



## **PERFORMING PLAYBACK THEATRE Training DVD: Transcripts**

Produced by Hudson River Playback Theatre and the Centre for  
Playback Theatre, 2006

***Full transcripts of performance and conductor  
Jo Salas's voiceover commentary***

<b>Full transcript</b>	<b>Conductor's voiceover commentary</b>
<p><b>Opening Song</b></p> <p>"We can make it better"</p> <p>On screen:</p> <p>Crystal Run Village is an organization serving people with developmental disabilities and mental illness in upstate New York.</p> <p>In June, 2005 they asked Hudson River Playback Theatre, a local playback company with 15 years' experience, to perform for a group of managers and administrative staff.</p> <p>The title of the show, chosen by Crystal Run staff, was "The Juggling Act:</p>	<p>Hi, I'm Jo Salas. In this commentary for experienced playbackers I'm going to talk to you about the show from the conductor's point of view, what I was aware of as the show unfolded, and why the performers and I made the choices we did. I'll also make some comments about playback in general.</p> <p>We like to begin with a song to help bring people together and signal the beginning of the show. We try to choose songs that will suit the situation and theme.</p>

<p>Supporting the people we serve, our staff, and ourselves.”</p>	
<p><b>Performing team self-introductions</b></p> <p>I’m Sarah, and after a year of doing a lot of caregiving at work, I’m really looking forward to having a bit of a lighter schedule.</p> <p>I’m Matt and as hard as it is to explain how I need things done, sometimes it’s just easier to do it myself.</p> <p>My name is Jo, and my life feels like a juggling act sometimes, and just when I get the hang of it, someone gives me a couple more plates.</p> <p>My name is Penny, and my son just returned from Labrador, and now I get to hear his stories of wilderness and adventure.</p> <p>[Conductor]</p> <p>And this is Debbie and this is Dean. And we are Hudson River Playback Theatre. And we are very glad to be here with you to be part of your day today. It’s the last day of the month when you usually have a meeting, is that right? So we’re here to do our kind of theatre, which is a little different from many other kinds of theatre. Some of you have seen playback theatre before, I know Judy mentioned that before. How many people have seen playback theatre before? Great. So you know, and others will soon see, that what we do is we listen to people in the audience, we listen to</p>	<p>Like most playback teams, we usually introduce ourselves. We carefully choose what to say according to the audience and the theme of the show. We tell fragments of our own stories that may seed stories in audience members, and we’re also letting them know that we may share some common ground with them in our work and personal lives. So Sarah lets the audience know that she also is a caregiver in her job. Matt tells them that he knows what it’s like to having responsibility and trying to delegate it. My introduction refers to the “juggling act” theme. Penny is bringing in the idea of family and life outside work.</p> <p>We don’t say things like “I’m feeling nervous” even if we are. We want to warm them up, not make them worry about us.</p> <p>Another important thing going on here is that we’re modeling the playback process—someone speaks, someone else responds in action. And we’re embodying the presence of ritual—the intangible but essential framework of playback theatre.</p> <p>In this show we decided not to have the two musicians introduce themselves, because we felt it would make the introductions too long. We most often perform with a team of five rather than six (three actors, one musician, and conductor.)</p> <p>My goal in welcoming the audience is to briefly</p>

what you say about your lives, and in this case about your work, what you've seen and observed and experienced, and what feels important to you right here and now to talk about, and that's what we make theatre out of. So we don't know what it is exactly that we're going to do because we will be inviting you to tell us and we will transform it into theatre.

So today you normally have a meeting at this time, because it's the last day of the month, and this is a meeting, just a different kind of meeting. Instead of listening to each other the way you normally do, you'll have a chance to listen to each other through these stories. And we're honored to be part of that with you.

So something about how this day is going. I heard that something special already happened today, which was you getting ready to leave?

explain about what we're doing so that they'll feel at ease and excited—that paradoxical combination of safety on the one hand and the possibility of transformation on the other.

I spoke a little more in this opening than I often do because I sensed that they were rather cautious. With an audience who's unfamiliar with playback I try to relate it to something they know, in this case their regular monthly meeting, to let them know that this also is about communicating with each other—which in fact turned out to be the strongest element of the show.

Before the show began, Judy, the assistant executive director, had introduced us briefly, and I'd spoken to the audience about the filming. We had two camera people and a boom mic operator, plus a third stationary camera, so it was somewhat intimidating for both performers and the audience. We also wanted to warn them that we might have to pause occasionally to give the camera crew time to move or change film.

Playback theatre is extremely hard to film because it's so unpredictable and because an important moment can take place anywhere on stage or in the audience. We filmed three shows for this project and chose the one that was best in terms of teaching content, unfortunately not the most ideal in terms of lighting and image. If we'd had unlimited time and funding we might have filmed more shows and had more cameras per show.

<p><b>3-part story for Maria</b></p> <p>[Audience member] After working here for 17 years I'm going to be leaving the agency. Going to be moving out of state. That's really the only reason why.</p> <p>[Conductor] So 17 years is a long time. And today there was a celebration?</p> <p>[Audience member] A group of my coworkers surprised me. It was a nice little surprise party that I was not expecting. They know those things are very hard for me but they still went ahead and did it.</p> <p>[Conductor] And it was hard for you but are you glad they did it?</p> <p>[Audience member] Yes, yes, it was nice that they did it!</p> <p>[Conductor] And how many people were at that party? OK, great, most people. And what is your name?</p>	<p>When I'd talked with the audience earlier, people had mentioned Maria's party, including Maria herself. I wouldn't usually start off by speaking directly to an audience member at this moment, but it felt natural to refer to this special event right away.</p> <p>In most shows the first short form would be a fluid sculpture. But the actors and I all heard Maria's statement as a story rather than a non-narrative short form.</p> <p>We had a split-second communication about it, which you don't see on the film. In our company it's sometimes the conductor who suggests which form to use, sometimes the actors. Usually we have a mutual sense of what's best.</p> <p>Without discussion, the actors choose three elements from the story. The second and third actors have to be ready to change their idea on the spot if their concept is used by another actor.</p> <p>Our stage set up includes this free-standing curtain, diagonally on stage left. It helps to define the stage area, gives us a backdrop for at least part of the stage, and also provides a place for actors to appear from or above. We leave the cubes in front of it unless we need them elsewhere on stage. (Penny stood on a box in this story to represent the future.) Actors tend to use fabric quite sparingly.</p> <p>Like all playback theatre, our performances are a constant interplay of art and social interaction. We</p>
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<p>[Audience member] My name is Maria.</p> <p>[Conductor] OK. Great, let's watch.</p> <p>[Actors] I remember years ago, I was so young. I started working here with all of you. I worked for years, with my coworkers and the people we serve, many many hours of work, I've really been here.</p> <p>We're gonna get her good! We're gonna get her good! We're gonna get everything ready. I know this is a little hard for her, but we're gonna get her good. It's gonna be amazing, this surprise. Ready? Ready? Ready?</p> <p>Seventeen years I was there. 17 years. There wasn't a day that was the same. But now, somewhere else, somewhere else, not like this, somewhere else waiting, waiting for me, and they don't even know they're waiting for me. Coming!</p> <p>[Conductor] Thank you, Maria. Someone else, something that stands out about this day that's a little bit more than half over, for you. Anybody. Yes?</p>	<p>have to use our artistry at every moment, in order to create effective theatre on the spot, with our bodies, faces, voices, language, teamwork, using the space, and so on. At the same time, we need to be skillful at creating an atmosphere of trust and respect . If we are not able to do this our audience simply will not trust us with their significant stories. Art, social interaction, and ritual are the three overlapping circles of playback theatre.</p> <p>If playback is working at all successfully the audience and especially the teller are watching in a kind of trance, which lets them enter into the world that the actors are creating. If there's no trance, there's no magic and no impact. Holly, sitting next to Maria, is someone whose trance is particularly visible, as we see several times during the show.</p>
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<p><b>Fluid sculpture for Consuelo</b></p> <p>[Audience member]  OK, I'm going on vacation tomorrow for 2 weeks, and I have to do a lot of things before I go on vacation. I schedule the calendar, I recruit trainers. Yesterday one trainer called me and said she had to change.</p> <p>[Conductor]  So here you are getting ready for vacation and at the last minute...</p> <p>[Audience member]  Then I have to figure out how to change the schedule, and Maria's leaving and...</p> <p>[Conductor]  Yeah. There's a lot today, this is the last day before vacation and saying goodbye to your friend, and dealing with a lot. And your name?</p> <p>[Audience member]  Consuelo.</p> <p>[Conductor]  Let's watch.</p> <p>[Actors]</p>	<p>My first questions to the audience are always here-and-now questions to build a connection between all of us. What we want from each teller, of course, is a statement about what's going on and how they're feeling about it, but we avoid using the word "feeling" too much, since it can feel intrusive to some people.</p> <p>We acknowledged the theme of the "juggling act" in our opening, and now I'm open to where they want to go with it. The more open the conductor can be, the richer and deeper the red threads will be. (The red thread is a metaphor from weaving, meaning the thread that tracks the emerging pattern.)</p> <p>Here Consuelo talks about juggling personal and professional needs.</p> <p>The actors bring out different elements of Consuelo's overload, supported by the percussive music.</p> <p>The audience laughs heartily when Consuelo says she came to the show to relax. I felt the audience itself relaxing at this moment.</p> <p>In some companies the actors make a strong acknowledgment to the tellers after each short form. However, we feel that a teller sitting in the audience may not want that degree of attention and eye contact from the performers. Instead the conductor acknowledges the teller with a look or a word. If I see that the teller is looking dissatisfied I might invite them to say something, otherwise we'll move</p>
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<p>Three more things. Three more things. Three—four more things before things, five more things before I leave on vacation—six more things</p> <p>Coming!</p> <p>[Conductor] Well, you know the end of the day will come and whatever's not done is not done, and you're going to go and have a great time.</p> <p>[Consuelo] I decided to come here because I wanted two hours to relax. I need to be here.</p>	<p>on. Pace is important, especially as we're getting started.</p>
<p><b>Pair for Holly</b></p> <p>[Conductor] Perhaps one more person, something about today, whether it was saying good bye to Maria, or something that came up while you were sitting in your office—yeah?</p> <p>[Audience member] I've got a big one.</p> <p>[Conductor] You've got a big one.</p>	<p>The next teller was quick to speak up, and ready to share some strong feelings. As in many playback shows, we were constantly moving between humor and deep emotion, often within the same sentence. Notice the empathetic look in the face of the woman sitting beside her</p> <p>It was clear to us all that this was a pair. We're ready to do pairs in the warm-up phase if they come up and we don't plan who will partner together.</p> <p>The theme in Holly's pair, of appreciation for co-workers, built steadily throughout the show, beginning with Maria's story and culminating in Rhonda's story at the end. This heartfelt dialogue with each other was apparently more important to</p>

<p>[Audience member]  She is my supervisor. I've worked with her for—I'm sorry—for over 10 years. She's leaving, and I just got her job, so it's bittersweet. I got a new job, but I lost her. On top of it I'm buying a house—can I announce it?—her house! So we're in the middle of leaving, hiring, closing, and we're doing all of this together, so it's like we're kind of looking forward to the date, but we're actually hesitating about the date, so there's a lot of feelings.</p> <p>[Conductor]  Sure.</p> <p>[Audience member, crying]  I'm sorry.</p> <p>[Audience member--Maria]  Please don't make this about me! Stop! Everyone else has more problems.</p> <p>[Conductor]  I'm sure by the time we finish there'll be lots of other stories. But this is important, someone who's been here for a long time. But this is her story.</p> <p>[Audience member--Holly]  This is about me but you happen to be in it!</p>	<p>them than the declared theme of balancing needs.</p> <p>If we've been hired to explore a particular theme we might need to stick more closely to it, as we did in the college show on social justice that's excerpted in the Playback Forms feature. But here at Crystal Run I knew it's OK to be open to whatever emerges.</p> <p>Again you can clearly see the “teller's trance” in Holly's face! Maria laughs but also wipes away tears.</p> <p>At this point I wanted to remind them that it was also OK to tell difficult or negative things about their work. I did this in different ways at several points during the show. Sometimes, if there's very a emerging, people with stories that don't fit that mood might feel reluctant to tell.</p> <p>The generally very positive tone of this whole show I think does reflect the atmosphere at Crystal Run, but it may also have something to do with the fact that it was being filmed. I'm sure most people would tend to choose more upbeat stories, whether consciously or not, when they know they're being recorded.</p> <p>In any case, in spite of my reminder, the theme of appreciation for each other continued with the next teller.</p>
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<p>[Conductor] What's your name?</p> <p>[Audience member] Holly.</p> <p>[Conductor] Holly. Let's watch.</p> <p>[Actors] OK. We can do this. We can do this together. You and me together. Together</p> <p>I'm—I'm going to miss you. I'm—I'm going to miss you. Don't go.</p> <p>I don't know. Can I do this without you? Can I step into your shoes? Can I?</p> <p>House! Positions! Stepping away! New! You, me, gone, here. So much! You're the best!</p>	
<p><b>Fluid sculpture for Huma</b></p> <p>[Conductor] OK. All right. So let's think a little bit bigger than today, although today is always</p>	<p>You can see Rhonda sitting beside Huma. It's likely that she's beginning to consider telling her own story. We don't know in Rhonda's case, but sometimes tellers debate within themselves for an entire show about whether they're going to get up</p>

kind of a microcosm of the whole thing, right, probably every single day there's wonderful things, and difficult things, and times when you wonder why you're doing this work, and times when you really know why you're doing this work, I imagine, every day. So, taking a step back and looking at life at Crystal Run. What stands out for you? What's some aspect of the way things are these days that stands out for you? Yes?

[Audience member]

Yes, for me personally, I think, life at Crystal Run, the fact that stands out is the biggest support system that I have experienced personally in my life.

[Conductor]

Wow. From?

[Audience member]

Everybody.

[Conductor]

Wonderful. And what's your name?

[Audience member]

Huma.

and tell. They'll be prompted in one direction or another by a complex set of factors including what they observe about the actors' skill and sensitivity in their treatment of other stories.

Debbie and Dean, the musicians, are adept at picking up the right key when one of the actors starts singing.

<p>[Conductor] Let's watch</p> <p>[Actors] You're all with me You're there! For me. You see me. This is amazing. All these people.</p>	
<p><b>Fluid sculpture for Keelin</b></p> <p>[Conductor] Thanks. Someone else, same question, something that stands out of the many, many aspects of the work you do. And I'd like to particularly invite one of the guys. You're outnumbered here but we still want to hear from you.</p> <p>[Audience member] I'll be a guy.</p> <p>[Conductor] Well, you can answer and give them a little time to think.</p> <p>[Audience member] I guess just sitting here, I've known some of these people for a really long time, and I'm sort of feeling there's things about them that I didn't know. And that's really a</p>	<p>People who are a minority in the audience, because of age, race, gender, or other factors may feel hesitant to speak up. So as the conductor I want to specifically invite those people to tell. Sometimes it works to be a bit light-hearted about it.</p> <p>Another reminder that they can talk about the difficult things too.</p> <p>Keelin told us later that her comment in part referred to a death in Huma's family—that's what she meant about Huma's statement making her sad as well as happy. There was a lot of communication going on throughout this show on levels that we were not always aware of, which commonly happens with audiences who know each other, or between subgroups in the audience.</p> <p>The actors are letting the music carry a lot of the meaning of this fluid sculpture. Sarah's words "it's growing" foreshadow the metaphor she will use in April's story later in the show.</p>

<p>good thing, I like to be surprised.</p> <p>[Conductor] You mean things that you've been hearing today...</p> <p>[Audience member] I didn't know that Holly was buying Maria's house. And I didn't know that Humah found us to be such a support to her and that makes me very happy and very sad at the same time.</p> <p>[Conductor] Great. So—hearing things that are new to you and how good that is. And your name?</p> <p>[Audience member] Keelin.</p> <p>[Conductor] Let's watch.</p> <p>[Actors] Oh! You!</p>	<p>In most shows we wear black pants and plain tops, as we are here. We want to be as neutral as possible so that we can be readily seen as whatever characters we need to play. So no jewelry, no brand names on our shirts, etc.</p>
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<p>Really? Really? I didn't know. It's exciting</p> <p>It's growing!</p>	
<p><b>Narrative V for Matthew</b></p> <p>[Conductor]</p> <p>So I want to hear from a couple more people and then we're going to do something a little bit different. And again, inviting one of the guys in the room so we hear your voices. Something about—looks like you're ready.</p> <p>[Audience member]</p> <p>All of a sudden I'm speechless and people who know me know that that's not me! 11 years ago when I started I had no idea that I would still be here and still doing what it is I do. That I would fall in love with what I do, which is helping people. And growing as I have—I used to be a very much a quiet, shy person, which some people find hard to believe, and trying to bring the experience I've had to the people I teach. And this is one of the rooms I teach in. Going from the back of the class to the head of the class is – the amount of transition I've experienced in my life through working here is amazing.</p> <p>[Conductor]</p> <p>Wonderful. OK. So your own path of growing through this work--</p>	<p>I wasn't going to let go of inviting the men to speak up. Sometimes you have to make the invitation more than once.</p> <p>At this point I also hint that something different is coming up soon, building up their anticipation.</p> <p>Matthew's story is another testimony about working at Crystal Run—this time about his own personal growth.</p> <p>When I turned to the actors at this point, they'd already decided to do a Narrative V. This is a form which we developed to respond to an audience member's statement that's too complex and narrative for a fluid sculpture. It's somewhat like a chorus, although more verbal than physical, and the leadership doesn't change.</p> <p>The keyboard echoes the rhythm of Matt's statements.</p> <p>Debbie, the keyboardist, is a professional musician, as is Dean—both are composers as well as performers and recording artists. The actors are all seasoned playback theatre actors and conductors—Matt has been a Hudson River Playback Theatre</p>

<p>[Audience member] Yes</p> <p>[Conductor] --of helping others. And what's your name?</p> <p>[Audience member] Matthew.</p> <p>[Conductor] Matthew. Thank you. Let's watch.</p> <p>[Actor] Once there was a young man who started a new job. Not quite knowing how long it would last, or how it would go. And in time he found himself learning, and reaching, and connecting, and teaching? In front of others. And leading the way. And after 11 years, somehow his voice is stronger, his presence is larger, and his heart has grown with the richness of helping others one day after another, right here in this very same place.</p>	<p>member for 14 years, Sarah for 11 years and Penny for 8. I started this group in 1990 after having been part of the original company since it began.</p> <p>Matt's the only one of this team who is a native-born American. Debbie is from South Africa, Dean and Penny are both Canadian, Sarah grew up in Switzerland, and I'm a New Zealander.</p>
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<p><b>Fluid sculpture for Christine</b></p> <p>[Conductor] Well, I'm getting the feeling that this is a pretty good place to work. Sounds wonderful. Perhaps one more. And we haven't heard much from this side of the room. So, perhaps one more person over here, something that stands out whether it's wonderful or not wonderful, about life at the moment working at Crystal Run.</p> <p>[Audience member] I have one.</p> <p>[Conductor] Yes.</p> <p>[Audience member] I've been at the agency 15 years, and a few years ago I worked at a house which was a transitional home. And one of the people who'd come for an interview to live in the house, at first we weren't sure how he'd do. We had our staff appreciation picnic the other day, and he actually got a 5-year plaque, for actually working for the agency in village care, as well as moving into his own apartment, So it was a really good thing to feel like I had a part in his development.</p> <p>[Conductor] Right, yes. Seeing the fruits of what you had put in there. And what's your name?</p>	<p>I wanted to acknowledge this theme of appreciation while also reminding them that they can talk about anything.</p> <p>Christine's story does in fact bring in the first comment about a difficult aspect of the work, but she's so gentle about it we didn't pick it up as strongly as we could have. She's talking about a resident who was problematic-- "we weren't sure that he'd fit in," she says-- but who then became a success story. We lost an opportunity here to bring out more of the negative part.</p> <p>Christine's comment also makes reference, for the first time, to the people served by Crystal Run. Up until then we'd been hearing about what it's like for them to work at Crystal Run. This focus on the people they serve will come back, in several different ways, as the show goes on.</p> <p>By the way, we'd been told ahead of time that "people we serve" is the term that they use in this organization, rather than "clients" or "patients," so we made sure to use this language.</p> <p>Christine was a teller who herself seemed to have a disability. This was another part of the red thread in the show—the vulnerability of the caregiver, from Huma's bereavement to Judy's lack of power and ultimately Rhonda's life-threatening illness.</p> <p>We could have done a narrative short form here but at this point I felt that we needed to be brief because it was time to move on.</p>
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<p>[Audience member] Christine.</p> <p>[Conductor] Let's watch.</p> <p>[Actors] There! There he is! There!</p>	
<p><b>Audience introductions</b></p> <p>[Conductor] So we're going to change gear a little bit here, and I'm noticing, I want to say, that I know these stories often touch your own story and touch your own feelings, and that's part of it, so I hope there's a Kleenex box somewhere in case we need to pass it around.</p> <p>In a minute I'm going to invite someone to come here and sit with me, and tell a little bit more of a story, the kind of thing you've been telling, but in a bit more detail, and we'll act it out in a more full way, but first of all I want to ask you take a moment and just talk to someone sitting near you, particularly if there's someone sitting near you that you haven't had a chance to say hello to yet, and you might tell</p>	<p>Christine's fluid sculpture, like others too, brought several audience members to tears. I wanted people to feel OK about emotions coming up.</p> <p>Again I refer to doing stories on stage. This is a key transition in the show. We're about to ask people to take more of a risk than they have so far, both by telling more and by telling it from the stage. We always invite audience members to talk to each other at this point. It helps to build a sense of comfort and connection so that they'll feel free to come forward with their stories. In a very reserved audience I might ask them to make contact with each other earlier on, or more than once.</p> <p>We set up the seats in slightly curving rows so that audience members are aware of each other as they</p>



<p>them a tiny bit of a story that you might tell, if you were going to tell a story. So just a minute to chat with someone sitting near you—or sitting the other side of the room if you want to get up.</p>	<p>watch. It's the opposite of traditional theatre in this respect, where straight rows and a dark house allow audience members to lose themselves in what's happening on stage, undistracted by each other. In an evening performance we keep the house lights up. And of course the conductor needs to see faces as well.</p>
<p>[Audience member to another audience member] I was thinking about the guys, and how we arrange for them to do something like going off to the mall, and the whole time we're sitting here like this...</p>	<p>By asking them to tell each other stories at this point, we're making sure that everyone has a chance to tell something to someone, even if they don't become a teller for the whole group. It's also a way for a potential teller to try out telling a little bit of their story, and perhaps be readier to come forward with it. Sometimes people are just bursting to jump up with their stories, but the majority of audiences over the age of 12 need some reassurance and encouragement.</p> <p>This woman looked rather stony-faced to me during the show. It wasn't until I saw the video footage that I realize how engaged she'd been!</p>
<p><b>Judy's story: interview</b></p> <p>[Conductor] OK. So we're ready for a story. Who would like to come and tell something? And it can be something—anything, big, small, recent, long ago, sad, happy.</p> <p>[Audience member] I'll break the ice if you like.</p>	<p>Judy was the senior administrator present. It often happens that the boss feels responsible for the rest of the audience and may offer a story right away, as Judy did. She says "I'll break the ice" but in fact there wasn't much ice at that point.</p> <p>When she got to the chair she moved it away from mine, revealing the fire extinguisher in all its glory. Tellers sometimes need more physical distance, and of course we respect that.</p>

<p>[Conductor]  Sure. This is your chair. So, Judy, you said before that you were at a playback show 20 years ago, almost. Did you tell a story then?</p> <p>[Audience member]  I don't recall.</p> <p>[Conductor]  OK. But you have one now. And Judy, I'd to ask you first of all to choose one of the actors to play you. Penny, Sarah, or Matt.</p> <p>[Audience member]  Well, I know Penny so why don't we have Penny...</p> <p>[Conductor]  OK. Where does this take place?</p> <p>[Audience member]  Well, here, we're a very diverse organization, especially here in Orange County, serving people who have developmental disabilities, who have mental health issues, day services, we have a respite service, support..(?) employment, we have a lot going on. I share from a personal perspective some insight that I've gotten into the</p>	<p>We use these high chairs so that people can see the teller and conductor easily.</p> <p>I sometimes ask the teller to choose the teller's actor almost immediately. The unexpectedness of this request can help them tell the story more spontaneously. Then I listen to the story, and ask questions to find out any essential details that have not been mentioned—who, where, when, what happened. I look for natural breaks in their narrative rather than interrupting, if possible.</p> <p>I make a point of repeating names to help the actors.</p> <p>Judy says "I know Penny so I'll choose her" —in fact she'd met her only once, briefly. She seemed rather nervous telling her story, which people often are, and it may have been reassuring to see a somewhat familiar face.</p> <p>We always ask the teller to choose an actor to play herself—the "teller's actor"—and sometimes other characters as well. Actors are free to self-choose any role, human or otherwise, which will help bring the story to life. They also may endow other actors as other characters, as we'll see later.</p> <p>As I listen I'm letting myself hear what this story is about—the "heart of the story"—and my later questions or rephrasing will reflect what I've heard. The actors are listening in exactly the same way, and they're also alert for any cues from me about what the story's about and how to shape it.</p>
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services we provide in our mental health services, because that's a voice that isn't always loudly emulated, or...

[Conductor]

Sure, and this is a great place to tell something that is not often told. Playback is about...

[Audience member]

A friend came to me about 6 months ago and asked me for some help, because she was going through a rough time and she has mental health issues and I assisted in getting social security disability. Little did I know what the benefit nemesis is in order to accomplish that and it took a good 6 months.

[Conductor]

OK. I'm going to interrupt you a couple of times just to clarify. So this is someone who's connected with CR or not?

[Audience member]

No.

[Conductor]

OK. So just a friend who knew that you might be able to help her in this crisis that she was in. So what you were doing was getting her...

<p>[Audience member] A lot of our case managers do...</p> <p>[Conductor] Right, the kind of thing that a lot of people here work with. So you helped to get her social security...</p> <p>[Audience member] Social security disability. The point is to be generalized, which is not only to recognize the work that the case managers do but the work that everybody does in advocating out in the community for people who are often voiceless.</p> <p>[Conductor] Right. So in this case it was—but we want to stick to your particular story and it will resonate with all these other stories.</p> <p>[Audience member] OK. So I just ran into roadblocks upon roadblocks upon roadblocks. And (...) not understanding.</p>	
<p>[Conductor] The frustration of the bureaucracy. Choose someone to play your friend. Sarah? And let's make up a name for her.</p>	<p>I invite tellers to make up names if there's any chance of unwelcome or unethical exposure by using a real name.</p> <p>Judy wanted her story to be about everyone's</p>

<p>[Audience member] Sally.</p> <p>[Conductor] Sally. And a word or two for Sally as a person. What's she like?</p> <p>[Audience member] A very strong person.</p> <p>[Conductor] A strong person. And a friend of yours, who's having a crisis with her own emotional health. And can you give us a couple of examples of the bureaucratic obstacles that you encountered?</p>	<p>situation, both as a tribute to her employees and perhaps to teach them something. I had to bring her back to her own story. We know that when an individual's story is told sincerely and enacted effectively, it'll hold many levels of meaning for everyone—far more meaning and impact, in fact, than if we did a “generalized” story as Judy was imagining.</p> <p>In fact, Judy is not only talking about the common experience of encountering bureaucratic obstacles, she's also letting her co-workers and employees know something personal about herself, that she cares deeply about this friend who is in need, and that even she is not powerful enough to deal easily with the system. Her story is very much part of the red thread that has been growing, about vulnerability, support, and connection.</p> <p>I asked her what “Sally” was like, both for Sarah to have some information which would be helpful in playing her, but also because we want to imagine Sally as a full human being, not just the victim and the object of the story.</p>
<p>[Audience member] They were daily.</p> <p>[Conductor] Daily, right! Does this ring a bell? [to audience]</p>	

[Audience member]

On the phone constantly trying to explain to people that didn't understand what the issues were in order to get the support that this person needed.

[Conductor]

And in the end you succeeded.

[Audience member]

I did. Yeah. A long time, probably took six months, and then it takes another 6 months to get the benefits.

[Conductor]

Right. And meanwhile poor Sally is in need...

[Audience member]

Without a penny.

[Conductor]

Without a penny. Not able to work. When you did finally succeed, and she finally a year later had that financial support that she needed, what was it like for you at that point?

<p>[Audience member] It remains frustrating, because it's not enough.</p> <p>[Conductor] It's something, but not enough.</p> <p>[Audience member] It has to do with the system.</p>	
<p>[Conductor] Of course! The system sometimes doesn't seem to be on our side, or on the side of the people we want to serve. So we're going to see Judy's story of taking on the system for her friend. Let's watch.</p>	<p>My final "launching" sentence often reflects an aspect of the story's essence. It's also an invocation—a ceremonial moment where art and social interaction are fused with ritual.</p>
<p><b>Judy's story: enactment</b></p> <p>[Actors] That was easy. Moved that dresser just like that. And then, I got to really flex my muscles.</p> <p>Judy?</p> <p>Sally!</p>	<p>"Let's watch!" indicates that we are now going from the interview to the story itself. The music begins, and the actors move slowly into position without discussion. Our custom in Hudson River Playback is to create a "stage picture" where each actor takes a pose that captures some essence from the story. Their pose may or may not be directly related to their role.</p> <p>The teller's actor usually makes the first move, though not necessarily. In this case Penny was trying to make the point that, as Judy, there were things she could accomplish easily, and others that remained a challenge. It would have been good to see something</p>

<p>Judy, everything's changing.</p> <p>It's OK, it's OK, I'm here. And there's resources out there for you. I'm going to help you. We're going to do it. Come on, Come on.</p> <p>Help available--for some! Help available--for some!</p> <p>Go!</p> <p>OK. Stay right here.</p> <p>Hello. Help available, for some!</p> <p>Hello, I have one. Just one.</p> <p>Um</p> <p>I can't pay my rent any more.</p> <p>I need it</p> <p>Help available, for some!</p>	<p>of Sally's strength as well.</p> <p>The music hints at trouble coming and Sally's sadness.</p> <p>Matt said later that as an unchosen actor he wanted to fill in the shape of the obstacles Judy encountered and ultimately to reflect the limitations of "the system."</p> <p>The actors are mindful throughout of what the teller is seeing, as well as what the audience is seeing—the unique sightlines of playback theatre. They make sure that the teller's actor's face is visible to the teller all the time. At key moments the action is angled slightly on the diagonal so that both audience and teller can see well. You can see Penny moving to the other side of Matt so that she isn't obscuring him from the teller and so that Judy can see her face.</p> <p>The actors also make use of the different levels and parts of the stage—high or low, upstage and downstage, far from or close to the teller.</p> <p>Sometimes the actors use minimal, semi-realistic language. At other times the language is more conversational. They're used to going back and forth between the literal and the metaphorical.</p> <p>Penny brings out one of the subtexts of the story—Judy's awareness of how Crystal Run workers have these struggles all the time.</p> <p>It's great to bring in humor, as long as we are fully</p>
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<p>OK, what do I need to do?</p> <p>For some! For some!</p> <p>Help available, for some! I'm sorry, we're closed.</p> <p>Sally, I'm sorry. It's going take a little while longer.</p> <p>Maybe food stamps.</p> <p>I'm trying to be patient.</p> <p>Here!</p> <p>OK. Oh—I'm sorry. It's the wrong color form. State regulations. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.</p> <p>No!</p> <p>This is what they do every day. This what all of them do every day.</p> <p>Judy, I need help now. I can't hang on much longer</p> <p>I know</p>	<p>in control of when it's funny and when it isn't.</p> <p>The music counterpoints with Penny's depiction of frustration, then changes when Sarah steps in with an expression of gratitude. Sarah felt here that it was important to express this gratitude, even though Judy hadn't explicitly spoken about it. And Judy seemed to appreciate this expression.</p> <p>Judy's reactions as she watched told me that the story was connecting for her. The teller is always literally "moved" when the enactment captures what's important in the story—they may laugh, or cry, their breathing may change, their posture may change. If a teller is completely motionless as she or he watches you can be sure that the scene has not been effective for her, even if she politely says it has.</p>
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I'm slipping

yes, fine, great,

this is the...

Excellent. Thank you for helping your friend, your application has been approved, and you'll be receiving this support in the mail, each month. This much.

Sally!

Thank you!

This much. No, that's too much.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Judy. I need some more, you know

That's all the government provides. Thank you

Just one, this is just one! This is just today. There was yesterday, and another one and another one, and tomorrow, and another one

<p>But I could never have done this much without you, thank you, Judy. I know you're there and that makes a big difference every day.</p> <p>Just one.</p>	
<p><b>Checking in with Judy and finding next story</b></p> <p>[Conductor] So, before you go back to your seat, did that capture the essence of that experience for you?</p> <p>[Audience member] Absolutely, yes, And I think it's what so many of us go through here.</p> <p>[Conductor] Yes. Well, thank you very much for telling that story. So we're going to remember that story. All of the stories that are told become part of a kind of collective story that you're telling about your work and your relationships here. So we move on to another story but we don't forget that story. So let's have another one. Something that's with you now that you'd like to tell us about and see acted out. And I know –it often happens in playback shows that there's a kind of a silence, and we know that in that silence there are a lot of stories that are just kind of taking form and just</p>	<p>At the end, the actors acknowledge the teller by pausing on stage and looking at her, not in role now but as themselves.</p> <p>They wait until she returns to her seat before putting props away, so as not to deflect attention from the teller as she checks in.</p> <p>Judy wants to leave her chair right away but we need to check in with her. It's important for both the teller and the audience to have this public moment of closure, and for the conductor to be sure that the teller is ready to sit down.</p> <p>I also want to model for future tellers that checking-in is part of the ritual.</p> <p>As soon as Judy left the chair I moved it back beside mine.</p> <p>I was sure at this point that there were many stories emerging in the room, and yet people were still somewhat shy about volunteering them. It can be</p>

coming to the mouth. So it's OK. Every single one of you has many stories. And I'll tell you right now that the hardest part of it is getting from your chair to this chair. After that it's a breeze.

Who would like—I'm seeing stories shimmering on a couple of faces here—like yours. It's just an invitation. I'm seeing you look as though perhaps there's a story there. Were you thinking of something?

[Audience member]

Yes.

[Conductor]

You were? Would you like to tell it

[Audience member]

Yes.

[Conductor]

Then please come. This is your seat. Get ourselves up onto this perch. What's your name?

[Audience member]

My name's April.

helpful, and reduce tension, if the conductor acknowledges this pause, and reassures the audience that we're not worried about it! While I'm talking I'm looking around at the audience and noticing people who look as though they're on the point of volunteering.

I feel the presence and support of the actors behind me. We're a team. I may be the one who gets to ask questions but we're fully in this together.

April's face had an expression that I've learned to recognize that says "I've thought of something that I'd like to tell!" If she had been reluctant, though, I wouldn't have pressed her.

I have to embody a kind of friendly, respectful firmness as conductor. This kind of presence is part of the ritual that makes the process work.

<p><b>April's story: interview</b></p> <p>[Conductor] April. Hi, April. And is this something that takes place at work?</p> <p>[Audience member] Actually it started at home.</p> <p>[Conductor] OK. And how long ago?</p> <p>[Audience member] Oh, probably about 25 years ago.</p> <p>[Conductor] 25 years ago, OK. And where is home?</p> <p>[Audience member] Right here in Scotchdale.</p> <p>[Conductor] OK, great. And choose someone who's going to play you, April, in the story.</p>	<p>April's story picks up the red thread of caring for people, and takes it to a different place—she brings in the historical dimension of how caring for vulnerable people as a teenager led directly to her idealism and her current career.</p> <p>Her story also looks out to the broader society where positive change has taken place—a dimension that will be picked up later in the show and in our closing.</p>

[Audience member]

I don't know her name, but that young lady in the purple.

[Conductor]

Sarah. OK. So you were a very young person 25 years ago.

[Audience member]

Yes.

[Conductor]

And what happened?

[Audience member]

My family provided a home for people with developmental disabilities and at that time society were not very acceptive to people with mental disabilities and I remember I used to take these individuals out to the store or out in public...

[Conductor]

So it was like one person at time but different people over the years?

[Audience member]

Yes, different people over the years, and I used to take them out in public and

<p>people in the neighborhood or in the community would criticize them and at that point in time in my life I said I wanted to protect them, and I knew from that moment on that that’s what I wanted to do with my life.</p> <p>[Conductor]</p> <p>So how old were you when you were helping these people who came to live in your family? Roughly, between what age and what age?</p>	
<p>[Audience member]</p> <p>I was roughly about 14.</p> <p>[Conductor]</p> <p>OK, so a young teenager. And not every young teenager could or would do that, but you did. You wanted to be the person that could protect and would take these people into the community and it sounds like you were very aware of the disrespect that they encountered.</p> <p>[Audience member]</p> <p>Yes, I wanted them to be respected for the people that they were.</p> <p>[Conductor]</p> <p>So we’ll see a scene from back then, and I don’t know, perhaps there’s more, but is there a particular person that you remember?</p>	<p>That big laugh was about April having to reveal how old she was. I tried to deflect her embarrassment by bringing attention back to her unusual qualities as a teenager.</p> <p>I was prepared for April to have a “chapter two” from the present, but her story was very clear and simple, with the events from the past casting a light on the present.</p> <p>Although she included Crystal Run in her approving comments about the present compared to the past, it’s not primarily a story about Crystal Run.</p>

[Audience member]

Yes.

[Conductor]

And who's that? You can make up a name if you wish.

[Audience member]

I'll make up the name of Jerry.

[Conductor]

And what was Jerry like?

[Audience member]

Jerry not only had a mental disability but he also had a physical disability. So that was something about him that was an attraction to others.

[Conductor]

Say that again? It was something about him...

[Audience member]

It was an attraction, from others, to his physical disability.



[Conductor]

People were drawn to him because of his physical disability?

[Audience member]

Yes, exactly.

[Conductor]

And what was it?

[Audience member]

Well, he had a hump.

[Conductor]

OK. So people felt compassionate towards him because of that, is that what you're saying?

[Audience member]

Some people were but then others, which were the ones that actually drew my attention, would make fun of him.

[Conductor]

You're saying the hump made him very noticeable.

[Audience member]

Yes.

[Conductor]

So he was one of the people you'd take out into the community.

[Audience member]

Yes.

[Conductor]

And what was your relationship with Jerry like?

[Audience member]

He was like an uncle to me.

[Conductor]

Like an uncle.

[Audience member]

Yes, like an uncle, because he was involved in my family for many, many years, and he was like an uncle.

[Conductor]

And he lived in your home...

[Audience member]

Yes.

[Conductor]

Great. So this is remembering 25 years ago, and here you are working professionally with similar people.

[Audience member]

Yes.

[Conductor]

Is there something from now that you were wanting to see as well, or is it just looking back at that beginning?

[Audience member]

Just looking back at the beginning and also how times have changed, and it's been agencies like the one I work for now that has helped educate the community and giving the knowledge to others to accept everyone for who they are no matter what their mental capability is.

[Conductor]

<p>So you see a real change.</p> <p>[Audience member] Definitely.</p> <p>[Conductor] And let's choose someone to be Jerry.</p> <p>[Audience member] That gentleman...</p>	
<p>[Conductor] OK, Matt can be Jerry. And Penny will play whoever else we need, and we're going to see that moment, that time from long ago, and what it was like not only for Jerry but for you. So this is April's story, of a beginning, and an opening, and a change.</p>	<p>That look of April's as I launch the story is part of the trance-building that will allow her to really <i>see</i> her story, to "see" Jerry and her own younger self. She's looking toward the actors and toward the empty space where her story will come to life.</p>
<p><b>April's story: enactment</b></p> <p>[Actors] Many years ago, a seed was planted...Hey mom!  Hi sweetie, how're you doing?</p>	<p>As an unchosen actor, Penny's job is to take on whatever role is needed at any moment to bring out the meaning of the story. In this story she plays five different roles. We find that it's much more effective to bring out meaning and the movement of the story through these briefly-held characters rather than through abstract ways like portraying another character's mood, for example.</p> <p>Everyone is responsible for the whole story, not just</p>

<p>Is the new guy coming today?</p> <p>Yes, he is, he's over in the living room. Go meet him.</p> <p>Hi. Hi, I'm April.</p> <p>Hi, April. Your family—</p> <p>Such a good girl</p> <p>Your family has a very nice house. I'm happy to be here.</p> <p>Thanks. Um—good to have you here.</p> <p>I need some milk and eggs, would you go get some? Maybe Jerry wants to go with you.</p> <p>OK!</p> <p>Do you go to the store? I like to go to the store.</p> <p>Good! Let's go</p>	<p>for the roles they may have been chosen for. If there is a shared sense of what the story is about—the heart of the story—and the most important events of the story, then the actors and musicians can shift seamlessly from role to role and moment to moment.</p> <p>The musicians took on the role of disrespectful passersby for a moment. An actor may endow the musician with a role when needed, or they can self-endow, like this.</p> <p>The actors are making sure that April has a good view of everything that's happening. They also make sure that they don't come too close to her, knowing that if they do, her teller's trance will be broken. For the same reason, they never make eye contact with a teller while enacting a story or short form.</p> <p>Dean's trombone picks up Penny's car noise.</p> <p>Sarah brings out the young April's inner dialogue while in the background the other actors continue to show what happens to Jerry.</p> <p>Debbie and Dean's music marks Sarah's statement of idealism.</p> <p>Sarah comes back to the plant metaphor. The scene could have ended here, but Penny wanted to show an imagined later moment when social conditions had improved.</p>
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OK.

This is a really nice part of the walk

Hi! Are you going to go to that –to, to, to the playground?

This is Jerry

Hello

Are you going to bring him?

Yeah!

Is that the store, April? You know what your mother wants? You have to remember.

So weird!

You have to remember what's on the list.

Don't pay any attention to them.

I'll get the milk.

Can I help you with anything?

Yes, well, he's getting some of the stuff. Here's some of it

Thank you very much, that's fine. How are you today?

There you go, sweetie pie, here it is, see you later, bring your other friend!

She's a nice lady. Maybe there are some nice people here. Like you.

There are some nice people in this neighborhood. Not everybody's so nice. That's OK. We'll keep going, all right? You can come with me any day, if you want to. Just let me know.

OK, April. Thank you

You know, people just don't understand. I can't believe how they treat him. I can't believe the way they look at him, as if he's not a person with a heart and a soul. It really makes me mad sometimes.

Hey, Jerry, some day, I'm going to finish high school, I'm going to be a grown up, I'm going to get a job. I want to work and help people.

That's good, April.

People who other people disrespect. I want to advocate and really make a difference. What do you think, Jerry?

You! I like how you see people. I like that about you. Let's go to the store tomorrow, OK!

And that seed that Jerry helped plant grew into a beautiful flower and every day it blooms and it's there for people and it knows what respect really is.

Hi, my name is Rhonda.

Hi Rhonda

What's your name?

I'm Jerry.

Hi Jerry, I'm glad you came today cause there's a lot we can do together.

OK. That's April.

Oh, is that your friend?



<p>She's like family.</p> <p>Is she? Well you know we're all like family some way or other.</p> <p>OK.</p> <p>Yeah, right?</p> <p>And it just grows and grows, and all kinds of other flowers come to join it.</p>	
<p><b>April's story: checking in</b></p> <p>[Conductor]</p> <p>Did that feel like the story?</p> <p>[Audience member]</p> <p>Definitely. Perfect.</p> <p>[Conductor]</p> <p>Thanks so much, April, for bringing Jerry here.</p> <p>[Audience member]</p>	<p>April was very moved and satisfied by the story.</p>

<p>Thank you.</p>	
<p><b>Introducing pairs</b></p> <p>[Conductor]</p> <p>We're going to do something a little bit different and invite you to think about times when you hear yourself saying something like this: "Part of me wants to take time off but part of me wants to stay here and see what happens," you know what I mean? Two things going on inside you at the same time. I mean, we already saw for Holly what it was like to be looking forward to taking on the supervisor's job and at the same time inside her that feeling of she's losing her friend and supporter and supervisor Maria. So something else, two feelings perhaps about this very complicated and demanding and rewarding and challenging work that you do.</p>	<p>We often do pairs three-quarters of the way through to give more people a chance to speak up without telling a full-fledged story. It's also a change of pace. Whatever else this event is, it's a theatre performance and it needs to hold the whole audience's attention through shaping, pacing, and performance skills.</p>
<p><b>Maria's pair</b></p> <p>[Audience member]</p> <p>Like when I need to take time off but at the same time I can't take time off because the guys need me or the staff needs me. But I need the time off!</p> <p>[Conductor]</p> <p>Yes, You're needed and you have needs. This is Maria. Let's watch.</p> <p>[Actors]</p> <p>Time away, time for me.</p>	<p>Maria's pair almost exactly replicates what I'd said in my hypothetical example.</p> <p>We have found that keeping pairs brief and holding the final pose while the second pair goes keeps the audience from applauding until the end, which is what we want. The two consecutive pairs are one form, not two separate pieces.</p>

<p>I can't, I can't, it'll just be too complicated, I should just stay, all right I'll be in tomorrow, all right I'll work, OK.</p> <p>Ah, no problem, fine without me.</p> <p>I'm here! Anywhere you want me! I'm here.</p> <p>[Conductor] That's how it feels?</p>	
<p><b>Elise's Pair</b></p> <p>[Conductor] Someone else-- "I'm pulled this way, I'm pulled this way." Two things going on. Or maybe feeling something on the inside and showing something different on the outside. Yes, Elise?</p> <p>[Audience member] I feel there's so much potential and so much need out there that I would like to see fulfilled. Because there are so many people in need, and so many more opportunities.</p>	<p>This teller, Elise, is another administrator. Her pair picks up the thread of the wider social context that April spoke about, and the need for further growth.</p> <p>We don't use music during pairs, unless we do a music pair with two musicians. Music while actors are doing pairs tends to overemphasize one of the feelings at the expense of the other. Some other companies do a little flourish of music between the pairs, which is nice.</p>

[Conductor]

Growth for the organization?

[Audience member]

Correct. And my role and all of our collective role in fulfilling that need. And on the other hand feeling that sometimes we don't have our act entirely together and maybe we should do a little cleaning up and straightening out and keeping the house in order. So this frustration between wanting to move forward but wanting to know our resources and what we can do well.

[Conductor]

Let's watch.

[Actors]

There's more out there to do, there's more we can do, bring it all together, focus it outward.

I see...

Dirt all over the floor!

...the horizon, I see a great castle on the hill

<p>Trouble on my desk</p> <p>I see hundreds, thousands, of people...</p> <p>Too many cases, too many, too many ...</p> <p>helping, infinite</p> <p>where?</p> <p>[Conductor]</p> <p>I think it's little bit like for us, the same thing. You're not alone.</p> <p>One more pair, we call these pairs, pulled between two feelings at the same time.</p> <p>Yes.</p>	
<p><b>Bill's pair</b></p> <p>[Audience member]</p> <p>I think it's interesting when you have one of the folks who live with you, and they're ready to move on, and you're very excited for that, but at the same time you're very nervous about what you may get to replace that person. So excitement for the one who's leaving and a little bit of anxiety for the one who's coming towards you.</p>	<p>Bill's pair links up to Christine's fluid sculpture earlier in the show and also speaks to April's story, reminding us that even devoted, compassionate workers can have doubts or criticisms about the people they serve.</p> <p>This kind of dialogue is not conscious or cognitive. It's a deep process of listening, understanding, and responding through the language of story and image.</p> <p>The audience's strong response to this pair tells me</p>

<p>[Conductor] And what's your name?</p> <p>[Audience member] Bill.</p> <p>[Conductor] Bill. Let's watch.</p> <p>[Actors] Um, can we get more information</p> <p>You did it!</p> <p>Is he really eligible?</p> <p>Out in the world!</p> <p>Are we prepared for this?</p> <p>Congratulations!</p> <p>Good luck!</p>	<p>that of course they do have stresses and frustrations in relation to their work.</p> <p>In this show, probably because of the extra pressure of filming, I didn't find it easy to go in and out of conductor and actor roles, although I and other Hudson River conductors are used to doing this. You see me here breaking the rule about not looking at the other actor in the pair. We try not to do this because it breaks the illusion that we're one person.</p>
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<p>uh oh</p> <p>Sure you don't want to stay?</p>	
<p><b>Transition to final story</b></p> <p>[Conductor]</p> <p>We're going to go on, and we'd like to do one more story. And this is a time to just notice inside yourself if there's a story that's been getting itself ready to be told, that perhaps you'll feel sorry afterwards if you didn't tell. Sometimes stories take a little bit longer to be ready. So this is the moment to offer the story that feels like the one that you want to tell now. One more story.</p>	<p>This transition, after pairs and before the final story, is an opportunity to make space for a deeper or more delicate story. Sometimes at this moment I've asked people <i>not</i> to put up their hands right away—to wait for a story that isn't so easy to offer. People who are shyer than others, or whose story is not so easy to tell, will often raise a hand if this space is opened up. As conductors, we need to be responsive to what's happening but also to guide it.</p> <p>My tone of voice here also conveys that we're ready for anything.</p>
<p><b>Rhonda's story: interview</b></p> <p>[Audience member]</p> <p>I have a story.</p> <p>[Conductor]</p> <p>Please come. Is that OK? Can you come? OK, great, thank you, I should have reminded you that that's what we're doing. And tell me your name?</p> <p>[Audience member]</p>	<p>Rhonda had not quite realized that I was inviting her to the stage. She was sitting beside three other people who had all told short forms from the audience.</p> <p>I don't want to pressure anyone to do something they're not ready for, but the playback ritual requires that a full-fledged story be told from the chair beside the conductor, not from the audience. It's just not safe to have the teller that far away from you. And it's very hard for the audience to remain attentive and empathetic with a teller whom they can't really see. So I gently encourage her to come to the stage.</p>

<p>Rhonda.</p> <p>[Conductor] Rhonda! We had an imaginary Rhonda a minute ago and now we have the real thing. And Rhonda, where does this begin?</p> <p>[Audience member] About two and a half years ago.</p> <p>[Conductor] Two and a half years ago, and whereabouts?</p> <p>[Audience member] After work, in my home.</p> <p>[Conductor] OK. And who's going to play you? Sarah, Matt, or Penny? Sarah? Great, OK. And what happens?</p> <p>[Audience member] I worked all day, and I got home, and I got really, really ill. And people here, they really stood by me. And I never got a chance to say thank you. (This is just a story that) I just wanted to let people know that I really appreciated that they were there</p>	<p>Rhonda's tears came quickly, and I put my arm around the back of her chair so that she could feel sheltered. You can feel very exposed on stage, even if it's not really a stage and even if you're not crying. When I heard about the stroke I was even more concerned to keep her grounded and connected.</p> <p>We want the teller and the audience to know that we're ready to hear whatever the story is and to enact it fully. I am communicating to Rhonda and to the audience that it's fine for her to go into her feelings as much as she needs to.</p> <p>Rhonda's story further develops the main red thread of caring for others, and this time the story is from the point of view of the one who is helped. Looking back, Judy's story was saying, in part, "This is what it's like to help people who are in need." April's story was saying "I was first inspired to do care for people when I was very young" and this story is saying "I'm someone who received care from others." Of course there are lots of other parts of the dialogue as well, both in these stories and in the short forms.</p> <p>We noticed the apparent coincidence of the two 14-year-old girls—April in her story, and Rhonda's daughter Melissa, both of them caring and responsible beyond their years. There are often seemingly coincidental parallels like these which knit the show together.</p> <p>Notice the actors' faces as they listen. They're</p>
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<p>for me, you know? And I just never really got a chance to say thank you.</p> <p>[Conductor] And this is a way that you can say thank you.</p> <p>[Audience member] Mm-hm.</p> <p>[Conductor] So you got home from work, and became ill, and it sounds like something fairly serious.</p> <p>[Audience member] I had a stroke.</p> <p>[Conductor] You had a stroke. Wow. Very frightening. And what were some of the things that people here did that were so meaningful to you?</p> <p>[Audience member] They cooked meals.</p> <p>[Conductor]</p>	<p>maintaining a very focused presence, but also letting themselves respond simply as fellow human beings, and letting that response show.</p> <p>As I listen to the teller's story I need to maintain contact with the audience, and with the performers. The one-on-one conversation that Rhonda and I are having is within the context of a collective event. The audience needs to know that I have not forgotten them, and I also need to be aware of how they are reacting. It's important to know and acknowledge that some of the people Rhonda is talking about are present.</p> <p>It took a lot of courage for Rhonda to make this gesture of thanks so publicly.</p> <p>Asking Rhonda to describe her daughter led to some further information about what happened.</p> <p>The conductor is always walking a fine line between letting the teller simply tell, and on the other hand keeping some control of how much and what they say. We need to give the teller space to speak, and yet if we step back completely they may say too much, making the enactment redundant, and possibly losing the audience's attention.</p>
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They cooked meals.

[Audience member]

(For) me and my daughter.

[Conductor]

(For) you and your daughter. How long did this go on? That you were not able to work, right?

[Audience member]

For about a month. I was able to recover from it really quickly, thank god. You know, my co-workers they were really there for me.

[Conductor]

Are some of those people there in the room?

[Audience member]

Yes, quite a few.

[Conductor]

Quite a few.

[Audience member]

And I never got a chance to really just express my gratitude to them, because they were really there for me, and you don't really know who's there for you unless a time like that comes, and that's when you really know that people got your back.

[Conductor]

Does anyone have a tissue?

[Audience member]

I didn't realize how this was just dormant there.

[Conductor]

These stories stay with us and they're important, they're very important to tell.

[Audience member]

They're very good people here.

[Conductor]

Very good people. Was there anyone in particular that you're thinking that was important during that time?

[Audience member]

My friend and co-worker Pam. She's not here right now. She was the instrument behind it.

[Conductor]

So Pam was someone who helped get other people organized to come in...

[Audience member]

Yes, and my supervisor Aaron.

[Conductor]

And your supervisor Aaron. OK, great. So Matt and Penny are going to play all kinds of people. So you had to call in—how did people find out that this had happened to you?

[Audience member]

When I was able to recover some of my speech I was able to call Pam and she then called Aaron and the word got around.

[Conductor]

OK, all right. So people came to your house with food?

[Audience member]

Yes, they did. Yes, they did.

[Conductor]

And how about your daughter, how old was she at that time?

[Audience member]

Um, she was about fourteen.

[Conductor]

Fourteen. And what's her name?

[Audience member]

Melissa.

[Conductor]

Melissa. And what's a word or two for Melissa, because we might see her on stage too. What's she like?

[Audience member]

I just love her. She was very supportive. Although she was afraid, she was very responsible and she did what she was supposed to do, as far as the daughter is concerned.

[Conductor]

OK, great. And it must have been pretty significant for her that your co-workers did what they did.

[Audience member]

It was a relief for she was able to go to school, although she worried if I was going to be able to get out of bed, if I was going to fall. She knew that when it came down to having something to eat that someone was there.

[Conductor]

Something so basic, right, just knowing that food will be there. Can you give us a little bit of a flavor of that day, before this happened?

[Audience member]

It was just a usual day, I did some visits, I did some paperwork, but during the day I just didn't feel well. I had gone to physical therapy for a pinched nerve. On my way home I felt like something was in my throat. And then I got home and I told my daughter we need to put the clothes together to go to the laundry and then I said to her that I'm not really feeling well, so I'm going to lay down for a little bit and then we'll go to the laundry. But once I lay down, it was like I lost my whole concept of where I was. I wasn't able to talk. But before my speech started to become slurred I said to her you need to call 911.

[Conductor]

Thank goodness she was there.

[Audience member]

Right. Then from that point on I wasn't able to say anything. It was like...my mind...

[Conductor]

You were somewhere else. OK, so we might see just a little bit of the day before you got ill. And I have one more question for you. When the time came that you could come back to work, what was that like for you?

[Audience member]

An accomplishment.

[Conductor]

An accomplishment.

[Audience member]

Because a lot of people are not able to recover as quickly as I did from a stroke and I had temporary paralysis so it was a challenge to be able to come back to work and have the functions that I had and still maintain that, and do my home visits so it was challenging and also rewarding.

[Conductor]

Great. OK. We won't necessarily see all the details of what happened, but we'll see this time that you remember. This is Rhonda's story of discovering who it really is

<p>that she spends her days with.</p>	
<p><b>Rhonda’s story: enactment</b></p> <p>[Actors]</p> <p>Hey Aaron, I’m going to do some paperwork</p> <p>I’ve got two meetings and then I’m going home, See you tomorrow!</p> <p>OK. Something’s funny. Time to go</p> <p>Mom’s going to be home soon. Going to do laundry.</p> <p>Hi honey</p> <p>Hi</p> <p>Would you put all those clothes together? I’m just going to go lay down, I feel a little funny.</p> <p>Here.</p> <p>You go finish that up, thank you, sweetie, I’ll just go lay down.</p>	<p>Sarah commented later about the challenge for actors and musicians with a story like this to make the enactment as powerful as the telling.</p> <p>Sarah stands on a box here for a very practical reason—no one beyond the first row will see her if she literally lies down—but also because it emphasizes her fear and vulnerability.</p> <p>The music is ominous, underscoring the growing danger and pain of Rhonda’s stroke.</p> <p>You can see the actors here making creative use of the geography of the stage. Upstage, Matt and Penny’s dialogue tells one part of the story, while Sarah in the foreground shows Rhonda’s journey into a strange and confusing world.</p> <p>Rhonda had said that her co-worker Pam was “the instrument” of the campaign to support her, so maybe Matt subconsciously remembered that when he used an instrument in role!</p> <p>He also used her language when he said “We got your back!”</p> <p>The music follows every change in mood. When the music is working well there is a circular and reciprocal relationship of leading and following between actors and musicians.</p>



Doesn't feel the same. Doesn't feel right.

Something's wrong! Call 911!

My mom, she's sick!

OK, shshsh! You did the right thing, we're going to take care of Mom, we're going to take her to the hospital.

She can't talk?

She's going to need some time to get better, OK?

OK. I can take care of that.

She's going to work hard on getting herself better, all right?

I'll work hard. We can do it together, we're good together, just us two. We are, we're good together.

Just follow our instructions, OK.

Home?

You're going home, start your physical therapy.

Glad to be home.

I cleaned the kitchen and I got some food and I did the laundry and I made your bed, it's cozy, I made it with your special sheets and everything, here, OK? And I made these lists and we'll just do it together, just you and I, I don't even need to go to school, just you and me

I can't cook dinner. I can't tidy up.

Just you and me, we'll do it

I feel so helpless.

Attention, staff! One of our own needs our help! You, mashed potatoes! You, black-eyed peas! You, corn! You, corn, you, beans, you, rice! Let's go!

Mashed potatoes!

Everything is covered, baby! We got your back! We got your back!

Look what they brought us, Mom!

Keep it coming!

Wow! Lasagna, that's my favorite.

Thank you!

You're looking a little bit better. And you're feeling a little bit better?

I'm going to go to school.

And you're doing OK? And your Mom's doing better. And there's leftovers so keep eating!

Are you going to be OK? I'm going to go to school.

And we're ready when you're ready.

It's time.

It's not just you and me....

<p>I can do things again. It's a little harder than it was, But I'm ready. Hey, I'm back! Good to see you! Hi! I'm back! I'm back.</p>	
<p>But now, that I'm all better, and some time's gone by, I want to let you know, I want to tell you...</p> <p>We're playback theatre...</p> <p>...all of you...</p> <p>And we would like one last story...</p> <p>Tell them what it meant. Tell them because I don't have words, words aren't enough. Tell them—thank you.</p> <p>Thank you</p>	<p>There's a very subtle exchanging of offers going on here: Sarah signals that she's moving the story on by saying "Now that I'm all better," then Penny makes an offer as playback theatre, quickly joined by Matt, and Sarah immediately builds on it. This is the kind of thing that you could not possibly plan in a short discussion before a scene. It can only come out of shared vision and absolute openness to each other and to the story.</p> <p>Watching from the conductor's chair it actually took me a moment to understand what Penny and Matt were doing with the green cloth. Then I realized that it represented our green curtain, in turn symbolizing playback theatre. It brought the story right into the here and now. This was the deepest part of Rhonda's story—her message to the people in the room.</p> <p>The last words here are framed by the music—the musicians and actors working together.</p>
<p><b>Rhonda's story: checking in</b> [Conductor] Just waiting for you to be ready.</p> <p>So. Everyone can take a big breath.</p>	<p>It's essential to give the teller time to say or do whatever they need to after seeing their story, even if they just need to sit there with you for a moment. I wanted to be sure that Rhonda was ready to return to her seat after such a strong story.</p> <p>You can see the incredible compassion in the actors'</p>

	<p>faces as they watch the teller in this almost wordless checking in—which in turn echoes what Sarah has just said in the role of teller’s actor: “Tell them thank you, because I don’t have words.”</p>
<p><b>Reflecting on the stories</b></p> <p>We’re coming to the end, and we’d like to take a moment to reflect on the stories that people have told, so just listen as Debbie and Dean play some music, and then we’re going to revisit some of the stories for a moment. So listen, and remember the stories as you listen.</p>	<p>We invite the audience to reflect on the stories so that everyone has a chance to recall what they’ve heard and told. Otherwise their busy lives take over and they may not have a moment to take in the coherence and power and meaning of the event that we’ve all just co-created.</p> <p>It also gives us, the performers, a chance to reflect and remember before our final closing collage.</p>
<p><b>Closing collage</b></p> <p>[Actors]</p> <p>[reflecting on Holly’s story]</p> <p>Hi, I’m the seller’s lawyer. You are the buyer’s lawyer?</p> <p>Yeah, I think we got a deal here.</p> <p>I think we do. I can’t even get a word in edgewise, they’re just laughing and crying—they don’t even need us!</p> <p>Is this a reality tv show or is this for real?</p> <p>I don’t know!</p>	<p>The closing collage is something that we’ve developed as a company, as a way to bring completion to the show by showing how the stories are all part of something larger. It’s a time when we can shine a light on the stories from a different angle; we can bring out themes and red threads that have emerged; we can bring back a character who may have been the object of a story and make him or her the subject; we can tell a shadow side or untold aspect of a story, particularly where there is social injustice which may or may not have been acknowledged by the teller.</p> <p>Penny’s offer here underlined the dominant theme of strong connection between co-workers.</p>

<p>They look like they're just so...</p> <p>Well, nice doing business with you.</p> <p>Congratulations on the sale.</p>	
<p>[Reflecting on Judy's story and others]</p> <p>Do you ever wish you could just change everything about the world?</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Everything about the system. Everything about how people treat each other.</p> <p>What can we do?</p> <p>I just...I just</p> <p>Maybe if we click our heels together—</p>	<p>Technically, one actor steps into the space and makes an offer, possibly endowing others as characters. If not endowed, others may step forward to support the first actor, or he/she may complete the moment alone. The actors fulfill just this particular moment, honoring the first actor's intention, and then return to the line. The collage story in the Playback Forms feature on this DVD shows us using a similar structure to enact a whole story.</p>

<p>I don't know, just take a leap of faith or something. There's got to be a way.</p> <p>All right. We'll take a leap of faith. Ready?</p> <p>Yes.</p> <p>OK. 1, 2, 3...</p>	
<p>[Reflecting on April's story]</p> <p>I used to feel scared, coming out like this. People used to look at me. They still do. But I don't care any more. Cause I got friends. I got friends.</p> <p>Hi, Jerry!</p> <p>Hi! She's a friend of April's, She knows me now. I don't care any more. I go anywhere I want. Hi...Hi.</p> <p>Anywhere!</p>	<p>My offer was to bring Jerry to center stage so that we might imagine his own story, and by extension to remember that all the people who are helped also have their own stories.</p>
<p>[Reflecting on Rhonda's story]</p> <p>That was an example of how if you catch it in time, get in the right support, and the recovery happens. Remember when she came in, how bad she was? But I could tell, she was strong, you can see it.</p> <p>But does it always work like that?</p>	<p>Matt's offer to Sarah showed an outsider's reaction to witnessing the unusual support system that Rhonda told us about.</p>

<p>Well, you know, you catch it in time, you get them connected with the right support, and they can get better. If all patients coming into our hospital had that kind of support...I don't know. Today was a good day.</p> <p>I'm inspired.</p>	
<p>[Reflecting on Elise's story]</p> <p>You know, I've been thinking. I think a lot, every time we have a town council meeting like this. Our town has almost everything we need. Almost everything we need, except we do not have a Crystal Run group home here. That's what we need!</p> <p>Goodness, what a great idea!</p> <p>They've got one, they've got one, they've got one. We don't have one.</p> <p>We want one!</p> <p>We want a Crystal Run group home right here!</p> <p>We want one!</p> <p>That's why I'm the mayor!</p>	<p>Ideally we end with something expansive, which is what I was trying to do with my reference to Elise's pair about growth for the organization. It was meant as a tribute to Crystal Run's work, and also an acknowledgment of one of the themes of April's story.</p>



<p><b>Closing song</b></p> <p>[Conductor] We're going to end with a song.</p> <p>[Conductor, actors, musicians] "Every burden shall be rolled away"</p>	<p>We usually end with a song. We like the wide harmonies and the lyrics of "Every Burden" to close a show like this with people whose work is so generous and so challenging. The song gives audience members a chance to settle and breathe, and get ready to leave.</p>
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