I run to playing area and Cynthia becomes hysterical. Screaming. Kate took Deby out. They said it was the medications. Cops came.

MARIE

I hate to say it, but you have got to cancel the next week's performance. It's not worth it. They are not ready.

BARBARA

What made me mad was after it was over, Kate comes up to me all angry talking about how Jay is going to call the whole thing off and that I should listen to her, that these people are not interested and when am I going to learn. I told her the only reason anything has been happening all along is because I want it to. Jay may be my partner and husband, but he is not the deciding factor, I am. I have a right to be angry, not her. On top of everything else, it's so sexist of her... it makes me crazy.

MARIE

Call it off. They aren't ready.

Scene 11

THE GROUP

Freda, Marie, Louise, Barbara

FREDA

It was because you didn't pay her, and she had been there before Maria. You shouldn't have paid Maria. Everything would be alright if you paid everyone the same amount.

BARBARA

I do not have to do anything. I do not have to pay anybody, but Deby has been with the group a long time now. To hit someone; to have violence which is against everything we believe in; there were young people there. I just thank God no parents saw that. That was the worst thing that could have happened and there is no excuse for it. I will not accept any excuse, especially money for the reason it happened. Not from us. We got to talk about it though, because I cannot let that happen. For the next festival I'm using only four people and no one absolutely no one, gets paid on that day. Everyone is paid by cheque the following Thursday. Louise, Freda, Kate and Marie.

FREDA

I tried to get there but I couldn't find the place. I walked back and forth.

BARBARA

It doesn't matter. If I don't punch in on time, I don't get paid and I have a lot more education and work experience. I will still get fired. I'm not helping you if I just say ok, ok you tried. You weren't there, whatever the reason you don't get paid. And what happened last Sunday?

We were supposed to meet for the block party on 15th street and read part of the play. Isn't that what we wanted all year to be included in the neighborhood? To be given a voice?

FREDA

What are you talking about? I was here. Were you?

MARIE

Oh, please we were here. We went upstairs downstairs. The guards told us you left.

BARBARA

What time?

FREDA

I don't know. We waited for you and then Kate came with the kids, and we looked for you and she didn't have any money, so I took care of your part. I bought the kids something to eat.

MARIE

We were there for half an hour, at least, we waited until two.

BARBARA

I said 1:00. You were late, very, late. We left.

FREDA

Can I have a couple dollars because I bought the kids something?

BARBARA

No. It was nice that you did that, but I don't owe anybody anything. I told Kate I would buy her lunch if she came, but I was not going to wait around all day.

LOUIS

I will try but I'm not guaranteeing anything, if my apartment comes through, I may have to leave.

BARBARA

But you can call and say you are not coming. I understand when emergencies happen but see that's part of it; we need to be; we need to be responsible to each other. You gotta call. Else you'll be fired.

LOUIS

I will try but I'm not guaranteeing anything, if my apartment comes through, I may have to leave.

BARBARA

But you can call and say you are not coming. I understand when emergencies happen, but see, that's part of it; we need to be responsible to each other and if you ever had any job you got to learn to call in or you will be fired.

LOUIS

Don't get me wrong. I can be responsible. I'm not like a lot of the others around here. I came from what you call an upper middle-class community. I had a husband and kids. Now my husband would beat me a lot, but I was in a nice house and the kids, and I didn't never really thought it was that bad. Finally, one day I snapped, and he knew I meant it; that I would kill him, and I left after that, but I had always been involved in politics in the community. I was able to take care of myself. My sister was the first one who confronted me. I really wanted to kill myself. I had a plan and everything. I had the pills. It was after a party and I guess I was really out of it and she called me up and said, "You know you have drinking problem, don't you? What are you going to do about it?" I was always the one in the family who everyone came to. I was the oldest. I don't know how to say this, but I had a spiritual experience. I was going to kill myself and then, it was like, like a vision. I mean, I couldn't say I saw God but there was this 'lightness' and I knew I couldn't take those pills. I called up a treatment center and I'm still in recovery but that's how I got here, after detox and I've been waiting for my section 8 to come through and it did a couple weeks ago - so any day now.

Scene 12

HUMAN SERVICE COMMITTEE MEETING:

Barbara, Roberta Sting, Elsa Crabtree, committee members.

BARBARA

I am Barbara Rick. I am an artist and social worker. I introduce myself and the Meltdown's program, *Voices of the Armory* not for self-aggrandizement but I think that it's important for you to know that members of the community have been working with the women for over two years now.

ROBERTA

Do you have a question?

BARBARA

Our first year only one person that was part of the program left the shelter. This year many members have left, and I commend the director for this. But every time I hear you talk of 'Self-Actualization Program' I think yes, believe me the women are ready. They need programming like that happening every day. They have nothing like that. There is only Meltdown which is volunteer and only two hours a week. If programming could be integrated into the daily activities with the staff of the shelter... That would be great. We have been talking about bringing specific programs that address incest (stutters) ...see, I get nervous too.

ROBERTA

You're nervous? I never thought you would get nervous.

BARBARA

Always.

ROBERTA

Is that all?

BARBARA

My point is *Voices of the Armory* happily supports that kind of programming. It is well needed.

All in all, that was not a bad board meeting, even though I felt the chairperson was patronizing. It was the first time I didn't feel attacked by the community. The group that won the contract came as guests of community boards 6 and 7 to meet the committee. This was the last Human Service Committee meeting before the summer break. They brought a woman who was formerly homeless. This woman told her story. She talked of the difficulties and the struggle - she told a story as the omen of Voices told stories. She even talked of the craft items she had learned how to make at CAMBA and how now she knows she can sell them at the festivals and make money.

After the meeting the Chairperson of CB7, the one who said I was ridiculous actually came up to me and asked how I was. I commented that I was excited and pleased by the reception that I felt the community members had given the representatives from the new shelter administration and that I felt it was due to Ms. Johnson story that this was what I have been trying to do with the *VOICES* program but we haven't been able to get the community to hear their stories.

ELSA CRABTREE

But she is one of them and they will listen to her.

BARBARA

Don't you see, that is what the *VOICES OF THE ARMORY* program is.

The women from the Armory have been trying to tell their story to the community for two years and no one would listen. Tonight, because CAMBA is the group that has been selected by the city you listened to one formerly homeless woman's story and the difference in the room is incredible. No one is angry. You listened. Really, this was the best meeting since I began trying to get people to attend the presentation with the women and this whole RFP process. We want you to see the women, who they are. Listen to their stories. Not that they don't have problems, they do. They have big complex problems, but they are trying -- not all, certainly, but some and most are just too messed up and disorganized and under educated to...It's a miracle they get up in the morning and are able to come to our group. It's even more wonderful that we're able to organize ourselves for the public presentation.

Scene 13
THE GROUP

(Barbara enters shelter's tv room, dark and crowded.
Women are sitting eating, watching TV. The show ends.)

BARBARA

Hello, everyone It's voices time. We haven't been here for a month. Usually there are other women with me, but they were unable to make it. You're welcome to stay.

RESIDENT

What is it?

BARBARA

It's a women's empowerment and advocacy group. We have been coming for the past two years. This is our third year. Usually I am here with other community women, but they weren't able to be here tonight. (As she talks, she straightens up the chairs, all the women leave. Barbara pulls the drum out of the bag and begins to play...One woman remains, another hangs out by the water cooler.

(Barbara sits at chair - starts to play the drum and sings opening song.)

MELTDOWN IS OUR NAME
THEATRE IS THE GAME
VOICES OF THE ARMORY
TO BE EXACT
IS THE NAME OF OUR GROUP
AND WE KNOW FOR A FACT
THAT THROUGH CREATIVITY
WE CAN ADDRESS
FEAR OF THE HOMELESS
IN OUR COMMUNITY
OF PARK SLOPE
BROOKLYN, NY, USA

(The woman at the water cooler begins to nod out.)

Scene 13

BARBARA

It was bad planning. I need to go in with people and energy and I just don't have it anymore. The program at Laura's shelter worked and maybe that's the direction, the hope. The women at the safe home found the process of improv and theatre an expressive form for complicated

feelings associated with domestic violence. When we took the play, and the violence prevention workshops to the family shelters, children and parents became involved easily. It was fun. We were told by the shelter coordinators that these workshops would not work for their clients. Again, the involvement would be all that more effective if staff were engaged in the presentations. With Laura as director of the shelter it's great because she has access to the women when I am not there and if repressed feelings of rage and depression occur someone on staff can attend to those feelings. Maybe it's too much to expect the women at the Armory to come back to our group if we can't provide more support. Our group brings stuff up. There is no way for this work to succeed without follow-up care which they don't receive now at the shelter. I have not been able to provide it with my work at Meltdown at this point. Maybe when I quit my hospital job, I can pay attention to the clinical issues this work identifies for the women...

At the family shelter there was a little girl, maybe about 5 years old, who was on stage with a group of the other kids in a scene where another child is upset that her parents are fighting and is trying to run away. I asked her what she would say to her friend. She said, "tomorrow will be a better day."

I hope....

Scene 15

ON PHONE IN APARTMENT TALKING TO BARBARA

KATE

I'm doing better. Yeah, I had to get a phone, because no one reached me when my brother died. He left all his money to my mother and my cousin, and she came up here and tried to help. It wasn't an easy time, it really wasn't. But you know I will help you whenever I can. The kids, they are doing good. Andre's teacher says she don't understand what I'm doing but they say whatever it is keep it up. Guess it's because I've had him for a year and he was acting out and everything. I keep thinking about what you were saying and I'm writing a lot. You know that book you gave me, it's almost filled and I'm taking care of things for me. When Andre is off for Christmas, I'm gonna see my mother. They say she got (mispronounced) Al-heimers, that she forgets, but she's also had a lot of losses lately and stress can do that, like you said. Thanks for calling. Just call when you got something, a play reading or anything.... I want her to tell me that she loves me, maybe she won't, yeah, I know, I can forgive, I was thinking about that too, but she might, you know, she just might least ways, I can hope....

End of ACT II

ACT III - Epilogue
(And the Beat Goes On...)

The following three scenes occur at 6-month intervals. Scene 1 is six months after act II ends. Setting is the Meltdown office, a floor-through apartment that has been converted to a Commercial space. Two organizations share the office: that of the Flatbush Business Improvement District (Flatbush BID) and Meltdown. The BID is very neat. Meltdown is a tad more disheveled and 'artsy' in nature. The office is filled with life and color.

Scene 1

(Marie, Jay and Barbara in Meltdown office. Marie has just entered. 3 chairs are in the center. Jay is sitting at the desk in the other office. Rises when Marie enters.)

JAY

Hi, Marie,

MARIE

Jay.

BARBARA

Why don't we sit here?

MARIE

Ok. (Marie does not take off jacket but puts bag by the door. Jay joins Barbara.)

BARBARA

First, I'm sorry about calling your boss and causing any trouble for you, but what I said was that I felt like calling the state because I was not the one holding up the project with the men....

MARIE

I can't believe you called him.

BARBARA

It wasn't to get you in trouble. I just was angry. The men had just come to the office to clean the poles for Jay which really makes me mad cause what we were going to do is so much better and Harry asked me why I cancelled the project. I said, I didn't. He said that was what he was told. All this time I've been waiting for a call from your boss. I took the time I wrote a proposal; I've given... I donated my time. We had three art workshops where we made the cards. The guys loved it. The work was good. I went down there for Thanksgiving. He tells me community involvement is what they want and then no response from my letter and all

my time...

MARIE

What do you want me to do?

BARBARA

What?

MARIE

What are we supposed to do with your anger?

JAY

Hey, now wait a minute.

BARBARA

Who are you talking to?

MARIE

I'm talking to you.

BARBARA

Doesn't our friendship mean anything? All we've been through, Voices...?

MARIE

A friend wouldn't have called my employer.

BARBARA

I was calling regarding a proposal Meltdown sent and we received no response. I was furious. I did not cancel the project. And the guys were disappointed. I saw their faces. I didn't want to put you in the middle. I called myself. And then you didn't even care to call. I called you. You hung up and we had to call this meeting. We've been friends. We gave you the keys to this office. Doesn't our friendship deserve more.

MARIE

Oh, so that's what this is about.

BARBARA

What? I said I wasn't calling the State, but I felt like it because we had a program that was community involvement. They said they wanted that for the men. Obviously, that wasn't true. Treating Meltdown like that was disgusting. Don't you understand how I felt?

MARIE

And how do you feel? What are we going to do with Barbara's feelings?

BARBARA
Don't look at me with those nastyass eyes.

MARIE
Nasty ass!?

BARBARA
Yeah!

MARIE
So now you're calling names. That's what this is reduced to.

JAY
Can't we talk about this calmly.

MARIE
You're the one calling names.

BARBARA
I'm not calling names. Isn't our relationship worth more than this?

MARIE
You just said "nastyass". Didn't I just hear that? Jay?

JAY
I don't know what to say.

BARBARA
I don't either. If you want to talk about this and understand.

MARIE
I came here to talk, but you have reduced it to name calling.
Here are my keys.

BARBARA
Marie
(She leaves. Jay looks at Barbara)

JAY
Let her go.

BARBARA

Don't worry. She doesn't want to work it out.

JAY

When are you going to learn? You think everyone's a friend.

BARBARA

So, did you.

JAY

I was wrong.

End Scene

Scene 2

(Six months later, also Meltdown office.)

FUNDER #1

I'm not sure I understand how you plan to train the women. You say this is for 8 people. Are these the only ones that are trained.

LAURA

Well, no, we will start with 8 who will then be the peer trainers at the next shelter. We have considered that there may be a total of 24 at each site and then there is a follow-up plan.

FUNDER #2

I understand and think this is a wonderful idea. I have worked with teenagers using theatre and it works really well.

BARBARA

The real job training that occurs in such a program is terrific! As well as the didactic psychoeducation info shared, all kinds of group process and team building skills are taught in the process. Many job training programs have no provision for these skills which are so necessary if sustained employment is the goal. Particularly with teens and women shelter residents such as those in the Voices program, self-esteem and basic life skills need to be taught. Not only that there must be a method of engagement, which is what the theatre is or art, an entire educational and therapeutic process occurs without hitting their heads with it or whatever the expression is....

LAURA

I've found in my work capacity in shelters these methods are often the only ones that work.

KATE

I just have to say, I want a job. I've learned so much and we could do so much more, but it is hard to keep giving the time. I can personally recommend this program as I know how much it has helped me. And if we can, with your help get some money so not only myself but others will get paid, I know we can really be effective. Volunteering is good, but it is not enough to make a big difference.

FUNDER #1

Well, we are going to have to go, I think we have quite enough. Thank you so much for taking the time to answer our questions.

BARBARA

Oh well, thank you for coming, for being interested.

FUNDER #2

Thank you for all your work.

BARBARA

Thank you.

FUNDER #1

Now, I don't know if we told you our timeline, but we are interviewing people this month and then we give our recommendations to the committee, and you should hear the end of April.

LAURA

We look forward to hearing from you.

FUNDER #2

Again, thank you for your time.

BARBARA

Bye.

FUNDER #1

Bye.

(Door closes. Women sigh.)

LAURA

I think we'll get something.

BARBARA

You think so?

LAURA

I think so. That was so weird. I get quiet and you can't stop talking.

KATE

I just had to get to the money. I mean, that's what it's about.

BARBARA

Yeah, you did fine. I just wish I had arranged for a presentation. It was like all that talk about what we were doing. It is so much easier to just do it. I don't know.

LAURA

Really, I think something will work. It would have been great if Marie could have been here.

KATE

What happened to Marie?

BARBARA

Marie worked with the mentally retarded, dually diagnosed men. I got them involved in a project making greeting cards - you know the hand painted cards. There was a misunderstanding. She didn't want to discuss it or work it out.

KATE

Maybe I should call her.

BARBARA

I wish it would make a difference, but I doubt it. It's been over a year. She used the occasion to believe the worst, which makes me think she wanted to believe the worst and was looking for a way out of the relationship.

KATE

I think she will come back in time. After all we've been through.

LAURA

Anyway, I think we're going to get something from them. Maybe not the whole amount, but something to get us started.

Scene 3
(Meltdown office - 6 months later.)

JAY

You can't start that again. We are always giving jobs to other people. That's why they don't take what you say seriously. They should be paying you.

BARBARA

It's just a stipend. I need the help. I can't do it. She adds a lot to the program.

JAY

What about Laura, Marie. Where are they? They all got their good jobs. You should be running some agency.

BARBARA

Gimme a break, this is all I can do.

JAY

When are you going to stop?

BARBARA

I have already. You don't see it; you don't care anymore. No one comes to the Brooklyn Wave meetings. The teens did some work that was good for a while, but it's over now.

JAY

They stole your puppets.

BARBARA

We don't know that.

JAY

Open your eyes.

BARBARA

Shut up. just shut up
(Bell rings) Great.

JAY

Don't worry I'm going.

(Barbara opens door - calls down steps)

BARBARA

Hi! Come up. Just you.

KATE

Laura's coming, she just pulled up. She's looking for a spot.

JAY

Hello Kate, good to see you again.

KATE

Hi, how are you?

JAY

I'm doing great. Sorry I can't stay. I've got a meeting at MetroTech. See you.

KATE

Bye. (Jay exits) He is always so busy.

BARBARA

Thank heavens. So, how are you? Guess you got my letter.

KATE

Things have been rough.

BARBARA

You stopped coming to the clinic.

KATE

I told you. I didn't have transportation.

BARBARA

You make me nuts.

KATE

Hey, I can't help it.

BARBARA

It's just that I had to close the cases. They wouldn't let me keep them open without a commitment to treatment.

(Bell rings.) Must be Laura (rings buzzer- opening door) Hi! come on up. I want to talk with you about this. Later.

(Laura enters)

LAURA

Kate, how are you? I haven't seen you since those funders were here. That didn't work, did it.

KATE

No, it didn't. (They laugh and hug.)

LAURA

How are you doing?

KATE

Hangin' in there. Hangin' in there.

LAURA

How're the kids?

(Bell rings. Barbara exits to answer door)

KATE

Stressin' me out. Andre is getting big and there both eatin' me out of house and home and well, you know how my living situation is with my family. They got a lot of problems. How's your job? Where are you working now?

LAURA

I'm working at a single woman's shelter in Manhattan.

BARBARA

Look, who's here! (Susan enters, all greet each other noisily)
The reason we are all here is I think it's time we do Voices again, maybe at your shelter (to Laura).

LAURA

I can't pay you anything.

BARBARA

What else is new? We haven't done it since that last time at the Armory with CAMBA.

KATE

That was a good show. The audience was terrific.

BARBARA

Yeah, it was because, Meltdown paid the women as part of the job training program out of the Racism Harmony Award, we gave full credit to them and said it was a joint project. We

got publicity. We advertised. The community came. But they still didn't see it as anything they want to pay for. It was a very positive PR piece for them. All our work brought the community in, but they took all the credit.

LAURA

They will take whatever we've got for free, but they missed the point. They don't see the job training or the mental health service it provides. Did she tell you what they did?

KATE

What?

LAURA

People gave donation money; the director of the agency covered the cup so Barbara wouldn't see it. We paid everyone out of our meager budget, and she wouldn't even share the tips with us. Later at the community advisory meeting I found out someone donated \$100 that night. They put it toward the garden. Not that there's anything wrong with that. I love flowers too. But that is all window dressing. Our play addressed real problems of the women and the community. People just don't want to hear it. They keep asking me to come back, but they won't pay anything.

KATE

You should talk.

BARBARA

What?

KATE

I don't want to say nothing or anything, but you always want me to work for free.

BARBARA

But I do pay, when I can.

KATE

How does CAMBA do it?

BARBARA

Meltdown is the one that is giving you a job, however meager, not them. They take all the money for themselves, for their own jobs. This is what happens in social service.

LAURA

Of course, you could argue that they employ over a 100 people to help the homeless and Meltdown has nothing, but it's true they wouldn't pay you; they make you pay them.

KATE

I never paid them anything.

BARBARA

Wrong. You are worth money. What about SSI, drug treatment, Medicaid, homeless services. You being there means money for CAMBA and that's it.

LAURA

I'll never forget how you made such an impassioned plea after the presentation for job training and then Holmes asked for donations for underwear. It was so demeaning. God forbid the women make money so they can buy their own underwear.

KATE

I remember that. That was embarrassing. Even I was embarrassed and after what I've been through, I didn't think that was possible.

SUSAN

We need to write to Oprah. She would help us.

BARBARA

I won't do it there again. Although despite my anger they did pay me for a teen dating violence program recently in one of their schools. But we did that reading last spring at your shelter and I'm thinking maybe we should work there. What do you think? Kate is going to help. Meltdown will pay as a continuation of the job training piece. I will donate my time.

LAURA

I hate to be part of the system that doesn't recognize the value of the work and have you do it for nothing.

BARBARA

I don't care. It would be worse to just disappear. I'm working at the clinic and I can afford to pay a little, at least enough to pay Kate a stipend. It's important that the work continue. Cause no one really cares about it, but maybe if we keep doing it, someone other than us will. It's not going to happen at all if we stop.

LAURA

Let me think about it.

BARBARA

Think about it?

LAURA

I've got my people to answer to.

BARBARA

Oh.

KATE

Why not?

LAURA

Remember, what did you call it, Project Newhope? The other contender for the contract. I now work for them. I'm not sure they will go for Meltdown coming in.

KATE

Can't you say something?

LAURA

I don't know. It's my job. I get paid a salary. I don't want to lose it.

SUSAN

I said before, I'd help. I'm not in it for the money. I want to finish my education. Did I tell you I might move to L.A.? My friend who works at the domestic violence shelter said that the director of the agency, Lisa Mahan - you know her and boy, does she know you, - anyway, she hired a known child abuser because he was her husband's friend. My friend wanted to do something, but she can't lose her job. There are too many in this business who are hurting rather than helping. You should have heard her cursing you out.

KATE

Why?

BARBARA

I got involved in an interagency collaborative, invited the directors of agencies in Brooklyn. That one, in particular, didn't like the attention I was getting really because of *Voices*. It was a national conference and I performed parts of the play, plus I had a few things to say about work with domestic violence survivors and the dually diagnosed. I stole her thunder a little. She is a power and control freak.

SUSAN

Well, she said in the open office. She would ruin you.

LAURA

She was threatened and discredited us, by saying Barbara was too emotional, that she was crazy...

KATE

Crazy?

BARBARA

It's all so complicated. It was during a brainstorming session for a community action plan at the National Women's Resource Center training in Washington. I said something about community violence prevention programs using creative arts. The director of a hospital

social work department said I had my own agenda; that wasn't the place. I argued. I did not leave the table, but I was offended, and tears came to my eye. God forbid. This was my downfall.

KATE

I thought I was the only one who got mad at you.

LAURA

No, we all do.

BARBARA

The entire team was selected for leadership, mind you. What's-her-face met with members of the team that evening and they decided I wasn't fit to lead them. I had put the team together with Brooklyn Hospital. Our work from the teen program and *Voices of the Armory* provided clinical expertise and the case stories that gave the Brooklyn Team Proposal the highest points. But Mahan was threatened and called me crazy and continues to disparage my reputation and Meltdown's work.

SUSAN

I wasn't sure what happened, but you know my friend. She called me up and asked what you did that the director was cursing you out when that fax came through.

LAURA

It would all have been different if Meltdown had a bigger budget. Social services are about power and control. I got to tell you every time I see the play, I feel bad. I feel I am becoming one of them.

SUSAN

It's like the play says, "homelessness is big business".

KATE

You never heard from Marie?

BARBARA

No. More fallout.

LAURA

It's hard to believe.

BARBARA

She got what she wanted. Gave her experience, glowing letters of reference for graduate school. We weren't big enough to give her a job. It was time to go. We were foolish enough to think she was a friend. And I guess, fortunately, to stay with us you gotta be a friend

because we don't have enough to offer on services and jobs. Oh, there are possible exceptions. I think we can still train, offer our expertise in group and theatre on job training and violence prevention programs for youth but as you can see its slow...

KATE

Is it all the big agencies you fight with?

BARBARA

Seems so.

KATE

That's not smart.

SUSAN

What's she supposed to do?

KATE

I'm not saying anything. But where's it get you? You got to play the system.

BARBARA

Right. Which is why I appreciate you all. You're still here and god knows we have had differences... Marie was changing....it was like she didn't want to be working or friends with the white guys....unless of course there was a fat salary...then she probably would still be here. She didn't believe OJ but when I asked that the board discuss racism, that is when she began to pull away, in little ways. She wouldn't talk about it. If there was a problem, she wouldn't let us know her true feelings. I'm left thinking we were white, she was black...she didn't ...maybe race is the cheap easy excuse. Then again, Mahan was another white administrator, like those funders. I can't help thinking that if I were black or Hispanic, I would have been more valuable, but since I had no traditional power, i.e. money and I was white just like her, there was no need. I was dispensable. But that is so racist. I also knew more than she from direct practice experience and education. I had a bigger voice at this conference. She played me out.

KATE

I don't know. Race shouldn't be in the way.

BARBARA

But it is.

KATE

We all bleed the same.

SUSAN

You white people. You got to learn from us. You need us.

KATE

I've always known you needed us in the program because we were black.

BARBARA

But that's not the only reason.

KATE

Oh, come on. Yes, it is.

We are the real thing. You're white, what can you know?

BARBARA

But it's about not having money.

KATE

Right. That too.

LAURA

Whenever there is a conflict at work, someone will call racism, most of the time it has nothing to do with race, but that if the parties are opposite races that is the reason. It's hard for me in a management position...I'm always stuck.

BARBARA

When the funders see me and Laura or Jay in charge, they say we are a white company and assume we are as racist as they and they won't fund us. Again, it's like the play, the same message from a black face has a different weight than a white one.

It makes me sick. Racism, sexism, this neighborhood and classism. Not in my backyard. I've made a lot of enemies.

We need both of you cause you are black. and your personal experiences, but is it racist to recognize that your blackness helps?

KATE

I see what you mean.

BARBARA

Do you agree? Is it racist?

KATE

Yes.

BARBARA

See. Even you will see it as racist.

KATE

Not like that.

BARBARA

It's OK. We got to be able to talk.

KATE

We're used to it. As long as I get paid.

BARBARA

I thought....

SUSAN

You know this isn't about money. It's having a voice.

BARBARA

Other times I bring it up, I've been accused of having my own issues, usually by black people. But the white guys also just won't talk. They don't even recognize it as their issue.

LAURA

It's hard to talk about.

BARBARA

Marie wouldn't talk about it.

SUSAN

You got to relax. I'm with you.
(Puts her arm around her.)

BARBARA

So anyway. It's time to do the show again. You on board?

KATE

If I can. You know I'm there.

BARBARA

I can guarantee a stipend that pays transportation and expenses. Performances there will be a fee and if you participate in the Teen program as assistant director, each workshop will be \$25, same as performance fee. I'll be back. You will be expected to attend at least one training a week at no charge.

LAURA

How are you going to pay for this?

BARBARA

We have some money and I'll throw in my own if I have to. I'm still working consulting jobs. Hopefully a solid program will help bring in money to the organization. Now, it simply is not working. I get calls for a community program and I can't do anything. I'm too busy doing other work and I don't have young people on a consistent basis.

LAURA

What does Jay think?

BARBARA

He thinks I'm a fool.

SUSAN

You are you know.

KATE

Why?

LAURA

People don't give their own money. The work is less valuable to others when no major contributor or funder is present.

SUSAN

Call me crazy. But I've been there. If it weren't for theatre, I don't think I could keep going. Ever since my daughter came to your program. I'll do this but we got to get even deeper than before. So many of the women in the shelter are incest survivors. My father, my brother, my husband, they are the ones who hurt me. I won't let these people who run these agencies get away with thinking they are helping. I will fight, but only if we keep writing and creating more plays. I mean it. We know what this about, don't we?

KATE

I don't know. I got to feed the kids.

SUSAN

Look, I know we can do this.

BARBARA

Thanks.

KATE

You know I think it's valuable.

LAURA

You benefit though.

KATE

Not much. Subway money and lunch. I work for it.

LAURA

You're right. But if you hang out with us you might get the resume to be hired by CAMBA.

KATE

Really?

BARBARA

But the work is not valued because it is art, it is theatre, it is elitist, it is me, I don't know, I do the best I can but it isn't enough and the very things that make the work special are what people are afraid of or say it's too special and not practical, and I'm not the best advocate... I've been known to cry.

LAURA

God knows, you can't be a women administrator on domestic violence issues and show any traditional feminist qualities you will be eaten alive for being weak.

KATE

What are you talking about?

LAURA

I'm talking about what happened to Barbara at that conference; the whole domestic violence movement and the shelter system is filled with hypocrisy and traditionalist sexist attitudes. Power and control are the principal operative and yet we pretend to understand. We are creating an impossible system for anyone we want to serve and if you say something about it like Barbara does you won't get a job. I've got a child too. I'm trying to buy a house and send him to school. I can't take those chances.

KATE

It is different not having kids. I guess you can take chances.

BARBARA

But I have kids too...but I do take chances that I might not take if I had my own child...then again maybe I would take more.

(Phone rings). I'll get in the back.

(She leaves.)

LAURA

Well, it's really wonderful seeing you.

KATE

Yeah, it's nice. It's just so hard sometimes. I keep telling Barbara I just need the money. I would be here all the time. The kids are getting bigger, and I got to keep them fed. They eat more. They have never gone hungry yet. You know, I wouldn't ask you this, but I'm really in a jam. Can I borrow five dollars? I get my check at the end of the week, but Kima needs a white shirt for school and I will have just enough.

LAURA

I'm not sure...I have change.

KATE

I really appreciate it.

LAURA

Oh yeah, I do.

aura

(gives her money) This job ought to help a little. It will be nice when we get funding for the work.

BARBARA

That was Jay. He's sorry and wants me to meet him. He always wants me to meet him. What are you saying?

LAURA

It will be nice when we get funding.

KATE

(Picks up drum.)

I'll say. bangs... and we here to say....

BARBARA

You want that part?

LAURA

You and Jay fighting?

BARBARA

It's been a little tense. No money. Meltdown is melting. He wants me to get a real job.

KATE

You can address...

LAURA

Condition of the homeless in our community....

ALL

Of Park Slope, Brooklyn, New York, USA

BARBARA

Yes.

SCENE END

EPILOGUE

BARBARA

When I left the hospital, Marie asked Jay if they could work with the BID and I helped as it was winter and got her clients involved in making greeting cards. It was a great project. Involved a lot of supervision as once the paper was hand painted it had to cut and white paper inserted on the inside for the note, but the hand painted cards were great. Jay and I participated in her agency's thanksgiving dinner and met all the 'mentally challenged' clients.

They were dually diagnosed, chemical/alcoholic or drug induced diagnosis mixed with a mental illness disability. We talked to Marie's supervisor about making a business card for the card business. I wrote a proposal to Marie's boss. No response. Her clients kept cleaning the streets which was a BID project. Damn this always makes me so angry. I am always offering these interesting projects that involve art and making products that can be sold but the art part was trivialized. The administrators will have the homeless or young people or large groups of 'mentally challenged' people sweeping streets -- that is community service.

I am a professional, an MSW, a groupwork community organizer professional! Doesn't that level of supervision count? I am offering it for free. Then one of the guys came to office and said, that the painting wasn't happening because I cancelled the project, which wasn't so. I was angry I called Marie's supervisor and told him it made me mad that the guys thought I cancelled the project when I've been waiting for a response to my proposal; that I felt like calling the state; it made me so mad....

He apparently freaked out, went to Marie; she freaked out...called Jay... would not talk to me...finally after many entreaties came to office....despite my apology for getting her boss

upset was not interested in working it out...left the office in anger...we have not spoken since...it's been..what..3 years now....Jay and I can't help but think it was racismshe was using us...we gave her keys to the office...we made her a board member.... thought she was a friend...forget it.

When the friendship was tested, she would rather think the worst of us than understand...please it is a terrible story what happened. Our friendship was over. Actually, it never really existed. Jay and I were very hurt.

In truth, the entire project 'melted down' from the women in the shelter to the women in the community who tried to help. I felt like Don Quixote – chasing windmills. Sometimes great mistakes are made from great expectations or great innocence in the ways of the world.

We were trying to help. We did in moments. Now 15 years later, the women of the Armory are still there. There is also a pool, the YWCA and other community groups.

BUT THE WOMEN ARE STILL THERE...Don't know if this is success or a good thing as homelessness...well, it's a human condition, and we certainly didn't stop it. This community has provided some shelter, a home for some. This is good, I guess.

Voices of the Armory was part of that struggle.

THE END