

# **FRED AND FRIEDA**

by

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*Fred and Frieda* (Play)  
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*In memory of  
Karel Weissberg (1944 – 2009)*

*In honor of  
William Keyes (1921- )  
761<sup>st</sup> Tank Battalion*

## FRED AND FRIEDA

### Cast of Characters

(in order of appearance)

#### REAL PEOPLE:

**Frieda Horowitz**, 67, concentration camp survivor and music teacher

**Michael Horowitz**, 49, Frieda's oldest son and CEO of a container board business

**Fred Cephas**, 71, WWII veteran, 761<sup>st</sup> Tank Battalion, and retired high school teacher

**Lisa Brown**, 19, Fred's granddaughter, computer science major at Howard University

#### MEMORIES:

**Frieda** and **Fred** play themselves at all times. **Zeyde**, **Motorcycle Thug**, **Mrs. Goldstein**, **Black GI**, **Bus Driver**, **White GI**, **German Soldier**, and **Waiter** roles can be multicasted in whatever way seems appropriate with available talent. The play *can* be cast with only four actors.

Sc	WHEN	WHERE	WHO
1	1997FX	A desecrated cemetery	Biker, Zeyde
2	1997	Frieda's apt in Berlin	Frieda, Michael, Fred, Lisa
3	1997	Michael's house, Detroit	Frieda, Zeyde, Michael
4	1997FX	Phone call	Frieda, Michael
5	1997	Fred's house, Annapolis	Lisa, Fred
6	1997FX	Phone call	Fred, Frieda
7	1997	Frieda's apt, in Berlin	FMFL
8	1996FX	Detroit synagogue	Mrs Goldstein
9	1997	Frieda's apt, in Berlin	FMFL
10	1966FX	Restaurant, Union Sta. DC	Fred, Frieda, Waiter
11	1997	Frieda's apt	FMFL
12	1943FX	Camp Claiborne, LA	FRED, white GI, black GI, bus driver
13	1944FX	ETO Patton's Army	Fred, bl GI, whGI
14	1944FX	Shermans vs Panzer	Fred, bl GI, German soldier
15	1997	Back to F's apt	FMFL
16	1945FX	Ohrdruf CC	FandF
17	1997	Back to Berlin	FMFL

## ***Fred & Frieda* Lexicon and Pronunciation Guide**

Stressed syllable is capitalized

Bastogne – ba-STONE – city in Belgium (Fr.)  
Bathsheba – bat-SHAY-ba – cat's name  
Bertelsmann – BEAR-tels-mahn - large German communications corp. (Ger.)  
Berthe – BEAR-tay – woman's name (Ger.)  
Bracha – BRACH-ah (guttural ch as in Scottish *loch*) – blessing (Hew.)  
Bubbe – BUB-bee – grandmother (Yid.)  
Buchenwald –BOO-chen-vahld (guttural ch as in Scottish *loch*) – German concentration camp (Ger.)  
Cephas – SEE-fus – man's name  
Das Kleine Museum des Gädächtnisses – dahs KLINE-uh moo-ZAY-oom des geh-DECK-nis-ses – the little museum of memory (Ger.)  
Elendsviertel—E-lends-fear-tel—a slum (Ger.)  
Franz – FRANZ – man's name (Ger.)  
Gelato – je -LA-to – ice cream (It.)  
Jah – YAHR – yes – (Ger.)  
Ketzeleh—KET-se-lah—dearest, little kitten (Yid.)  
Kibbutzim – kee-boot-TSEEM – inhabitants of an Israeli commune – (Heb.)  
Ku'Damm – koo-DAM – Kustenfradamm, main avenue in Berlin (Ger.)  
Mürbe Teig – MUR-buh TIE-guh – sugar cookie (Ger.)  
Neue Synagogue – NOY-er – the largest synagogue in Berlin before WWII (Ger.)  
Ner Tamid – NARE ta-MEED – 'the eternal light', a ceremonial lamp in synagogues (Heb.)  
Oneg – OH-neg – refreshments after the Jewish service – (Heb.)  
Oranienburger Strasse – oh-RN-nee-en-boorg-uh STRAS-sah – the Berlin street that the Neue Synagogue's on (Ger.)  
Orhdruif – or-DROOF – German concentration camp, satellite of Buchenwald (Ger.)  
Pesach – PAY-such (guttural ch as in Scottish *loch*) – Passover, major Jewish religious holiday (Heb.)  
761<sup>st</sup> Tank Battalion – seven-sixty-first – all-black battalion and the spearhead for Gen. Patton's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army  
Schnell! - SHNEL – hurry! (Ger.)  
Schue –SHOO-ah – shoes (Ger.)  
Schwartzte Soldaten – SHVARTS-ah sol-DAH-tun – black soldiers (Ger.)  
Seabees – SEE-bees – American Naval youth group  
Siegfried – SEEK-freed – north-south line on the western border between France and German (Ger.)  
Shul – SHOOL – synagogue (Yid.)  
Spree –SHPRAY – the river that runs through Berlin (Ger.)  
Tateh – TA-teh – father (Yid.)  
Tater – TAY-ter – nickname from “Sweet Potato”  
Terezin – ter-reh-SEEN – Czech city that was a Jewish ghetto prison during WWII (Czech)  
Theresienstadt – ter-RAY-see-un-shtaht – German name for Terezin (Ger.)  
Weimar – VY-mar – German political era from x to y (Ger.)  
Weissensee – VY-sen-see – Largest Jewish cemetery in Berlin (Ger.)  
Westwall –VEST-vahl – the German fortifications on the western front during WWII (Ger.)  
Wir ergeben uns - VEER air-GAY-ben oons – We give up! (Ger.)  
Ye'simech Elohim ke-Sarah, Rivka, Ra-chel ve-Lay'ah – yeh-see-'MECH el-lo-'HEEM keh-sahr-RAH, reev-KAH, rah-CHEL vuh-lay-UH (Ye'simech and Rachel: guttural ch as in Scottish *loch*) – Beginning of the Jewish blessing (Heb.)  
Zeyde – ZAY-dee - grandfather

Prologue:

FX 1 Sc 1

*Motorcycles tear through a dark cemetery, riding through the night in their own personal playground. A MOTORCYCLE THUG enters and topples the tombstone, exits. ZEYDE enters, wearing a black suit and a black hat.*

ZEYDE

Oy! Shandeh! Shandeh!

*He exits.*

*At rise: FRIEDA's apartment in Berlin*

Sc 2

*FRIEDA rearranges the furniture in her Aunt Berthe's old apartment in eastern Berlin, nervously awaiting visitors. The furnishings are castoffs donated by the Jewish community of Berlin, mostly Russian emigres: a sofa and chairs, a table, some dishes, and an unusual rug, perhaps a bearskin. On the mantelpiece are a pair of Shabbat candles, a photo. She places a vase of yellow tulips in the center of a beaten-up "coffee table" that's a steamer trunk. On the table she places a plate of homemade cookies, then takes the cookies off the table.*

*She finishes making coffee and retreats to the window to watch the street.*

*A jet lands. [AUDIO]*

*MICHAEL, FRED, and LISA enter through the theater, if possible. MICHAEL leads the way, pulling a suitcase and consulting directions. FRED walks with the help of a handsome cane. LISA brings up the rear carrying a suitcase, a backpack, and wheeling another suitcase. MICHAEL knocks to enter. FRIEDA answers.*

FRIEDA

Hello! Hello! I can't believe it - you found me! Come in. Hello, darling!

*(FRIEDA hugs MICHAEL affectionately. FRED enters followed by LISA)*

Fred! I can't believe it's you.

*(FRIEDA shakes FRED's hand with both hands, excited but more restrained)*

Hello, who's this?

FRED

That's my Red Cap.

LISA

Are you going to behave yourself?

FRED

This is my granddaughter, Tater. This is Mrs. Horowitz.

FRIEDA

Please, Frieda. It's good to meet you, Tater, what a nice surprise.

LISA

*(They shake hands)*

Pleased to meet you. You can call me *Lisa*.

*(Shoots a look at FRED)*

FRIEDA

Let me take your coats.

*(Takes coats)*

Michael, put the bags over there. Now, I borrowed some inflatable mattresses, I hope they're okay. I may not have enough...

FRED

Don't worry about us. I booked rooms for Tater and me at the hotel down the street.

FRIEDA

Oh... fine. So, Michael, you can have the mattress or the sofa? I have blankets and pillows, but it's suddenly so cold...

MICHAEL

Mom, we just got here. We're not going to bed yet.

*(Walks around the apartment, taking in its shabby splendor)*

This is incredible!

FRIEDA

How were your flights? You found each other okay? It's *so* cold. When I went to do my shopping this morning, I had to buy a new scarf and warmer gloves...

*(FRED is staring at FRIEDA)*

MICHAEL

Mom, what are you doing here?

FRED

You look... different.

FRIEDA

I used to be thinner, and my hair...

FRED

Hmm.

FRIEDA

I'd know you *anywhere*.

FRED

You mean I *always* looked this old?

*(FRED embrace her and winces; his leg hurts)*

Ow!

FRIEDA

What wrong?

LISA

He broke his ankle at Thanksgiving.

FRIEDA

You have brittle bones?

FRED

No. I slipped on some ice on the patio and came down crooked.

FRIEDA

Because brittle bones...

FRED

I slipped and fell, that's all, thank you! For your concern.

LISA

He's *supposed* to do exercises.

FRED

Which I do. When I feel like it.

LISA

He's *supposed* to do them every day.

*(FRED begins half-heartedly doing ankle-strengthening exercises)*

MICHAEL

Mom, this is totally bizarre.

FRIEDA

How so?

MICHAEL

The building's abandoned for one thing.

FRIEDA

Not true. There are several other tenants.

MICHAEL

The block's surrounded by chain link fence. It looks like they're going to tear it down tomorrow.

FRIEDA

Not tomorrow. I'm a legal tenant.

MICHAEL

Why are you living in an abandoned building - in *Berlin*?

FRIEDA

I'll explain. Would you like some coffee? Lisa, what would you like? I have juice.

LISA

I'll have coffee, thank you.

FRED

Me too.

FRIEDA

Michael?

MICHAEL

Sure.

FRIEDA

Michael, get another cup over there.

*(MICHAEL brings an extra cup. FRIEDA brings over a tray with coffee, cups, and the plate of Muerbe Teig vanilla sugar cookies. She pours.)*

MICHAEL

Fred said he came to see you in Detroit. Why didn't you invite him over?

FRIEDA

I... don't remember. Fix it how you like. How were your flights?

MICHAEL

I *just* made it out before they closed the airport for ice.

FRIEDA

You were lucky.

*(To LISA)*

Is this your first time in Germany?

LISA

My first time in Europe!

FRIEDA

That was nice of your grandfather to bring you.

FRED

*(aside)*

Didn't have much choice.

LISA

Some people are plain foolish.

Excuse me? FRIEDA

Time she saw the world. Travel's educational. FRED

It certainly can be. FRIEDA  
*(They drink coffee awkwardly)*

Mom, really, what gives? MICHAEL

I'm going to explain. FRIEDA

*(Looks out of the window)* MICHAEL  
What's that dome?

That's the Neue Synagogue. Your great-grandfather's shul. FRIEDA

Really? MICHAEL

Not much has changed in fifty years. FRED

I know, I grew up here. FRIEDA

In this neighborhood? FRED

In this apartment. FRIEDA

Whoa! MICHAEL

This was *your* apartment? LISA

It was my Aunt Berthe's apartment. We lived down the street. FRIEDA

But you came here? MICHAEL

FRIEDA

Stayed over many nights. Berthe lived *here*, we lived four blocks away, and my grandparents lived around the corner in a big house that's not there anymore.

But Zeyde's shul's still here.

LISA

Who's Zeyde?

MICHAEL

My grandfather.

FRIEDA

*My* grandfather!

MICHAEL

It means "grandfather" in Yiddish, that's what the Jews spoke.

FRIEDA

*(FRIEDA moves downstage. She hears motorcycles)*

That's why we're here.

FX2 Sc 3

*(Lights change to indicate MICHAEL's house in Detroit, downstage. FRIEDA makes a bed out of two chairs and a shawl. She's at home asleep. ZEYDE enters hat)*

ZEYDE

Frieda. Come back and tend my grave!

FRIEDA

Zeyde!

ZEYDE

Come back to Berlin.

*(FRIEDA sits bolt upright, they stare at each other, then ZEYDE moves upstage)*

FRIEDA

Am I crazy?

*(FRIEDA gets up and looks at a synagogue newsletter on the table. She reads)*

"The Sisterhood invites synagogue members and guests on a 10-day guided tour of Germany, including Berlin."

Oy.

MICHAEL *(offstage)*

You should go.

FRIEDA

I've already been there. *You* should go.

MICHAEL *(offstage)*

Why should I go?

*(FRIEDA goes back to bed. ZEYDE comes downstage)*

ZEYDE

Ketzeleh, look at my resting place. You should be ashamed! Didn't I teach you to take life by the horns and shake it?

FRIEDA

I raised three sons on my own! I've been shaking it!

ZEYDE

Ketzeleh, I need you.

*(ZEYDE exits. FRIEDA rises, picks up the newsletter again)*

FRIEDA

Maybe I'll go.

MICHAEL *(offstage)*

Go where?

FRIEDA

To Germany.

MICHAEL

When is it?

*(FRIEDA is alarmed; she doesn't want him to go)*

Nah, I'm too busy. You go, have a good time.

FRIEDA

*(Speaking to God)*

Should I go, for Zeyde? Who, by the way, is dead. Or ignore him You want me to go, give me *a sign*. A burning bush, a flood, something I can't mistake. Just make it *clear*.

*Sc 4*

*(The phone rings. Lights up on MICHAEL at home. He's reading a report. FRIEDA is calling from the shul in Berlin)*

MICHAEL

Hello?

FRIEDA

Hi!

MICHAEL

Hi Mom. How's the tour?

FRIEDA  
Everything's fine.

MICHAEL  
Good. Where are you today?

FRIEDA  
Berlin.

MICHAEL  
I thought you were supposed to be in Munich, or was it Mannheim?

FRIEDA  
*Jah*, well, I decided to stay on in Berlin.  
(*Silence*)  
Hello?

MICHAEL  
You left the tour?

FRIEDA  
I've found a nice place to stay and...

MICHAEL  
Where are you staying? What's the number?

FRIEDA  
The phone won't be installed till next week but you can leave me messages at...

MICHAEL  
Whoa, whoa! You're having *a phone* installed? You're not in a hotel?

FRIEDA  
Don't get excited. I rented a little apartment. Until my phone's installed you can leave messages at the *shul*. You have a pencil?

MICHAEL  
You have a *shul* too? Give me the number.

FRIEDA  
First you dial 49 for Germany...

MICHAEL  
What's the number of the *shul*?

FRIEDA  
30-243-7707.

MICHAEL  
I didn't know they still had *shuls*.

FRIEDA  
It's the Neue Synagogue.

MICHAEL  
Okay.

FRIEDA  
You're great-grandfather's *shul*.

MICHAEL  
Wha?! Mom!

FRIEDA  
What?

MICHAEL  
This is nuts. You went to Germany on a group tour. You're supposed to stay with the *group*. It's a foreign country... Mom? You still there?

FRIEDA  
I went to your great-grandfather's grave. It was just the way he told me in my dream: Desecrated.

MICHAEL  
What dream? I want you on a plane home tomorrow. Do you hear me?  
(*Silence*)  
Mom?

FRIEDA  
I'm waiting for you to finish getting your exercise.

MICHAEL  
You're scaring me. What are you doing there?

FRIEDA  
I'm trying to remember.

MICHAEL  
What's your address?

FRIEDA  
Why?

MICHAEL  
This place you're staying, what's the street address?

FRIEDA  
You sending me a letter?

MICHAEL  
No, I'm coming over...

*(Leafs through his Daytimer)*

FRIEDA

No, no. That's not a good idea. Let me get settled first...

MICHAEL

I'll be there Friday...

FRIEDA

Listen, Michael...

MICHAEL

... Friday afternoon.

FRIEDA

Don't, I'm not ready...

MICHAEL

Mom, I'm coming. You want me to bring anything?

FRIEDA

Oy.

MICHAEL

There's a letter here from a... Fred Cephas, and a couple of other pieces of mail, I'll bring them.

FRIEDA

Open the one from Fred.

MICHAEL

Sure.

*(Opens FRED's card)*

"Dear Frieda, Happy Hanukkah"... Uh-oh, his wife died.

FRIEDA

No! Read it.

MICHAEL

"Nita died from a stroke on April 20. I found her on the kitchen floor." Poor guy! "... Been a tough year. Wishing you and your family best wishes, Fred." Who is this guy?

FRIEDA

Listen, you let me get settled here first...

MICHAEL

I'll see you Friday. Don't do anything else crazy.

*(MICHAEL hangs up and exits. FRIEDA takes more money from her pocketbook and lays it on the desk. She looks up FRED's phone number and dials. Lights up on FRED's living room. The phone rings four times and stops as LISA enters carrying a backpack over her shoulder, a bag of groceries, some mail, and a sack of old newspapers, which she drops. She picks up the phone but the caller's hung up.)*

LISA

Poppy! You sleeping?  
*(FRED answers, sleepy)*

FRED *(offstage)*

Yeah.

LISA

I got everything on your list and took out the trash. You better clean this place up. If Mom sees it, she'll whup us both.

*(LISA leaves a framed photo and a pack of greetings cards on the table. She collects her textbooks and laptop computer and loads them in her backpack. She corals the pile of newspapers and stuffs them as best she can back into the paper sack)*

Mom says write some Christmas cards even if they're late. Poppy, you hear me?

FRED

I sent some already.

LISA

I'm going back to school. I'll pick you up tomorrow at 6. Mom's getting a honey-baked ham.... Poppy?

FRED

What?!

LISA

Poppy, you should...  
*(The place is still a mess. And telling her grandfather what to do is pointless)*  
... I love you.

FRED

Back at ya.

LISA

Call if you need me.

*(No answer. LISA exits. FRED enters, stage right, carrying an M1 rifle, leaning on it like a cane, wearing old clothes.)*

Sc 6

FRED

Nita wrote the cards in our family. I *might* sign my name or add a line for the Battalion fellas. I don't broadcast my business.

*(Surveying the perceived disorder of his room)*

I don't water plants. I don't vacuum, don't stop and start the paper, don't recycle tin cans, and don't yammer on about how I *feel*.

*(Takes up the rifle, looks it over admiringly from barrel to stock)*

You're the kind of roommate I like, Chester, tall, dark, and handsome. That's why I keep you around. Remind me I'm a man with choices.

*(He props the rifle against a chair, glances at his mail, and tosses it in a trashcan. The phone rings again. He answers it.)*

FRED

Yep.

FRIEDA

Fred?

FRED

Yep, who's this?

FRIEDA

It's Frieda.

FRED

Frieda.

FRIEDA

I'm so sorry to hear about Nita. What a terrible shock.

FRED

Yeah, it was. How's your family?

FRIEDA

Everyone's fine.

*(Deep breath)*

I'm in Berlin.

FRED

Where? On vacation?

FRIEDA

No, I'm staying here.

FRED

Really?

FRIEDA

*Jah.*

FRED

Thought you didn't do that history stuff. You know: "Forward Ahead?"

FRIEDA

"Forward Focus."

FRED

Yeah, *right*.

FRIEDA

I'm so sorry, Fred. Can I do anything to help you?

FRED

No.

FRIEDA

Is your daughter taking care of you?

FRED

She's around. My granddaughter puts her head in. And I got my friend, Chester.

FRIEDA

That's good. You need friends.

FRED

Yep.

FRIEDA

Are you still working?

FRED

Nope. I *was* substituting till all this.

FRIEDA

Maybe you should... It's good to get out, even when you don't feel like it.

FRED

Might pick it up. When I feel like it.

FRIEDA

Fred, I have a favor to ask. If you can't, I understand, especially now.

FRED

Go ahead.

FRIEDA

Since I got back here, I've been remembering a lot of things. It started with a lady at the synagogue. Actually, it started with Zeyde... it's a long story...

FRED

Don't stand on ceremony.

FRIEDA

Michael's coming over next Friday.

FRED

Is he?

FRIEDA

He's worried about me. Doesn't have any reason...

*(reluctantly)*

I'm getting there...

FRED

Take your time.

FRIEDA

So, Michael...

FRED

... is coming to visit...

FRIEDA

... and I want to tell him... finally... about the war.

FRED

That's great, Frieda. It's about time.

FRIEDA

*Jah*, well, *jah*. not so simple. I'm remembering a lot of things from my childhood...

FRED

Good.

FRIEDA

But then I go blank. I don't remember the camp, I don't remember the day you came.

FRED

It'll come back, keep trying. You were sick, remember.

FRIEDA

I've *tried*. I feel things, but I can't remember. I thought if *you* could tell Michael, I might... even if I don't... we'd both know from you.

FRED

What are you asking?

FRIEDA

Will you come to Berlin next week?

FRED

*Next week?*

FRIEDA

I know, I know, would you just think about it?

FRED

Frieda.

FRIEDA

I'll pay your airfare.

FRED

It's not the money!

FRIEDA

I know.

FRED

Looky, I can't just up and fly halfway across the world...

FRIEDA

*Jah*, I know, it's fine...

FRED

...and ... I mean... there's my daughter... and my foot...

FRIEDA

I shouldn't have asked... Forget it, please. It's rude of me.

FRED

No, don't... don't be like that. It's just, I'm *recovering*... I'm glad you asked.  
*(FRIEDA fingers the medallion around her neck)*

FRIEDA

If you could come, would you?

FRED

You know I would. In a New York minute.

FRIEDA

I'll work it out, somehow. It was *good* talking to you.

FRED

Hold on, hold on, not so fast. Let me think about this.  
*(FRED looks at Chester)*

Change might be good... What date we talking about?

FRIEDA

January 14! Oh, thank you, Fred! I'll call the airlines and make a reservation. I'll pick you up at the airport.

*(They hang up and FRIEDA exits. FRED pulls out a bag and begins packing. Takes up the framed picture of Nita. Places the picture in the bag)*

FRED

You come on, Tulip. You coming. Used to say I shouldn't stay lonely if something happened to you. ' course, it's different when something *does* happen.

*(FRED closes the suitcase)*

Sc 7

*FRIEDA's apartment*

*(All are back in the present in the apartment)*

FRIEDA

*(To FRED)*

My grandkids were home from college, planning a sailing trip. I mean, they just got home and then they're off again, so Michael says...

MICHAEL

... Let's go to Friday night services. There's a special speaker. We'll be together for one evening, come on!

FRIEDA

I don't usually go Friday nights. I'm a Saturday morning synagogue person. Some people are Friday nights, others are Saturday mornings. It happens so much when I see friends at special occasions, I say, "Since when were *you* at this shul?"

MICHAEL

Turned out the special speaker was a *survivor*.

FRIEDA

I *hate* survivor stories. I'm an American. I don't look back.

MICHAEL

It was supposed to be a guy talking how the Jews have always been environmental. If I'd known, I wouldn't have suggested it.

FRIEDA

I ask for a sign, what do I get? *A survivor story*.

FRED

You could have left.

FRIEDA

I was stuck in the middle of the row. Family on the left, family on the right. I'd have to climb over every family member. So I closed my eyes. But I couldn't close my ears.

FRED

What did she say?

FX4 Sc 8

*(Enter MRS. GOLDSTEIN, who has a slight accent. FRIEDA and MICHAEL sit in the synagogue, FRED & LISA become congregants)*

MRS. GOLDSTEIN

I'm happy to be here tonight. Some of you have read my book...

*(she holds up a copy of her book, "FRED" takes the book from her)*

... thank you. I was a prisoner in a ghetto near Prague. Before the war, it was a fortress town. For you young people, I'm talking about the Second World War, the one that followed the First World War, which they used to call "The War to End All Wars" and "The Great War." There's *nothing* great about war, and clearly, it didn't do its job.

I was about your age...

*(picks out a young person in the audience)*

... How old are you? 15? That's how old I was. I felt like I was 115. Maybe a thousand and fifteen.

By the time I got to Terezin in 1943, I was all alone. My father and my brothers had been arrested and taken to labor camps. I never saw them again. My mother died working in a labor camp, God rest her soul. My cousin Mara was shot before my eyes. She resisted an order from a guard. Maybe some of you know about things like that, resisting arrest?

The Nazis called Terezin "a model camp." That makes it sound fun; it wasn't. Hitler said it was "a refuge where Jewish artists could be *safe*." The Nazis even made a movie to show how we were "protected." The International Red Cross came. It was all fake, all lies. Terezin was really no different than any other concentration camp. When they shut the gates behind the visitors, down came the curtains, away went the blankets, and out came the guns. We were there for one reason: we were waiting to die. I was imprisoned with 15,000 Czech children. 132 of us survived. I tell my story because I can.

I took care of an older woman with cancer. Alma Weissberg of Heidelberg, God rest her soul. Her husband taught German at the University of Prague. We had no medicine. She was in terrible pain. I rubbed her feet, I brought her food, I recited poems, I told her the news of the camp. What else could I do? When she was close to death, she took my hand...

*(MRS. GOLDSTEIN takes LISA's hand)*

...and said, "I've no one left, so you are my family. *You* are my daughter and I leave you this blessing." She laid her hands on top of my head...

*(She lays her hands on LISA's head and closes her eyes)*

... like my Papa used to, and said the *bracha* for a daughter:

*Ye'simech Elohim ke-Sarah, Rivka, Ra-chel ve-Lay'ah*

*May God bless you and keep you.  
May God cause His countenance to shine upon you.  
May God turn His glory unto you and grant you a life of peace.*

Within an hour, Frau Weissberg died. People often know when they're going to die. Her blessing protected me at least three times:

The first time was when a Nazi guard who was drunk put the barrel of his pistol in my ear and whispered craziness. I knew he was going to blow my brains out the next second but I prayed my blessing and thought of Mrs. Weissberg, and instead he fell over and went to sleep. True story.

The second time, someone had stolen some bread. The Stormtroopers locked us in a truck, twenty children, and they took turns shooting through a hole in the side of the truck. *Madmen*. I closed my eyes and prayed my blessing. The girl next to me, shot through the neck. The boy behind me, hit in the stomach. They bled to death in the dark. I crawled over them when they unlocked the door in the morning. Why didn't I die? I had a blessing!

And the third time was when the war was over. Thousands of prisoners sick with typhus arrived out of nowhere. People were dying. I caught it too, I had such a fever, and as I lost consciousness, I knew I was done for and prayed my blessing for the last time. By a miracle, I woke up, the Red Army had come, the Russians took over the hospital, and we all got better.

Each time I said my blessing, it protected me like a shield, Alma Weissberg's shield. That's why I lived. That's why I tell my story: We never know when our words can become someone else's shield.

*(The congregants and MICHAEL move upstage and they each hug MRS. GOLDSTEIN before exiting)*

FRIEDA

Up and down the row, they're listening like she's the Messiah. My own grandkids who even in their 20s are what you would call "restless in shul" - all listening. Afterwards, Michael hugs her, the kids hug her. And suddenly I think: I have a story.

But what is it? Do I really have one if I don't remember it? If I never tell my family? If there's no one left to tell it to?

The survivor lady, Mrs. Goldstein, came over to me when we're having refreshments at the Oneg, and offers me a cookie.

MRS. GOLDSTEIN

I made them. *Muerbe Teig*.

*(MRS. GOLDSTEIN winks at FRIEDA, who takes a cookie from the plate. MRS. GOLDSTEIN exits)*

FRIEDA

*Muerbe Teig*, that's a German sugar cookie.

*(FRIEDA takes a bite, closes her eyes in rapture)*

Exactly like my grandmother's cookies, with a hint of almond. Hmm...

*(another bite)*

I see my Bubbe in the kitchen, water running in the sink. Suddenly, I'm flooded with memories...

*(another bite)*

... The musty smell of the synagogue, the lights at night on the Ku'Damm, the streetcar clang, dropping my blue leather glove in the snow, swimming naked in the Spree .... It's like a dam bursting.

I could have killed God. I said a sign, not a slideshow!  
It's time.

Sc 9

*(To MICHAEL)*

We weren't just refugees.

MICHAEL

*I know.*

FRIEDA

Don't be angry.

MICHAEL

I'm not angry.

FRIEDA

We didn't want you kids to suffer. We didn't want the neighbors saying things. We wanted you to enjoy life and not worry what would happen when you left the house in the morning. Real American boys.

MICHAEL

We couldn't mention the past.

FRIEDA

I saw you with Mrs. Goldstein, I said to myself, it's time. Then Zeyde pushed me.

LISA

Your grandfather's alive?

MICHAEL

Are you sick?

FRIEDA

No!

MICHAEL

Nothing terminal?

FRIEDA

No!

MICHAEL

Her grandfather is definitely dead.

LISA

Maybe Mrs. Goldstein created a window to your past and suddenly you could see through it.

FRIEDA

Ha! Such a wise young lady.

LISA

I watch a lot of sci-fi. They always have windows opening into the past.

MICHAEL

What happened to your aunt? The one who lived here.

FRIEDA

She joined the Greek Resistance and died blowing up a Nazi supply train.

MICHAEL

She must have had guts.

FRIEDA

She had guts. And such a singing voice. At night, I can almost smell the lavender of her bath. The Nazis took away all our radios, so she sang lieder in the bathtub.

FRED

I'm surprised this building's still standing.

FRIEDA

There's strafing above the entrance. The East Germans didn't fix anything. How's your coffee?

FRED

Fine.

LISA

Good.

FRIEDA

Zeyde would be happy to see us drinking coffee and eating *Muerbe Teig*.

*(She offers some cookies. To MICHAEL)*

He was a businessman, like you. Shoes and boots. *Schue*.

*(Tuts repeatedly)*

Bubbe would turn blue to hear me. I *love* speaking German.

LISA

Who's Bubbe?

MICHAEL

Frieda's mom, my grandmother. They wouldn't let anything German in the house. Nothing. No movies, no toys, no books...

FRIEDA

... no German things for the kitchen...

LISA

Because of the war?

FRIEDA

*Jah.*

MICHAEL

And no questions.

FRIEDA

*Jah.*

MICHAEL

But now I can ask?

FRIEDA

*Jah, you can.*

MICHAEL

Why didn't your family leave? Lots of Jews left.

FRIEDA

We had a wonderful life: a grand piano in the living room, a summerhouse by the river. I went to a good school. We couldn't believe all this could be taken away...

*(Snaps her finger.)*

... like that. Except it wasn't...

*(Snaps her fingers again)*

... like that. It was very confusing. You couldn't believe the rumors. And when you saw it happening, you couldn't believe it was true.

MICHAEL

So you *did* see it coming?

FRIEDA

I was 11 years. We had a private tutor. It was fun - we didn't have to go to school anymore. Bubbe said it was temporary, Tateh said, "It'll blow over." We were Germans, *civilized* people.

By the time it got really bad, it was too late to leave. They came and took Tateh and Franz away.

LISA

Who's Tateh?

MICHAEL

Frieda's father. But who's Franz?

FRIEDA

*(pause)*

Franz was my brother.

MICHAEL

You had a brother?

FRIEDA

Three years older than me. See this scar?

*(She points to her brow)*

MICHAEL

*(He touches it)*

There?

FRIEDA

*Jah.* Feel a little lump?

MICHAEL

Yeah.

*(FRIEDA touches the corner of the mantelpiece)*

FRIEDA

I caught my eyebrow on this corner, right here, on the mantelpiece. Franz was chasing me. Oh, it bled. I needed stitches, they hurt like hell.

LISA

Why was he chasing you?

FRIEDA

Why do brothers chase sisters?

LISA

I don't know. I'm an only child.

MICHAEL

Bubbe never told me she had a son.

FRIEDA

He taught me everything important: How to swim. How to hold a rabbit. How to hide in the raspberry patch and not get caught.

*(FRIEDA does to the windowsill)*

This is where Bathsheba used to lie in the sunshine.

*(She caresses the windowsill)*

I was afraid she'd fall into the street but she never did.

LISA

She was your cat?

FRIEDA

My gray Persian queen. Bubbe had allergies so we kept her here. One day, they said we could no longer... own pets.

LISA

Why?

*(Silence)*

Poppy?

FRED

Only human beings can have pets. The Nazis had to dehumanize the Jews.

MICHAEL

This is a time capsule.

FRIEDA

Every inch of it. You know what I remembered this morning? Outside the back door in the kitchen, there's a chute in the wall for trash. One day I was helping Auntie clean the apartment and I dropped my bracelet down the chute.

*(She feels her wrist, sees the bracelet)*

It was a silver charm bracelet with trees and birds and hearts and German monuments. She ran downstairs and we went through all this stinky trash but we never found it. Maybe they'll find it when they tear the building down.

FRED

They're going to?

FRIEDA

*Oh, jah*, it's all going, this block, the next one. For Bertelsmann's new headquarters. No one wants a old Weimar building. The stairs are worn to cups. The elevator's broken. I'm surprised the boiler still works. Apparently, the developers say the building has "no historic value." They call it "Elendsviertel," "a slum".

FRED

We can't let tenants stand in the way of progress.

MICHAEL

It's a museum.

FRIEDA

*Das kleine Museum des Gedächtnisses*. The Little Museum of Memory.

*(FRIEDA shakes her head)*

It's so hard...

FRED

Words can't hurt you. Not truthful words.

FRIEDA

It's not the words I'm afraid of.

FX5

Sc 10

*Lunch in a restaurant at Union Station, Washington, D.C., 1966.*

*LISA, as WAITER, sets a table with a white linen tablecloth, silverware and a small vase of flowers. FRED enters and the WAITER shows him to the table and leaves menus. FRED waits... and waits. FRIEDA rushes in, wearing a pillbox hat and matching coat. She sees him and FRED stands as she approaches the table. It's the first time he's seen FRIEDA in person since the war.*

FRIEDA

I'm so sorry. *Frank Sinatra* was visiting the President and they held up the tour! He waved at us!

FRED

Did you wave back?

FRIEDA

Yes, I did!

*(FRIEDA extends her hand and they shake hands)*

It's good to see you, my goodness.

*(FRED indicates they should sit down)*

Thank you.

FRED

I'm not sure I would've recognized you.

FRIEDA

I didn't used to be blond.

FRED

Hmm.

FRIEDA

I'd know you *anywhere*.

FRED

I've never been blond.

FRIEDA

So, they let you off school?

FRED

I developed a heck of a toothache this morning...

*(rubs his cheek)*

...had to take the afternoon off. ' course, it was too late for a sub. They'll be forced to play basketball all afternoon. No doubt, tears will be shed.

How's your trip?

FRIEDA

Yesterday, we went to the Congress and Michael got to shake hands with Gerald Ford the Minority Leader. He's from Michigan. Then we met the rest of the Michigan delegation, well, only one of the Representatives was there but he was very nice.

FRED

And tomorrow?

FRIEDA

Tomorrow is the Smithsonian and the National Gallery of Art. I'm looking forward to that.

FRED

Been a while since I went to the National Gallery. We take museums for granted around here.

FRIEDA

How's your family?

FRED

They're fine. Nita's works in a hospital in intensive care. The kids are in high school. You look just like your picture, no, you do.

FRIEDA

That was a while ago...

FRED

How's your husband?

FRIEDA

Not so good. It's his heart. He would have liked to come but we have two more boys at home.

FRED

Someone's got to stay home.

*(The WAITER approaches with a notepad)*

FRIEDA

We should order. I have to catch up with the group.

FRED

Anything you want. Lunch's on me.

FRIEDA

No, I invited *you* to lunch, this is my treat...

FRED

Don't you know it's not ladylike to argue over the check? Give the waiter your order.

FRIEDA

I'd like the sliced turkey sandwich and some coffee, please.

FRED

Make mine a roast beef, coffee, and a side of fries.

*(WAITER collects the menus and exits)*

What's Michael say about college? Engineering? Medicine?

FRIEDA

Business. You can always get a job.

FRED

I'm sorry I couldn't meet him.

FRIEDA

He doesn't know anything about... before.

FRED

Really? Why?

FRIEDA

None of my kids know.

FRED

Where did you tell him you were going?

FRIEDA

Arlington Cemetery. To visit the grave of a friend.

FRED

Thanks a lot!

FRIEDA

I had to say something that sounded boring.

FRED

Frieda, I spend hundreds of hours teaching kids – and adults - what happened at *your* concentration camp and why we shouldn't forget. And you haven't even told your own kids.

FRIEDA

I can't.

He's your son.

FRED

Forward Focus.

FRIEDA

"A people that forgets its past is doomed to repeat it."

FRED

Don't say that.

FRIEDA

It's true.

FRED

Maybe when he's older.

FRIEDA

He's old enough to be drafted.

FRED

Don't say that!

FRIEDA

Okay, I won't.

FRED

*(FRED briefly pats her hand)*

*Sc 11*

*(Back in FRIEDA's apartment, in the present)*

What happened to Franz?

MICHAEL

*(FRIEDA shakes her head no and looks at FRED. He throws his hand up.)*

Tell him what you know. That's why we're here.

FRED

I can't.

FRIEDA

You can and you will.

FRED

Poppy.

LISA

"Tough love" time. I flew six time zones to be here. Sometimes, you've got to lay it out.

FRED

LISA

You're not in school.

FRED

Life's a school.

FRIEDA

I don't know where to start.

FRED

Answer the man's question: What happened to Franz.

FRIEDA

*(FRIEDA closes her eyes and summons Memory)*

What happened to Franz.

We were eating strawberries...

MICHAEL

You hate strawberries.

*(She looks at him; he'll find out why)*

FRIEDA

Then came "the Nazi knock."

*(Loud banging)*

We were eating from the same bowl. Suddenly, the room was full of boots and guns and ... soldiers barking, "*Schnell! Schnell!*" They wouldn't let them take anything. They dragged Franz outside. He looked so frightened through the window. The last soldier, he knocked everything off the table... I cut my knee, cleaning up...

MICHAEL

God.

LISA

What happened to them?

FRIEDA

A neighbor who survived said Tateh died and Franz escaped into the woods. We looked for him for years.... I can't do this.

FRED

You're doing it. Don't stop now.

FRIEDA

Tateh – my father – died in Poland. Zeyde – my grandfather - had a heart attack. We buried him at Weissensee. I just went there.

MICHAEL

You did?

FRIEDA

*(To FRED)*

My grandfather been visiting me in my dreams. It happens sometimes.

FRED

I believe you.

LISA

You do?

FRIEDA

The cemetery is exactly the way he said it would be: Someone's been riding motorcycles over the gravestones. His stone was toppled over and there's graffiti all over the cemetery.

MICHAEL

Mom, please come home.

FRIEDA

*(To FRED)*

You'd better tell us before I change my mind.

MICHAEL

Tell us what?

FRIEDA

From the beginning. Right up to here on Oranienburger Strasse.

FRED

From the beginning?

FRIEDA

I want to know the whole story.

LISA

I've seen pictures of Poppy on his tank.

FRIEDA

He's a hero.

LISA

I know it.

MICHAEL

I thought you were a cook or something?

FRED

No! Thank Heaven no troop ever depended on my cooking.

LISA

Poppy was a Tanker, 761<sup>st</sup> Tank Battalion in Patton's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. All-Black battalion.

FRIEDA

Tell us from when you joined the Army.

FRED

Well, I enlisted when I was 19, in D.C. Your age, Tater-Tot.

LISA

Poppy!

FRED

I didn't know there were two wars going on: the war overseas and the war at home. I ended up in 'em both.

MICHAEL

What was the war at home?

FRED

Segregation. See, Racism and Nazism are cut from the same cloth. The U.S. Army was *completely segregated* back then. Did you know that?

MICHAEL

Yeah, I...

FRED

Of course you didn't. They don't teach it, not properly.

LISA

Poppy was *wild*.

FRED

I was spirited. Being from DC, I was used to going wherever I wanted. There were a few spots you steered clear of but my Seabees Cadet troop was integrated in 1941. White folks didn't faze me at all.

LISA

You were *wild*.

FRED

Nita said I didn't suffer fools well. She was right.

*Army Training, 1943, Camp Claiborne, Louisiana*

*(FRED as a young soldier arrives at tanker training, carrying his pack and a duffel bag. A WHITE SOLDIER stands cleaning his gun)*

FRED

Excuse me, which way's the barracks?

WHITE SOLDIER

You all's yonder behind them pines.

FRED

Way over there?

WHITE SOLDIER

That's right, boy.

*(FRED doesn't like that "boy." He enters the decrepit Black barracks, composed of a few chairs and a box, puts down his pack, takes a sniff)*

FRED

Phew! What a holy stink!

*(He slaps and waves to ward off the mosquitoes)*

...bugs as big as bats...

*(Jumps back startled)*

...swamp rats sashaying in and out all night, big as alley cats...

*(Pulls back a cover, as if from a bunk)*

...Found a cottonmouth in my bunk!

*(A BLACK SOLDIER enters, played by LISA)*

BLACK SOLDIER

Hey - Saturday night! Let's go to town!

FRED

See a show!

*(FRED and the BLACK SOLDIER wait for the Army bus to take them into town.)*

How do I look?

BLACK SOLDIER

Smooth, man!

*(The bus pulls up – sound effects)*

BUS DRIVER (offstage)

No room. Next bus.

*(Bus drives away)*

FRED

There were seats on that bus.

BLACK SOLDIER

Here's comes another.

FRED

We're getting on this one. See this uniform?

BLACK SOLDIER

Don't fuss. Louisiana folks are crazy.

FRED

I'm not fussing. We're going to see a show.

*(Bus pulls up)*

BUS DRIVER (offstage)

No room. Next bus.

*(FRED steps up and holds onto "the bus")*

FRED

Whoa, sir. My pal and me are heading to town.

BUS DRIVER (offstage)

I said no room for y'all.

FRED

I'm black but I'm not blind.

*(FRED plants his foot on "the bus")*

Roy, get on this bus...

BLACK SOLDIER

I-I-I- don't think so...

BUS DRIVER (offstage)

Boy, remove your hand and foot or I'm calling the MPs. You get a ride – straight to the stockade.

BLACK SOLDIER

*(Backs away from the bus)*

Do as the man says. I don't want to see a show.

FRED

*(FRED gets in the driver's face)*

See this uniform? I'm getting On This Bus Right Now!

BUS DRIVER (offstage)

*(Turns off the bus)*

Your funeral, boy.

BLACK SOLDIER

*(Pulling at FRED's shirt)*

Come on, Driver don't play.

*(BLACK SOLDIER pulls at FRED's shirt. FRED's gaze is locked on the DRIVER. To the DRIVER, slapping FRED on the shoulder)*

He's a big joker, this one. Come on, Fred.

*(Reluctantly, FRED takes his foot off the bus step and moves back)*

BUS DRIVER (offstage)

Northern "Ne-groes" need to learn to behave.

*(Snorts, spits, closes the door, and drives away. FRED's burning up, SOLDIER slaps him on the back again)*

BLACK SOLDIER

Hey, these armadillos don't know nothing!

*(FRED is steamed)*

I bet that swamp rat never crossed the county line, let alone been someplace. Claiborne, Louisiana! Man, you been to New York City!

FRED

Been to Boston too.

BLACK SOLDIER

That's right.

FRED

Climbed the Capitol steps.

BLACK SOLDIER

That's right!

FRED

Been *inside* the Supreme Court building.

BLACK SOLDIER

Yes, you have.

FRED

I'm going to Europe.

BLACK SOLDIER

Yes, sir! Gonna fight for our country. Gonna find some girls!

*(The soldiers put on their helmets and salute)*

FRED

Yes, sir. Gonna fight for my country.

*(The soldiers climb up on their "tank")*

BLACK SOLDIER

Watch out, world. Here come the Black Panthers!

FRED

“Come Out Fighting!”

BLACK SOLDIER

“We can, We will!”

FRED

Trained... And Ready.

BLACK SOLDIER

“Forward!”

FX Sc 13

*(Battle sounds. A WHITE SOLDIER enters on foot)*

WHITE SOLDIER

What you niggers doing on that tank? Git down before I shoot you! Black boys playing on a tank!

*(FRED and BLACK SOLDIER “rotate the turret” slowly to face the WHITE SOLDIER)*

Don’t know why they bother letting you train. Ain’t never-ever going to let you boys fight. You know how much a tank costs? \$60,000!

What you doing up there? Answer me!

FRED

*(FRED locks eyes with the White Soldier)*

Got my finger on a 50-caliber trigger. Pointing at you.

WHITE SOLDIER

Hope them Krauts shoot you dead.

*(FRED returns the WHITE SOLDIER's stare)*

BLACK SOLDIER

Watch out! Straight ahead near the trees!

FX Sc 14

*(The WHITE SOLDIER dons a German helmet, becomes a GERMAN SOLDIER in a firefight with FRED and BLACK SOLDIER. Explosive battle sounds)*

FRED

We got ‘em cornered! They may be bigger, but we’re faster!

*(Firing)*

BLACK SOLDIER

They’re on fire! They're comin' out!

*(The GERMAN SOLDIER waves a white flag. Battle sounds lessen. GERMAN SOLDIER creeps forward with his arms up)*

FRED

Steady. Let 'em move forward.

GERMAN SOLDIER

*Wir ergeben uns! We give up!*

FRED

If they so much as sneeze, blow 'em to Kingdom Come.

*(FRED raises up through the hatch. GERMAN SOLDIER sees FRED and is instantly terrified)*

GERMAN SOLDIER

*Schwarze Soldaten! Schwarze!*

*(He drops his white flag and runs offstage. We hear a loud explosion and an anguished cry. The BLACK SOLDIER and FRED look at each other and shrug.)*

FRED

Now you see 'em, now you don't.

Sc 15

*(Back in the apartment in the present. LISA looks out of the window)*

LISA

Look, it's snowing.

FRED

You ever hear of the Battle of Bastogne?

MICHAEL

No.

FRED

I was in it.

MICHAEL

Where is Bastogne?

FRED

Belgium. First we shipped to England. I recall dancing with those English girls. That about drove the white officers out of their minds...

LISA

Seems like you had one thing on your mind.

FRED

Tell me your boyfriends don't have one thing on *their* minds?

LISA

Hmm.

FRED

We came ashore at Omaha Beach, Normandy, October 1944. I started as a quartermaster, but I was a tanker by then.

1944 was the coldest winter in Europe in thirty years. The 761<sup>st</sup> Tank Battalion was spearheading for Patton's Third Army. Going where angels fear to tread.

General Patton was a son-of-a-bitch. He wanted to breach the German border and *nothing* was going to stop him. Not the snow, not the cold, definitely not the Germans. And not the fact he was short of skilled tankers. Oh, yes. You know what Patton did?

MICHAEL

Get replacements.

FRED

Didn't have any. He did what the US Army had never done before, he put a bunch of Negroes into combat. The *first time*. Before that, all we were allowed to do was service jobs, truck supplies, dig ditches, the whole Red Ball Express thing. Patton said, "I don't care what color you are as long as you kill those Kraut sons-of-bitches!"

*(LISA makes a disapproving tut)*

That's exactly what he said, he was a foul-mouthed man. We fought 183 days straight.

*(To LISA)*

No showers.

LISA

*(Recoiling from the idea)*

Ew!

FRED

They called us a "bastard battalion." That's because we moved between whichever division needed us, the 3rd, the 5th, the 7th. By summer, we were in Czechoslovakia, in the thick of it.

MICHAEL

The whole battalion was Black?

FRED

Yep. The Germans had the U.S. surrounded at Bastogne. It's a crossroads of three major roads. We fought for days, finally broke through and relieved the siege.

Then we punched through the Siegfried Line—the Germans called it the *Westwall*, [pronounced *Vest-Vall*—their defense on the western border: bunkers, tunnels, tank traps, you name it.

Sc 16

FRIEDA

Cold.

FRED

Yes, indeed, it was cold. The Germans were on the run but they would *not* surrender. We were chasing down the German Army when we came across this first camp, Orhdruif. Your camp.

FRIEDA

Ohrdruf.

MICHAEL

I've never heard of it.

FRED

It was a satellite of Buchenwald.

MICHAEL

I've heard of that.

FRED

We didn't know what we were going to find. We just roared up a hill and there was a gate and a barbed wire fence.... We figured it was some kind of prison. So we blasted a hole in the fence and plowed through.

MICHAEL

Do you remember this?

*(FRIEDA shakes her head no. It's scary)*

FRED

We knocked through these steel and barbed wire gates and that electric fence, yeah, the fence shorted out the tank. First thing we saw were the dead. Lord God Almighty. Bodies everywhere. Never seen so many. Guards must have panicked before we got there and shot as many people as they could. We took some gunfire but mostly they'd run off.

*(Pause)*

You all right?

FRIEDA

Go on.

FRED

I found a shed stacked with bodies, barely more than skeletons. First I thought they were dead, but then the pile moved. Living dead. It was covered in lime but that didn't stop the smell.

FRIEDA

I was cold.

*(FRIEDA shivers)*

Wooden... shoes.

FRED

It was a cold day. Snow was gone but we slept in the tanks and trucks, it was cold.

Nothing prepared me.... We'd heard Germans mistreated their prisoners but we had no idea of this *brutality!* Hooks in the walls, drains in the floor for... what we found was unbelievable.

I had woken up that day, sick of how I was being treated. Then we broke through the fence and the scales fell from my eyes.

FRIEDA

We'd never seen Black people.

Sc 17

LISA

Never?

MICHAEL

Bubbe tole me, "Out of Heaven came a Big Tank."

FRIEDA

She *told* you?

MICHAEL

Not really.

FRED

Out of Hell, more like it. I try to explain to my students...

LISA

They don't understand.

FRED

But it's important! Because it can happen anywhere.

FRIEDA

We were a normal German family.

FRED

I'd been busted down to Corporal again. This time for yelling at the refuelers. The Army didn't want Black faces on the scene when we met up with the Russians. Didn't want the 761st getting *anywhere* first. And these were Black guys doing the refueling, understand, but they had their orders. We finally got some fuel but not as much as we should've.

One minute I was chewing on how hard-done I was, cursing the refuelers and the crackers. We crest an ordinary German hill and suddenly I'm in a hellhole that burns my nostrils my brain my eyes! I'm vomiting. Skeletons are staggering toward us like in a horror movie. I fell to my knees.

FRIEDA

We worked.

FRED

All night, I tried to figure it out. Couldn't sleep. I'd hired down South, I'd studied history. Here were *white people* being treated in ways I couldn't even imagine. Dumped in huge pits, trenches the length of a football field. Hanging from gallows. Oh, this was Strange Fruit to the Nth degree.

FRIEDA

I was sick.

FRED

I learned cruelty has no particular color.

FRIEDA

*(FRIEDA closes her eyes to remember)*

She brought me out... to the place. Dark giants! Crying.

FRED

We were all crying and puking. Hardened combat veterans, crying and puking. "Why are you crying?" you said to me. Remember that? You spoke English.

*(FRIEDA shakes her head no)*

You touched my shoulder like you didn't believe I was real. It was a mess. Then your mother hugged me and then *everyone* wanted to touch us. It was horrendous.

FRIEDA

Eat.

FRED

Yeah, we handed out K-rations. Lord, what a mess. They were too rich and folks started vomiting. Some of them died right there on the spot. You remember?

*(FRIEDA shakes her head no)*

We didn't know. I gave you some crackers. Man, I was hoping they wouldn't kill you. I kept my eye on you, seemed okay, pecking on your crackers. I just wanted to help. You took my hand, like this...

*(FRED takes FRIEDA's hand, stares at the skin on the back of her hand)*

You looked at it real hard, turned it over...

*(He turns her hand over and stares at the palm)*

...and then you took it like this...

*(He presses her hand to his cheek)*

... then you kissed it.

*(he kisses her palm and presses her hand back on his cheek)*

You remember that?

*(FRIEDA repeats his gestures with their hands. When she kisses his hand, FRED pulls away)*

Boy, I was humbled. Scrawny little white girl treating me like a hero. I gave your Mom that St. Christopher.

*(FRIEDA lifts the St. Christopher medallion on a chain around her neck)*

My mother gave it to me. Seemed like you all could use some protection. We were moving out. We were the *spearhead*. Your Mom asked my name and I wrote it down. That's how she found me. True story.

MICHAEL

How did she find you?

FRED

The power of an Army serial number. That's what I wrote down.

After Europe, they sent me to the Pacific where I contracted hepatitis. So the Army shipped me to this hospital in God Knows, Texas. Back in the Swamp. Didn't matter I'd risked my life for my country. Been shot at, bombed, chased around the freezing cold countryside, seen my buddies blown to hell. Far as the Army was concerned, I was nothing but a slave! We weren't allowed to use the PX, couldn't ride *the bus* into town. Looky here, German POWs could use the PX while I was barred. You come home...

*(Slams his fist down)*

... home! and witness *your enemy* being treated with more respect than you've ever been accorded!

*(Sucks air through his teeth to keep control of himself)*

Evil. *Bitter.*

FRIEDA

Horrible.

FRED

One morning, a candy striper trips in with a letter. From the International Red Cross, from your Mom. You all are in an Italian refugee camp. She thanks me, writes that you're *on the beach* eating *gelato*.

*(FRED laughs)*

I laid in that hospital and had to laugh. *Gelato*. And instead of going berserk, I decided to become a teacher.

MICHAEL

You saved us.

FRED

No, brother, we saved each other.

FRIEDA

Fred...

MICHAEL

I'm... what you went through, both of you. Phew! It's...

FRED

War's a mess.

FRIEDA

Did you ever... do something... bad...

FRED

Besides the ordinary kill, main, and steal?

FRIEDA

I did something...

*(FRIEDA's remembering something that FRED picks up on)*

FRED

You were 12.

FRIEDA

I was 16.

*(FRIEDA covers her mouth)*

FRED

Sixteen, twelve, what's the difference?

MICHAEL

What happened?

FRED

Did you break the Ten Commandments?

*(FRED directs this to FRIEDA. She thinks and isn't sure)*

"Thou shalt not steal?" We stole a whole bunch of stuff, that's war.

*(FRIEDA thinks about this and nods no)*

Kill anyone?

*(FRIEDA shakes her head no)*

Someone die because of you?

*(FRIEDA shakes her head no)*

MICHAEL

She used to lock herself in the bathroom and wouldn't come out.

FRIEDA

I did?

MICHAEL

You don't remember? I had to cook dinner. Once I made you a cake. I told you through the bathroom door, "Mom, come out, it's got chocolate icing, it's your favorite." You wouldn't come out. You used to kind of disappear.

FRIEDA

I had to.

MICHAEL

I got pretty good with frozen peas and box mac.

FRIEDA

*(FRIEDA doesn't want to remember something but it circles around her like a wasp, something about her mouth)*

She gave me meat.

FRED

Who?

I didn't know. FRIEDA

What didn't you know? FRED

*(Anguished)*  
I didn't know. She *gave* it to me! FRIEDA

Hey, it can't hurt you now. FRED

*(FRIEDA holds her hand to her mouth)*  
“Eat.” FRIEDA

You can tell us. MICHAEL

*(FRIEDA chews slowly)*  
Meat. FRIEDA

Meat. FRED

“Slowly”  
*(FRIEDA cups her palm under her chin as if she were feeding someone. Chews then freezes)*  
I saw the body. FRIEDA

She stole it from a guard?  
*(FRIEDA shakes her head)* FRED

I saw the body. Before they took him away. FRIEDA

I don't understand. FRED

A man. FRIEDA

FRED

A man. Are you saying, it was... *human* meat?  
(*FRIEDA bows her head*)

MICHAEL

(*Horror and compassion, intertwined*)  
Mom.

LISA

That is so gross.  
(*LISA understands that everyone's on thin ice. FRIEDA, stunned and confused by the realization that she ate human flesh to survive.*)  
Sorry.

FRED

(*FRED looks into FRIEDA's heart*)  
To hell with it.  
(*She tries to speak but can't*)  
You were an enslaved person trying to survive among other enslaved people.

MICHAEL

It wasn't your fault. Mom. It was war.  
(*MICHAEL tries to comfort her*)  
It's okay.

LISA

Hope I never go to war.

FRIEDA

Why would she do that?

FRED

To save your life.

MICHAEL

When you save a life, it's as if you've saved the whole world.

FRIEDA

(*To MICHAEL*)  
She told you?

MICHAEL

No!

FRIEDA

Lisa's right.

LISA

I didn't mean it.

FRED

Now looky here, sixteen-year-old prisoners-of-war get a free pass.

*(He touches her but she pulls away)*

Frieda...

*(He lifts the St. Christopher medallion and chain that's around her neck and tugs on it gently)*

...By the authority vested in me as a Liberator, and a high school History teacher...

*(FRIEDA looks at FRED)*

... I absolve you. Like the man says, save a life, it's like you've saved the whole world.

*(FRIEDA removes the medallion and studies it in her hand)*

That's what your mother did, saved a life. Hard-working fellow, St. Christopher.

FRIEDA

Even when you're Jewish.

Bubbe wore it when we lived in Israel. The neighbors used to say, "What kind of kibbutzim wear Christian necklaces?" "Living ones," she said.

*(FRIEDA presses the medallion into FRED's hand)*

You take it now. *You* could use protection.

FRED

I'm doing fine.

*(Not)*

FRIEDA

Take it.

LISA

Uh-uh. Most days he doesn't even get dressed.

FRED

Hush.

FRIEDA

Oh dear.

LISA

I have to do almost everything. His house is a mess!

FRIEDA

Do you have a picture of Nita?

*(He takes a photo of Nita in the garden from his wallet)*

How lovely she is, and look at those flowers.

FRED

I built those beds. She's got black-eyed susans, day lilies, irises all colors, tulips... I don't know the names.

FRIEDA

You know the names.

FRED

Soon those damn flowers going to be bursting out of the ground!

LISA

Poppy's blue days go on and on.

FRED

I'm going to wish I didn't bring you.

LISA

Mom wouldn't *let* you come without me!

FRED

No one tells me what to do!

FRIEDA

Shh. It hasn't even been a year.

FRED

We had *plans*.

FRIEDA

I know.

*(She looks at the photo again)*

Tell me about Nita.

FRED

Last time I saw her she was working in that garden. Springtime, and she was dirty, been working all day. She took a lemonade break and pushed that straw hat down her back like Annie Oakley. I said, "Hey Annie Oakley, where's my lemonade?" She leaned back on her bench and took a long pull and said, "on the counter in the kitchen." I was a little irritated she didn't jump up and fetch it but I got it myself. Came out and she was resting, all sweaty satisfaction. I sat down next to her and she put her head on my shoulder and sighed. I still hear that sigh. She didn't seem sick at all. I put my arm around her shoulder and I thought, I'm a lucky bastard. Fine wife, nice home, all a man could want. Twenty-four hours later, she was *dead*.

*(Puts the photo down)*

FRIEDA

I know how you feel.

FRED

No, you don't!

FRIEDA

No, I don't.

FRED

I hate being alone! I hate the house. I hate the yard!

FRIEDA

You should be *in* the world, the world needs you.

FRED

No, it doesn't.

LISA

I need you—to clean up your house! Look it, Poppy – we're in Berlin!  
*(LISA embraces the grand old tattered apartment and the tulips on the table)*  
Flowers and everything.

FRED

I hate flowers!

LISA

See!

FRIEDA

“Forward Focus.”

FRED

I have... dark thoughts.

FRIEDA

*Jah.*

FRED

Dark conversations.

FRIEDA

*Jah.* When Arnie died, I had no money and three kids and I thought about walking out, just... leaving.

MICHAEL

Really?

FRIEDA

Sure. Jump on a Greyhound bus, find another city, job, get another life...

MICHAEL

You would've left us?

FRIEDA

No. But that's how desperate I felt. Bubbe never left me...

MICHAEL

Wow.

FRIEDA

It's shocking what we think under pressure. Isn't it, my friend?  
*(FRED nods. He knows she knows his darkest thoughts: suicide)*  
Dark conversations. With who?

FRED

A friend.

FRIEDA

Chester?

LISA

I don't know anyone named Chester.

FRIEDA

Not a good friend.

*(Rearranges the tulips in their vase)*

When the war was over, the wildflowers were blooming in the fields, blue and yellow. I remember thinking, "How can there still be such flowers after so much death?" But look at that flower.

*(Indicates MICHAEL)*

And that one.

*(and LISA)*

FRED

Doesn't matter.

FRIEDA

It *does* matter. Our job is to live.

FRED

I don't know how.

FRIEDA

Yes, you do.

*(Comforts FRED)*

You're doing it.

*(Picks up the photo of Nita)*

They say we're closer to God in a garden than anywhere else on earth. She's still with you...

*(FRIEDA props the photo up next to the vase of tulips)*

... everywhere there are flowers, even in Berlin.

LISA

I miss her too, Poppy.

FRIEDA

People need you to go on with them.

FRED

No.

FRIEDA

Is he always so stubborn?

LISA

Uh-huh.

FRIEDA

Before you do anything you can't back out of, promise you'll call me.

*(She takes hold of his arm)*

You're my Black Angel.

Well? ... *Well?*

FRED

Is she always so demanding?

MICHAEL

Oh, yeah.

FRED

We... Nita and I were married 46 years.

MICHAEL

*(Looks at the photograph of Nita)*

She's beautiful.

FRED

Yeah.

MICHAEL

I see you still wear your ring.

FRED

Some days.

MICHAEL

You had one daughter?

LISA

Uncle Amos was killed when I was four, DWB.

MICHAEL

“DWB?”

LISA

Driving While Black. Cop shot him.

MICHAEL

I'm so sorry.

FRED  
Been thinking a lot about Amos.

FRIEDA  
Because of Nita.

FRED  
Seems like one after another.

FRIEDA  
Seems like. But these flowers...  
*(indicates LISA, MICHAEL)*  
... they keep growing.

FRED  
Don't know why.

FREIDA  
To live, that's reason enough. *L'chaim!*

FRED  
*(Takes the necklace and tries to put it around her neck)*  
Put this back on.

FRIEDA  
No, I'm giving it back to you.  
*(FRED puts it on her)*

LISA  
Poppy wants you to keep it.  
*(MICHAEL senses he's a third wheel in the room)*

MICHAEL  
Hey, come on, let's go wash up. Are you hungry? What do you feel like eating...  
*(MICHAEL and LISA exit to the kitchen)*

FRIEDA  
You coming here—means so much to me. I feel... almost free.

FRED  
I'm glad I came. Think I'll ever feel like myself again?

FRIEDA  
You will.  
*(FRED turns away)*  
You will.  
*(FRIEDA fingers the medallion around her neck. Now she feels a little awkward, but only a little.)*

FRED

You think so?

FRIEDA

*(FRIEDA smiles a little at FRED)*

I hope so.

*(MICHAEL and LISA return, drying their hands on a towel)*

LISA

Can we go eat?

MICHAEL

*(To FRED)*

Lisa and I have decided you both should come visit us at Passover, right?

LISA

Yep.

MICHAEL

I have a question: why does he call you "Tater?"

LISA

Don't ask.

FRED

*(Deadpan, FRED likes this story)*

Well, she was a long skinny red baby but we loved her so we called her "Sweet Potato."  
But she wasn't always so sweet so now we just call her "Tater."

*(LISA mouths the latter because she's heard it so often)*

LISA

See what I have to put up with.

MICHAEL

Mom, you'll come home by Pesach?

FRIEDA

*Jah*, by Pesach.

MICHAEL

*(To FRED)*

I want my brothers to meet you, and my wife and kids. You're part of our family. We wouldn't be here without you.

FRED

Thank you.

MICHAEL

It's nice to have something to look forward to in the winter.

*(Putting his arm around FRIEDA)*

I'll go find our coats.

FRIEDA

*(As they put their coats on)*

We can go to the Orange Café. It's vegetarian but it's very good. Then we'll go to the Neue Synagogue, *jah?* Talk about a survivor! First, the Nazis torched it, then the Allies bombed it, then the East Germans bulldozed what was left. But when they began to restore it, guess what they found in the rubble? The *Ner Tamid*, the Eternal Light. True story. And just like before it has three golden domes and a beautiful staircase.

MICHAEL

Do they hold services?

FRIEDA

On Friday nights, in a little upstairs room, there we are, the Russians and me. They'll be so happy to meet you.

*(LISA finds her camera in her carry-on bag. FRIEDA props NITA's photo on the mantelpiece)*

LISA

We should call Mom.

FRED

Okay, after dinner.

FRIEDA

You can send her a postcard. Of the River Spree.

LISA

Poppy doesn't write cards.

FRED

You can write it.

LISA

Photo-time.

*(She aims the camera at the group. FRED poses but doesn't smile)*

Hey, let's see your Cheese face.

*(nope)*

Come on, Poppy, for your Sweet Potato?

*(LISA smiles to entice him. FRED relents – a sincere smile. LISA's camera flashes as she takes the picture. Lights go to black)*

END OF PLAY

## Props List

1. Eight sugar cookies for each performance that are eaten and play as homemade
2. Coffee carafe, six spoons, two plates and a creamer
3. Two 1997 cell phones
4. One Day-timer with pen and a printed synagogue newsletter
5. Four executive-looking pens and pencils
6. One box of obviously recognizable Christmas cards
7. One obviously recognizable Hanukkah card
8. Wallet-sized photo of attractive African American woman in forties or fifties
9. Stand-up photo of attractive African American woman in forties or fifties
10. One military-looking overnight bag
11. One backpack-style college book bag
12. Three lightweight suitcases (two of which should match)
13. Mantel photos and Shul decorative/sacred items (may be set dressing)
14. Pair of Shabbat candlesticks for mantelpiece
15. Stack of unopened mail for Michael's Den in Michigan
16. Vase of real tulips
17. Large black shawl
18. One German tanker combat helmet
19. Two U.S. Army Tanker combat helmets
20. Two MI Army Rifles and one cloth to clean one rifle
21. One white flag for German
22. Two restaurant menus
23. Appropriately-sized table cloth for table (may be set dressing not props)
24. Four cloth napkins (two of which have silverware secreted securely within them) and a small vase of flowers
25. Cloth satchel or sack, and (possibly wilted plants and stacked up tin cans)
26. Pile of newspapers
27. One unisex St. Christopher's medal on very long chain necklace
28. One man's cane
29. Bag of groceries packed with items that can be unpacked (was not used in this production due to space, time, and set considerations)