

**JOEY**

—

A Short Play

By

Donald Loftus

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**"JOEY"**

**CHARACTERS**

**CHARACTERS:**      SPEAKER ONE:      A non-descript male  
                            SPEAKER TWO:      A non-descript female  
                            SPEAKER THREE: A non-descript male  
                            SPEAKER FOUR:    A non-descript female  
                            JOEY:                      Somebody's son.  
                            SARAH:                     Somebody's mother.

**SETTING:**            An empty stage.

**TIME:**                For THE SPEAKERS: It is 2018  
                            For JOEY:                    It is years later.  
                            For SARAH:                 It is years later.

**"JOEY"**

**AT RISE:** The *FOUR SPEAKERS* enter from stage right with unreadable, deadpan expressions. *THEY* form a line across the stage with about an arms length between them and then turn in unison to face the audience. *SPEAKER FOUR* is the furthest stage right (audience-left). *SPEAKER THREE* is to the left of *SPEAKER FOUR*... and so on. So, from the audience perspective it is:

**SPEAKER FOUR---SPEAKER THREE---SPEAKER TWO---SPEAKER ONE**

**AUDIENCE**

*(SPEAKER ONE steps forward, moves to downstage center, stops and looks back at THE OTHER THREE SPEAKERS who physically shift to their left (audience-right) leaving an empty spot at the end of their line)*

**SPEAKER ONE**

*(Without emotion)*

If you cross our border unlawfully, then we will prosecute you. It's that simple. If you smuggle illegal aliens across our border, then we will prosecute you. If you are smuggling a child, then we will prosecute you and that child will be separated from you as required by law.

*(SPEAKER ONE moves back upstage and rejoins the line talking the empty spot at end of the line. SPEAKER TWO steps forward, moves to downstage center, stops and looks back at THE OTHER THREE SPEAKERS who physically shift to their left (audience-right) leaving an empty spot at the end of their line)*

**SPEAKER TWO**

What good does it do to bring in somebody who's illiterate in their own country...somebody who has no skills... somebody who is going to struggle in our country and not be successful? That is not what a good nation should do, and we need to get away from it.

*(SPEAKER TWO moves back upstage and rejoins the line talking the empty spot at end of the line. SPEAKER THREE steps forward, moves to downstage center, stops and looks back at THE OTHER THREE SPEAKERS who physically shift to their left (audience-right) leaving an empty spot at the end of their line)*

**SPEAKER THREE**

There is no question that separating children from their parents can result in significant, traumatic psychological injury to the children. Simply put...taking children away from their mothers is harmful to them. There's nothing complicated about it.

*(SPEAKER THREE moves back upstage and rejoins the line talking the empty spot at end of the line. SPEAKER FOUR steps forward, moves to downstage center, stops and looks back at THE OTHER THREE SPEAKERS who physically shift to their left (audience-right) leaving an empty spot at the end of their line)*

**SPEAKER FOUR**

U.S. officials separated somewhere between 1,425 and 1,720 children...

*(Beat)*

U.S. officials separated approximately 2047 children...

*(Beat)*

U.S. officials separated 2,550 children...

*(Beat)*

U.S. officials separated less than 3,000 children from their families at the U.S.-Mexican border between April 19 and May 31, 2018. Less than 3,000.

*(SPEAKER FOUR moves to the end of the line. ALL FOUR SPEAKERS turn upstage in unison...their backs now facing the audience. THEY freeze as JOEY enters from stage-right, moves to center to address the audience)*

**JOEY**

It was a long time ago. I try not to... but sometimes I can't stop myself.

No matter how hard I try...I can't help myself from wondering. Wondering what she was like.

And in my wondering...I think to myself...and only to myself...that maybe...and I can't be sure about this...but maybe she had a face like an angel. Yes.

*(HE moves to talk to the audience at his left)*

**JOEY (Continued)**

And I think to myself... Yes. I think she might have had a peaceful and gentle face like the beautiful, fading angels in the ancient oil paintings that hang up high in the main chapel of my church.

*(HE moves to talk to the audience at his right)*

And then, although I try not to...I wonder about her eyes. And I think that her eyes were...or at least maybe they were... big and brown...and caring. Maybe she had bright and loving eyes.

*(HE moves to center to talk to the audience)*

But then, as I think more...as I think more about it...I wonder if instead... if maybe her eyes were sad.

Or scared.

Or both.

*(JOEY turns upstage and walks through the line, with his back to the audience. He freezes upstage and THE SPEAKERS turn in unison to face the audience. THEY return to their original positions. Once all are in place, SPEAKER ONE steps forward and again the line shifts to the right)*

**SPEAKER ONE**

There's incredibly strong science and a big hunk of common sense that both lead us to the same conclusions... Taking children away from their mothers is harmful to them.

*(SPEAKER ONE returns to the end of the line. SPEAKER TWO steps forward, the line shifts)*

**SPEAKER TWO**

The children often experience what is known as toxic stress. It comes from an intense, repetitive or prolonged hardship...or danger... without an adult's intervention... well it's the same as is seen when a child is placed in an orphanage...or survives a natural disaster... or lives in poverty or in a war zone or in a refugee camp. This kind of stress can have a lifelong impact.

*(SPEAKER TWO returns to the end of the line. SPEAKER THREE steps forward, the line shifts)*

**SPEAKER THREE**

When humans...or animals for that matter... feel threatened... the brain sets off an alarm. Your heart races, your muscles contract, your breathing quickens and your blood pressure rises. Your brain's alarm prepares the body for how to handle the pending trauma.

*(SPEAKER THREE returns to the end of the line.  
SPEAKER FOUR steps forward, the line shifts)*

**SPEAKER FOUR**

This happens when a child cries because he is hungry. In a stable environment, a familiar adult calms them down. Their heartbeat slows, they can take a deep breath and relax. But for the nearly 3,000 children removed from their parents and held in custody... in cages... along the U.S./Mexico border, the adult who could have flipped that off-switch wasn't there. They were not there.

*(SPEAKER FOUR returns to the line. ALL FOUR SPEAKERS turn upstage in unison, their backs now facing the audience. THEY freeze. JOEY turns to face the audience and moves to his previous downstage center position)*

**JOEY**

And I wonder to myself...did her sad, brown eyes...did they glisten in that bright moonlight? Did they maybe glisten from the tears that must have been there? I don't know.

*(HE moves to talk to the audience at his left)*

And I can't know for sure...but I'll bet her smell was warm and sweet... like chocolates.

*(HE moves to talk to the audience at his right)*

Or maybe she smelled pretty...and delicate... like the wildflowers smell.

I'll bet her breath was cool and fresh like candy canes.

*(Getting more excited, HE moves to talk to the audience at center)*

I'll bet her skin was smooth like silk ribbons on a birthday present.

**JOEY (Continued)**

I'll bet her voice was kind. I'll bet her hair was soft like a kitten.

I can't remember but...I think her arms were strong. They must have been. Yes, I bet her arms were strong...but also... tender and loving. And I'll bet her arms were reaching out. Reaching out as far as they could reach.

But I don't know.

*(JOEY turns upstage and walks through the line, with his back to the audience. He freezes upstage and THE SPEAKERS turn in unison to face the audience. THEY return to their original positions. Once all are in place, SPEAKER ONE steps forward and again the line shifts to the right)*

**SPEAKER ONE**

The staff at these refugee camps are not allowed to touch children. If a child is crying... weeping for their mother...the staff can only offer a toy or a book to console them. They are not allowed to hold them.

*(SPEAKER ONE moves to the end of the line. SPEAKER TWO steps forward, the line shifts)*

**SPEAKER TWO**

The trauma that these children go through has biological consequences... on their brain development. Consequences that can last a lifetime.

*(SPEAKER TWO moves to the end of the line. SPEAKER THREE steps forward, the line shifts)*

**SPEAKER THREE**

There is not one study that tells us separating children from their families is bad for their brains and development. There are *hundreds* of studies... produced over several decades.

*(SPEAKER THREE moves to the end of the line. SPEAKER FOUR steps forward, the line shifts)*

**SPEAKER FOUR**

People often think that an infant or toddler who experiences trauma won't remember the fear and anxiety that filled his early years once he's placed into a stable environment, like a foster home. But that is absolutely wrong. While the stress may seem more subtle than a broken bone, it can leave permanent mark on a child's brain and can create a weak foundation for later learning, behavior, and health.

*(SPEAKER FOUR moves to the end of the line. ALL FOUR SPEAKERS turn upstage in unison...their backs now facing the audience. THEY freeze as JOEY turns to face the audience and moves to his previous downstage position. HE addresses the audience at center)*

**JOEY**

I try not to... but sometimes I can't stop myself from wondering... wondering why she didn't fight? Why she didn't try? Why she didn't care?

*(HE moves to talk to the audience at his right)*

And sometimes...or rather most times... even though I know I shouldn't...I wonder if she is wondering about me.

*(HE moves to talk to the audience at his left)*

Does she wonder what I'm like? Does she wonder if I care? Does she wonder if I'm wondering about her?

*(HE moves to center)*

I can only wonder. I can only guess. I can never know.

*(JOEY turns upstage and walks through the line, with his back to the audience. He freezes upstage and THE SPEAKERS turn in unison to face the audience. SPEAKER ONE steps forward and the line shifts to the right)*

**SPEAKER ONE**

If you break into my house, you are going to jail...and your kids are not going to go with you!

*(SPEAKER ONE moves to the end of the line. SPEAKER TWO steps forward, the line shifts)*



**SPEAKER TWO**

The best way to describe the centers would be to liken them to summer camp. 24/7 food, water, and some have other services. Some even have basketball courts and soccer fields.

*(SPEAKER TWO moves to the end of the line.  
SPEAKER THREE steps forward, the line shifts)*

**SPEAKER THREE**

Something had to be done. We are a laughing stock. When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending the best. They're sending people that have lots of problems and they're bringing those problems. They're bringing drugs, they're bringing crime. They're rapists and some, I assume, are good people, but I speak to border guards and they're telling us what we're getting.

*(SPEAKER THREE moves to the end of the line.  
SPEAKER FOUR steps forward, the line shifts)*

**SPEAKER FOUR**

Close to a thousand parents remain separated from their children. Hundreds of parents were removed from the U.S. without their children. Some of the parent's cases are still "under review."

There are some children with no discernable parental information, name or location attached. These are the troubling cases. There is a risk that these children will be indefinitely separated from their parents.

*(SPEAKER FOUR moves to the end of the line. ALL FOUR SPEAKERS turn upstage in unison...their backs now facing the audience. THEY freeze as SARAH enters and moves to downstage center to talk to the audience)*

**SARAH**

I know it would be better... healthier...I know I would be happier... if I could just stop wondering. They all tell me that I should...they all insist that I should...

*(SPEAKER ONE, remains upstage but turns to face the audience. SARAH puts her head down as SPEAKER ONE speaks)*

**SPEAKER ONE**

*(Without emotion)*

If you cross our border unlawfully... if you are smuggling a child, then we will prosecute you and that child will be separated from you as required by law.

*(SPEAKER ONE again turns to face upstage. SARAH looks out at the audience and continues)*

**SARAH**

They, none of them, understand that I just can't. I can't stop wondering. Wondering what he is like. Now that he has grown. I never can stop wondering.

*(SPEAKER TWO, remains upstage but turns to face the audience. SARAH puts her head down as SPEAKER TWO speaks)*

**SPEAKER TWO**

Simply put...taking children away from their mothers is harmful to them. Both of them. There is nothing complicated about it.

*(SPEAKER TWO again turns to face upstage. SARAH looks out at the audience and continues)*

**SARAH**

I know that I must try to stop spending my days and nights worrying and wishing and hoping and praying...but this is what I do. This is what I must do.

I must wish that he is happy. I must hope that he is healthy. I must pray...that after all that has happened...I must pray that he is now better off than he would have been... then he would have never tried...

*(SPEAKER THREE, remains upstage but turns to face the audience. SARAH puts her head down as SPEAKER THREE speaks)*

**SPEAKER THREE**

Your heart races, your muscles contract, your breathing quickens and your blood pressure rises. Your brain is preparing the body...

*(SPEAKER THREE again turns to face upstage. SARAH looks out at the audience and continues)*

**SARAH**

And I think to myself...maybe his eyes glisten. Maybe his legs are strong. Maybe he is tall. I try to picture him as he plays, and laughs and runs. Maybe his hair is curly...

I know I shouldn't... but I can't stop myself from wondering... does he know that I tried to fight?

Does he know how I tried to keep him with me?

Does he know how it broke me apart?

Does he know I am broken?

*(SPEAKER FOUR, remains upstage but turns to face the audience. SARAH puts her head down as SPEAKER FOUR speaks)*

**SPEAKER FOUR**

And they are not allowed to touch the children. They are not allowed to hold them.

*(SPEAKER FOUR again turns to face upstage. SARAH looks out at the audience and continues)*

**SARAH**

And sometimes times...or rather most times... even though I know I shouldn't...I wonder if he is wondering about me. Does he wonder what I'm like? Does he wonder if I care? Does he wonder if I'm wondering about him?

They tell me to try not to think of it. They tell me it does no good. No good for nobody. Even if I ever tried not to think about it...I would continue to think about it always.

I think that maybe someday I may see him again. I think that some day I will be able to tell him what happened. I think that some day...but I don't know. Not for sure.

*(SARAH exits. When SHE is fully off-stage, JOEY comes forward to downstage-stage center to address the audience for the final time)*

**JOEY**

I'm not to discuss it...I'm not really even to know. They didn't want me to know that she was taken away from me before I could walk.

That she was taken away from me before I could know her.

Taken away from me before I could tell her I loved her.

Before she could tell me...

They took her away from me and now I'll never know...what she was like...

I'll never know...what she was thinking...what she *is* wondering.

They took her away from me before I knew anything. But now I do know.

Now I do know that I'll never really know.

I do know I can't ever know.

*(HE turns and moves upstage but then turns back to the audience)*

I try not to think about it...ever. But instead...I think about it *always*.

I always have.

I always do.

I think maybe when I turn ten...I won't. But I don't know.

Not for sure.

**(BLACKOUT)**  
**END OF PLAY**