

# oXyC Contin FolLies(S)

By Steve Gold

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes... The year may be 1998 in Steve Gold's scathing seriocomedy, but what better way to celebrate the shit show of 2020's pandemic than a spirited theatrical jaunt into the introduction of yet another source of death and devastation in our society? That's right, folks; it's the opioid crisis, with Oxycontin as the backdrop as well as the title role. There is no song or dance in Oxycontin Follies, rather it offers a time capsule glimpse into just a few of the forces that released the scourge of these drugs into the general population. We've got Ginger, a hopeful and hungry drug rep from Purdue Pharma where she's been groomed for "humanitarian service" with incentives, retreats, and motivational seminars. Then there's Dr. Bill Van Zandt, a young physician who admittedly has limited experience with pharmacology, but wants to do right by his patients. It's a lethal combination. To top it off, there's fantastic dialogue without a wasted word that leaves us feeling sucker punched even when we know where this thing is heading because, well, here we are. This timely short play is a societal call to wake up and smell the Narcan. It's totally doable on any platform from Zoom to Room - and it needs to be done.*

Ginger

Believe me, you don't have to worry about addiction. It's so safe, like taking M&Ms.

*(Spacing and format are playwright's own.)*

Oxycontin Follies

Cast of Characters

Ginger.....Pharmaceutical Saleswoman

Bill Van Zandt.....Physician

Time: 1998

Place: West Virginia

Scene: A darkened stage. A woman in her early twenties is stage right, well-dressed and very enthusiastic. Her name is Ginger; she is carrying a small knapsack. Stage left is a man dressed in business attire and wearing a white lab coat: Dr. Bill Van Zandt, about thirty, low-key and amiable. It is the year 1998. The place is West Virginia.

Ginger

(GOES TO HIM)

Hi! My name is Ginger.

Bill

Hello, Ginger.

Ginger

(SHAKES HIS HAND)

Isn't it a *beautiful* day?

Bill

Yes, indeed.

Ginger

I prefer warm weather myself—I'm from Florida. Newly arrived here.

Bill

Welcome to West Virginia. My secretary tells me you're from Purdue Pharma.

Ginger

Yes, I am.

Bill

How long have you been with them?

Ginger

I started three weeks ago.

Bill

How do you like it?

Ginger

Oh, it's *fabulous!*

Bill

Really.

Ginger

The possibilities are endless.

Bill

You get a commission?

Ginger

Oh, yes. And a regular salary and a bonus. Isn't that terrific?

Bill

Yes, it is.

Ginger

Purdue is a top-notch place in which to work. They have motivational seminars for us.

Bill

Do they?

Ginger

Yup.

Bill

Well, you seem to be motivated.

Ginger

And they have retreats.

Bill

Retreats?

Ginger

And they pay for it too. Isn't that *fabulous*?

Bill

Sounds good to me.

Ginger

They have all these wonderful products.

(A BIT SHEEPISH)

...And that's what I've come to talk to you about.

Bill

(TO STAGE CENTER; MILDLY AMUSED)

Is that so?

Ginger

You don't mind?

Bill

Not at all.

Ginger

I mean, I'm kind of new at this.

Bill

That's okay.

Ginger

I graduated college only a few months ago. And I've got a lot of students loans to pay off.

Bill

(WRYLY)

Tell me about it.

Ginger

This is my very first job.

Bill

Very first?

Ginger

Isn't that *fabulous*?

Bill

Fabulous.

Ginger

So if I say something wrong, it's because of my inexperience.

Bill

Don't worry about.

Ginger

Okay, great. Now, I came to tell you about a wonderful opportunity.

Bill

What's that?

Ginger

Well, I'll tell you. My company, Purdue Pharma, makes a product that will change the way we think about pain management.

Bill

That would certainly be a good thing—

Ginger

And profitable.

Bill

That too.

Ginger

And why not? Do we have to apologize for making a buck?

Bill

Of course not.

Ginger

I mean, I've got my student loans to pay off. But anyway, Purdue Pharma has this medication that does wonders where pain management is concerned.

Bill

What's the name of this medication?

(PAUSE)

Ginger

(MELODRAMATIC)

Oxycontin!

Bill

Oxycontin.

Ginger

That's right.

Bill

I vaguely remember oxycontin from my pharmacology class.

Ginger

That's *fabulous!*

Bill

Isn't it given only to cancer patients to lessen their pain?

Ginger

That was the original function, yes. But Purdue Pharma and I believe that oxycontin can be used for other types of chronic pain.

Bill

What other types? Did they alter the formula?

Ginger

I'm not sure. I'm really terrible when it comes to chemistry. But I can get back to you on that.

Bill

Great.

Ginger

But the point is, you don't have to have cancer to see the marvelous benefits of oxycontin.

Bill

No?

Ginger

*No.* If someone comes into your office with, say, severe back pain, oxycontin will help them immediately.

Bill

Perhaps.

Ginger

No perhaps about it.

Bill

Have you got any literature I can read?

Ginger

*Absolutely!*

(REMOVES SOME PARAPHERNALIA FROM HER KNAPSACK, GOES TO HIM AND HANDS IT TO HIM; HE LOOKS IT OVER)

Bill

Hmmmm. Interesting.

Ginger

It's more than that: It's *fabulous!*

Bill

Maybe.

Ginger

You'll be even more impressed when you read it. I know I was.

Bill

I can see that.

Ginger

Like I said I don't know the first thing about chemistry, but I have a feeling this is very impressive, you know?

Bill

I'm a family doctor, not a pharmacologist.

Ginger

But you do appreciate the fact that pain has been undertreated for far too long.

Bill

(TO HER)

Has it?

Ginger

Of course it has. Survey after survey has shown that.

Bill

If you say so—

Ginger

We have to think of patients as health consumers. We have to give them what they want. I don't see anything wrong with that.

Bill

(PUTS THE PARAPHERNALIA IN HIS SIDE POCKET)

Well, every patient is different—did they tell you that during your training?

Ginger

No, and I'm sure that's true. But I'm not trying to tell you how to practice medicine.

Bill

I realize that—

Ginger

The point is, we now have a chance to alleviate the misery of countless people. This is humanitarian stuff we're talking about.

Bill

Humanitarian?

Ginger

*Absolutely!* ...And if we can make a few bucks on the side that's okay, too. Right?

Bill

I guess so.

Ginger

Here's a sample supply.

(REMOVES A BOTTLE OF PILLS FROM HER KNAPSACK, HANDS IT TO HIM)

Bill

What's the dosage?

Ginger

80 milligrams.

Bill

Sounds a bit high.

Ginger

They didn't pick that number out of a hat, you know.

Bill

I'm sure they didn't.

Ginger

They did tons of clinical work and this is the amount they came up with. Take one of these tablets and you can run the Boston Marathon.

Bill

My patients have lower expectations.

Ginger

Oh, by the way do you have children?

Bill

Yes.

Ginger

If, God forbid, one of them suffers a serious accident requires pain medication, you won't find anything better than oxycontin. And, you know, this may sound crazy, but I almost wish I have such an accident so that I have the opportunity to take oxycontin.

Bill

You have a lot of faith in it.

Ginger

I sure do!

Bill

What's the rate of addiction?

Ginger

How's that?

Bill

The rate of addiction.

Ginger

(CAREFREE)

Oh, that. Less than one percent.

Bill

That's all?

Ginger

That's what the material says.

Bill

I'll look it over.

Ginger

Believe me, you don't have to worry about addiction. It's like taking M&Ms.

Bill

M&Ms?

Ginger

You know what M&Ms are?

Bill

Yes.

Ginger

What could be more safe than that?

Bill

You tell me.

Ginger

Nothing. And nothing is safer than oxycontin. Purdue Pharma guarantees it.

Bill

I would hope so—

Ginger

Look, I would never, *never* sell anything that could have the slightest chance of harming anyone. And your patients will kiss the ground you walk on.

Bill

That's not why I got into medicine.

Ginger

But isn't a nice feeling to be worshipped?

Bill

No.

Ginger

Well, *I* wouldn't mind being worshipped.

Bill

Good for you—

Ginger

So you'll consider prescribing oxycontin?

Bill

I don't know yet.

Ginger

Just keep an open mind. That's all I ask.

Bill

I will.

Ginger

(DELICATELY)

In the meantime...can I order you...a sample supply?

(LONG PAUSE)

Bill

...Go ahead.

GINGER

(BEAMING)

...*Fabulous!*

End

**THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS:** *I got the idea for the play from a book called "Dopesick," by Beth Macy; as well as a 60 Minutes piece on the same subject.*

**AUTHOR'S BIO:** I'm a New York City-based playwright and the author of the full-length plays *Smash the State*, *Women and Guns*, and *Star of David*, *Men of Bondage*. Several of my one-act plays have been staged at local festivals. My influences include Bernard Shaw, Eugene O'Neill and Preston Sturges. His story **Mussolini Monologue** appeared in Issue 7 (fiction).

