

Illinois Wesleyan University

From the Selected Works of Jared Brown

Summer June, 2004

Kathy on the Spot

Jared Brown, *Illinois Wesleyan University*

KATHY ON THE SPOT

a ten-minute play by

Jared Brown

© 2004 Jared Brown

KATHY ON THE SPOT

A male voice is heard in the darkness, amplified over the sound system.

MALE VOICE: Kathy, let's start with you. You have ten minutes.

Lights come up. All we see is a college-age student in a chair. Slowly, shyly, awkwardly, she stands.

KATHY: Um. Well, I didn't exactly finish the reading, but – I do have a few ideas. Well, maybe not *ideas*, exactly, but some thoughts that popped into my head. Well, no, not *popped*. That wouldn't be the right word, because I *did* think about the question. So I guess what I have are *conclusions*. Or if that seems too, like, pompous or something, I could just say . . . Well, I'm not really sure.

An awkward moment of silence.

Would it be okay if I blow my nose? (*She looks at her "teacher," located somewhere in the audience*) Oh, thanks. (*She takes out a Kleenex, blows her nose, puts the Kleenex in her pocket*) I think I'm coming down with something. My roommate was sick all night and she probably gave it to me, whatever it is. I should have gone to the infirmary. (*Looks at her watch*) If I left now, I could get there before lunch. (*Looks at the "teacher"*) Well, I guess I'll go later.

Anyway, you said you wanted our impressions of the reading, right? Well, I had some pretty strong impressions of the first couple of pages – which, to be honest, is as far as I got. I was really interested, and I wanted to finish, but I couldn't, because . . . Well, I guess you don't really care why I didn't finish. You've heard all the excuses already, right? This big german shepherd came through the library and suddenly ate the article before I could get beyond the second page! (*She smiles broadly, then her smile fades*) Just kidding. (*Pause*)

Would you like to know what I thought about when I was walking back to the dorm? I thought about how the author could know about all that stuff, because he wasn't there at the time, was he? I mean, he couldn't have been, could he? But even, let's say he *was* there, even though we all know that he wasn't. Like, I hate it when somebody pretends to know everything that went on practically a hundred years ago when he couldn't possibly . . . I mean, even if he read everything in the library, he couldn't have known how Eleanor *felt*. Even if he knew what she *did*. Which I also doubt, by the way. I mean, I hardly know what *I* think, and I didn't live a hundred years ago. (*Pause*)

So, anyway, my impressions – or thoughts, or whatever they are. (*Pause*) You know, my mom told me before the semester began that it would take time for me to feel really comfortable here – and it's *true*, she was right, I don't really feel comfortable. I mean, in high school we didn't have to stand up and talk about our ideas. We could just listen to the teacher or pretend to listen, anyway. So I feel, you know, a little

uncomfortable. I mean, part of it is that I'm not used to having everybody look at me and (*looking around at the other – imaginary – students*) I kind of wish you'd look somewhere else. At the blackboard, maybe, or the door. (*Looks at the "teacher"*) Actually, I'm not too comfortable even with *you* looking at me. Sometimes I feel that you're looking me over, you know? If I didn't know better, I'd think you were getting ready to hit on me. Just *kidding!* (*But she isn't.*) Like you think I think you'd think about me that way. I'm probably just a number to you, right? Well, anyway, I hope it's a good number. (*Pause*)

So, you're married, aren't you? I think Jenny told me she met your wife somewhere, like at the mall or maybe on campus at some event. Whatever. (*Pause*)

But, anyway, you wanted my impressions of the *reading*, didn't you? That's what my dad would say. "Stay focused, Kathy, stop rambling. Get with the program." (*Pause*) That's what he used to say before he left us, anyway. My mom and my sister and me. It's been – how long? Let's see. He left in '98, so I guess it's been six years. My God, I didn't realize it was that long. But, you know, now I don't think about him so much. I mean, I would have been about eleven when he left, so I've lived practically a third of my life without my Dad in the house. More, even, now that I think about it. You know how most Dads stay in touch with their kids even if they leave? Well, mine doesn't. I'll bet it's been two years since I even got a postcard. (*Pause*)

I remember a few days before he left, he and my mom had this violent argument, you know? She was yelling, he was yelling, my sister was crying, I was trying to hold my hands tight over her ears so she wouldn't hear anything, but of course I couldn't hold tight enough. And then he slammed the door and we never saw him again.

So, about three years later, Mom started dating again, but it never worked out, you know? She's pretty lonely, I guess, now that I'm not living at home, and Kelly is going on college visits practically every weekend, from what she tells me. I don't think she'll come here, though. (*Smiles*) Be pretty difficult having to compete with her high-achieving sister, right? (*Her smile fades*) I mean, I think I'm doing okay. Maybe not top of the class, but pretty good. At least a B. Probably a B-plus. (*Pause*)

Next year, you know, I'm planning to try out for the choir and be on the soccer team. And maybe write for the college paper or something. My adviser says not to take on too much, but I know I can do it. If I get all A's this year, I can afford to let the old grade point slip a little next year, you know?

I told Jenny that I thought I'd ace my Philosophy class – we're both taking it this semester – and she *laughed* at me. I said, "Why are you laughing?" and she said, "Well, don't you think you ought to do the readings if you're planning to pass the tests?" My God, in high school I never read *anything* except what I felt like reading and I passed every class. I don't know what *you're* going to give me, but I hope it'll be good.

I used to know this girl in high school, one day she got up right in the middle of class and she said to this teacher, "I'd do *anything*, and I mean *anything*, to get an A." So

everybody knew what she was talking about and everybody laughed, but you know what? She got an A, she told me later. I always meant to find out if that was true, but I don't know how I'd do that. I couldn't just walk into the Registrar's office and ask to see her grades, or call up her Mom and ask what she got in her English class. Or maybe I could've, but I didn't. *(Pause)*

So, what was it you wanted me to talk about? Oh, yeah, I remember. Why do I think Eleanor Roosevelt stayed with Franklin even though they weren't exactly *intimate*, if you know what I mean. Well, like I said, I didn't get very far in the article. *(She seems about ready to drift off, but manages to focus)* Last summer, though, I read a few books about the Roosevelts – just for myself, you know, not for any class. Let's see. There was *Eleanor and Franklin* by Joseph Lash, who was a great friend of Eleanor's, even though he was much younger than she was. That book weighed seventeen pounds or something. Just kidding. And *No Ordinary Time* by, what's her name? – Doris Kearns Goodwin, which I think won the Pulitzer Prize or something. So, like, based on those books, and, of course, on my *thoughts* and *feelings*, I'd say that Eleanor stayed with Franklin because, even though she knew about his love affair with Lucy Mercer, she wanted to affect his, you know, policies, because she had this strong sense of, like, social justice, and she kept whispering in his ear until he agreed to present her programs to the congress. Of course, he was pretty big on social justice, too, but he was, like, *constrained*, because he didn't want to get too far ahead of public opinion, but she didn't care about that. I guess since she wasn't elected, she felt more free to say what she thought, maybe. And also, like, she knew she was indispensable – is that the right word? I think so. Anyway, she was indispensable to Franklin because he was, like, confined to a wheelchair, and she could go around the country and be, like, his eyes and ears. So she knew what was going on in the country a lot better than he did, you know? Then she'd come back to the White House or wherever and tell him everything she'd seen and heard.

There's a lot more, too. I'd like to tell you what James McGregor Burns said in *The Three Roosevelts*, but I think my ten minutes are up. *(Begins to sit, then stands)*. Don't forget, I'd do *anything* – and I mean *anything* – to get an A on this assignment. Just kidding. *(Sits down as the lights fade)*