

Here's Hoping

A Play By

Philip Middleton Williams

Contact:

Philip Middleton Williams

16600 SW 77th Avenue

Palmetto Bay, FL 33157

pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com

www.pmwplaywright.com

CHARACTERS

EUNICE – in her fifties. Housewife.
THAD – early twenties. College student.
STEVE – yuppie.
FRAN – Steve’s wife.
PHYLLIS – middle-aged matron.
VERN – her husband.

SCENE

A meeting room in a church basement.

Here’s Hoping was commissioned by Northern Michigan Planned Parenthood for the Troupe Teen Theatre. It was first produced in Petoskey, Michigan on December 1, 1994 as part of World AIDS Day 1994. The cast was as follows:

Eunice: Melinda Doan
Thad: Robert Wood
Steve: Matthew Whitener
Fran: Lindsay Connolly
Phyllis: Chris Kolinski
Vern: Ben Hope

The production was directed by Krist’n Meister.

PRODUCTION NOTE

This play was written in 1994. Since then, great advances have been made in the treatment of HIV and AIDS, and some of the information in this story may seem to be dated. But the stigma and misinformation that was rampant at that time about HIV is still present, and safe sexual practices for all is still the best way to prevent its spread. Education and understanding are still powerful weapons.

Here's Hoping

The scene is a meeting room in a church basement. All that is required is a few folding chairs arranged in a semi-circle. At rise there is one person on the stage, a middle-aged woman sitting in one of the chairs working on some sewing. This is EUNICE. She is dressed nicely and appears calm and content. After a moment a young man enters. He is THAD. He is in his early twenties, dressed in jeans and a polo shirt. He is athletic, energetic, and doesn't sit still for long. He is carrying a cup of coffee in a paper cup.

THAD: Hey, Eunice!

EUNICE: Good evening, Thad. How're you?

THAD: Great.

EUNICE: Where'd you get the coffee?

THAD: A.A meeting down the hall. You want some?

EUNICE: Oh, no, thank you. So, how's Will?

THAD: He's great. Yesterday at the gym he benched two-fifty.

EUNICE: Is that good?

THAD: Two hundred and fifty pounds? That's fantastic. That's more than I can do.

EUNICE: Really? And you're so strong yourself.

THAD (*flattering himself*): Oh, well, yeah... (*He privately flexes a bicep and feels it.*)

EUNICE (*not noticing; sewing*): So how's school?

THAD: Oh, okay. Two more semesters and I'm outta there.

EUNICE: Then what?

THAD: Dunno... maybe I'll transfer to the university, maybe not. Depends on Will.

EUNICE: What does he say?

THAD: Oh, he wants me to get a degree...but that means I'd have to move to the university, and we'd probably have to live apart. He'd have to quit his job and... well...he doesn't want to. But we don't want to move.

(*THAD sits in a chair heavily.*)

EUNICE: I know. It would be a tough decision. But you don't have to decide right away.

THAD: No. Not yet, anyway.

(A young yuppie couple enter. They are FRAN and STEVE. They are both in their late twenties.)

EUNICE: Well, good evening.

STEVE: Hi, Eunice.

FRAN: Hello. Hi, Thad. How're you?

THAD: Okay.

(FRAN and STEVE sit.)

STEVE: Bill and Mike can't make it tonight.

EUNICE: Oh?

STEVE: Bill's mom is in town for the week so they're taking her out tonight. Mike said this meeting would be a real bummer for her.

THAD: Yeah, no doubt.

FRAN: Besides, she doesn't know that Bill is positive. They have to break it to her gently.

EUNICE: There's no easy way. How's Robin?

STEVE: *(shrugging)* She's responding to the antibiotics.

FRAN: The doctor said the infection's not that serious, but they want to keep her in a few more days.

THAD: She's still in the hospital?

(STEVE nods.)

FRAN: We just came from there. Visiting hours are over at seven in Pediatrics.

THAD: Jeez.

FRAN (*brave front*): Oh, she's quite the little patient. The nurses all say she's practically taken over the whole floor.

(*FRAN can't keep up the appearance for long, and she starts to sob quietly. STEVE comforts her and THAD and EUNICE look on sympathetically.*)

FRAN: It's just that... she asked me if she'd have to get shots if she went to heaven.

THAD (*softly*): Oh, God.

STEVE (*hearing THAD*): Yeah. That from a five-year-old.

EUNICE: Poor dear.

(*A short pause while FRAN composes herself. After a moment she looks up and smiles.*)

FRAN: I guess that we should be glad we've had her this long. The doctors said she'd be lucky to make it to three.

EUNICE: God loves to make doctors look foolish. (*Looks at her watch.*) It's after eight, and I guess this is it. Shall we get started?

FRAN: Okay.

(*They all stand up, form a circle, and hold hands for a moment of silence. At the appropriate moment, they all whisper "Amen" and are about to sit down when two more people come in. They are PHYLLIS and VERN. They are both middle-aged, dressed conservatively. PHYLLIS looks matronly, VERN is a businessman.*)

PHYLLIS: I'm sorry. Excuse us.

EUNICE: Come in.

PHYLLIS (*looking around*): Is this the...? (*Pause; she cannot say "H.I.V. support group."*)

EUNICE (*gets her drift*): Yes, it is. Come in and sit down.

PHYLLIS (*slightly flustered*): We went in the other room at first.

VERN: The drunks' meeting.

THAD: Alcoholics Anonymous.

VERN: Whatever.

PHYLLIS: We found out it was the wrong place for us.

THAD: Uh huh.

FRAN: This is the H.I.V. support group.

PHYLLIS: I see.

VERN: Well, here we are.

PHYLLIS: Our minister suggested we come.

VERN (*flatly*): Yeah. Sit down, Phyllis. Let's at least give it a shot. What, this lasts an hour?

EUNICE: Yes, although we sometimes go beyond that if we need to.

THAD: We try to think about the time we've got, not the time we take.

VERN (*resigned, glancing at his watch*): Yeah. Whatever.

(*He sits and PHYLLIS sits uncomfortably next to him. Short, uncomfortable silence.*)

EUNICE: Well, we'll start by introducing ourselves. I'm Eunice.

THAD: Thad.

FRAN: I'm Fran.

STEVE: And I'm Steve.

(*They all look at PHYLLIS. Beat.*)

PHYLLIS: Oh, is it...? I'm Phyllis and this is my husband, Vern.

EUNICE: Welcome. Officially, this is the Monday Night H.I.V. Support Group. We meet here every week at this time and we help—

VERN (*interrupting*): What do you talk about?

EUNICE: Beg pardon?

VERN: What do you all talk about? AIDS?

EUNICE: Sometimes.

VERN: Well, isn't that what H.I.V. is? AIDS?

EUNICE: Not exactly.

FRAN: H.I.V. is the virus that causes AIDS. You can have the virus and not have AIDS.

VERN: But if you've got the virus, you're going to get AIDS, right?

THAD: Not necessarily. Some people live for a long time without ever developing symptoms. There are even studies that show that some people who once tested positive for H.I.V. lose it. Now they test negative.

EUNICE: The purpose of this meeting is to help people who have friends or family who have H.I.V. We try and lighten the load a little.

VERN: I see.

EUNICE: And we do that by sharing our ups and downs and learn from that. Thad, why don't you start. Tell us about your week.

THAD: Okay. Actually, it was a pretty good week. Will's got this big trial coming up and so helped him get ready for that, and then we decided to take a couple of weeks off at Christmas and go to the Caribbean, so I spent some time looking up places to visit. Man, there are some islands down there I've never heard of. Anyway, we're working on that, and then we thought we'd better start planning for next summer—maybe go hiking in Rocky Mountain National Park or Yellowstone. We're kinda torqued about that... Will hasn't been out west since he went to summer camp when he was twelve.

PHYLLIS: Who's Will?

THAD: He's my lover.

PHYLLIS: Is he... Does he have...?

THAD: H.I.V.? Yep.

PHYLLIS: And you...

THAD: Nope. Last test was negative.

(PHYLLIS involuntarily shudders.)

THAD *(genially)*: Got a problem with that?

PHYLLIS: Oh! No... well...

THAD: That I'm gay or that my lover's H.I.V. positive?

PHYLLIS: Well, I...

THAD: He doesn't have AIDS. His T-cell count is normal and he can out-bench press me. He has trouble losing weight, if anything.

PHYLLIS: Did you know he had it before you...

THAD: Sure. First thing you ask a guy when you date him...after you get his phone number.

VERN: Wouldn't know about that.

PHYLLIS: And you still...

THAD: Hey. Just 'cause he has a communicable disease doesn't mean I can't love him. We're just real careful.

VERN (*snorting*): Well, it's his own fault.

THAD (*slow burn*): Excuse me?

VERN: You heard me. If he hadn't been doing weird things it wouldn't have happened. He wouldn't have caught it if he hadn't been doing... you know...

THAD (*level*): As near as we can determine, Will contracted the virus long before anyone really knew how it was transmitted. He could have picked it up when he had his appendix taken out when he was a kid.

FRAN: There are other ways of getting AIDS.

STEVE: That's right.

VERN (*ignoring them*): It's a sexually transmitted disease...just like the clap. So, if you boys hadn't been fooling around, no one would have ever heard of it.

(*THAD is about to jump out of his chair, but EUNICE stops him.*)

EUNICE: I think it is very important that we all remember why we're here. Part of our mission is to inform...to educate...so we can understand. (*To VERN.*) Perhaps if you heard all our stories you might...understand as well. Thad, thank you. Shall we go on, Fran? Steve?

The play is not over. To find out how it ends, contact the playwright at pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com.