

**Why Our Dads Need Therapy, a new play**  
**By Jake Alexander**

**CHARACTERS:**

DAD A- early sixties, also plays YOUNG DAD A

CHILD A- mid- to late-twenties, eldest child of DAD A

CHILD A1- early- to mid-twenties, youngest child of DAD A

DAD B- early-sixties

CHILD B- early- to mid-twenties, child of DAD B

DAD C- early sixties

CHILD C- early- to mid-twenties, child of DAD C

DAD D- early sixties, also plays INTERESTED MALE BUYER

CHILD D- early- to mid-twenties, child of DAD D

CHILD E- early- to mid-twenties, father-less

THE LISTENER- plays multiple roles, including multiple THERAPISTS, DAD A'S FATHER, CONSERVATIVE OPINION PUNDIT, LIQUOR STORE OWNER, 1980's REALTOR, and TALK RADIO HOST.

Playwright's Note: The style of this piece is on a spectrum. Some moments are grounded in reality, whereas others are hyper-stylized, cartoonish, campy. The scenic, lighting, costume and sound design should reflect these changes between vignettes and scenes.

*(Lights up. The following scenes are moments, memories, undefined. The LISTENER sits in one of their listening chairs. They have a pad of paper and a pen. They address the audience, although it's someone else.)*

LISTENER

I'm happy you came in today. I always enjoy our time together. *(A pause. They nod along, listening)* So. Let's get down to it. What did you want to talk about?

*(Lighting and scenic shift. CHILD A sits, scrolling on a device. After a moment, we hear a video being played on the device, something comical. CHILD A is amused. DAD A enters. CHILD A does not see them, continues watching the video.)*

**VIGNETTE i.**

DAD A

What the hell is that?

CHILD A *(putting away device)* Nothing,  
it's nothing.

DAD A

Didn't sound like "nothing".

CHILD A

Just a stupid video, seriously.

DAD A

Did you do anything today?

CHILD A

How do you mean?

DAD A

Are you listening to me??

CHILD A

I am, I am. I didn't do anything today.

DAD A

Figures.

*(A beat.)*

CHILD A

How was work?

DAD A

Work was work! It's what it always is!

CHILD A

Okay. What about that project you were working on, do you still want help with that?

DAD A

You wouldn't be able to help.

CHILD A

You asked me to help yesterday.

DAD A

I'd have to explain everything and I don't want to do that especially after a long day at work.

CHILD A

Why was it a "long day"?

DAD A

How about you worry less about my job and work on getting yourself one.

CHILD A

You know I'm trying. I filled out a job application this morning.

DAD A

For a good job?

CHILD A

I think so.

DAD A

What's the pay?

CHILD A

It's an entry-level position so-

DAD A

What the hell do you have a college degree for if you'll work pennies? You can't take that job.

CHILD A

You're right. I'm sorry, I'll let them know.

DAD A

Can't have you sitting around here all day. You gotta get out there.

DAD A & CHILD A  
/Pound the pavement./

CHILD A  
I will tomorrow.

DAD A  
Well you can't do it tomorrow, I need your help with that project! Or can I not count on you?

CHILD A  
Okay, I'm sorry. I'll do it the day after.

DAD A  
Can't settle though, gotta be a good job.

CHILD A  
You said yesterday that it didn't matter what job it was.

DAD A  
It doesn't matter! Jobs a job. You gotta work for a living, you know. You can't always get a hand-out.

CHILD A  
I'm not asking for a hand-out.

DAD A  
Gotta work for what you want. That's only way to get anything in this world. Hard work.

CHILD A  
Okay. I promise I will.

DAD A  
Don't promise me! Promise yourself!

CHILD A  
Okay.

DAD A  
So you'll do it? You guarantee it?

CHILD A

Okay.

*(A beat.)*

DAD A

I can't count on you, I should ask A1.

CHILD A

You don't need to, I'm here, I can help.

DAD A

I won't have to explain it to them.

CHILD A

Okay. I'll text them, say you want their help.

DAD A

You gotta work a living. Can't just sit around here.

CHILD A

Okay.

DAD A

And I need you to take a look at my phone again, it's doing that weird thing again.

*(Scene shifts. THE LISTENER, as THERAPIST A, is in one of their listening chairs. They take notes.)*

LISTENER

I'm sorry to hear that. That sounds very hard. But your father's points come from a place of worry, do you see that? *(A pause.)* Mmmmm. Yes. I can understand that perspective. But it seems to me, an outside observer and someone who's just heard the story, that your Dad is concerned about your well-being, he just doesn't know how to communicate it. Does that sound like a fair assumption? *(A pause.)* He mentions you having a college degree, I found that interesting. He places high-value on that, and that's typical of parents and guardians who themselves did not go to school. He clearly wants what's best for you. You mentioned your sibling, A1, is that something your Dad brings up a lot? *(A pause.)* And are they older or younger than you? *(A pause.)* Younger? Is that so? That's surprising. Usually parental comparison comes from the hierarchy: we are typically compared to our older siblings. Do they have a special relationship, A1 and your father? *(A pause. This is a long answer, the LISTENER reacts throughout)* I see. Well, it seems to me that your Dad wants to communicate more, he just, maybe, in my opinion, doesn't have the tools or skills to do so. There are some exercises I can recommend that would help with that. A framework to get the conversation going. It can be

as simple as saying “Dad, I need you to speak to me \*this\* way”, being very upfront about your emotional capacity and what you need from him. Is that something you think you could do? As some “homework” before our next session? (*A pause.*) We’re human. We need things from each other. I don’t think he wouldn’t hear you. I wanted to ask about the contradiction in that story. Your Dad contradicts himself quite a bit. Why do you think he is that way? Where does he get that from?

*(Scene shifts. The same set-up as before, approximately 45 years earlier. DAD A now plays YOUNG DAD A; they sit, holding a letter. They read it. The LISTENER, playing DAD A’s FATHER, enters.)*

DAD A’s FATHER  
What the hell is that?

YOUNG DAD A (*putting away letter*)  
Nothing, it’s nothing.

DAD A’s FATHER  
Doesn’t sound like “nothing”.

YOUNG DAD A  
Just a letter, seriously.

DAD A’s FATHER  
Did you do anything today?

YOUNG DAD A  
How do you mean?

DAD A’s FATHER  
Are you listening to me??

YOUNG DAD A  
I am, I am. I didn’t do anything today.

DAD A’s FATHER  
Figures.

*(A beat.)*

YOUNG DAD A

How was work?

DAD A's FATHER

Work was work! It's what it always is!

YOUNG DAD A

Okay. What about that project you were working on, do you still want help with that?

DAD A's FATHER

You wouldn't be able to help.

YOUNG DAD A

You asked me to help yesterday.

DAD A's FATHER

I'd have to explain everything and I don't want to do that especially after a long day at work.

*(A beat.)*

YOUNG DAD A

You know. I've been filling out some college applications.

DAD A's FATHER

Why would you want to go to college?

YOUNG DAD A

To get a good job.

DAD A's FATHER

And how much is that gonna cost? College?

YOUNG DAD A

I could get a job while going, so I could pay-

DAD A's FATHER

Waste of your time. I'll get you a job down at the mill with me.

YOUNG DAD A

I was already accepted to a few good schools, maybe we could go look at them.

DAD A's FATHER

When am I supposed to do that? With what time?

YOUNG DAD A

You're right. I'm sorry, I'll let them know.

DAD A's FATHER

Can't have you wasting all day behind a desk. You gotta get out there. Any job that pays a livable wage is a good job. You gotta work for a living, you know. You can't always get a handout.

YOUNG DAD A

Do you like your job?

DAD A's FATHER

Doesn't matter if you like it! Gotta work for what you want. That's only way to get anything in this world. Hard work.

YOUNG DAD A

Okay. I promise I will.

DAD A's FATHER

Don't promise me! Promise yourself!

YOUNG DAD A

Okay.

DAD A's FATHER

So you'll do it? You guarantee it?

YOUNG DAD A

Okay.

*(A beat.)*

DAD A's FATHER

Are you talking back to me?

YOUNG DAD A

I'm not.

DAD A's FATHER

I won't have you disrespecting me.

YOUNG DAD A  
I don't disrespect you.

DAD A's FATHER  
You gotta work a living. Can't just sit around making eyes at college girls.

YOUNG DAD A  
Okay.

DAD A's FATHER  
You'll see what I mean when you're older and have a kid yourself.

*(Scene shifts. CHILD B and DAD B sit at a meal. DAD B sips something in a mug and reads a newspaper. CHILD B scrolls on a device. After a moment, DAD B throws the newspaper down in front of CHILD B.)*

**VIGNETTE ii.**

DAD B  
Do you think this is okay?

CHILD B  
What?

DAD B (*pointing an article*)  
You agree with this shit? You think that's alright?

CHILD B  
What're we talking about?

DAD B  
This! This shit!

CHILD B (*picking up the newspaper*)  
Oh, about the-? Hold on, let me read it...

DAD B (*snatching it out of their hands*)  
You don't need to read it, its trash. This is what the world is coming to!

CHILD B

They have a right to say their peace.

DAD B  
Bullshit they do!

CHILD B  
You agree with free speech, Dad.

DAD B  
Not if it's violent! They can speak their mind non-violently. They don't get to be aggressive.

CHILD B  
They feel passionately about the issue, they want their voices to be heard.

DAD B  
They're rioters! Looters! Thugs!

CHILD B  
I don't agree.

DAD B (*shaking newspaper*)  
Are you listening to me??

CHILD B  
I think that no one is listening to their concerns. And they have a right to protest.

DAD B  
Not like this!

CHILD B  
Well then how do you want them to protest?

DAD B  
How the Constitution lets them!

(*A beat.*)

CHILD B  
Let me read the article, and then we can talk about it-

DAD B (*pointing at it*)  
You don't need to read about it! Look at that picture!

CHILD B

That's just a guy chanting.

DAD B

He's screaming. At a cop!

CHILD B

Well he clearly feels passionate about what that cop did.

DAD B

They should all be locked up. That's a problem with this country, too many liberals, too many "politicians" running everything. We gotta take this country back.

CHILD B

It's conservative policies that have gotten us to this point of escalation-

DAD B

Don't talk back to me.

CHILD B

We're talking about the article, which I still haven't read.

DAD B

You don't need to read it! You have to listen to me! Your generation, always so attached to your devices, you gotta look at what is going on in the world.

CHILD B

These people have a right to make their voices heard. That's in the constitution.

DAD B

Well they shouldn't do it like this. Don't you care about the future?

CHILD B

Of course I do, it's my future.

DAD B

Well then you'd better take a look at what's going on out there.

CHILD B

Well I want to read the article.

DAD B

Don't look at that, listen to what I'm telling you!

CHILD B

Stop shouting about it, Dad.

DAD B

Oh, now you're just being sensitive. Snowflake.

CHILD B

Well I can't discuss it with you if you're screaming at me.

DAD B

Who's screaming? I'll just keep my opinions to myself.

CHILD B

Maybe we both should. We clearly don't agree.

DAD B

How can you not see it? How can you disagree?

CHILD B

Dad, let's just let it go.

*(A beat.)*

CHILD B

Dad we can talk about this.

DAD B (*going back to the newspaper*) You  
won't listen. You never listen.

CHILD B

Dad, come on-

DAD B

I want to read this.

*(A beat.)*

CHILD B

All right.

DAD B

This country is done for. With your sort in charge. Your grandfather is rolling over in his grave, watching you defend these fuckers. Do you know that? Well? Do you?? He fought for this country, you know, put his life on the line, for you and this family to have freedoms. And that's what they want: to take away your freedom. Socialism. Leftists. It's all the same now. He'd be crying with what's happened. He'd be sick to his stomach. Watching these people trample all over the freedoms he fought, killed for? What do you have to say for yourself? You proud of that?

*(Scene shifts. The LISTENER, as THERAPIST B, is in one of their listening chair. They take notes.)*

LISTENER

That sounds like it was a difficult conversation. Do you often discuss politics with your father? *(A pause.)* I see. I find it's best to avoid those topics, but I also understand in this day and age that it may be difficult to ignore. It seems your Dad just wanted you to see his point of view, do you? *(A pause.)* Of course, of course, your point of view is \*just\* as important to the conversation. Does you feel your Dad values your point of view? *(A pause. A long answer, the LISTENER reacts throughout.)* Well I can imagine that would put a dampener on the whole situation. How about your mother? Does she listen to you? *(A pause.)* That sounds very different from your father. I feel a lot of my patients' mother's fall right in line with their spouse, which speaks more to the time than to anything else. I'm sure she has opinions, but just feels it is best not to share them. *(A pause.)* Your Dad sounds afraid, and very concerned. Do you think he has a right to be? *(A pause.)* Sometimes our fears aren't communicated as well as our other thoughts. Psychologically speaking, it's much more difficult to describe something that scares you than something you love because by putting words to it, you have given it power. I'm sure your Dad is trying to tell you his fears, and has been conditioned to tamp them down. To overcome it. That can be liberating, but can also be deeply repressing. And when that happens, we often see signs of depression, sometimes even mania. What're your thoughts? *(A pause.)* You haven't mentioned your Dad being very political, is this a fairly new development? Does he get this passionate about anything else? *(A pause, LISTENER laughs.)* Is that right? That's good, that's very funny. *(They write it down.)* Do you have any sort of understanding why your Dad might just now be taking such a strong interest in politics? Where might he get that passion from?

*(Scene shifts. The LISTENER becomes the CONSERVATIVE "OPINION" PUNDIT, ala Tucker Carlson or Laura Ingraham. They address the audience passionately.)*

CONSERVATIVE "OPINION" PUNDIT

Good evening and welcome to our program. Tonight, I want to honor all the veterans who put their lives on the line for this country and the freedoms we deserve. Tonight, I tell the story of

John Doe: an Iraqi War veteran who served three terms, voluntarily. John Doe was not drafted, he was not on an ROTC scholarship. He volunteered because, and this is direct quote from his enlistment paperwork: "I love this country and want to defend it." And so the politicians and bureaucrats did what they always do: they sent John Doe overseas to defend our freedoms. And that's where John Doe, a dutiful soldier, son, and father, gave his life. Because he wanted to defend this country's freedoms. But how can they say they stand with our troops, like John Doe, when they are working so hard to strip the rights he died for from his loved ones and every other citizen? Tonight, we should be very, VERY, VERY scared. Got that? Because tonight the Democrats are showing us exactly what they stand for and who they are. Today we saw Wall Street, Big Tech, and the Liberal Media Mob align squarely and soundly behind this administration's attempts to steal our freedoms. That's right. They will silence your social media to the outside world just as gagging the town crier. They are planning on shutting down your bank, taking your money for big-government "welfare" programs, and giving you only pennies back. They will tell you lies and force you to call them the truth. After today's revelations, you can say goodbye to your guns, your religious freedom, your ability to open your mouth and speak your thoughts. Say goodbye to all that. The looney liberal left has taken control of this country. They are your neighbors, your co-workers, serving on your police force. They are your mayors and the politicians that were elected to represent you. But how can they silence you with one hand and demand payment in the next? How can they tell you what to think but shush you when you express an opinion different from their own? The laughable lying Left has become a party of silencers, and thieves. They want your support but NOT your voice. They gag you, shove you in the back of their trunk, tell you to kiss mommy goodbye, and then use your wallet to fund the tech corporations. Tonight I want to say: You can't trust them. But they control everything, so you have to trust them. This country is at a crossroads: Will you stand up for this country? Will you stand up like John Doe? Disclaimer (*to be said quickly*): The opinions and perspectives shared by this Conservative Opinion Pundit are entirely their own and do not reflect the ideals, motives, and opinions of the news organization they speak for. All advertisers are advised.

*(Scene shifts. CHILD C and CHILD A sit together.)*

**VIGNETTE iii.**

CHILD C

He said that? You told you that?

CHILD A

Oh, yeah. It was a whole thing.

CHILD C

Jeez, I'm sorry about that.

CHILD A

It was fine, just like, one more thing to unpack.

CHILD C

I know what you mean.

CHILD A

My therapist thinks I need to give him more slack. Like he just doesn't know how to communicate so I need to figure out his "language" and learn to "speak it".

CHILD C

Well that makes sense?

CHILD A

Does it?

CHILD C

Your therapist is an expert, you know?

CHILD A

Maybe.

CHILD C

What's his "language"?

CHILD A

I don't know, complaining about me not having a job?

CHILD C (*laughing along*)

Sure.

CHILD A

I'm SURE my grandfather never gave him this much shit about his career. He was so hands-off.

CHILD C

Still-

CHILD A What?

CHILD C

I wish my Dad was involved in, you know, my life.

CHILD A

What're you talking about? He takes a huge interest in what you're doing.

CHILD C

Not really-

*(DAD C enters. They immediately see CHILD A and greet them warmly.)*

DAD C

Hey! Look who's here!

CHILD A

Hello sir! How's it going?

DAD C

Oh stop it with the "sir". It's going about as far as it can go. How's the job hunt, anything yet?

CHILD A

Ugh, don't remind me. No, nothing yet.

CHILD C

Hey, Dad.

DAD C *(just noticing them)*

Oh, hey. Didn't see you there.

CHILD C

Okay.

DAD C *(turning back the CHILD A)*

Well something will come along, no need to worry. Say, how's your dad doing? Still giving you a hard time?

CHILD A

He's worried I'm just sitting around and doing nothing.

DAD C *(jovial)*

That's all I used to do. You'll be fine, you went to college, you've got a good head on your shoulders. And look at ya! Growing up! Trying to get a real job.

CHILD A

Trying to.

DAD C

My dad busted my balls, too. But he still loved me down deep. And he had a funny way of showing he cared, but he just didn't want me dreaming all day. He used to say to me: "You can't be a dreamer forever." And he was right. That's why I work, so that my kids can be dreamers. I'm sure your Dad just wants you to be realistic. But he is proud of you, I've heard him say it before.

CHILD A

He's said so?

DAD C

Sure, at your graduation! We were sitting right there! Said so himself: "I'm proud of what they've done." Are you listening to me?

CHILD A

Doesn't sound like him.

DAD C

It's a third party characterization. Say, how about we go out a grab a drink, just us.

CHILD C

Oh, that's alright, we were going to-

DAD C

Come on, come on! It'll be fun!

CHILD A

I could go for pizza and beer.

DAD C

That's the spirit. Emphasis on the beer. Let's do it.

CHILD C

I'll drive.

DAD C

No, hey, I blocked you in. Just let me change my shoes.

*(DAD C exits.)*

CHILD A

See that's what I'm talking about! Your Dad is so chill and really interested in what's going on.

CHILD C

To you, not to me.

CHILD A

He takes an interest in you too! He invited us both out.

CHILD C

He doesn't if you're not here.

CHILD A

Take it from me: I appreciate a Dad who has more to say than "pound the pavement" to me. And you would too, if it went the other way.

CHILD C

Sure.

CHILD A

I'm serious.

CHILD C

You didn't notice?

CHILD A

Notice what?

CHILD C

Some people can't tell, but I've gotten pretty used to seeing it.

CHILD A

Used to seeing what?

*(DAD C re-enters.)*

DAD C

Alright let's shake a leg. Come on now, pizza awaits!

CHILD

You're sure you don't want me to drive?

DAD C

I'm fine, I'm good! Let's go.

*(Scene shifts. The LISTENER, as THERAPIST C, is in one of their listening chair.)*

LISTENER

That must've been hard, to see your Dad take such a strong interest in someone other than you.

Do you feel he starves you or attention? *(A pause.)* Well I can imagine, after growing up an only child, that you are fairly used to receiving undivided attention from your parents. How did your father's attention manifest while you were growing up? Was there a particular activity or hobby you both shared? *(A pause. A long answer, the LISTENER reacts throughout.)* Is that right? Well, that's certainly, I hope you don't mind me saying so, a funny idea. You doing that

activity? You just don't strike me as someone who would enjoy that? Did you enjoy it? *(A pause. The LISTENER chuckles.)* Right. Of course, just as I thought. That activity is a rather, forgive me for the heteronormativity, a rather masculine activity. *(A pause. The LISTENER takes notes.)* My. Well, that is good to know. I want to get back to your relationship to your father. Why did it bother you so much that he took an interest in a friend of yours.? Couldn't you interpret that as taking an interest in your life, since it's \*your\* friend? *(A pause.)* Sure.

Absolutely. It sounds like what this boils down to is a lack of shared interest. You and your Dad don't have the means right now to connect. To start to discover about how his perceived lack-of-interest in your life, and the feeling that he is very invested in your friends' life, is affecting you. You mentioned that activity, is that something you feel you could reintroduce into your relationship? *(A pause.)* Maybe that could give you the space and time, particularly when it's just the two of you, to share these thoughts with your father. I think we should get back to this sense of jealousy you expressed for your friend. You said they also struggle with a relationship with their father, do you think that affects how this friend, I'm sorry I can't remember their name *(A pause.)* Right. Do you think that affects how this friend interacts with your father?

They could be looking for a surrogate-father-figure if they struggle with their own father. But you felt jealous of them, found yourself wanting to be in their shoes? Do you still feel that way? *(A pause.)* I think that's good. That's real growth right there. I do think there's more work to be done when it comes to how you express these thoughts to your father, but I think this is a good starting place. Do you think that's something you can do? Find a shared activity? *(A pause.)* Well, consider that some homework for our next session. One more question: you described your Dad as happy, almost "giddy", I think the word you used was "giddy", when he came in the door and saw this...your friend. You said he's come home like this before, would you describe it as a "mania"? *(A pause.)* That's interesting. I wonder where that comes from. I wonder what's going on there.

*(Scene shifts. The LISTENER becomes a LIQUOR STORE OWNER in a commercial on local TV.)*

LIQUOR STORE OWNER

Can you feel the heat, everybody!? Big Chucky here of Big Chucky's Wine & Spirits. Feeling that hot summer? Feeling those sticky nights without an A/C? Dying after mowing the lawn for the billionth time? Come on down to Big Chucky's Wine & Spirits for our Summer of Hot Sales. We have huuuuuggggee discounts on everything you need for the perfect summer cocktail: Mai Tais, Pina Cool-adas, Marggggggggaritas! Let our ingredients take you away on an island vacation from the comfort of the lounge chair by your above-ground pool. Forget the cares of the world and the problems you deal with daily with our weekend sales on everything from Tequila to ice cold Brewskis! Wanna feel light, airy, and joyful again? Wanna experience some semblance of normalcy in a world full of chaos and destruction? Wanna go back to that night after you threw the winning touchdown at the homecoming game your senior year? Wanna forget that you've done nothing with your life? Come on down to Big Chucky's and help us help you! The only way to keep the heat off the back of your neck is to beat the heat with us: Big Chucky's Wine & Spirits. Come on in, you'll be happier than ever that you did.

*(As the commercial ends, we see DAD C walk by behind the LIQUOR STORE OWNER with multiple boxes of alcohol. He smiles manically. Scene shifts. CHILD B lays in bed reading a book, CHILD A1 gets ready for bed.)*

#### VIGNETTE iv.

CHILD B

Can't believe he said that about them.

CHILD A1

Well he's always pitted us against each other

CHILD B

Yeah he usually doesn't say he can't "count on" them, though.

CHILD A1

He's just angry. I'm not sure why. Maybe work is rough, he hasn't said anything to me. He just shouts and takes it out on one of us, he always has. And if you try to say anything to him, he just shouts louder. It's like trying to understand a bear. But like a bear who's an asshole.

CHILD B Wow.

CHILD A1 What?

CHILD B

You've never spoken that way about your Dad, is all.

CHILD A1

Sure I have.

CHILD B

No, you always talk about him, I dunno, respectfully.

CHILD A1

Well I \*do\* respect him.

CHILD B

You just called him an asshole.

CHILD A1

Well he can be one sometimes!

CHILD B

Maybe. Instead of respecting him so much, and vying for his affection, you should try to see it through their eyes, is all I'm saying.

CHILD A1 (*shocked*)

Fuck you!

CHILD B

Hey!-

CHILD A1

I see it through their eyes all the time! They are just so sensitive.

CHILD B

That's so fucked up, babe.

CHILD A1

How is it fucked up?

CHILD B

You support your Dad unconditionally, but the minute your SIBLING needs you, you write them off as "sensitive". Maybe, rather than dismissing them, you just like, support them. They clearly need it.

CHILD A1

Fine. Whatever. (*A beat.*) Maybe you're right. I'm sorry I snapped.

CHILD B

That's okay. Sorry I said "fuck you".

(A beat.)

CHILD A1

Wait, I'm sorry, babe, I didn't ask about what your Dad said.

CHILD B

He's just spouting off. He's just old-fashioned.

CHILD A1

Okay, I'm sorry, I don't want to- but like...how is that any different from what I do with my Dad?

CHILD B

Well my Dad isn't an asshole-

CHILD A1 (*sarcastic*)

Oh, he's not?

CHILD B

-and I wouldn't call him one, and then in the next breath defend him.

CHILD A1

So you agree with him? About the protesters?

CHILD B

Of course not!

CHILD A1

Then you condone his behavior, just not what he's talking about?

CHILD B

I don't condone his behavior!

CHILD A1

Then tell him that!

CHILD B

We don't talk about that stuff.

CHILD A1

It sounds like today was your chance to say to him “Dad, your opinion is fucked up, and here’s why it’s wrong.” But you chose not to engage. It’s the same fucking thing you just told me not to do.

CHILD B

I don’t want to fight about this. Let’s just go to sleep.

CHILD A1 (*sarcastic*)

Fine. Be a hypocrite. Double standards are super healthy for relationship.

CHILD B

Fuck you.

CHILD A1

Fuck you, too.

*(Scene shifts. DAD D and CHILD D sitting in lawn chairs in a back yard. We hear a buzzing form an air conditioner. They sit in silence for a while. DAD D is examining the house in front of them.)*

**VIGNETTE v.**

DAD D (*looking up*)

Gotta paint this house.

CHILD D

You think?

DAD D (*pointing*)

Look up there. That gray color is chipping around the shutters.

CHILD D

I hadn’t even noticed, but that sounds good. What color? I like yellow.

DAD D

Not for a house, I don’t think. Maybe a lighter blue.

CHILD D

Blue would be nice.

DAD D (*still looking up*)

It's driving me crazy, it looks horrible. We gotta get some paint.

CHILD D

We can do that. How's tomorrow?

DAD D

Can't tomorrow. What's that sound?

CHILD D

What sound?

DAD D (*looking over his shoulder*)

Is that the motor on that air conditioner? Christ, it sounds horrible. Are you listening to me?  
Gotta clean those filters out.

CHILD D

We'll do it this weekend.

DAD D

Can't do it this weekend.

CHILD D Why  
not?

DAD D

That tree's got to come down. Look how dead it is.

CHILD D (*looking up*) Which  
tree?

DAD D (*pointing out*) That  
one.

CHILD D

You started to cut those branches off, remember?

DAD D

Well the rest has got to come down, too.

CHILD D

Why didn't you do it the last time you took the limbs down?

DAD D

Whole thing's gonna come crashing down on us. Going to kill us all, one of these days.

CHILD D

I'll hold the ladder.

DAD D

That sound is driving me nuts!

CHILD D

Well let's do it now, then. I'll grab the brush to clean the filters.

DAD D

Can't do it now.

CHILD D

I think the house looks good.

DAD D

Well it can be better. We should make it better. I told you it was a money pit when we moved in.

*(CHILD D's phone buzzes. They check the notification and get up.)*

CHILD D

I gotta go, my bookshelf was just delivered.

DAD D

You got a bookshelf?

CHILD D

Yeah, I needed a bigger one.

DAD D

It's gonna fit in that tiny apartment of yours?

CHILD D *(getting up)*

It'll be fine, Dad.

DAD D

How're you going to get it inside?

CHILD D

It's not assembled yet, I'll call you this week.

DAD D

You got the tools to assemble it?

CHILD D

Uhh, I think so?

DAD D

You're gonna need help, hold on let me come with you.

CHILD D

No. Dad- seriously, it's fine. I can manage.

DAD D (*getting up, folding their chair*)

No, no, you're gonna need a drill and a screwdriver and probably an allen wrench, I'm coming with you.

CHILD D

I really don't need help, Dad.

DAD D

Come on, I love doing this stuff!

CHILD D

But you just said-

DAD D

What?

CHILD D

The air conditioner? The paint? What about the tree?

DAD D

I can do that anytime. Plus, you can give me that book you were telling me about. I'd love to crack into that tonight.

CHILD D

You're sure you want to come all the way to my tiny apartment to help me build a bigger bookshelf?

DAD D

Of course!

*(A beat.)*

CHILD D

Alright.

DAD D

Let's grab those tools and then rock and roll!

*(DAD D and CHILD D exit. The buzzing of the air conditioner fills the air. Scene shifts. The LISTENER, as THERAPIST D, is in one of their listening chair. They take notes.)*

LISTENER *(rubbing their eyes)*

Let me get this straight. Your Dad left a home, where he claims there is so much work to be done, to help you build a bookshelf? Well. That *\*is\** strange. And does that affect your relationship? *(A pause.)* Well that certainly tracks, based on what you've told me. Listen: I'm not your father's therapist, and I certainly wouldn't dare try to give you any sort psychiatric evaluation of a man I haven't met face-to-face, but if I can be frank- it seems to me your Dad from a sort of ADHD. He has difficulty focusing on tasks, and often puts them off if they get overwhelming. You mentioned the story of the tree branches, I recall you sharing that story with me in the past. Your Dad got "flustered", I believe you put it? *(A pause. They take notes.)* And he walked away? Is that right? Well. This isn't atypical. Most men his age were not diagnosed, mostly because we didn't have the means or the language just yet to diagnose a learning disability such as that. You seem concerned. *(A pause.)* Well let me ask you this: do you think you have the same disability? Would you qualify yourself as distracted easily or anxious if a project can't be finished? *(A pause.)* I see. One last question before we have to wrap up for the day: did you finish the bookshelf?

*(Scene shifts. A commercial for a Realty Company, taking place in the 1980's. DAD D plays INTERESTED BUYER, and the LISTENER becomes a 1980's REALTOR. They enter a house and are shown around.)*

1980's REALTOR

Lovely neighborhood, right?

INTERESTED BUYER

Beautiful yard, and I love that front porch. How many bedrooms?

1980's REALTOR

Three. But it's certainly possible to add another in the basement, should you want a big family!

INTERESTED BUYER

A challenge, a challenge! We love a challenge.

1980's REALTOR (*stepping out of the scene, addressing the audience*)

Worried your current home isn't big enough for what \*you\* want? Don't trust those big-namerealty companies to take care of what you need, specifically? You're an individual, and here at Gender Norms Homes & Buildings, we want to match your individual needs! We know that all homes need work. You're going to be paying for whatever you pick for most of your lives. But we make sure it's not \*too much\* work. And even if it is, we rely on one simple rule: if you don't trust us, trust your husband! (*Back to the INTERESTED BUYER*) It's nothing for a skilled contractor, like you, Husband. I mean look how strong you are. How good looking. You seem very handy, are you handy?

INTERESTED BUYER

Very handy, my Dad taught me everything I know.

1980's REALTOR (*back out of the scene*)

At GNH&B, we know this. This generation of men: wooh! Sensible minds, and great with their hands. Exactly what a woman wants. And those required skills for being a home-owner can only be attributed to one thing: their fathers!

INTERESTED BUYER (*commenting on commercial*)

They get it!

1980's REALTOR

We, here at Gender Norms Homes & Buildings, have always felt you can really judge a man by how much his Dad taught him. How good he'll be in crisis is directly correlated to how he holds a screwdriver. You can tell how he'll be with kids based on the type of dog he wants. How good he is in bed is all in the way he flips a pancake. How wonderful he is with your parents is related to how many beers he has before dinner. The mark of a good man is in the type of fencing he puts up around the yard, and whether he pays someone to install the child locks or he does it himself. His character is in his aftershave. His love for you is in the type of chocolate he likes. Whether he waters with a hose or with a sprinkler tells you how often he plans to have sex with you. You know what we're saying? Now we know that wives have a lot of questions. We know that women are pre-disposed to worry. They get flustered easily. They get distracted and need to walk away from difficult challenges. But we don't have to worry as long as there is: husband. Husband is solution. Husband can do all. We expect husband to be perfect and be able to do everything. Because husband's father encouraged him and demanded that of him!

INTERESTED BUYER

And now my mind won't ever allow me to stop thinking about how I can be better!

1980's REALTOR

So: we have a winner?

INTERESTED BUYER

We do! We'll take it!

1980's REALTOR

Excellent news! (*as a tagline*) Gender Norms Homes & Buildings. For everything we can't do, your husband swears he will.

(*Scene shifts. A memory: CHILD A1 sits at a bar with DAD A. They face forward, not looking at each other, watching something.*)

**VIGNETTE vi.**

CHILD A1

I really think they could go all the way this year.

DAD A

They will. Look at that defense!

CHILD A1

So you said work was  
okay?

DAD A

It's a little hectic, but fine, otherwise.

CHILD A1

How's mom?

DAD A

Your mother is worried about your sibling. I don't know what for.

CHILD A1

You're not worried?

DAD A

Worried about what? Not like they're doing anything worth worrying about.

(*The LISTENER, as THERAPIST A, appears in one of their listening chair. They take notes and comment throughout.*)

LISTENER

Well it seems like you have a truly bonded relationship with your Dad, do you agree?

CHILD A1

So you two have patched things up?

DAD A (*not responding to the question*)

What ya gotta understand about any good defense: it's about the size of it. You can't have a defense full of small guys. You gotta cover the field.

CHILD A1

Sure.

DAD A

Your sibling is a fuck-up.

LISTENER

And how did that make you feel? When your Dad talked about your sibling like that?

CHILD A1

How do you mean?

DAD A

They aren't doing anything! Wasting away! Sitting around doing nothing all day, doesn't help, can't pay for themselves. Useless.

CHILD A1

I think they're just going through something right now-

LISTENER

It feels like you want to defend them, but you can't necessarily.

DAD A

Not like you. Look at ya! Doing great! Good job, good relationship, solid social life. Your sibling just sits around all day.

LISTENER

Your Dad seems to have a lot to say about your sibling's life? Is that because they are older?

CHILD A1

Have you asked them to move out?

DAD A

Where would they go? Who's gonna rent a place to them?

CHILD A1

Well I'd offer to have them move into my place, but we don't exactly have the room-

LISTENER

That was nice of you, but that's not your job. We have to first learn to take care of ourselves.  
Then we can help others.

DAD A

They can't be hanging on to you, too! They'll only drag you down.

CHILD A1

I'm not sure if that's fair-

DAD A

Life's not fair. They gotta do something. Anything. With their lives.

LISTENER

Is it hard to hear that? Your father's perspective on your sibling?

DAD A (*soft*)

But you're doing great. I'm so proud of you. Are you listening to me?

CHILD A1

Thanks, Dad.

DAD A

And your grandfather would be of you, as well.

CHILD A1

That's- really nice to hear.

LISTENER

I know that's something you struggle with, what your grandfathers would think of you now that they're gone. It must've been nice to have that validation.

DAD A

How is work going? Keeping you busy, these days?

CHILD A1

It's good. Obviously a lot on my plate, but I think I'll be offered a promotion soon. At least they've indicated-

DAD A

That's good. Hey- one more round?

CHILD A1

Sure.

DAD A

It's on me. (*clinking glasses*) Cheers to moving up!

CHILD A1

Cheers.

LISTENER

Your father wants to take care of you. And it seems he doesn't care to do the same for your sibling. (*A beat.*) You seem quiet. Is it weighing on you? How does your partner feel about that?

*(Scene shifts. Back in CHILD A1 and CHILD B's bedroom. CHILD B turns the light back on.)*

CHILD B

Is this so stupid?

CHILD A1

It really is.

CHILD B

We should just listen to each other more.

CHILD A1

I love you.

CHILD B

I love you, too.

*(They kiss. CHILD B turns off the light. Scene shifts. CHILD E enters and faces the audience. They speak to no one in particular. They are perfectly well-adjusted throughout.)*

**VIGNETTE vii.**

CHILD E

Hey. I'm doing well. Really...actually, just fine. Not well. That's over-stating things. Work is fine, but I don't care about that. I'm not seeing anyone. But I am seeing a new therapist, so that counts, I guess. Let me think, let me think. Anything else to update you on? I guess not. (*A beat. CHILD E almost leaves.*) Oh! Wait, I totally forgot. I had this assignment, "homework" they call it, for therapy. I was supposed to tell you how you fucked me up. Well. They didn't put it that way. They said "how I was affected by our relationship", but let's be honest: that's pretty much what it is, right? I am pretty fucked up and it's kind of your fault. Not like in an angry way or anything! You just had an effect on me! And that's totally normal. Dad's should have an effect on their kids. I have friends, people I look up to and love dearly, who have terrible relationships with their dads. And if I can be honest: sometimes I'm glad you're not here. Because I don't have to realize what our relationship would be like. (*A beat.*) So: I made a list. I know that seem corny, something you would've hated, but since everything I've needed to organize my thoughts this way. So, here goes. (*CHILD E pulls out a list, unfolds it.*) Please don't interrupt me during this. Number one: You made me not trust anyone and I still can't today. Number Two: You made me feel unwanted sometimes and as a result, I have serious problems with intimacy. Number Three: you made me feel like what other people felt about me mattered, and now I am constantly seeking others' approval. Number Four: I can't tie my shoes properly. That's a big one. Number Five: I never learned how to cook eggs. What am I supposed to make for breakfast? I eat so much cereal. Number Six: I eat so much cereal because of you. Number Seven: I'm afraid you wouldn't approve of who I've become. Number Eight: I don't think I know how to love. Number Nine: I care so much about making you proud and not an ounce about making myself proud. Number Ten: You're not here, and that's why I'm so fucked up. (*CHILD E folds the list and puts it away.*) So. That's that. I'm glad I shared it. (*A beat.*) I'm not sure what I'm supposed to do now. So. I think I'll just go.

(*CHILD E exits. After a moment they re-enter.*)

CHILD E

I want to ask you something. And it's not like, a big deal or anything, I don't want sympathy and I'm not expecting anything. But I have to ask: why do any of that? When you have a kid and you might be gone soon? Why not just make that fucking count? Why do I care so much about you when you didn't care about me. That's big to say, I get it. You had me, so on some level you cared. But you're gone, and I still went through shit, so maybe you didn't? What the FUCK am I supposed to do now? Are you listening to me??? Huh? What am I supposed to do now?

(*CHILD E stands there. The LISTENER, as THERAPIST E, sits in one of their listening chair. They stare for a moment.*)

LISTENER (*gradually getting emotional*)

That must've been. I mean. What I mean to say is. That list. I'm sorry. (*A beat. They blow their nose, wipe their eyes.*) I really don't know what to do with that.

*(Scene shifts. CHILD C faces the audience, shouting.)*

**VIGNETTE viii.**

CHILD C

You shouldn't've done that! What the fuck were you thinking? For the rest of my life, I'm going to have to watch after you. What if we had died? What if you had hit someone? Killed someone?

Killed yourself? That's too much. This is all too much. You can't do that. You can't just get behind the wheel if you've had too much. There are so many other fucking things you could've done: called a car, called me, called mom. You could've walked. Hitch-hiked. Slept in your car.

Anything else. There were so many other options. So many other options. You're lucky you fucking knew the cop. You're lucky he let you off, drove us home. You're lucky. And that's more than I can say for anyone else. Lucky. Fuck you, Dad. Fuck you. *(A beat. CHILD C changes tones.)* That's what I wish I could've said to him in the car.

*(Scene shifts. CHILD D enters.)*

**VIGNETTE ix.**

CHILD D

I really do appreciate you helping, Dad, but it seems like you have other stuff to worry about back at the house. I can build the bookshelf, really. I have the tools, I think actually it comes with the materials. Like the screws and allen wrench and everything. I love that you take an interest in my life, Dad. Sometimes it makes me feel really, like, good. That you care about me and about my life and want to help me. But sometimes I worry that it's only because you need an outlet. Like you try to run away from your problems and as a result, run to me. And I'm not able to help myself, let alone help you. I'm in therapy, Dad! I'm not good at communicating with you, but I want to help you put your energy elsewhere. But I worry also that you think I can't do it on my own. And it's possible that's true, I don't need you to confirm or deny it. But if

I can't do it by myself right now, then I'll never learn. And that, somehow, feels worse. I just wish you'd let me try. I'll tell you when I need help, like with this bookshelf. I didn't ask! I would've asked, you know that. I promise I'll ask for your help. But I have to try to do some of this by myself. I think you have to use your energy for something else. *(A beat. CHILD D changes tones.)* That's what I wish I had said to him.

**VIGNETTE x.**

*(The LISTENER sits in one of their listening chair. They take notes. Each of the CHILDREN appear as they speak.)*

LISTENER

And when your father makes you feel that way, how do you cope with that?

CHILD A  
Rage runs.

CHILD B  
Dismiss it. Or internalize it.

CHILD A1  
Try to find a wall to bounce off of.

CHILD D  
Pillow punches.

CHILD B  
I make peace with it.

CHILD C  
Put a pin in it-

CHILD A  
Ignore the world and try to create something instead.

CHILD C  
-And never come back to it.

CHILD A1  
Sibling Shouting matches.

CHILD D  
Looooooooooooong periods of silence.

CHILD B  
I become his therapist.

CHILD A1  
Temper the temperature.

CHILD C  
I try to figure out how I can further the conversation.

CHILD D  
I try to improve my father's ability for emotional connection. It never works.

CHILD B You.

CHILD A  
I act. Just. Like. Him.

LISTENER  
And how do you cope? With him not being around?

*(A beat.)*

CHILD E  
Sometimes it just sucks.

*(Scene shifts. The LISTENER becomes a TALK RADIO HOST.)*

TALK RADIO HOST  
Hey, hey! My lads and ladies, welcome back to Dad-Talk here at *(radio jingle)* Krazy 202.5: Today's Top Hits and Hard Hitting Topics of Today. We've got a very special show for you guys and gals our there today. Today's show is hosted by: a weird protein bar you've never heard of, but somehow that one guy at the gym is always having. So let's get started with it: you know the name, you dominate the game: It's Dad-Talk! Where we take a moment to examine some of our listener's father's and their favorite things. Last week, we played a game called "What is my Dad's Favorite Animal and why is it the bear". Let's get to this week! We got! A game! Unlike! Any other! We reached out to some long-time listeners- Short-time lovers- We reached out to some of our top fans asked: "What is your father's favorite Movie and why is it Top Gun?" We got some callers lined up, here we go we got caller A1. You're the line with me and Guest on "Dad-Talk"!

*(CHILD A1 appears.)*

CHILD A1  
Hey, thanks for having me.

TALK RADIO HOST  
Alright here we go: Caller A1, *\*what\** is your Dad's favorite movie and why is it Top Gun?

CHILD A1  
Well. Actually. If I can, just like challenge the question. My Dad's favorite movie isn't Top Gun.

TALK RADIO HOST  
Say what! This may be a first for "Dad-Talk". Okay, okay, you've piqued my interest Caller A1. So, lay down some skinny, what, then, perchance, is your Dad's favorite movie?

CHILD A1

It's actually The Sound of Music.

TALK RADIO HOST

Thrown for a loop! How about that, here on Dad-Talk! Caller A1, I wanna guess. I think your dad's favorite movie is The Sound of Music because it's about beating the shit out of some Nazis, am I right?

CHILD A1

Uhm...no?

TALK RADIO HOST

Whoa hey, don't tell me. Okay, okay. Here's my guess: Your Dad's favorite movie is The Sound of Music because he likes the fact that the dad in that movie- My man Christopher Plummer! He likes that Chrissy Plummy absolutely shreds it on the guitar in that one number.

CHILD A1

No, that's not it either.

TALK RADIO HOST

I am stumped! Alright, alright, Caller A1: why is your dad's favorite movie The Sound of Music?

CHILD A1

He just...really likes the music? He sings it, like, all the time. And he also loves Julie Andrews.

*(A radio honking sound is played. CHILD A1 disappears.)*

TALK RADIO HOST

That is wild! Thanks for sharing, Caller A1. Let's get someone else in here who might be able to answer the question. We got Caller D. Let's hear what ya got!

*(CHILD D appears.)*

CHILD D

Hey, first time listener and caller.

TALK RADIO HOST

Glad to have ya! Welcome to "Dad Talk"! Let's get to our game. Here comes your question: What is your Dad's favorite movie and why is it Top Gun?

CHILD D

Well. I know the caller before me also did this, but my Dad's favorite movie isn't-/

TALK RADIO HOST  
/Don't tell me don't tell me!/

CHILD D  
/-Top Gun, it's White Christmas?

TALK RADIO HOST  
Two in a row! Two in a row! I'm so PUMPED to hear this: can't believe I'm experiencing history. All right, all right. Caller D-money, I wanna guess: Your father's favorite is White Christmas because Bing Crosby and Danny Kaye are absolute lady-killers!

CHILD D  
No...nothing like that. I'm pretty sure Danny Kaye was gay?

TALK RADIO HOST  
Lemme take a whack at it: your Dad's favorite movie is White Christmas because it's about Ruggedness! War!

CHILD D  
No. That's not either. My Dad's favorite movie is White Christmas because I think he loves the dancing and loves Bing Crosby.

*(A radio honking sound is played. CHILD D disappears.)*

TALK RADIO HOST  
Can't believe these are the callers we got, but holy hell, this is fascinating show. Alright, alright, let's get one last caller in before our time is up today. Caller E, you're on "Dad Talk"! You ready to play our game?

*(CHILD E appears.)*

CHILD E  
I...guess?

TALK RADIO HOST  
Okay love the confidence! Alright here's your question: What is your dad's favorite movie, and why is it Top Gun?

CHILD E  
This is tough. I mean. If I can be honest? Just like, safe space, right?

TALK RADIO HOST

Absolutely, everything you say is just between us- And forty million listeners!

CHILD E

Cool, cool. Well. My Dad's not around anymore. But-

TALK RADIO HOST

It's not Top gun is it?

CHILD E

No, no it's not.

TALK RADIO HOST

Three in a row! Wild day today! You know, let's make a small modification to the game. Caller E, you cool with that?

CHILD E

Sure. What is it?

TALK RADIO HOST

We're gonna guess what your Dad's favorite movie is, how's that sound?

CHILD E

Sure. Go ahead.

TALK RADIO HOST

Is your dad's favorite movie Step Brothers?

CHILD E No.

TALK RADIO HOST

Is your dad's favorite movie Risky Business?

CHILD E No.

TALK RADIO HOST

Is your Dad's favorite movie Dances with Wolves?

CHILD E No.

TALK RADIO HOST

This is getting crazy! Is your Dad's favorite movie Citizen Kane?

CHILD E No.

TALK RADIO SHOW

Mrs. Doubtfire? The Fugitive? The Dirty Dozen? Dirty Harry? Harry and the Hendersons?  
Indiana Jones? Jurassic Park? Anchorman? Caddy Shack?

CHILD E

No. None of those. He really loves Pretty Woman. Because he loves the line "Big mistake.  
Huge."

*(A beat. CHILD E disappears.)*

TALK RADIO HOST *(with accompanying sound)*

Wow. Well that's our show. Thanks for coming to "Dad Talk"! Great show today, huh?  
Certainly full of contradictions, definitely makes you think. Anyways! Thanks to our sponsor,  
those jars of mixed nuts that seemingly only dads buy, and thanks to our listeners. This has been  
"Dad Talk" on Krazy Radio 202.5! And tune in next week for our show's game: "Who is your  
Dad's favorite golfer, why is it Tiger Woods?"

*(Scene shifts. DAD A, DAD B, DAD C, and DAD D all stand around having a beer. They leave  
space for where DAD E would have been. The scene builds and builds until finally exploding.)*

**VIGNETTE xi.**

DAD A

What you wanna do is take it to Route 9, that's the fastest way.

DAD C

With traffic? Come on, no way!

DAD D

I've got the four-wheel drive, plus 26 to the gallon on highways. Can't beat that.

DAD C

No what ya wanna do is hop on exit 35, go west for five miles-

DAD A

Can't be doing that.

DAD C

-And then you take the left!

DAD B  
Can't take the left!

DAD D  
I can take whatever left I want, it's a free country.

DAD A  
Amen.

DAD C (*getting another beer*)  
I need another beer, anyone need  
one?

DAD A  
How's the kid?

DAD B  
Won't listen to reason. What's happening to this country?

DAD D  
Amen.

DAD C  
Can't get through to mine either. Yours is great though. Asking lots of questions.

DAD A  
Yeah?

DAD C  
Oh yeah, scared of you, I think.

DAD D  
We help them as much as we can.

DAD B  
Amen.

DAD D  
Mine's complaining I'm too hands-on, who would've imagined?

DAD A

Anyone's Dad too hands-on? Not mine!

DAD B

Not mine!

DAD C

Amen.

DAD B

But their political views! My dad didn't take five bullets in Korea for you to turn out like a commie!

DAD A

The way they disrespect me! If corporal punishment was still a thing. Amen.

DAD C

So I like to have a beer from now and then, I don't think I need to be punished for it.

DAD D

Well you'd want to take exit 45 to avoid the cops.

DAD B

The men in blue deserve our respect. Amen.

DAD A

Except when they pull him over!

DAD B

This damn economy is going to shit. We built all this for our kids and now it's all gone. Thanks a lot, Mexico!

DAD C

Great cerveza though! Amen!

DAD D

I tell ya, our kids won't ever be able to buy a house. Got mine for a nickel and did all the work myself! Amen.

DAD A

Well if we keep letting these rioters take over government property, the economy won't be the only thing destroyed. That's what Fox said!

DAD C

My doctor thinks I need to cut back. But I don't see anyone cancelling cigarettes!

DAD D

And our Dads smoked! All of them!

DAD B

While serving their country!

DAD A

You know who I listen to? That radio show, you know the one-

DAD C

Love that one!

DAD D

Just wish my kid would let me help more. They don't even know a wingnut from a bolt.

DAD B

Wingnuts! Like the Democrats!

DAD A

My dad is rolling over in his grave!

DAD C

My kid hates having a drink with me. That's how me and my dad bonded.

DAD D

Same here.

DAD A

Same here.

DAD B

Same here.

DAD A

That and a belt!

DAD C

A belt!

DAD D  
A belt!

DAD B  
My dad wouldn't let me disrespect him this way, why do we stand for it?

DAD C  
That's why I took Route 16 over here, no cops!

DAD D  
Well if ya had four-wheel drive-

DAD A  
I've got the new Outback.

DAD B  
Hatch-back.

DAD D  
Cowboys need a new fullback!

DAD A  
It's the disrespect-

DAD B  
The politics-

DAD C  
The good times-

DAD D  
The work-

DAD A  
Why do we do it?

DAD B  
Where's the return on our investment?

DAD C  
When will they learn?

DAD D

When will they see all that we do for them?

*(The Dads are all shouting at an insane volume. Like a pack of wild animals, it's hard to decipher if they are saying anything at all. Finally, A beat. The tone shifts.)*

DAD A

If I can speak my mind, I'm afraid my child will end up just like me. I'm afraid they both will.

I'm scared I can't communicate my feelings to them, and I'm afraid I've fucked them up beyond repair. I'm afraid I hold my child to such a harsh standard because my dad forced me to give up any goals I had, and as a result, I use employment as a tool to measure a person. Their success in life is determined by how solid a career they have, and how much money they make.

The truth is my children will never be able to live up to my ridiculous expectation, because I never lived up to my father's.

DAD B

If I can be honest, I focus so much on politics now, and then force my opinions on others because the world is shifting around me and I don't know what to believe anymore. I've bought into the lies and propaganda that TV hosts give me because I'm terrified that I've been wrong all along. And I've been trained not to acknowledge that my history is based on white supremacy and sexist beliefs, and so I refuse to see anything any other way. What if this country was built on blood and sweat from slaves? What if not everyone is free? What if our society needs to change? I'm afraid I can't change with it because I'm too far gone. I don't know my world looks like if I've been wrong all along. And it's not my fault that I've been taught what I've been taught, but I'm in control of my beliefs now and I should want to adapt to the world we live in.

DAD C

If I can tell you all, I rely on alcohol as a crutch because I can't face the emotional and physical abuse I experienced as a child. I've been taught not to see my alcoholism as a disease but instead as a coping mechanism. I hope that it's not a trait that's been passed to me, because that could mean it's a trait I've passed it to my kid. I think it's just have a good time and just to be social, but really it's a danger and it could kill me or someone else, like my kid! I drink to forget that. I drink not to remember. I drink to try to live a life I don't think I'm capable of. My father couldn't be himself without alcohol. I can't be myself without it, either. I ignore my family because I can't face them as the man I am now. I'm afraid they see me for what I am, and I'm ashamed of that. And I'll never admit my problem because that would give power to all of my fears.

DAD D

If I can share my story, I don't finish projects because it'll never be enough. I was taught by my father to do everything myself, but I'm afraid I can't do it all. Gender stereotypes and norms were forced on me and I feel like a failure if I can't live up to the antiquated standards that's

expected of me. If I can't fix that pipe, maybe I can't fix my marriage. If I won't be happy with the paint color, maybe I won't be happy with my child. I put off having to face these challenges because it's easier just to ignore it than admit I'm wrong. I help my child with their artistic projects to escape from the overwhelming anxiety I feel when I try to finish a job that I've put off for weeks. I need to learn to breathe through my panic, and finish what I've started.

*(A beat. They leave space for where DAD E would've spoken. The tone changes back.)*

DAD A

It's got to be Route 9, you can't go getting on the highway.

DAD D

I told you, I can get on any highway I want. Four-wheel drive.

DAD B

That's their right as a citizen of this country.

DAD C

Did anyone need another beer?

*(A beat. CHILD A, CHILD B, CHILD C, CHILD D appear.)*

CHILD A/ CHILD B/ CHILD C/ CHILD D

That's what I wish they'd said.

CHILD E *(appearing)*

But of course they didn't say any of that.

*(Scene shifts. The LISTENER sits in one of their listening chair. They address the audience.)*

LISTENER

You know, we go to therapy because we want help. That's, ultimately, what it's all about: help. But it's not so that someone can do all the work for us. I'm here to help you learn how to help yourself. It's not about lists, or tasks, or "homework". It's about the big things. It's what we're afraid of, what demons we fight, how we cope. And you're not always going to like what I have to say. But. One day you'll get it. That's a hard...thing. But I'm here to help. To help you. To help you help yourself. You see, it's not a perfect science. That's the point I want to make, there it is: no one is perfect. And we shouldn't want to be. Therapy isn't about becoming perfect. It's about accepting the limitations of ourselves and others. Everyone is limited by what they are and what we expect of them. I too, want to be more. I want to hold others accountable to be more, to be the best versions of themselves. And that's why I'm a therapist: to hold others accountable. I don't think you blame others for your problems. I think you want to understand? To learn to communicate everything. But you can't. And that's the first lesson: expect from

yourself exactly what you expect from others. Imperfection. I'm here to help you see the imperfections of everyone else, and to help you see that you can't do anything about it.

*(A beat.)*

LISTENER *(checking their watch)*

That's our time. Good session. We'll see you next week.

*(End of play.)*