

Standing Alone

A Collection of Monologues by

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Allen's Big Adventure

From **A Tree Grows in Longmont**.

Memories come flooding back as a spouse says goodbye to his soulmate.

Do You Get It

From **The Sugar Ridge Rag**.

The mother of a soldier in the Army in Vietnam in 1970 talks with her husband about what keeps her awake at night.

Hey, Dad

A son remembers his father.

Just A Local

From **Cooler Near the Lake**

Kenny, a local guy, shares an honest moment with the summer people up on Lake Michigan.

Quite The Connoisseur

From **Tucumcari Tonite!**

Alex explains why he only drinks a certain brand of water.

Remember Me?

My left ankle reminds me of a moment that left a scar.

Simple Black Marks

From **A Good Year**.

An English teacher at a prestigious New England private school addresses the class at the end of the school year.

That Goddam Tree

Larry, a white heterosexual homophobe, reacts to **A Tree Grows in Longmont**.

Zero Sum Game

From **The Sugar Ridge Rag**.

Dave Granger, an Army medic at a MASH in Vietnam, is home on leave in Sugar Ridge, Ohio, in June 1974. He talks about one night on duty.

Allen's Big Adventure

CHARACTER: PHILIP: Allen's former partner, in his forties, any ethnicity

PLACE and TIME: A park in Longmont, Colorado. Mid-July, present day. The space is empty except for a sapling center stage.

Philip enters. He looks around, then speaks to the sapling, which was planted in memory of Allen.

PHILIP: Well, Allen, you finally did it. You're off on the biggest adventure of all; so big that it's taken me a year to put my thoughts together and say them out loud.

But life with you has always been an adventure, from the moment we met on that spring evening at the dance at Eldorado Springs outside Boulder and our first date the next night – you had me with the flowers you bought from the street vendor on the way to my house – and for the next fifteen years. Sometimes it was scary and harsh, but no matter what, we were together, and so many times, whether it was snorkeling on the reef with the barracuda, or skiing the double-black diamond runs at Snowmass, or sailing on the waves of Lake Michigan, or wandering the streets of Paris in December in jeans that didn't fit because your luggage was lost on the missed flight, or climbing the steps of Notre Dame to pet the gargoyles, or standing in the Vatican to see the pope bless your mom's rosary, or climbing to the top of St. Peter's to see the roof of the Sistine Chapel, or the tower of Pisa, or driving through the night from Colorado to Michigan to surprise my dad for his birthday, or riding in the bunk of a semi to go to Kansas for your family reunion and being swept up in your family's loving arms and you in mine, or renting the house in Longmont, or the house in Petoskey, or owning our own home in Albuquerque and planting a garden in each one of them, or showing up at the gym with Sam cupped in your hands and making him our companion for the rest of his life, or buying me that 1959 Buick for \$150, or wandering through the Painted Desert and the canyons of New Mexico, or going to Montserrat and Jamaica and Tobago and wandering the beaches, or the many, many other things we did, including the weekend in October of 1992 when we began our journey together to sobriety. For every one of those times, you always said, "C'mon, it'll be fun!"

I look around my house in Miami and still see you here. The chairs and table we bought at Sears for the house in Albuquerque. The O'Keeffe prints from Santa Fe. The Gandalf candle in the bookcase. The fish mobile made of palm fronds from Jamaica that hangs over the sink in the kitchen. The shirts in the closet that still fit both of us. The Pontiac in the garage that once had both our names on the title. Our rings in the little carved box that also holds the slip of paper with your phone number on it. The dedication in my book to the man who showed that wisdom is not measured by degrees. The character who shows up in my writing again and again. The hundreds of pictures, mementos, and kitchen utensils: traces, as the old song goes, of love.

We were never married in the cold and unfeeling eyes of the state or in the thrall of a church, but even if it was unwritten or un-vowed, we were married in every other way, and despite the mere fact that we separated for reasons I never truly grasped, we never let go of each other. You were always going to be a part of me, and when we talked on the phone, each call ended with "I love you," and "I love you too." And while we went our separate ways and found new lives in different places and with new friends, our time together was and will always be the best time of my life.

I don't believe in the superstitions of Heaven and Hell or Life Eternal; those are things the mind has concocted because it is incapable of comprehending its own mortality. But I do believe in the spirituality of everlasting life because as long as I and your family and your friends and the people who knew you remember you, you're not really gone. You're just in the next room, even if it's just that little pewter urn next to your high school picture. Your number is still on my phone. Your letters are still in my drawer. I can still hear your laugh.

So, when you set off on your last adventure on that quiet night in the house you grew up in, I knew in my heart that I was losing a part of me in one way, but keeping it with me forever. Grief does not care about time or distance, and while I may not be widowed, I am very sure that what I feel, what I miss, what stops me in mid-sentence, is every bit as real as it gets. And, to quote you, it sucks. But it also shows me how much I truly loved you.

I know that you went in peace and on your own terms, and I know that you were ready to go. Because, as Tinker Bell says to Peter Pan, to die is an awfully big adventure.

Philip takes one last look at the sapling, then exits.

END OF MONOLOGUE.

Do You Get It

CHARACTER: DEB GRANGER: Late 30's, mother of Davey, who is a soldier in Vietnam.

PLACE and TIME: The kitchen of a modest home in the rural community of Sugar Ridge, Ohio. It is 1970.

Deb is seated at the table talking to her husband, Hal.

DEB: Eddie Martin was two months older than Davey. He barely shaved. Sweetest boy in the world. That goofy grin, those big ears that stuck out; strong as an ox, gentle as a lamb. He was so in love with Marcie Kinderman that you could see it across the room. And... (*Deep breath.*) He's gone. Twenty years old. For what? What was it for?

He never asked. That's what his mother said. Eddie never asked why we were in Vietnam, why we were fighting. He just went. He did what he was told. And now that kid who taught our boys how to lift weights, who smiled like he meant it when he was bagging groceries at Food Town, who spent hours trying to get that old Studebaker to run, who held hands with Marcie when they sat in church, who wanted nothing more from life than to give back with the gifts he was given, is all alone in Fort Meigs Cemetery because he was the first in his family to die in a war.

Do you get it? Do you really? Do your friends – our friends – at the Veterans of Foreign Wars really get it? Or is it just some story in the paper like World War Two was when we were kids and all we knew was that you couldn't get bacon without a ration book and daddy didn't drive the car to work anymore? Tell me it's real, Hal. Tell me that you read the paper and wonder where Davey is over there. That when you see a strange car pull in the driveway, you pray that it's just someone who got lost trying to get to the interstate, not someone from the Army along with Reverend Graham walking up to the front door. That when you wake up every morning that you pray that this isn't that day, and when we go to sleep at night you say thank you, God, for getting me through another day.

END OF MONOLOGUE.

Hey, Dad

CHARACTER: PHILIP: Mid-sixties. His son.

PLACE and TIME: An open space in a forest. Autumn.

In the middle of the space is a mint plant that has grown up to perhaps two feet tall out of a mound of dirt.

Philip enters Stage Right. He is a man in his mid-sixties, in decent shape, wearing jeans, boots, a flannel shirt, and a jacket. He looks around the forest, then goes to the mint plant and the mound.

PHILIP: He loved animal jokes. Take any story about a priest, a rabbi, and a pastor walking into a bar and recast it with a fox, a squirrel, and a raccoon, and he'd be rolling on the floor. There was something about the gentle world of "The Wind in the Willows" and the adventures of Winnie the Pooh in the Hundred Acre Woods that told us what a gentle and humble man he was: giving, loving, flawed, human, and who tried his best to do what he could for his family, his friends, and his community.

There are so many memories that he created for me. Teaching me how to sail, going to baseball and football games, teaching me how to play golf, spending the day bird-watching; sharing the little things that brought him joy, and giving of himself in ways that I didn't realize until we were older. Yes, of course we had our struggles. He had disappointments and made mistakes. He would be the first to admit them. But through it all, the basic goodness of my father withstood it and came through to the other side.

I am glad I was able to see him a few weeks before he went, through the dance of pixels and electrons of Zoom. Dad looked pretty good for someone in his condition. He waved and said he loved me. I hoped against hope that it would not be the last time I saw him; that after this was all over, I would get to be with him and share the two books I sent him: "Swallows and Amazons," the books from his childhood that he shared with me and taught me to love good writing and sailing, and the "Field Guide to the Birds" by Roger Tory Peterson, the book that we shared when we walked through the woods or watched them at the bird-feeders. Those books were on the shelf in his room when he slipped away. That was as close as I could be to him, and it was all I could ask.

One last thing: Hey, Dad, did you hear the one about the fox, the squirrel, and the raccoon? It's a really good one.

Philip smiles at the mound, then exits.

END OF MONOLOGUE.

Just A Local

CHARACTER: Kenny, well-built, late twenties; handyman.

PLACE and TIME: A summer cottage enclave on Lake Michigan. Summer, present day.

Kenny is asked by some summer residents what he really thinks of them. Honestly.

KENNY: You're not any different than the rest of us. I know, you've got money and you live in nice places somewhere else, and when you come up here you try and fit in with your thirty-year-old cars and your log cabins without air conditioning, but no one cares. To us you're nothing special. We know you. We know your stories, your secrets, but don't worry; remember, we're just the locals and we're invisible. But honestly, no one gives a shit. We know we're just part of your summer vacation away from the real world. After you're gone, we just sit around the Northwoods Tavern and laugh and tell stories about the time we had to pull someone's car out of the ditch 'cause their kid got drunk out at Lighthouse Point and did a woodsie in their dad's Buick. *(Beat.)* And don't worry. I'll never tell who invited me out for a little midnight skinny-dip off their dock.

END OF MONOLOGUE.

Quite The Connoisseur

CHARACTER: Alex, mid-thirties.

PLACE and TIME: Bare stage, any time.

Alex, mid-thirties, enters and looks out at the audience.

ALEX: Okay, so if you must know, the reason I drink La Croix is that as of two years ago last Thursday, I've been sober. I did the whole thing, the Twelve Steps, the Serenity prayer, all of it. So now all I drink is water, okay? And I'll have you know that I've become quite the connoisseur, too. I've tried 'em all: San Pelegrino, Perrier, DaSani, Evian, Crystal Springs, even plain old tap from the Brita filter jug. But La Croix's the one and that's all I drink. Well, y'know, when I'm out on the town I'll try the house water, but if I have a choice, it's the one. It's clear, it pours well, and unlike some of your plain old generic supermarket brands, it doesn't taste like it came out of the garden hose from behind the garage. And you know what the best part is? No more having a hangover and my tongue tasting like the entire Cuban army marched over it in their stocking feet. No more waking up in my own puke. No more blackouts or trying to take my pants off over my head. Yeah, water may be odorless, tasteless, and colorless, but at least it saved my life.

END OF MONOLOGUE.

Remember Me?

CHARACTER: My Left Ankle.

PLACE and TIME: Anywhere, any time.

My Left Ankle enters, looks up, and waves.

MY LEFT ANKLE: Hey, there, remember me? Yeah, you know, the one place on your body where you broke some bones? That was a hell of a day: February 2, 1989, Longmont, Colorado. It was cold and the weather guys were warning of an Alberta Clipper bringing below-zero temperatures, so you thought you'd be smart and put some anti-freeze in the Buick. On the way back to the house you didn't see that patch of ice in the driveway, and you in your worn sneakers and... (*Shudders.*) You heard a dull snap, and then you were like an overturned turtle, flailing, the pain shooting through you, screaming for Allen... In that moment, a cog in your universe shifted just a little bit.

The rest is kind of a blur. Allen carried you to his dad's pickup and drove you to the E.R. at Longmont United. You were x-rayed, filled out forms, and waited. And waited. You had to pee, but you couldn't stand up and then they brought you that plastic jug and... Well, there are more humiliating things to do in a hospital waiting room, I suppose, but I can't think of one. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity of staring at a silent TV that was showing game shows and soap operas, the doctor comes in and says you need surgery to put the bones back together. You ask him if that's the only way – as if being a freshly-minted PhD in playwriting gave you insight into the field of orthopedics – and he says yes, that's the only way. More forms, more needles, gripping Allen's hand as you both try to hold it together – him trying to laugh at your jokes – then slowly the fog rolls in as the drugs take over and you tell the surgical team that you're not here for the colostomy because you can never get shoes to match the bag. And you're under.

The kitten is staring back at you. It looks startled, but it is unblinking, unmoving. Off in the distance you hear a series of high-pitched beeps. A soft female voice says, "Breathe." You take a breath, the noise stops. You feel weak, your body heavy. You try to look around. Soft lighting, chemical smells, muffled sounds, people moving. The alarm sounds again and the voice repeats, "Breathe." Your throat is dry. You are very tired. Darkness moves in.

The light comes back slowly. Your right hand is resting on your chest. A long metal cap like a thimble with a wire running from it encloses your index finger. You try to lift your arm, but it is too heavy. Once again you hear the beeping and you take a deep breath.

Your head is clearing. The kitten is a poster on the ceiling: "Hang In There, Baby." You are in bed, the covers lightly tucked around you. Your left leg throbs but you cannot move it.

So, there you are. Your left leg is in a cast up to your knee. You can't walk on it. You get lessons on how to use crutches, you get a handicapped parking permit, and you borrow a wheelchair from a friend. You learn that even the simplest task like bathing requires planning, and forget about carrying a cup of coffee. You're now living in a world that is not designed for you, and it's a very different view from a wheelchair. People look at you differently, or they look away, keeping their

distance as if broken bones are contagious. Children point and stare. What's wrong with him, they ask. You smile and nod.

But after twelve weeks, the cast comes off. You are able to take a shower instead of a sponge bath, and the simple liberty of walking through a door is a cause for quiet celebration. The wheelchair is returned, the crutches are in the closet, and life is back to what passes for normal.

But I'm still here... that faint straight line in your skin with the faint dots beside it where the stitches were that reminds you of that morning, that day, the next three months. Sometimes, when the weather's right, I'll ache and you'll think of the three screws embedded in your bones. But I'll be with you for the rest of your life to remind you of how fortunate you are that it was only temporary; that the cog in your universe moved back into its rightful place. Not everyone is so fortunate. Remember that.

My Left Ankle exits, perhaps with a bit of a limp.

END OF MONOLOGUE.

Simple Black Marks

CHARACTER: An English teacher. The role can be played by any gender, any ethnicity.

PLACE and TIME: A classroom at a prestigious New England private day school. End of the school year.

An English teacher has been let go at the end of the school year. They enter the classroom carrying a moving box full of paperback books and address the class.

TEACHER: Just for once, listen. All my life I wanted to be a teacher. To share my love of the language, the words that make a difference, to explore the ideas, the dreams, the fears, the realities, the fantasies, and the truths about what makes our minds tick, makes us love and be loved, and laugh and cry and hope and escape. There's more of that in this box of bound paper than anything else in the world, and the only reason they exist is to share what they have to offer. It's no wonder evil people burn them; they scare them with their simple black marks on the paper, and those words can change more lives than all the armies and politicians ever have or could hope to. A simple thought conveyed from one person to another means more than all the money in the world, and the written word has changed the world time and again with such simple phrases as "In the beginning" or "We the people." That's all I ever wanted to do: share that simple idea and maybe, just maybe, inspire someone. And if it was just one, well, then, that's one more than yesterday, and I'll reach one more tomorrow. *(Beat.)* But not here. Maybe some other place. And just to be sure, I'm taking these with me.

END OF MONOLOGUE.

That Goddam Tree

CHARACTER: Larry: Mid-sixties white heterosexual homophobe.

PLACE and TIME: Anywhere. Anytime.

Larry, a white heterosexual homophobe enters.

LARRY: Hey, I saw your pictures on Facebook. The ones you posted of your trip to Colorado back in September. I saw the one you took of the tree that was planted in memory of your “friend.” Yeah, was that the one you wrote that play about; what’s is called...? Oh, yeah: “A Tree Grows in Longmont.” Cute title. Anyway, I thought it was strange that you’d post something like that on Facebook. I mean, all sorts of people could see it. And you said... how did you put it... “I will always call you sweetheart.” And you called him your “husband,” right?

But you were never really married, am I right? Oh, yeah, I know it’s legal now and all that, but it’s not like you were really married, was it? Didn’t you guys break up? So, how come you felt like you could call him that? Your husband?

Look, I get it. Whatever makes it work for you, but c’mon... two guys just ... living together... That’s not a marriage. Not like what I had with my wife. We were really married; in the church in the name of Jesus, we had kids, the house, the dog. I guess that’s what makes me wonder... what gives you the right to say that what you had was the same as what we had? We had forty years of it and then when she passed, I knew that what I’d lost was more than just someone who I slept with. I just don’t think it’s the same thing. I miss her. Every day. So do the kids and the grandkids...

So, I don’t think you should be going around telling the world, flaunting it on Facebook, that what you guys had was...like anything the rest of the normal people had. It’s embarrassing.

And that tree. Someday it’s gonna die. And what will you have left? At least when my wife passed, I had all those memories, those children and grandchildren, and friends who cared, not to mention a headstone with her name and mine next to it. But you? I just don’t see it happening with that goddam tree.

Larry shakes his head and exits.

END OF MONOLOGUE.

Zero Sum Game

CHARACTER: DAVE GRANGER: Twenty-two. An Army medic at a MASH in Vietnam.

PLACE and TIME: Sugar Ridge, Ohio. June 1974.

Dave Granger is a twenty-two-year-old Army medic stationed at a MASH in Vietnam. He is home on leave visiting his parents in Sugar Ridge, Ohio.

DAVE: I killed a man. I didn't pull a gun and shoot him. Someone else did that. But I killed him. (*Beat.*) About a year ago it was late at night. I'm asleep in my bunk, dead to the world after twelve hours in the O.R. when all of a sudden, I hear them hollering, "we got wounded!" This patrol got hit bad and we had about ten men coming in with bullet wounds, shrapnel fragments, all sorts of stuff, but nothing we can't handle. I'm in pre-op doing my job and there's this kid. I mean, he looks about fifteen, and he's got a bad belly wound. The aid station patched up what they could and loaded him up for us. I get a morphine drip line in him ready to go in to the O.R. The doc comes over, takes a look under the bandage, shakes his head, and goes on to the next litter. He's knows the kid's not gonna make it no matter what he does, and he can save the next guy.

His name was Josh. Josh Evans from Julesburg, Colorado. I looked it up. It's a little place out on the prairie. So, Josh... he's still conscious, but he's doped up on the morphine. He looks at me. And he doesn't say a word. He looks at the IV drip, then looks at me. And I know what he wants. So, I go over and I dial up the drip just a notch, and I see him, his big brown eyes staring at me. He starts to smile, all peaceful-like, and then, like he's drifting off to sleep, he goes. I dial back the morphine, I tell the doc he's gone, and he says okay, get him to the morgue. We finished the O.R. session, and I went back to my bunk. Another night in 'Nam.

We treat life – people – like they're mosquitos. We swat them and move on. How many people have died so someone else can gain power, to stay in power, to force others to believe in a superstition or their politics, to take their property, to... Why?

I took a life. Josh is gone. His work is done. He'll never have to take another life for someone else. I took a life to save a life. Zero sum game.

END OF MONOLOGUE.