

WILDERNESS

BY

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AND

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DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

WILDERNESS
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The world premiere of WILDERNESS was produced by En Garde Arts (Anne Hamburger, Founder and Executive Producer) at Abrons Arts Center in New York City on October 26, 2016. It was directed by Seth Bockley, the set designer was Carolyn Mraz, the video designer was Mike Tutaj, the costume designer was Claudia Brown, the lighting designer was Scott Bolman, the sound designer was Mikhail Fiksel, the movement directors were Devon de Mayo and Patrick McCollum, and the production stage manager was Spencer Armstrong. The cast was as follows:

| | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| MICHAEL | Jake Williams |
| COLE | Riley Suter |
| DYLAN | Luke Zimmerman |
| SOPHIA | Taylor Noble |
| CHLOE | Holly DeMorro |
| ELIZABETH | Caitlin Goldie |
| MOM | Welker White |

WILDERNESS was developed with support from Pace University and the University of Florida.

The text of this play is derived from interviews and true stories, and the authors wish to express their appreciation for the generosity of the families whose stories we share.

AUTHORS' NOTE

This is the script for a multimedia theatre piece derived from interviews with families across the country and the people that work in the field of wilderness therapy.

The authors recommend creative interpretation of the multimedia elements, which may include any of the following: pre-recorded music, live music, choreographed movement, pre-recorded video, live video, shifting projection surfaces, photography and video from the high desert. That said, it may be performed with as many or few of these elements as you prefer. The authors urge interpreters to create tension and juxtaposition through visual storytelling.

In the original production, the Parents were represented by audio/video recordings (in a Skype-style interview format) and the 911 Operator, the Transporter, and Mikey were represented by audio recordings. You may find your own creative solution to these roles, including performing the text live, recording your own versions, or in the case of the Parents, you may use the original interview materials (see instructions below).

Note on Licensing Supplementary Materials

Video recordings of the Skype interviews of the parents are available at no charge upon request. This accounts for all of the parents' dialogue. These recordings are provided in a universal digital format at high resolution.

Music from the original production is also and separately available for licensing. These songs, if licensed, may be performed live or presented via recordings by the artists. "House of Stone" by Kyle Miller and "Mountain Breeze" by Kyle Henderson are available to be previewed at Dramatists Play Service's website.

Other voiceovers indicated (the 911 Operator, the Transporter, and Mikey) may be recorded by actors or performed live, as you see fit, but are not included with the Supplementary Materials.

CHARACTERS

THE KIDS

ELIZABETH

(also appears as Field Staff)

SOPHIA

CHLOE

DYLAN

(whenever possible, this role should be played by a transgender actor)

COLE

MICHAEL

The other kids may double as well, as follows.

THE FIELD STAFF

MERRITT

(possible double with Sophia)

REBECCA

(possible double with Chloe)

BILLY

(possible double with Dylan)

COREY

(possible double with Cole)

TACO

(possible double with Michael)

THE INTERVIEWER

MOM

THE PARENTS

JEFF—Elizabeth’s dad

BETSY—Sophia’s mom

LOUISE—Chloe’s mom

SCOTT & JUSTYN—Cole’s parents

MARY—Michael’s mom

DYLAN’S PARENTS

(voices only)

OTHER VOICES

911 OPERATOR

TRANSPORTER

MIKEY

SETTING

The stage is a cross between a modern home interior and the high desert of Southern Utah. There is a clothesline with a few socks and handkerchiefs hanging. Outcroppings. Projection surfaces suggest interior bedroom walls as well as photographic shapes or the screens of digital devices.

WILDERNESS

1. Initiation

Darkness.

Then: stars.

Sounds of the desert at night.

Dimly seen onstage are three teenage boys, lying on the ground in sleeping bags. Very slowly the stage brightens as the sun begins to rise.

The dawn light discovers Rebecca, standing, who sings a folk song (old or new) to wake up the Boys' Group. Her voice is ringing and clear.

MICHAEL. Is she singing again?

COLE. It's like a goddamned folk-rock alarm clock.

Rebecca sings.

MICHAEL. *(Groaning as he sits up.)* My neck is like...made of pain.

Rebecca sings.

I think I slept on dried cow shit again.

Rebecca sings to the end of a line or verse, then speaks:

REBECCA. Good morning group six!

COLE and MICHAEL. Six!

Elizabeth, as staff, joins Rebecca.

ELIZABETH. Go ahead and get shelters packed up, and head in for cup line. We're hiking today, let's get an early start!

Michael, Cole, and Dylan, shoeless, begin to roll up and pack their sleeping bags. Elizabeth and Rebecca confer to the side.

MICHAEL. Why do they take our shoes at night anyway?

COLE. Dude. Think about it. So we can't run.
Daylight now, so if we split, they can see us and catch our asses.

MICHAEL. We're in the middle of like a deserted wasteland. Where the hell would we run to?

COLE. Saint George dude. Forty miles away. I heard about a kid who made it. Hitchhiked. They caught him when he went on Facebook in the public library. Fucking idiot!

Michael is aware of Rebecca and Elizabeth across the stage.

MICHAEL. You know they're listening to this right?

COLE. I don't give a fuck anymore. I want out. I don't care who knows.

First chance I get, I'm running to the road, by sundown I'm in Vegas at the Sands drinking champagne with Earl Sweatshirt.

REBECCA. (*Calling across space.*) Not gonna happen Cole!

MICHAEL. Who's Earl Sweatshirt?

COLE. The rapper. Dude. Works with Frank Ocean. He got sent here.

MICHAEL. Really?

COLE. Yeah. For like, I don't know, drugs, behavior, whatever. And he's like...he's like...wait I got it.

Cole raps a bit. A verse from "Super Rich Kids" or the like.

MICHAEL. Uh.

That was pretty "sick" rapping. But I'm not running away with you. I've like seen that movie before and...the fat kid always dies first. Dehydration, poisonous spiders, scorpions, the Blair Witch... You're on your own, dude.

The boys assemble camp and lights shift to full daylight as Rebecca sings another verse of her song.

Elizabeth approaches Dylan.

ELIZABETH. Good morning Dylan. How'd you sleep?

DYLAN. ...

ELIZABETH. First night on the ground is rough, I know. I remember mine.

I was a client here, so I know how it feels.

You're going to be tagged to me today so stay close, okay?

Your first assignment will be to write your life story.
You have a pad, right?

DYLAN. Yes.

ELIZABETH. Okay. Go for it. I'll let you know when cup line is ready.

DYLAN. Cup line?

ELIZABETH. That means breakfast. Everyone gets in line with their cups. So... "cup line."

She hands him his cup.

DYLAN. Like in *Oliver*?

ELIZABETH. *(Smiling.)* Yeah. Just like that.

DYLAN. Okay. So I just sit here and write the story of my life?

ELIZABETH. That's right.

DYLAN. Like from the very beginning?

ELIZABETH. Uh-huh.

DYLAN. That's a lot.

ELIZABETH. I bet you can do it.

The boys are now "busting" fires using a bow drill set.

MICHAEL. I can't do it.

Goddamnit!

I um. I can't do it.

Like also. Why.

Why do I have to light a fire using a rock. Haven't there been like a millenia of inventions that made it so we don't have to light fires using a freaking stick and rock?

COLE. You want to try my top rock? It's pretty bitchin'.

MICHAEL. No thanks.

COLE. Your funeral dude.

MICHAEL. My funeral would be a lot more fun than this. I'd have it catered by Jimmy John's, and there would be a marching band playing AC/DC covers.

He fumbles with the equipment.

Fuck!

Rebecca approaches Dylan.

REBECCA. Are you okay?

You want to check in about what's going on?

DYLAN. No.

I don't want to talk to you.

I don't want to write about my life.

I just want to die.

REBECCA. Can we talk about that?

DYLAN. I said I don't want to talk.

REBECCA. Okay. I'm here whenever you do.

You get your first water down?

DYLAN. No. Why do you care?

REBECCA. It's gonna be hot today. Gotta stay hydrated. We're all looking out for you.

DYLAN. You don't know me.

REBECCA. You're right. I don't...yet.

Music. Transition to a different part of the wilderness.

The girls hike on, wearing their backpacks.

SOPHIA. God. I can't hike any more.

TACO. Are you okay?

SOPHIA. No.

My pack is too heavy and I can't keep up.

TACO. Want me to look at rebalancing that for ya?

He picks it up briefly to test its weight.

Wow. What do you have in here?

Taco opens Sophia's bag. He picks up a big rock.

He turns over the top loader and rocks spill out.

ELIZABETH. Jesus.

TACO. Sophia, why are there rocks in your bag?

SOPHIA. I don't know I don't know.

CHLOE. You're literally carrying rocks around? While we're hiking?

ELIZABETH. We're going up a mountain. And you're ADDING weight to your pack. Why?

SOPHIA. I don't know I don't know. I just.

Elizabeth shakes her head in disbelief.

I just picked them up and put them in.
I don't know why I'm carrying the rocks.

TACO. Hey group three.

ELIZABETH and CHLOE. Three.

TACO. Let's circle up. Sophia, do you want to check in?
Any...idea...why you filled your bag up with rocks?

A pause.

SOPHIA. No.

CHLOE. Is it to stabilize your shelter? Cuz there's like rocks / everywhere.

SOPHIA. No.

ELIZABETH. Then why?

SOPHIA. (*Upset.*) I don't...I don't know.
Because...

Sometimes people do things for no reason. That's why I fill my bag with rocks. For no reason.

A dark pause.

CHLOE. Are you okay?

Chloe reaches out to her.

SOPHIA. Don't touch me.

She walks away.

Music. Lights shift. As the scene changes, Sophia slowly takes the rocks out of her bag.

Another part of the Wilderness. The girls are writing letters.

CHLOE. What's a synonym for "abandoned"?

ELIZABETH. Um, "lost," "left with nothing," um, like, "devastated," uh, "fucked"?

CHLOE. Nice. Thanks.

I'm just like using it so many times in this letter.
What about "hopeless"?

ELIZABETH. Despairing, depressed, uh, dejected.

WILDERNESS

by Seth Bockley and Anne Hamburger

9M, 11W (doubling, flexible casting)

WILDERNESS is a pulsating documentary theatre piece that speaks to our collective search for connection and hope, as families survive the extraordinary pressures and complexities that accompany coming of age in 21st-century America. It is anchored by six real families' stories—narratives that explore issues of mental health, addiction, and gender and sexual identity. In WILDERNESS, adolescents stand at the brink of emotional chaos, lost in social stigma, insecurity, aggression, and anger. Parents risk losing their children forever. Thoughts race. Emotions fire. Isolation intensifies. One question emerges: How do we persevere when we feel most alone in the world?

"A fierce, sad gale blows through WILDERNESS, a terrific, moving... theater piece about troubled youth... the [play's] emotional fluency is bell-clear, as is its honesty about the complex and sometimes mysterious roots of the characters' problems. Dig beneath the usual stories of broken marriages and adolescent angst and we discover wells of darkness that seem to have no bottom. ... WILDERNESS is at its eloquent best when it is simplest, when the characters and their parents discuss their lives, in unadorned language, with an honesty that is deeply affecting."

—The New York Times

"WILDERNESS is a compassionate glimpse at the outer edge of teenage angst... poignant... compelling... There's a lot of beauty here."

—The Village Voice

"...[A] beautifully drawn docu-play... What could be maudlin and sentimental is anything but."

—The Huffington Post

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