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“Between a Rock and a Yes And” : Positive Correlations Between Improv Techniques and Conflict Resolution Theories

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“Between a Rock and a Yes And”

Positive Correlations Between Improv Techniques and Conflict Resolution Theories

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1. Introduction

Conflict resolution theories have sparked debates about efficiency and morality in Peace and Justice settings since the declaration of the area of study. In our current world, access to information about political conflicts is becoming more and more accessible with the continual growth of social media platforms. This seemingly never ending stream of coverage about conflicts motivated me to research what kinds of conflict resolution techniques were being implemented today. After taking the time to read multiple different theories about conflict resolution I started to notice a pattern between my own experiences with improv and what was being presented in the conflict resolution theories. This led me to my thesis: there is a positive correlation between the teachings of improv and theories of conflict resolution. Observing multiple current-day examples of how improv can improve self-concept and interrelations between smaller groups in the workplace, I believe that these teachings can be explored on a larger, more political level. Throughout my paper, I will show the similarities between different improv schools and different theories of conflict resolution and will also present five sketch comedy scenes that showcase the different areas of improv/conflict resolution that I explored.

2. Literature Review: Comparing Improv Teachings and Conflict Resolution Theories

For my research, I focused on two books of improv: *Improv At the Speed of Life* by TJ Jagodowski and Dave Pasquesi and *Improvisation for the Theatre* by Viola Spolin. I particularly enjoyed *Improv at the Speed of Life* because it covered the foundations of improv, but in a more modern context. TJ and Dave have been performing together as an improv duo since 2002. They are known for improvising a one hour play every night. I was also drawn to Viola Spolin's book because she is considered to be one of the most important innovators of 20th century American

Theatre. She made her mark in the world of theatre by developing unique directorial techniques, and also because of her focus on the present moment, stressing that actors should find their choices improvisationally. Spolin makes the argument that anyone willing to play in the theater has the potential to become “stageworthy”. She also argues that what makes an individual talented is their capacity for experiencing, or their channeling of energy (Spolin 3). By experiencing or channeling of energy, Spolin means that the most interesting improvisers to watch on stage are the ones who are intentional with their body and ideas, while also allowing themselves to be open to spontaneity and discovery. For example, this can manifest itself in specific enunciation and posture for the character that is being portrayed and then observing what happens when that character is placed in different situations. If the improviser is confident in their character, while also listening to the world around them then it helps build a trusting relationship between the actor and the audience. If an audience does not trust a player, then the performance itself will never be fully understood by the audience. When the improviser is confident in their character, but also not closed-minded, it opens up the world of the performance to the audience; allowing them to embark on the journey of discovery with the improviser as opposed to being on the outside looking in. Because improvisation forces the actor to carry themselves intentionally and openly, Spolin makes the point that improvisation can be used as tool and not just as a performance method (Spolin 3).

For my conflict resolution theorists, I mainly explored four books: *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development, and Civilization* by John Galtung, *Negotiating the Non-Negotiable: How to Resolve Your Most Emotionally Charged Conflicts* by Daniel Shapiro, *This Is An Uprising: How Nonviolent Revolt is Shaping the Twenty-First Century* by Mark and

Paul Engler, and *Dignity: The Essential Role it Plays in Resolving Conflicts* by Donna Hicks. I was specifically drawn to Daniel Shapiro's *Negotiating the Non-Negotiable* and how he teaches readers to resolve their most emotionally-charged conflicts. Shapiro currently works at Harvard University running the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School and is the former US Ambassador to Israel. John Galtung is a sociologist and mathematician and is known for establishing the Peace Research Institute in Oslo as well as the Journal of Peace Research. Galtung says, "Conflict generates energy. The problem is how to channel that energy constructively," (Galtung 2133).

2.1 The Role of Your Scene Partner

People often fall into the trap of viewing conflict as a binary concept and that only one side benefits. This results in people only focusing on trying to solve their independent interests as opposed to seeing how they can work together with the other side in the situation. Shapiro states, "Learning how to transform an emotionally charged conflict into an opportunity for mutual benefit requires that you learn how to effectively navigate this space" (Shapiro xvii). Similarly in the world of improvisation, collaboration is just as important and necessary. Spolin points out that, "This combination of individuals mutually focusing and mutually involved creates a true relation, sharing of a fresh experience" (Spolin 24). Both Shapiro and Spolin stress not only the importance, but the prosperity that can come from having a mutually beneficial relationship with any partner-related instance. They both argue that in order to have a successful interaction with someone, whether it be in a negotiation setting or in an improv game, that you must both be willing to acknowledge the role of the other party.

Conflict oftentimes repels an individual away from the idea of cooperation because of how deeply rooted it can be in fundamental values. This supports the point of why it is so important to remain present with your partner and to continue to remember the value of their role (Shapiro xvii). Along the same lines, the primary role of an improviser is to be a scene partner and to behave as genuinely as possible which allows your scene partner to respond appropriately (Pasquesi and Jagodowski 33). Donna Hicks points out that making your partner feel safe and understood is essential in resolving conflicts because it allows room for vulnerability and empathy (Hicks 134). The relationship is not about the title of the relationship, but rather about the emotional connection between participants, therefore making it necessary to acknowledge both parties as equal players (Pasquesi and Jagodowski 110). Spolin also stresses the value of the partner by saying, “Without the other plays, there is no game. We cannot play tag if there is no one to tag us,” (46).

2.2 Listening & Silence

Gene Sharp, an academic and activist that dedicated his life to advancing the study of nonviolent action, observed why people turned to war as opposed to taking nonviolent routes. He noticed that the attraction to war is not driven by hatred, but it is because people cannot see any other solutions for difficult conflicts (Engler 5). When you are in the heat of a conflict it is extremely difficult to have an outside eye and notice the different dynamics going on (Shapiro 9). In order to move forward, you must have a willingness to learn and this often comes from listening to the other side (Pasquesi and Jagodowski 37). Listening shifts your focus the other party involved, releasing group power and individual genius; therefore, making room for both

parties and creating a safe environment for discovery (Spolin 22). When both parties feel safe in the presence of each other, that gives room to genuine connection and conversation (Hicks 3).

In this time of conscientious focus, it is important to remember to act, not react. Reacting is protective, halts the process of creativity, and prevents us from exploring solutions beyond the ones we easily resort to. Intentional focus and acting upon what is given creates a “catalytic action thus creating interaction that makes process and change possible,” (Spolin 39). Listening relieves you of the pressure to come up with the solution all on your own. In order to be a good listener, it is essential to remove any obstacles that may prevent you from being able to listen. Pasquesi and Jagodowski highlight some of these obstacles: being afraid, pre-planning, and self-involvement (Pasquesi and Jagodowski 41).

In improv, it is essential to actively let go of your fears so you can focus on listening to your partners as opposed to the judgments going on in your mind. This also ties into pre-planning (the act of “planning the scene” before you are already in it). The point of improvising a scene is to experience spontaneity and discovery. If you pre-plan then you are going against the very nature of improvisation. Both of these combined issues can lead to self-involvement, which is pursuing your own individual interests as opposed to what is right for the scene. This connects to when Galtung says, “conscientization and mobilization are precisely the processes needed to transform the interests in a structural conflict into consciously held values” (2778). Galtung’s ideas about being aware of your personal obstacles and actively working on them are very similar to Pasquesi and Jagodowski’s points of being aware of

obstacles that arise in the individual because both of them stress the importance of self-awareness and self-critique when working towards resolving a conflict.

Shapiro divides conflict resolution up into three dimensions: Homo economicus, homo emoticus, and homo indenticus. These three categories identify the main points that people function from in a conflict: getting your interests met in an economic way, your emotional domain, and the driving urge to find meaning in your existence (Shapiro 13). In order to successfully function together, both parties need to identify the truths of both sides and what is driving them to respond in certain ways. This relates to Viola Spolin's point about improv when she says, "it is imperative to sharpen one's whole sensory equipment, shake loose and free one's self of all preconceptions, interpretations, and assumptions (if one is to solve the problem) so as to be able to make direct and fresh contact with the created environment and the objects and the people within it," (Spolin 15). Shapiro and Spolin's points are similar because both of them are pointing out that both parties, both in the context of improv and conflict resolution, have individual identities that need to be addressed in order to work together. They also both emphasize the necessity of not only recognizing your own aspects of your identity that cause you to function the way that you do, but you also must recognize your partner's.

Shapiro also makes the point that identity is not necessarily fixed. If identity was fixed then the only way to resolve a conflict would be to compromise your identity (which not a lot of people are willing to do); however, this does not mean that your identity is fluid either because that would mean you couldn't be held accountable for your own actions (Shapiro 13). The main

purpose of identity is to help people find meaning in their lives and that meaning can shift with life experience (Shapiro 97).

In improvisation, you must also recognize that when you are asking someone to use their imagination you are asking them to delve deep into themselves and to explore their identity. What the individual brings out in a scene is rooted in their frame of reference, which might be limited (Spolin 42). This is similar to Shapiro's point about the importance of taboos when in a conversation about identity. Shapiro defines taboo as, "[identifying] certain feelings, thoughts, or actions as being off-limits, creating a boundary between what is acceptable and what is forbidden within a community to which you belong," (Shapiro 77). Taboos are social constructions that are only as constraining as the parties observing them agree on, but nonetheless they are major factors to consider (Shapiro 77). An example of this is when Daniel Shapiro was leading a negotiation workshop in Egypt, he noticed two men getting along particularly well. Then suddenly, one of the men got up and quickly started gathering his things to leave the workshop. When Shapiro asked why he was leaving, the man said, "I didn't realize whom I was talking to until just now. (a former Israeli politician and peace negotiator) I have no issues with Israelis, I just can't risk the photo." The man was Lebanese, and Lebanese law forbid contact with Israelis (Shapiro 94). This is similar Spolin's point about each person's imagination having limitations, and the same is true for individuals in negotiation settings.

2.3 How Fear and Our Habits Inhibit Us

"Succumbing to the fear, which causes us to react without integrity is the true archenemy of good improvisation," TJ and Dave emphasize (Pasquesi and Jagodowski 73). Oftentimes

when you are in a state of fear and heightened emotion, you can experience vertigo which is, “a warped state of consciousness in which a relationship consumes your emotional energies” (Shapiro 36). In this warped state, your priorities shift from resolving the conflict to winning it and it reduces your ability to experience self-conscious emotions (Shapiro 37). Improvisers can experience vertigo as well and during that time they often stop paying attention to their partner, leading them to start fighting for status and blaming others (Spolin 11). In these moments, it is important to identify that we are acting out of fear so that way we can work calmly towards a resolution. Taking a step back, taking a breath, and slowing down are all useful ways to get your mind out of a state of panic and stop yourself from slipping into vertigo (Shapiro 44).

Habits also arise in moments of fear because it makes us feel safe to fall back on familiar feelings (Shapiro 72). Habits in the conflict resolution world can fall under the concept of the Repetition Compulsion as defined by Daniel Shapiro. The Repetition Compulsion is defined as a “Dysfunctional pattern of behavior that you feel driven to repeat,” (Shapiro 56). This habit ranges from interpersonal conflicts to international politics and acts as a clot in the conflict resolution process (Shapiro 55). It is important to acknowledge the lure to lean into your habits and that you are acting from a place of fear. Once you notice this you are able to work towards changing. “Every fear is a wish in disguise. For all its destructiveness, the repetition compulsion carries a message of hope,” stresses Shapiro (72).

While in a different light, improvisers also succumb to fear for very similar reasons. Much like the repetition compulsion, improvisers can fall into habits of their own that include scene steering and pre-planning (Pasquesi and Jagodowski 98). It takes a lot of courage to move from a place of fear into the unknown (Spolin 45), but once you do so you will rediscover your

partner and have more clarity about what step to take next (Pasquesi and Jagodowski 102).

Pasquesi and Jagodowski, Spolin, and Shapiro all agree that you must embrace this state of fear and use it as a time of discovery. By doing that, you become a better and more self-aware partner.

2.4 Negation

Negating an improv scene immediately stops the flow of creativity and action. In order to continue on in a successful scene, the players must work together and agree to continue the scene. Researches have also found that when someone negates our personality or our ideas, our bodies are programmed to sense a threat just as much as if we were being threatened physically (Hicks 6).

It is necessary to acknowledge in this work that the human experience of self-worth is fundamentally emotional (Hicks 6). There is room for healthy debate when it is used as a tool to assure the other side that you are aware of what is going on (Pasquesi and Jagodowski 62). The supporting factor of a healthy argument is that your energy is always directed towards your partner and ensuring their safety. Neurological studies have found that “psychological injury such as being excluded stimulates the same part of the brain as a physical wound,” (Hicks 19).

The concept of negation also brings up the concept of choice and when a participant actively chooses to not resolve a conflict. In his book, Shapiro highlights the time he visited the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland to lead a negotiation exercise amongst some of the top economists in the world. The exercise was that he split the room up into “tribes” and gave them fifty minutes to define key qualities of their tribes. He then posed the technicality that an

alien invasion was happening and they must choose one tribe to join and represent all of Earth. The economists could not agree on which tribe they should all join and therefore the world was destroyed. When one economist snapped at Shapiro, telling him that he had set them up for failure, he responded by saying, “At the end of the day, you had a choice. You could have come to agreement. You could have questioned me and resisted the rules. You could have. But you didn’t. You... had... a choice,” (Shapiro 12). An individual must be open to their partner because “a fixed attitude is a closed door,” (Spolin 44).

2.5 What does “Yes And” Mean?

The biggest thing that people forget when in times of conflict is that at the core of any argument, both parties ultimately want the same thing: to find a resolution. Daniel Shapiro brings up an interesting point when he says “Don’t change people’s minds. Change the subject,” (Shapiro 47). The concept of “Yes And” is entirely about acknowledging the truths of a given situation, and then making the choice to move forward together. In 1996, Ambassador Dennis Ross, previous State Department director of the Middle East, noticed that the conflict between Israel and Palestine was heating up to a point where civil negotiation didn’t seem possible. He took it upon himself to acknowledge both parties’ frustrations and knew that they needed space to step back from the tension. He organized a summit between the two prime ministers and that resulted in a conversation about possible mutual agreement as opposed to constant defense mechanisms (Shapiro 47). Donna Hicks noticed something similar when she led a workshop between Palestinians and Israelis and brought up the question, “What are you doing to contribute to the problem?” She and colleagues observed that prior to this conversation, both sides felt like they were the victim, and that prevented them from listening to the other side. Hicks wrote, “It

felt to me that this was the kind of conversation [about peace] they were yearning to have but that no one knew exactly how to go about making happen,” (Hicks 147). When they observed this, they were able to bring both focus groups together to talk about how they can move forward, past the point of seeing themselves as victims. It was acknowledgment and conversation that gave everyone space to speak and feel heard.

The root of improv is the concept of “Yes And.” It helps improvisers grow in scenes and it is what helps move conflicts from a place of tension to a place of listening. Every problem is solvable, the individuals in it just need to shift their focus to outside themselves in order to understand the big picture (Spolin 23). Transformation happens when we embrace each other’s humanness (Spolin 39).

3. Methodology

The first step I took was to find the most universal improv books that I felt related to the improv world today, and also find the books of some of the most well-known conflict resolution theorists. In order to find the improv books, I consulted with my advisor and also asked improv teachers that I trusted which books they preferred. Fortunately, I found two books, one that represented traditional improvisation techniques and the other that was a more modern version. When I was finding sources on the conflict resolution side, my main goal was to find theorists that I agreed with and then research their books. I had been researching Daniel Shapiro for a while because of his work with the Israel/Palestine conflict and I had known about Johan Galtung from my Intro to Peace and Justice class. After taking the time to read multiple different theories about conflict resolution I started to notice a pattern between my own experience with improv and what was being presented in the theories. I realized after reading, that many conflict

resolution attempts are stuck in a theoretical place and need some sort of feasible skill set that is rooted in a similar place to ground them.

The second step was to take notes on all of my sources and then draw connections between them. I then divided all of my research up and placed it into the categories that I thought best showcased the similarities between improv techniques and conflict resolution theories. I was satisfied to see how easily the notes from the improv books and the notes from the conflict resolution books fit well together in categories.

After I compiled all of my research and divided it into categories, I wrote a sketch that I thought fit best with each topic, writing “Stuck” for the Role of Your Scene Partner, “Woody Allen” for Listening & Silence, “History of Airbud” for How Fear and Our Habits Inhibit Us, “Jew-ish” for Negation, and “The MTA Yes And’s” for What Does Yes And Mean. When developing these sketched, I presented an initial round of them to Professor Stuard and we discussed why each one fit into the categories best. I had slight edits made to “Stuck”, “Woody Allen”, and “The MTA Yes And’s”. I rewrote the sketch for How Fear and Our Habits Inhibit Us, shifting the idea from a game show to a more familiar environment. I also rewrote “Jew-ish” to make the character of the Grandma blatantly negate Noah more. After meeting with Professor Stuard, I decided to focus much more on shaping the characters around the research as opposed to focusing the entire idea of the scene around it. For example, in my first draft of “Guess That War!” (the sketch for How Fear and Our Habits Inhibit Us), I was focusing on the overall concept that I wanted to be present in the scene. I then realized that I had been so focused on the big picture, that the scene itself wasn’t that funny or interesting. When I shifted my perspective in “History of Airbud”, I wrote Teacher as someone who has a difficult time accepting change

because they are afraid of it. By focusing on the characterizations more than the overview of the scene, I found that the ideas became clearer and the jokes became funnier.

Professor Stuard, and I have spoken a lot about the power of improv and what it could do for the world beyond theatre. Before I even started my thesis, we would talk about it in a hypothetical sense and how it could be applied to modern day politics. Professor Stuard stressed the importance of listening and acknowledging what your partner brings to the table while also understanding your own emotional state and learning how to communicate from that. In my junior year, I was in her improv class where we focused on being present and listening to our partners. I was with my peers who had also been studying acting for three years alongside me at the point, but many of them had trouble truly connecting with their partners onstage. Many people had feedback of how much of a conscious effort it takes to be a fully engaged scene partner and had to train themselves how to be better scene partners.

4. Conclusion

Overall, I learned a lot throughout the process of my thesis. I went through a lot of different ideas and am content with the one that I settled on. I not only learned how to analyze different types of texts and draw conclusions from two very different genres of writing, I also learned how to translate that research into sketch comedy. Through my research, I am able to recognize the positive correlation between improv teachings and conflict resolution theories. I plan to continue my research after graduation and hope to expand on this idea more. My research affirmed my speculations about the positive correlations between improv and conflict resolution theories and I plan to one day apply it hands on. To conclude my paper, I will close with a quote

from Viola Spolin, “Break through the walls that keep us from the unknown, ourselves, and each other.”

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Stuck

by

Elly Silberstein

INT. A FAMILY HOME - EVENING

CINDY sits watching TV. Next to her, a car has been driven through the wall. It's normal. MOM enters carrying suitcases.

MOM

Ugh, traveling really brings out the worst in me.

CINDY

Did you yell at another flight attendant?

MOM

(Scoffing) No, I did not yell at another flight attendant.

CINDY

Did you tell another barista that they were an accident?

MOM

That was one time and it was because I knew his parents and thought he should know.

CINDY

Did you have the aisle seat so you told the person with the window seat that you have a well-established non-profit curing Ebola in Nigeria and need to look out the window to "process the heartbreak you see everyday."

MOM

It's just a little white lie.

CINDY

You created a fake website so it would be convincing.

MOM

Because it's a great idea and I want the domain name.

MOM notices the car.

MOM (CONT'D)

Cindy! Did you drive the car through the wall?

CINDY

(Calmly) I did.

MOM

How long has it been like this?

CINDY

How long was your trip?

MOM

Three days.

CINDY

It's been there for three days.

MOM

The car has been in the middle of the wall for three days?!

CINDY

Yes, yes it has.

MOM

Cindy, why would you do this?

CINDY

Because I wanted you to have a physical representation of how you make people feel everyday.
(*Motioning to the car*) The wall is people, the car is you.

MOM

I am *not* a Prius.

CINDY

And I am not a wall, but that's what you make me feel like!

MOM

Okay, I hear you, but WHY did you think this was the best way to start this conversation?

CINDY

I don't know. Because I'm sixteen and impulsive.

MOM

Fair point. I guess the Prius does make an interesting statement.

BLACKOUT.

Woody Allen

by

Elly Silberstein

INT. A COFFEE SHOP — AFTERNOON

SAM and CARLA sit discussing politics. They each have a latte and sip at the same time.

SAM

I don't know, Carla, he seems like he might have a chance at winning the Republican vote.

CARLA

How could he have a chance at winning if he just admitted to having a relationship with his stepdaughter?

SAM

Yeah, but Woody Allen did the same thing and look at him now. He did a full 360.

CARLA

A full what?

SAM

You know, a full 360.

CARLA

Wouldn't that mean he's the same? I mean, I agree, but he just did a full rotation and ended up in the same place?

SAM

(Scoffing) Pedantics. Okay, fine he did a full 450.

CARLA

Sam, that would mean he went all the way around once and now is only slightly different.

SAM

Yeah he's really been working on himself by doing a 540.

CARLA

Okay now that would just technically be a 180 which I THINK is the phrase you're trying to say so just SAY 180 SAM.

SAM

WHY ARE YOU YELLING AT ME

CARLA
WHY ARE YOU YELLING AT ME

SAM
BECAUSE YOU'RE YELLING AT ME!

CARLA
BECAUSE YOU DON'T KNOW HOW TO TALK
ABOUT POLITICS PROPERLY

SAM
Yes, I do, but you're getting too
caught up on pedantics to actually
listen to my points..

CARLA
Saying "pedantics" is
grammatically incorrect.

SAM
GRAMMAR IS PEDANTIC.

CARLA
Well... I... don't... disagree... with
that...

SAM
So you agree.

CARLA
I didn't say that.

SAM
You said that you "don't disagree"
which means that you agree.

CARLA
No, there's gray space. Called
apathy.

SAM
So you're apathetic about—

CARLA
You're just trying to change the
subject!

SAM
That you changed in the first
place!

CARLA
Okay let's just take a breather,
these kinds of conversations can
get heated.

SAM
Right... so what were we talking
about?

CARLA
Uh.

SAM
Hm.

CARLA
I can't really remember.

SAM
Yeah I'm at a loss.

CARLA
OH! Oh oh oh! I got it. Woody
Allen.

SAM
Riiiiight, have you seen
Manhattan?

CARLA
Easily one of his most beautiful
films.

SAM
Yeah but did you hear he slept
with his stepdaughter?

BLACKOUT.

History of Airbud

by

Elly Silberstein

INT. A CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

TEACHER is lecturing and writing on the board. SARAH stares at the crevasses of her pencil. It's history class.

TEACHER
... and so the American
Revolutionary War started because
we wanted freedom from the
British.

SARAH raises her hand.

SARAH
We wanted freedom from the
British? Didn't we take the land
from other people?

TEACHER
Well, yes, but--

SARAH
This sounds similar to the War of
1812?

TEACHER
It was but in a different way--

SARAH
But in this different way they
still ended up fighting in the
same way?

TEACHER
Yes, but it was different, almost
thirty years later and--

SARAH
Like different but the same?

TEACHER
Um--

SARAH
Or the same but different?

TEACHER
Uh--

SARAH

Or at first the same, then a little different, then some familiarity mixed in, then PLOT TWIST the main character dies like Game of Thrones, but then it's back to the same?

TEACHER

I don't think I followed you there.

SARAH

I just feel like, they would've used some other tactic, ya know?

TEACHER

Well different war tactics were used--

SARAH

No I mean... like... without the fighting and stuff.

TEACHER

That's what war is. That's what history has consisted of.

SARAH

Yeah, I don't know Teach, I think you're undermining the creative potential of conflict resolution.

TEACHER

Well this is what American History is about.

SARAH

American History is about redundancy?

TEACHER

This is a conversation for another time.

SARAH

"A 'conversation' for another time"...I feel like that's what America said in the first war they had, and then just kept saying the same thing over and over again in history. It's like Airbud movies! You get the idea the first time around but then they keep wringing it out--

TEACHER

I don't think American History is similar to the Airbud movies.

SARAH

-- with Snow Buddies, Space Buddies, Santa Buddies, Spooky Buddies --

TEACHER

Well would you look at the time!

SARAH

Pretty sure they had a video game coming out at one point...

TEACHER

The class is over, Sarah.

SARAH

Oh, one more question! Were any of the wars ever started by women?

BLACKOUT.

Jew-ish

by

Elly Silberstein

INT. A MALL FOOD COURT - AFTERNOON

GRANDMA and NOAH sit at a mall food court. GRANDMA is wearing an elf costume, sipping on Jamba Juice. NOAH eats teriyaki chicken. They are seated next to a sign that reads "We thank St. Paul's retirement home for bringing the magic of Santa to Ross Park Mall."

GRANDMA

When I was your age I used to think that Santa was just a ripened Jesus.

NOAH chokes on a piece of chicken.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

And I still do. Isn't Christmastime beautiful?

NOAH

Well yes Grandma, and I appreciate you inviting me to the mall today, but you know that because mom converted to Judaism that makes me Jewish.

A beat.

We go over this every year.

GRANDMA

No, sweetie. Your mom said that she was converting to "get a break from family". Just like your grandpa said that he wanted to take a break after I spent all of our savings on AC/DC Christmas Special paraphernalia.

NOAH

And we do appreciate the annual Axl Rose themed advent calendars, but you really don't have to keep signing the card "Santa loves you".

GRANDMA

I don't know what you are talking about.

NOAH

Grandma--

GRANDMA

I could have never thought of such a creative gift.

NOAH

You charge it to mom's credit card.

GRANDMA

No, Santa just needed a little bit of extra money because grandpa thought that it was "10 years too many".

NOAH

Did Santa also need to buy the box set of "How I Met Your Mother"?

GRANDMA defiantly sips her smoothie.

GRANDMA

Well as soon as your done with your tare-ee-ah-kay chicken we can go get you a picture with the big guy himself.

NOAH

That's just Joe with his dentures in.

GRANDMA

No, that's Joe with MY dentures in. Are you going to give up being a sourpuss for lent?

NOAH

Grandma we're not even Catholic.

GRANDMA

With that attitude we'll never be.

NOAH

Oy vey.

GRANDMA

Please cover your mouth when you sneeze.

BLACKOUT.

The MTA Yes And's

by

Elly Silberstein

INT. A SUBWAY CAR - AFTERNOON

A full subway car. Doors are open.

OVERHEAD

Please stand clear of the closing doors.

The doors stay open.

OVERHEAD (CONT'D)

Ladies and gentleman, there is a train ahead of us. We will be moving shortly.

A minute passes.

OVERHEAD (CONT'D)

There is a sick passenger on the train ahead of us. We will be moving as soon as possible.

Another minute passes.

OVERHEAD (CONT'D)

Please stand clear of the closing doors.

The doors close for a moment, then they open again.

OVERHEAD (CONT'D)

Due to the sick passenger at Fulton street this train will now be running on the F line.

The doors remain open.

OVERHEAD (CONT'D)

This train will also be skipping Essex street, I repeat this train will also be skipping Essex street.

A moment.

OVERHEAD (CONT'D)

This train will be running express from 2nd Avenue to the end of the line.

A moment.

OVERHEAD (CONT'D)

In addition the front two cars of the train are no longer in service. Please move if you are seated in these cars.

A moment.

OVERHEAD (CONT'D)

The air conditioning is no longer working. We are sorry for the inconvenience.

A moment.

OVERHEAD (CONT'D)

Ladies and gentleman, my, uh, son is on this train and he's been working on some poetry. He'll be coming car to car. Please, uh, donate if you would like to support young artists.

A moment.

OVERHEAD (CONT'D)

There are rats in the cars. Please watch-out while we wait.

A moment.

OVERHEAD (CONT'D)

Ladies and gentleman, we will now be running on the R line because... *muffled words*.

A moment.

OVERHEARD

I repeat, we will be running on the R line and still express.

A moment.

OVERHEAD

Please stand clear of the closing doors.

A moment.

OVERHEAD (CONT'D)

Ladies and gentleman, due to a technical problem, this train will no longer be in service.

Doors close.

BLACKOUT.