

TALK TO THE WALL

By Mike Willis

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SYNOPSIS: Lieutenant Jack, a disabled Vietnam Vet who suffered a severe head injury in the war, visits the Wall daily to talk to the 58,000 servicemen listed on The Wall. In his odd, slightly off way, Lieutenant Jack helps one visitor, Dorothy, say goodbye to her father who was KIA in Vietnam.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 females, 1 male)

SARAH (f)..... A young A volunteer at The Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C. *(37 lines)*

LT. JACK (m)..... Suffered a traumatic brain injury and shuffles when he walks. He repeats things and sometimes talks to himself. *(69 lines)*

DOROTHY (f)..... Daughter of a Vietnam Veteran who was killed in action. *(56 lines)*

DURATION: 15 minutes

TIME: 2018

SETTING: The Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C.

COSTUMES

SARAH wears a lanyard around her neck indicating that she is a volunteer.

LT. JACK wears a ragged, 1960's army fatigue jacket, baggy olive drab pants and boots. His hair is long and shaggy and he hasn't shaved in days. Wears a dirty ball cap turned backwards.

DOROTHY is well dressed.

PROPS

- Sign that reads: Vietnam Veteran Memorial Wall Information
- Tall stool
- Brochures
- Shopping bag
- Lawn chair
- Six-pack beer
- Burger (*Whopper*TM)
- Two beers inside Jack's jacket
- iPhone (Sarah)
- Photos

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

The Wall is not a physical character, but even though it has no lines, it has a voice in the play. The Wall is an imaginary line between the stage and the audience.

The play is performed on a bare stage with props. The Wall is not visible. It is the space between the front of the stage and the audience. On the floor are mementos left to honor those whose names are on the Wall. (examples: flowers, pictures, etc.) For effect a slide of an actual panel from the Vietnam Memorial Wall can be rear-projected on a cyclorama up-stage behind the actors. Entrances are made from the wings. The events in this play are fictional.

PREMIERE PERFORMANCE

Talk to the Wall premiered at Inspiration Studios in West Allis, WI in 2017. The play was directed by Tom Zuehlke and featured the following cast

SARAH Gabriella Dorantes
 LT. JACK Erico Ortiz
 DOROTHY..... Bonnie Kotlewski Sekulovich

DEDICATION

This play is dedicated to the memory of William A. “Doc” Beyer, Panel 14E Line 102 and to Gordon Stark, Panel 15E Line 2. Both, KIA Feb. 1967, Gone for fifty years, but not forgotten.

DO NOT COPY

SCENE 1

SETTING: *A bare stage. There are flowers, pictures, old sports equipment, letters, and miscellaneous other things spread out across the front of the stage at the foot of the audience. There is a sign on a stand up-stage left that reads, "Vietnam Memorial Wall Information."*

AT RISE: *SARAH enters carrying a tall stool and a handful of brochures. SHE places the stool up-stage left by the sign and then sits on the stool waiting for visitors to come to that area of the memorial. A commotion can be heard offstage.*

JACK: *(Cackling offstage.)* Hoo, eh! Lookit yerself out there Jack boy! Whooo eeh, Oooh ya! Hey ya there, Billy. What's shakin'? Oh yeah... you know it. Billy, Billy... Billy goat gruff, you're the man. Ooh ya! *(Cackling laughter.)* It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood... Wouldn'tcha like ta be my neighbor? *(Cackling laughter.)*

JACK enters carrying a shopping bag and an old folding lawn chair. He crosses to SARAH.

JACK: *(To SARAH.)* Sister, Florence... oh Sister Florence you're lookin' fine today! Ooooh ya! *(Laughing.)*

SARAH: Now, Jack...

JACK: *(Saluting.)* Lieutenant Jack., reportin' for duty, Sergeant Nightingale! *(Cackling laughter.)* Hey, hey! Hee, hee!

SARAH: It's Sarah, Jack.

JACK: Why of course it's, Sarahhh... Super Sarah. Staff Sergeant Sarah, keeper of the gate. Ooo, yeah, we got to have a keeper of the gate.

SARAH: You come here every day Lt. Jack and every day you call me Florence. Why is that?

JACK: Cause you're Florence Nightingale, Sergeant Sarah. Volunteerin' to take care of all these pitiful souls (*Indicating the Wall.*) these sorry sons of bitches that marched into hell and here you are watchin' over 'em. You're an angel, Sergeant Sarah... *Sergeant Super Sarah*, a goddamn angel marchin' through the halls of hell.

SARAH: Jack...

JACK: Ooops. Sorry. (*Admonishing himself.*) You know better than to talk like that in front of a lady Lieutenant. Yessir, I surely do. I surely do. (*To SARAH.*) I'm sorry Sergeant Sarah... sometimes my head it just ain't workin' right, ya know. Shit just slips out. Yep, all sorts uh sorry-ass shit jest keeps on slippin' out.

SARAH: You're forgiven.

JACK: Thank you Miss Florence... (*To himself.*) It's Sergeant Sarah, you fool. I know that. I know that, Sergeant Sarah, the gatekeeper. (*Laughing.*) Hee hee, he.

SARAH: Are you having a good day today, Jack?

JACK: (*To himself.*) Lieutenant Jack he's doin' good, right LT.? (*To SARAH.*) Oh yeah... the docs at the VA they keep Lieutenant. Jack doin' good, flyin' high. Yeah, boy, oooo, yah! (*Laughing.*)

SARAH: You visitin' anyone special today Jack?

JACK: Sure as shit, sure as shit... you know it, got me some friends down on panel 14E, haven't talked to 'em in awhile. Know they're missin' their ol' Lieutenant Jack an our talks. Yessir, yessir Sergeant Sarah, panel 14 E all mine today.

SARAH: (*Pointing to the shopping bag.*) Can I see what you have in the bag, Jack?

JACK: (*Very serious.*) Oh, no, no no no... can't do that, Sergeant Sarah... top secret shit in the bag. Top secret.

SARAH: Lieutenant Jack, you know the rules. All packages must be checked by the gatekeeper. I have my orders.

JACK: Orders. Oooo eeh, oh yeah, (*Laughing.*) Lieutenant Jack, he remembers orders. (*Shaking head.*) Orders are a pain in the ass, yessir, a pain in the ass.

SARAH: That may be Jack, but I need to look in your bag. You wouldn't want me to get in any trouble, would you?

JACK: Oh, no. No trouble for Sergeant Sarah. (*Laughing.*) He, he... (*Suddenly serious.*) Do you have a security clearance, Sergeant?

SARAH: Why, yes I do.

JACK: Top secret?

SARAH: The highest.

JACK: *(Giggling.)* Well... allrighty then. Oooh, yah. *(Cackling laughter.)*

JACK hands the bag to SARAH. SARAH reaches in the bag and removes a burger and a six-pack of beer.

SARAH: And what do we have here, Lieutenant Jack?

JACK: Rations. *(Laughing.)* Hey, eey.

SARAH: I'll let you keep the sandwich...

JACK: *(Laughing.)* It's a Whopper™. From the "King Burger."

SARAH: Yes, I can see that. You can take that with you, but you'll have to leave the beer here. You can pick it up on your way out.

JACK: Shit! Ooops... oh, yeah, can't say shit. No shit. Sorry.

SARAH: *(Handing JACK the burger.)* Enjoy your visit with your friends, Jack.

JACK: *(Saluting SARAH who salutes back.)* At ease, Sergeant! *(Laughing.)* Ooooh, yah!

JACK crosses to center stage and sets up his folding chair facing the audience. SARAH crosses up-stage to her stool, sets the beer down and then sits on the stool and begins checking her phone. JACK glances back at SARAH, then pulls two more cans of beer out of the pockets of his fatigue jacket. JACK pops the top on one of the beers and sits it on the floor amongst the other mementos.

JACK: *(To the Wall/Audience.)* Here ya are fellas. Drink up! *(Pops the top on the other can of beer and sits in the folding chair. Toasts the Wall and then begins holding a conversation with some of the names on the Wall.)* Cheers. *(Drinking and laughing.)* Oooo...eeeh, doesn't git any better'n that. What say, Billy? Hits the spot, don't it? *(To another name on the Wall.)* Hey Foo Foo, how they hangin', man? Damn, been awhile since I seen you guys. Gots ta tell ya, the VA got me doin' all kinds a crazy shit. Puttin' ol' Lieutenant Jack through the paces, yessiree... testin' the QI they call it. Thinkin' the ol' man crazy. Shit, the Va's the ones is crazy,

all wrong with me is a chunk a steel in the head, what's theys excuse? (*Laughing.*) He, he, he... Bullshit! All bullshit, you guys lucky you gets to sit here all day and rest up on the Wall.

JACK takes the burger and starts to eat it. DOROTHY enters and crosses to SARAH.

SARAH: (*To DOROTHY.*) Good morning. Can I help you?

DOROTHY: I hope so... I'm looking for my father... uh, not him exactly, he was killed in Vietnam. I'm here trying to find his name on the Wall.

SARAH: Who was your father? I can look him up in our records and help you find where he's listed on the Wall.

DOROTHY: Thank, you. Art. Uh, his name was Arthur.

SARAH: (*Smiling.*) Lots of Arts on the Wall.

DOROTHY: Oh, yes of course. I'm just a little nervous. This is all very imposing. I've never been here before, I'm a little out of my element.

SARAH: Nothing to be nervous about. Now, let's see if I can help you, what's your father's last name?

DOROTHY: Abrams. Art Abrams, I looked it up on the Internet and it said he was listed on Panel 14E.

SARAH: (*Pointing at JACK.*) Panel 14E is right over there where that gentleman is sitting.

JACK lets out a loud cackle and slaps his knee.

JACK: (*To names on the Wall.*) Hot damn! No, way! No way in hell you gettin' any of this here Whopper™ Julio. This baby's all mine. Yo, Gordo, what's shakin', man? Holy shit! Gots some big news... big, big news. We got us a new president, boys. New chief commander, yessiree. Crazy son of bitch... gonna build a big Wall. Big ass Wall... The Great Wall of Mexico... times is a changin' yessiree, shit's a changin'. What say, doc? (*Pauses then begins laughing.*) No shit.

DOROTHY: (*Indicating JACK.*) Who's he talking to?

SARAH: He's talking to the Wall.

JACK laughs off-and-on as he eats his burger.

DOROTHY: The Wall?

SARAH: That's right. Lieutenant Jack, comes here every day, sets up his lawn chair and talks to the Wall. A different panel every day.

DOROTHY: Is he crazy?

SARAH: Not really. Jack is a sweetheart. He suffered a brain injury in the war and has this steel plate in his head. He talks to himself and can be a little childish sometimes, but he really is harmless. I'm sure he was quite intelligent before he was injured. I was told he went to West Point.

DOROTHY: West Point?

SARAH: That's what I heard. C'mon, I'll take you over there and we can see if we can find your father's name on the Wall.

DOROTHY: *(Looking at JACK.)* Are you sure it's safe?

SARAH: Sure. C'mon.

SARAH crosses to JACK; DOROTHY follows reluctantly.

SARAH: Jack...

JACK snaps to attention and salutes.

JACK: Lieutenant Jack, and Panel 14E all present and accounted for, Sergeant Sarah! *(Laughing.)* He, he. Ooh yah! No AWOLs today, Sarge. *(Over his shoulder to the Wall.)* Right, fellas? Strac up there, Gordo! Sergeant Sarah's here for inspection. Doc, tuck yer shirt in. Oooh yah!

SARAH salutes.

SARAH: Jack, I'd like you to meet someone. Lieutenant Jack, this is Dorothy.

JACK: From Kansas?

DOROTHY: Kansas? No, I'm from New Jersey.

JACK: *(Childish teasing.)* Off to see the wizard, Dorothy? Follow the yellow brick road, follow, follow... *(Laughing.)* Hee hee,,,

DOROTHY: What? No, I...

SARAH: Dorothy is here to find her father's name on the Wall, Jack. He's on Panel 14E.

JACK: *(To DOROTHY.)* Then, welcome to Oz, sweetheart. This is Panel 14E. *(To the Wall.)* Which one of you low-lifes has a kid named Dorothy, from Kansas?

DOROTHY: No, I'm from New Jersey. My father's name was Art, he was in the Air Force...

JACK: *(Calling to the Wall.)* Abrams, ya got yerself a visitor.

DOROTHY: What?!!

JACK: *(To the Wall.)* Says you're her daddy.

DOROTHY: How did you know my last name was Abrams?

JACK: Only one fly-boy on Panel 14E named Art, sweetheart. Art, sweetheart... *(Laughing.)* Liuetenant Jack you're a poet an din't know it. *(To the Wall.)* What's that, Art?

DOROTHY: Excuse me, who are you talking to? *(To SARAH.)* Who, is he talking to?

SARAH: Just a minute. Jack...

JACK: *(To DOROTHY.)* What's the matter, cat got yer tongue?

DOROTHY: What?

JACK: Your pops... wants to know how you found him way out here, so far from Kansas.

DOROTHY: What?! How... you can talk to him?

JACK: Sure as shit, sure as shit... *(To himself.)* You talkin' to the Wall again, Lieutenant? What's wrong with you, you crazy? *(Laughing as he answers himself.)* Sure as shit, sure...

SARAH: Jack...

JACK: *(Laughing.)* Oooops. *(To DOROTHY.)* Tell 'im. *(Pointing to a place on the Wall.)* He's right over there.

DOROTHY: I can't see him.

JACK: Don't mean he ain't there. Lotsa' things can't be seen.

DOROTHY: What?

JACK: World's gone blind... full of non-believers. Ya needs to be a believer, Dorothy from Kansas. Gots to follow the yellow brick road if ya wants to find the wizard. Find the wizard, Dorothy.

DOROTHY: *(To SARAH.)* I can't do this.

SARAH: I understand.

DOROTHY starts to leave.

JACK: (*Shouting.*) Dorothy Jean!

DOROTHY: Oh, my god!

SARAH: What?

DOROTHY: That's my name. Dorothy Jean... how did he know my middle name was Jean?

DOROTHY crosses to JACK.

DOROTHY: Who told you my middle name was Jean?

JACK: Lieutenant Jack is smart. He, he he... (*Laughing then serious.*) No, no, not so smart... Lieutenant Jack is stupid most times...

DOROTHY: I don't think you're stupid. You're not stupid, Lieutenant Jack.

JACK: VA says so.

DOROTHY: (*To SARAH.*) The VA?

SARAH: The Veteran's Administration. Jack is being treated at the VA hospital.

JACK: The VA 's stupid. Some stupid sons-a-bitches there. (*Laughing.*) Oooh yaah!

SARAH: Jack...

JACK: (*Laughing.*) Oooops.

DOROTHY: (*To JACK.*) There are things I want to say to my dad, but I'm not sure how to go about it. Do you think you could help me with that, Jack?

JACK: (*Serious.*) I dunno... top secret, shit.

DOROTHY: I need to talk to him, Lieutenant Jack. This is really important to me.

JACK: (*Laughing and childish.*) OK! OK, Dorothy from Kansas.

DOROTHY: Thank you. So, what do I do first?

JACK: Just talk.

DOROTHY: But, I can't see him. How do I know where he is?

JACK: He's in the air... Ol' Art, of the U.S. Air Force is in the air, don't need to see him. Just believe an' talk.

DOROTHY: Talk?

JACK: To the Wall.

SARAH takes DOROTHY to a place on the Wall.

Thank you for reading this free excerpt from:

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