

IMPACT

By Todd Ford

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IMPACT

A One Act Drama

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SYNOPSIS: September 11th is an event that dramatically affected us as individuals and as a nation. In this series of interrelated scenes and monologues we are given the opportunity to reflect on how this event rippled through our lives. *Impact* expresses our fear, hope and anger but more importantly poses the question. “What have we learned?”

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(9 female, 3 male, 0-1 extras, doubling possible)

JUDE (f).....	Early thirties, reflecting about the tragedy. <i>(1 line)</i>
RUTH (f).....	Late teens, daughter, angry about her father's death; learns forgiveness and respect. <i>(36 lines)</i>
RACHEL (f).....	Early twenties, remembers her life being saved. <i>(1 line)</i>
REBEKAH (f).....	Mid-forties, widowed mother, upset about her husband's death; teaches her daughter about forgiveness and respect. <i>(34 lines)</i>
JOAN (f)	Early thirties, teacher. <i>(1 line)</i>
DENISE (f).....	Late teens, daughter, upset about her parents' death. <i>(1 line)</i>
AAMILAH (f).....	Twenties, widow, angry about her husband's participation in the tragedy. <i>(1 line)</i>
ALEXANDER (m)	Early thirties, son, angry about his father. <i>(1 line)</i>
SYDNEY (f)	Early forties, widow, tormented about the tragedy. <i>(1 line)</i>

TONY (m).....	Mid-forties, architect, admiring the memorial. <i>(1 line)</i>
RICK (m)	Early thirties, widower, upset about his wife's death. <i>(1 line)</i>
AMY (f)	Thirties, playwright, reflecting on the tragedy. <i>(1 line)</i>
REBEKAH'S HUSBAND (m)	Mid-forties, dead husband; comes back as Rebekah's last memory of him. Can be double cast. <i>(Non-Speaking)</i>

DURATION: 50 minutes

PROP LIST

- Letter
- Picture
- 4 Roses
- Laptop

PRODUCTION NOTES

Impact can be performed bare stage using lighting to highlight the speaker when monologues are being presented and a full stage wash during the scenes between Ruth and Rebekah. We found during our production that having the lights remain up on a frozen actor after they have delivered their monologue until their set is completed (they chunk in sets of three or four depending on the section) added a poignancy to when they all freeze on stage at the end of the play. Costuming can be simply done. In our production we had our actors wear all black in the style of their character with one colored item representing their key emotion (for example Alexander was in a black button up oxford shirt, black slacks with a red tie representing anger). In the final scene all characters who had the same emotional color froze in the same area and the actress playing Amy was near that group when she spoke about the emotion. Doubling and gender flexibility is definitely possible in this script. The only characters whose gender cannot be changed are Ruth, Rebekah, Aamilah, Sydney and Rick. Please feel free to experiment with staging and transitions to suit your own needs.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Impact was first produced at Union Academy Charter School on October 18th 2013 with the following cast:

JUDEShannon O’Grady
RUTH..... Mikayla Marlow
RACHEL..... Milissia Koncelik
REBEKAH..... Caroline Kirk
JOAN..... Madison Montgomery
DENISE.....Shelby McVicker
AAMILAH..... Shawna Sheperd
ALEXANDER Ethan Beck
SYDNEY..... Caroline Kirk
TONY.....Lucas Daugherty
RICK Ricky Moore
AMYMaxine Warren
REBEKAH’S HUSBAND Ethan Beck

AT RISE: JUDE, RUTH and RACHEL are evenly spaced throughout the stage in darkness. A table sits upstage center with two chairs unlit. Lights come up on JUDE.

JUDE: 2,996 crosses dot the landscape, placed by shaking hands as the dew slowly draws upon the lawn. 2,996 crosses. Lives shattered, broken, ended too soon. Years have repaired buildings, repaired governments, repaired fears, but the crosses still remain. As I place each one, my mind utters a silent prayer for those left behind. As I place each cross, my breath catches in my throat realizing its significance. As I place each cross, my salty tears water the soft, green grass. I cry because each cross represents a name. Each name represents a life. Each life touched countless others. The years can heal a lot but it will never close the gulf of a missing life. It will never repair a broken family. It will never give a child a father or mother back. I feel the rage swell in my breast, a natural reaction to the pain I have witnessed. For a moment, I am back there. I stood stone still afraid of what I was witnessing. A feeling of helplessness filled me as I witnessed the aircraft disappear in a shower of fire and glass a tourist, unable to help, miles away witnessing the beginning of a national tragedy. How many lives were lost at that moment? How many people scarred forever? Then I am here again standing among the crosses. I kneel on the soft grass, still damp with the moisture of the morning. I do the one thing I know how to do. I pray. I pray with the ferocity of a broken soul. I pray among the silent witness of 2,996 souls. I never prayed before this. I went through the motions. I attended church. I called myself a Christian, but I never really prayed. I never really believed. I wanted to, but I never saw the purpose. In my life, surrounded with the trappings of a material world, with appointments and work, with a nice house and material wealth, I didn't see the need. I would think to myself "Why do we need heaven when I have all I need here?" Now, kneeling among a memorial of such profound number, I realize I was wrong. Life without redemption is meaningless. We never know when this world will end for us. How can we live without the acceptance that something is beyond? Before I stand, I utter a prayer of thanksgiving. I thank God for the realization of what I did not understand before it's too late.

I thank the countless witnesses that brought me to this realization. My anger has dissipated because of my faith. I realize that to truly love your neighbor as yourself means to let go of hate no matter how profound. The number of crosses tells me to remember; to remember the lives of those who went before us, to remember the families and pray for their pain. To remember the fragility of life that became so obvious on that day. The cross itself though, that reminds me to forgive.

JUDE freezes in place as lights come up on RUTH. The lights remain up on JUDE and RUTH throughout RUTH'S monologue.

RUTH: A tear slides down my cheek as I trace the name. I feel the cool bronze beneath my fingers and hear the soft sound of rushing waters. The names number in the thousands. Others stand making rubbings, taking pictures, remembering loved ones. I simply trace the bronze. Feeling it makes it real. The name makes it real. It brings into awesome clarity that my father was here, that my father died here. It also brings into focus what I failed to do. Years had passed, far longer than the ten years that mark the anniversary of his death. I had not spoken. I had instead dwelled on my anger, dwelled on my hate, dwelled on the unexplainable and horrifying things my father had done. Whenever my thoughts lingered on him, they were dark, grainy, and scattered. Flashes of abuse. My father drinking too much to hide the pain he felt. A failure at his job, a failure at his marriage, he drank to hide the intense pain he felt. The liquor gave rise to his anger. The scene flashes forward. Angry words through a door, my mother screaming, a slap, the dull thud of her unconscious body hitting the floor. Another skip in the picture. Now, there is a loud knocking at my door, then, the hard, repetitive pounding of his fist, the rattling of a doorknob, finally, the splintering of wood. The final moments have no image, just sensation. The burning sting of a slap. The sickening crunch of a broken nose. The warm trickle of blood. The salty taste of my tears. The dull nothing of slipping into unconsciousness. I left. I did what I had to do. I left and never looked back. I allowed the anger, hate, and resentment to grow within me like a choking weed. It impeded my ability to love. It blocked my ability for compassion.

It destroyed my kindness for my fellow man. Then, on that day in September, it happened. I saw the tower where my father worked collapse into a twisted, charred form. I watched the smoke drift from the gaping hole into the heavens. I had a lot of expectations for the moment my father passed. I expected a sense of relief. I expected a sense of vindication. I expected to be whole again. Instead, my heart reflected the dark, smoking hole of his tomb, bitter, empty, devoid of any life. I had lost the opportunity to make peace with you. To look you in the eyes and tell you that despite what you did, I flourished. To tell you that despite what you did, I succeeded, but most importantly, that despite what you did, I love you. Even all those years, I loved you. I kept away not because I didn't love, but because I did; but I was afraid you didn't love me. Over the years, I learned that despite my anger, deep beneath it all was love and forgiveness. I wanted to tell you, but I've lost the opportunity now. Instead, I'm left here tracing your name in the bronze because the name makes it real. You were a real person, you had a real family and they feel real pain.

RUTH freezes in place. Lights come up on RACHEL. The lights remain up on JUDE, RUTH and RACHEL throughout RACHEL'S monologue.

RACHEL: September 11th, for many this day is a day of mourning but to me it is a day of life. I don't remember the tragedy. You can ask me where I was and I'll have an answer. You can ask me what I was doing and I'll have an answer but I have no memory of it. As to where I was, I was there at the heart of the tragedy. I was present when the planes hit. As to what I was doing, I was sleeping. I lay swaddled in a cradle in a nursery sleeping. I had been brought into the nursery just hours before and placed in the withered hands of a daycare worker. My mother uttered no words just turned away and left. I remember none of this, but the story has been told many times. Shortly after I was laid to rest, the building shook. Panic ensued but I never woke. I stayed peaceful dreaming even as the fire spread. I lay in the innocent sleep of childhood while people rushed for escape. A smile crossed my dreaming face as Emilia, the very day care worker I had been left with, scooped me from my cradle and fled the building holding me close.

She fought through crowds, dust and debris, all the while holding me in the close shelter of her embrace. When she arrived to safety, she was coughing, covered in dust but unfolded her arms to reveal my clean pink shining face. Her husband died that day but not her love. She took all of her hope, love and compassion and poured it on me. She did this despite not being my blood or my race. She did this despite the fact that my skin, my eyes, my hair all reminded me of the ones who killed her husband. She took me into her home and raised me as her own. So each year as I watch the remembrances of that tragic day, as I watch the images of smoke and fire and death, as I watch people gather and mourn and weep at their loved ones tomb, I think of something different. I think of the sacred day that I was given a chance at a new life. I think of how a stranger fought through dust and rubble to save me. I think of how a woman looked upon a face that she should revile and hate and found only beauty, love and forgiveness. I strive to become an example of the compassion she teaches. When I am looked down upon, insulted and shunned because I share the features of terrible men, I share this story with those who insult me. When I hear of the atrocities that people who looked like me committed, I remember this story so that I realize that race does not define a person. When I feel the fear and tension from those around me, I reach out to them and help them to understand. My mother is gone now but her legacy lives on in me. My role, to help others, is sacred to me.

Lights come up on the table and chairs. In unison JUDE, RUTH and RACHEL begin saying their monologues again. RUTH sits in one of the chairs at the table. JUDE and RACHEL approach her saying their monologue as they do. RUTH reacts in panic at their voices. As they leave (or in RUTH'S case sit) they stop saying their monologue. REBEKAH enters to find RUTH visibly upset at the table.

REBEKAH: I'm leaving now, honey. Dinner is in the oven if you need anything

RUTH looks up REBEKAH realizes she's been crying.

What's wrong?

RUTH: This, everything, I don't understand how you can go about today like it's a normal day.

REBEKAH: Because we have to Ruth, we have to...

RUTH: Don't say it. Don't you dare say that we have to move on.

REBEKAH: But we do.

RUTH: But I can't. I can't accept that my father was murdered.

REBEKAH: Lots of people lost people that day, Ruth.

RUTH: I don't care about lots of people, Mom.

REBEKAH: I think if you came with me, you would see that you should.

RUTH: Why should I come with you?

REBEKAH: To remember.

RUTH: Why would I want to remember?

REBEKAH: To show others you care.

RUTH: By reminding them of losing their loved ones?

REBEKAH: To get support.

RUTH: I didn't get support from the one person who could have helped me.

REBEKAH and RUTH'S lines begin overlapping.

REBEKAH: Ruth that's not fair I...

RUTH: You abandoned me, Mom.

REBEKAH: Tried to help you but you wouldn't listen. I tried to tell you...

RUTH: You never talked to me about it.

REBEKAH: To pray, and when that didn't work I encouraged you to...

RUTH: You pushed your responsibility on God and on other people.

REBEKAH: Get counseling. It was so hard to get through to you...

RUTH and REBEKAH: It was like I lost two people that day.

RUTH: *(Suddenly quiet.)* I never knew you felt that way.

REBEKAH: How could I not? I lost my husband. My daughter suddenly wouldn't speak to me.

RUTH: You always seemed so calm; so self-assured. I never knew you were hurting.

REBEKAH: You never asked. I needed to be self-assured to help you through this. But I needed help too.

RUTH: You could have come to me.

REBEKAH: You were so full of hate; so full of anger. It wasn't what I needed.

RUTH: Of course I was angry. I lost my dad.

REBEKAH: And I lost my husband; but I couldn't hate forever.

RUTH: Why?

REBEKAH: Because then they win. They wanted to plant fear, doubt, and hate by killing people. I won't let them win. So, we gather every year on this date, to show solidarity, to show them that they didn't win, to help each other.

RUTH: I guess I never thought of it that way.

REBEKAH: You can still come you know.

REBEKAH takes RUTH'S hand and they leave. Lights go to blackout. JOAN, DENISE and AAMILAH spread out throughout the front of stage. Lights come up on JOAN.

JOAN: My worldview was shaken that day. I had thought of myself as open minded. Free from prejudice. Free from judgment. I had never let the doubts of racism enter my heart. Ten years ago, the barrier I had put between myself and those judgments crumbled into the dust. It became us and them, they who had attacked, they who had violently robbed our country of its citizens, they who had killed in the name of religion. How could we trust any of them? We who were victims. We who were only trying to help them. We whose innocent blood was spilled. I realized that the only way to protect myself was a lack of trust, to treat anyone of that religion as if they were a zealot. To treat anyone of that race as if they were a terrorist. I lived my life in that manner, but then one day it all changed. I took my class to another memorial; a memorial of fear and genocide, a memorial of denial and hate. I stared at the photos of emaciated people; kept like animals in cages, herded into box cars, and forced to toil for their captors. Then I saw other pictures, pictures of their captors. Pictures of them standing tall in uniforms their words talking of patriotism and protecting their country. I stood before thousands of names and saw my own name among them. In that moment, I realized the mistake I had made. I had judged a people by the actions of a minority. Before me, I saw the possible result. September eleventh was a day of horror.

A day where we were senselessly attacked, but how we respond to this tragedy is our choice. Do we become like our attackers? Do we judge man by their creed, color or gender? What type of road does this take us down? For me, I need look no further than the past to see the future that lies at the end of that path. It is a future of death. It is a future lined with the bodies of the innocent. It is a future that will inevitably take away the very freedom that we struggle so hard to keep. We stand at a crossroads. We, as a country, have a choice. I, as a person, have a choice. We must remember, we must honor, but we must not succumb to the white hot anger of our hearts. For I have seen the path that anger leads to. It leads to a path of hate, intolerance, violence, and genocide. It leads to a place of unspeakable horror. September 11th caused my heart to harden but, ten years later I have opened my eyes. I have not forgotten, but I have forgiven.

Lights remain up on JOAN and lights come up on DENISE. JOAN freezes in position.

DENISE: I was only a child when I saw them disappear, both my parents gone in a flash of flame, the images strewn across television causing me to relive the horror, loss, and sadness every minute of every hour that day. I cried until I slept and then awoke and cried some more. Today, ten years later, I live it all again. I see the images, see the memorials, hear the words spoken all reminding me of a pain that I thought had healed but hadn't. I walk to my father's study in a house left to me full of memories. I sit in his chair feeling the large contour of where his body once sat and I weep. I don't know why but I open a drawer. In the drawer I see a weathered yellowed envelope. The scrawling barely legible handwriting of my father crosses the envelope, one word "Denise", my name. It brings fond memories of picnics and barbeques, the smell of summer smoke almost tangible in the air. My father, a large intimidating man until a smile softened his face, draws my thin delicate mother to his side and kisses her on the cheek. I slide my finger under the flap of the envelope and open it hearing the dry paper crackle at my touch. I unfold it and stare at the words through blurred tears and read. *(Pulls out the envelope and opens it.)*

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