Author's Note Page:

Woody is very bright but non-verbal. He communicates through sounds, nodding his head yes or no. Eventually he used word boards and now a Speech Generating Device (SGD) like the one Stephen Hawkins has. Woody activates it with his head. Tobii Dynavox, known as Sentient Systems Technology (Dynavox) in the 1970s, grew out of a student project at Carnegie-Mellon University and was created in 1982 to help a young woman with cerebral palsy to communicate. Woody was one of the very first owners of a Dynavox in 1982.

CAST:

Ann Talman

SETTING:

Pittsburgh and Ann's memory

@ 2018 by Ann Talman

Production shots:
https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/y9b06s9p8pjzt8wfl853z/h?dl=0&rlkey=pknnmp6cp44h1n23g9t3x3s61

(*Preshow 15 minute video underscored as audience taking seats) (Announcement) (Then 5 minute video begins as Ann enters from back of house, sits on cushion in front of screen on stage and watches the rest with the audience.)* Link to videos: https://vimeo.com/412018718/cb5657278a

Woody's Order! Prologue:

To Audience: December, 1995. My big brother Woody and I are finally tucked into the Super Sized bed at The Allentown Hilton, having a Grown-up Prop Up with all the pillows and blankets, just like when we were kids. A peaceful end to a long ordeal. Earlier that day we had tucked our father into the cold December earth. And from then on, it was just Woody and me. (*Cue: Closing Theme of The Simpsons.*)

Ann: Hey Woody, matching PJs.

Mmm. (head tilt SL)

Ann: You drool on me, I swear to God, I'll kick you right outta this king size bed.

Mmm. (yeah, right)

Ann: Let go of the remote and turn yourself onto your sleeping side, OK? Woody, we did it. I'm worn out.

Yes.

Ann: Hey Woody?... There's more right?…I'm young still. I wonder what's next, for me?...Woody?...

To Audience:. He was asleep. So I stared at his face in the moonlight as I have done since I have memory **and waited for the cripple to go away.** That night I had one of my Woody and Me Rescue Dreams. We burn-up in fires, smother in cave-ins, sink to the bottom of the ocean in a car. We're always in a life or death crisis and I'm faced with a choice. **Do I save myself? Or do I stay with my brother so he won't die alone**? I ALWAYS stay. We die together. **Never ever do I leave my brother.**

Woody's Order!

(Mime washing clothes)

Little Ann: Mom! Mom! Mom!

Mother: What Ann!?

Little Ann: How many days till Woody comes home from his special sleep-away school down south for his summer visit?

Mother: For Heaven's sakes, Ann, three weeks, July 22nd, 1964, his sixteenth birthday!

Little Ann: Can we get my Advent calendar down so I can count the days like Christmas?

Mother: (sing song) Yes Ann. Daddy'll get it for you when he gets home from the office. I'm busy right now washing his mining clothes. Tomorrow he goes down under to inspect.

Little Ann: I get to look for coal in his ears!

Mother: *Calm down, Miss Ann!* I'll need you to help me get ready for Brother. This is an extra special summer visit. Daddy has a big surprise– and there's lots to do to prepare, hear?

Little Ann: Yes m'ame (whirl around) Mom?

Mother: *Yeeees,* Ann.

Little Ann: Would you tell me the story about how Woody conjured me? (after thought) And what's conjure again?

Mother: *If you* help me set the table? (Ann nods and does 1 fork) *Allright*. ***Conjur*** means that Brother wanted something so much he thought and thought and prayed and prayed and surenuff- like magic, it happened!

To Audience: *This is the legend of my birth.* Woody and I love this story.

Mother: It all began in 1956 when Woody was eight and we still lived in West Virginia. I was headed to the hospital for my big back operation, and Woody was parked on the wrap around porch in his chair to see me off and cryin' so hard bless his heart. Then as they loaded me into the ambulance, your brother did an amazing thing. At the top of his lungs, he shouted: **M-O-T-H-E-R!** His mouth made the M, the O, the TH and the ER plain as day and everyone heard. Was a miracle. Only word he ever spoke.

Little Ann: Neat-o!

Mother: T'was *adrenaline* helped him do it sure nuff. (almost to herself)

Little Ann: What's 'Drenaline?

Mother: ***A-drenaline, Ann, pay attention,*** is a juice that shoots through your veins in times of great danger to help you do something you would never be able to otherwise. And the minute I came home, from the hospital six weeks later, *that's when he began to conjure you.*

To Audience: **This is the best part.**

Mother Brother would touch my tummy with one hand and Daddy's . . . lap with the other, and wave his hands like wands! (Little Ann giggles)

To Audience: Our Dad, Woods Garth Talman, a *Virginia* Gentleman, WWII Colonel, and Chief Inspector of Coal Operations for US Steel, called Woody's efforts (as Dad) "The Campaign" and Woody was "The Superintendant of The Campaign for The Duration".

Mother: And nine months later, on *Friday The Thirteenth,* September, 1957, you finally appeared!

Little Ann: A Caesar, right?

Mother; Yes Ann, A *planned Caesar, we didn't take any chances.*

Little Ann: Cause of Woody and the babies who went back up too soon?

Mother: What? How did you know about that?

Little Ann: Woody told me!

Mother: Oh. That's right. When Woody was born in 48, we were afraid he was gonna go right back up to Heaven from whence he came too.

Little Ann: I know. I'm glad he stayed, so he could conjur me. Aren't you?

Mother: Yes, Ann. But, (weary) it has not been easy. When Woody was born, I knew right away something was wrong. There was silence in the delivery room. He was fevered and jaundiced. We didn't know yet it was cerebral palsy. He had to grow a bit. Then they compared what was normal with what was … Woody. By the time we took his Christening picture and he was still lying down – we knew.

Ann*:* But I sat up for my Christening picture right?

Mother: ***YES ANN.*** Yes you did.

To Audience: I was christened *Martha Ann,* but our parents called me **Ann**, because **Ann** is a short word, beginning with an open vowel, ending in a consonant. An easy word for Woody to say in case he might one day get another gust of Drenaline.

Mother: On the wavy white border of those Polaroids of newborns they took back then, I wrote, "Woody's Order Exclamation Point! An instant nickname for a guaranteed guardian. You have a destiny Miss Ann. *To be thy brother's keeper in case anything ever happens to mommy or daddy . . . but don't fret sugar-it won't***.**

Little Ann: (think about it) OK!

Woody's Home!

To Audience: Finally, Christmas in July!

(Looking out window, to self at first like a mantra) Woody, Woody, Woody.

Woody, Woody, Woody. (see car) It worked! (begin wave) There's Daddy's car turning up Thorntree Drive! Mom! Woody has on his Davy Crockett coonskin cap! Daddy, open the door and do the airplane seatbelts!"

EEEEE!

Little Ann: Woody says, 'I'm home!"

Dad: *Calm down Miss Ann.*

To Audience: Since the early 40s Dad had airplane seatbelts from the USSteel private hanger installed in all his cars.

Dad: 3 in front 3 in back. Safety first y'all. All right now, exhale on the exertion and bend with your knees. (Place Woody tenderly into imaginary wheelchair.)

To Audience: Woody's wheelchair had an airplane seatbelt too. (buckle seatbelt)

Little Ann: Woody did you bring me my wings from TWA?

Yes.Yes! (He looks down at his shirt)

Little Ann: Daddy did you bring me the little brown bottles from the plane for my Imaginaries?

Dad: Yes.

Mother: Oh Woods!

Dad: Now Martha…lay off me.

Little Ann: Woody pop a wheelie! (I jump up and down)

Mother: Ann! Don't jump! My cake'll fall. You're like a pogo-stick!...And Brother's chair is not a toy, hear!

Little Ann: Woody, can I put my Barbies on your chair tonite, just for a little while, please?

Mmmmm (*maybe)*

Little Ann: Woody I love you so much! (kiss) I wish you lived with us all the time!

Mother: Ann did you sip some of Daddy's martini? Woods she has been acting drunk all day. What are we gonna do with her?

Dad: Trade her in for greenstamps I reckon.

Little Ann: Hey Woody! ***Johnny Beck*** comes tomorrow!

EEEE!

To Audience: Johnny Beck was one of the highschool boys Dad hired to help lift and carry Woody when he was at work or down in the mines. They helped mother feed Woody too when her arthritus was acting up. Johnnie and all his highschool buddies treated Woody just like one of them, even took him camping. No girls allowed. Every single helper became a doctor or a preacher or a teacher. Woody has that kind of effect.

Little Ann: Woody, your neighborhood baseball birthday party is next week! Oops. Dad says Bob Prince and Maz are gonna stop by. We're going to the pool every day and Kennywood, and The Gateway Clipper and Storybook Forest and baseball games at Forbes Field with the ivy. And Bob Prince'll announce on KDKA when you're there just like last year and we'll do Seventh Inning Stretch when Daddy helps you stand up almost on your own! And Woody, this year ***YOU*** get to sit in the dugout for a game! I'm not allowed only you. But I'll be in the box with my mit to catch fly balls. **But best of all Woody, this visit, Mom says I'm gonna learn to feed you too!**

EEEEEE!!!!!

Mother: Ann, let your brother rest! I'm gonna put 10 pounds on Brother this visit, to get him through to Christmas. When he was a baby, the hardest thing was to feed him. My world revolved around that. He couldn't breast feed. Failure to thrive.

Little Ann: Did you use an eye dropper like for baby birds fallen out of their nest?

Mother: Don't be ridiculous!

Little Ann: Um, Woody, Mom says we can have an Official Prop-up in Dad's Lucy Bed tomorrow night, with all the pillows and blankets, and watch the portable! *Wagon Train's* on I think!

EEEE!

Mother: Ann, why do you call Daddy and my beds that?

Little Ann: 'Cause, just like The Ricardos on *I Love Lucy*, you and Dad each have your own little bed, not one big one! Woody listen! (takes a moment to prepare and sings I Love Lucy theme operatically) 'I love Lucy and she loves me. We're as happy as we can be!'

Mother: Lord have mercy. I have one chile who can't speak atall and tha tother just can't stop!

Little Ann: Woody, watch me perform the percolator! (she does)

Mother: Woods, get the Polaroid! She's on stage again! This is RICH! Oh my, you look like a young Elizabeth Taylor from *National Velvet*. Even as a percolator! Woods, she could almost play her daughter! (*sound cue: Maxwell House commercial and fade out.)*

Twenty Questions

To Audience: Patty and Katy O'Malley next door were my new best friends. And just like Caroline Kennedy we each had our own Chatty Cathy: blonde, brunette, redhead. The week before Woody came home, when we were playing Pegasus from Fantasia, I had prepared them.

Little Ann: Hey you guys, you're gonna love my big brother Woody! He's so handsome and funny and smart! He's like a real live doll to care for and I do! Oh, he's in a wheelchair cause his legs don't work. But he says the funniest things sometimes! You're gonna love him just like me!

To Audience: But when Patty and Katie met Woody it didn't go the way I planned. They were frightened and ran home. I saw Mother cying when they left. But Mrs. O'Malley came over later.

Mary Jo O'Malley: (Pittsburgh accent) Knock knock knock. Mr. Talman, is Martha home?

Dad: Why hello Mary Jo. Come on in. Martha is lyin' down right now with a sick headache.

Mary Jo: Well, I don't wanna bother yenz, but I wanna 'pologize 'bout the way my girls acted today. They were upset ona counta we didn't, they didn't relize . . . Woody can't speak. When Ann talks 'bout Woody

Dad: Which is all the time. She talks for two.

Mary Jo: (she laughs) Oh yeah. She says things like "Woody says, Woody thinks, Woody toll me," . . . so it was a shock.

Dad: Well now don't fret, Mary Jo. We understand. So does Woody. Why don't you'all come on over for a cocktail tonight and we'll show you how we talk to Woody.

(cue:Jeapordy theme)

Dad: (clapping) All right now y'all, Let's play a round of Twenty Questions! Woody can nod yes or no, so talkin' to him is a guessing game like that brand new show Jeapordy! Right Buddy Boy? (does cheek fist)

Yes. … … … Mmmm! (Woody points to me)

Little Ann: Woody wants to say something! I can read his mind! (proud)

Yes!

Mother: Alright dear. Let's see, person, place, or thing? Person?

No. Yes. (Woody enjoys this)

Little Ann: Neither!" That was easy!

Hehehe.

Dad: Dead?

No.

Little Ann: Famous?

No.

Mother: Animal? (she knows)

EEEEEEEEEEEE!

Little Ann: Lassie? … Rin-Tin-Tin? … Alvin and the Chipmunks?… I know! Woody, you want to call Grandma in Birmingham and have Buffy bark to you?"

Yes, yes, yes!

Little Ann: I got it!!!!!!!!!

Dad: Well, I'll be. How on Earth did she win so fast?

Little Ann: I have Super-sonic ESP. Right, Woody?

Yes!

Dad: Right with ever sharpness.

Little Ann: Um, Patty, Woody wants to know can he borrow your Easy Bake Oven?

Mother: Ann! Don't put words in Brother's mouth, hear! (now softer) We have to watch her like a hawk on that.

Little Ann: OK. Patty, ask him something!

Patty: (shakes her head no.) Nuh uh.

Little Ann: Katie, you go.

Katie: (She whispers also Pgh accent) Hey Woody, hows come you drool like a baby?

Little Ann: (defensive) He can't help it. He can't keep his lips together. His drool is warm and smells like Vitalis mixed with the place I like to kiss on his forehead where his hair starts. And I don't even care when it gets in my hair!

To Audience: But what I love about Woody's drool is that it's the one smell in the whole world that also smells just like me.

Why?

To Audience: I dreaded when Mother brushed my fanny-length hair each night. She wasn't gentle. But it was one of my chances to ask her things.

Little Ann: Ouch!

Mother: Ann! Sit still. You're like a squirrel in a windtunnel! (brushing my hair in front of a mirror)

Little Ann: Mother, why does Woody have to have CP? Was God mad at us?

Mother: No Ann and he doesn't *have to have* CP he just does. Our God is not mad he's loving.

Little Ann: Mother please, you're pulling too hard.

Mother: (fiercely) ***Ann, look at me when I talk to you***. The part of Brother's brain that got hurt when his head was stuck in the tunnel while he was bein' born, is just the part that tells his body *how* to move, not the *thinking* part, hear?

Little Ann: Yes mam'e. He's not retarded, he's just crippled.

Mother: Ann, let's just say he's *special*, all right?

Little Ann: OK. Will Woody ever get better?

Mother: No, Ann. CP is for life. You know that. (slight scold)

Little Ann: Can't Mr. Einstein invent somethin' to make him better?

Mother: No Ann, not even he.

Little Ann: Will Woody ever get married?

Mother: (harsh) No Ann! That will never happen.

Little Ann: Are you mad at *me*?

Mother: (softer) No, I'm just worn out, I do declare.

Little Ann: Poopitus! That's what Lucy gets when Little Ricky wears her out. Poopitus. (rise) Some day I'm gonna be on TV too Mom! (beat.) When I'm not on Broadway. (*cue:Beach Boys "In My Room")*

A Crawl In

To Audience: Each night Dad did prayers with Woody and me.

Dad: (kneeling) . . .world without end. Amen.

Little Ann: And God Bless John-John and Caroline now their Daddy went up to God in Heaven too soon!

Dad: Right-o**.** After all you and Caroline are growin up together,… separetly.

Little Ann: (giggles and puts her head on Dad's chest.) Hey Woody. I can hear Daddy's heartbeat sixty like the clock.

Mmmmmm. *Yes.*

Dad: All right now son, turn yourself onto your sleeping side. No, no, don't help him Miss Ann. He can do it himself. Right son?

Mmmmmm.

Little Ann: Put the bedsides up so he won't fall out!

Dad: (rising) Allright now. (blows kiss) Lights out you two scallowags.

Little Ann: (whisper) Hey Woody. Crawl in, tonight?

Mmmm. *Yes.*

To Audience: Each night Woody and I waited for Mom and Dad to put the house to sleep. And then…

Little Ann: Hey Woody, matching PJs! (get running start, jump.) Now, Woody, don't worry. We'll teach everybody how we talk. Someday people are gonna figure out how to see thoughts and feelings like you and I do. They're real things with weights and shapes and colors. We just can't measure em yet cause we don't have the right kind of scales. They're like the invisible gases in the mines Daddy measures so people don't blow up and die. If you could use words, I bet you'd swear sometimes like Dad, huh Woody? 'Specially when we can't figure out what you're trying to tell us in Twenty Questions.

Yes.

Little Ann: Hey Woody? Do you think in words? I do. Pictures and smells too.

Yes. (very serious).

Little Ann: So, even though you don't talk out loud, you think in words, so you're talking?

Yes! *Yes! Yes!*

Dad's voice: Pipe down you two scoundrels. Bedtime. (we giggle)

To Audience: As Woody fell asleep, each night, like the twin morning doves outside our window, he cooed. I struggled to stay awake, to watch his face get soft and his twisty wrists relax. **To see the cripple go away.** Because asleep, he looks normal. And then I'd stare at my handsome brother for hours and pretend *what if.*

Little Ann: *What if Woody were normal? If Woody were normal,* he would go to Virginia Military Institute like Dad, but be a fireman cause he loves firetrucks, have a girlfriend, ***and they would get married*** and I would be the flower-girl, and they'd come see me on Broadway. *(Sound cue: Woody coos.)*

"Duck and Cover!"

To Audience: Showtime! I was at places about to make my debut. My first official feeding lesson.

Mother: Ann, is that my apron you have on tied up under your arm-pits like a smock?

Little Ann: It's my costume!

Mother: This isn't play acting, Ann. It's for real!

Little Ann: Yes ma'am. (hurt)

EEEhehehehe. (giggle)

Mother: Now, Ann! Stop the silly. (trying not to giggle) Brother will laugh so hard he won't be able to hold himself up!

Little Ann: I know I love it when I make him laugh so hard I can see the wiggly thing in his throat!

Mother: It's called a uvula. No baby talk, hear? (turned away) And don't pick your nose. It'll make your nostrils big and you'll never be a movie star.

Little Ann: (whisper) Woody, how did she know I was picking my nose? (he rolls his eyes)

Mother: (turn back again) Now, first I tie his protector. And ***we*** *don't call it a bib. Remember Woody is not a baby, he's sixteen.* And **NEVER EVER** use plastic utensils. They'll shatter in his mouth. Sit up! The sign of a great actress is she looks taller than she is on stage. (grab bowl) Alright, let's begin with Rice Krispies and banana.

Little Ann: (taking bowl) Yes, ma'am. (Starts to feed Woody, but hesitates with nerves.) Mother. I know I can do this. But will you be mad if I spill a little?

Mother: No Ann. Accidents happen. Right Woody?

Mmmmmmm. (He giggles)

Little Ann: OK. Here I go. (mime a bite.) We did it!

Mmm. (Smiling)

Mother: Bravo Miss Ann. You're on your way.

Moo, mmmmoooo, moo.

Little Ann: Mom! Woody's doing The Moo Coo!

Mother: The what?

Little Ann: The MooCoo. It means pure love. I'm gonna write it out in music like the notes in your hymnal!

Mother: Mercy. (*Voice of Walter Cronkite introducing the news for that night)*

A New School?

Dad: (clapping) All right now y'all, Ann, Woody, Mother and I have big news.

Little Ann: Is it about the riots in Birmingham with all the dogs and fire hoses?

Dad: No. *Martha, no more TV during supper*. Woody, Mother and I have always wanted you to live closer to us. We're gonna move you to The Good Shephard Home in Allentown, Pennsylvania. It's only a six hour drive, not all day on aero-planes.

AAAAHHHHHHHH!

Mother: Oh Woods, I think Woody is upset right now about leaving Grandma, and Aunt Mary and all the cousins down south.

Little Ann: WAIT! Did anyone ask Woody what he wants? Why not Pittsburgh? Why can't he live with *us*?

Yes Yes Yes!

Dad: There isn't a school for his age group here, Miss Ann. The Squirrell Hill Crippled Children's Home cut off was sixteen. *This* one is just right. We'll be together ***every*** holiday.

Little Ann: But the kids at school think I'm an only child and I hate when he has to leave.

OOOOoooooo! (me too!)

Mother: (with dread) Woods, you grab Woody! I'll do the pillows and bedsides.

Mmmmmoooo!

Dad: Wings in angel, wings in. We don't want you to hurt yourself. (*Dad does the fireman's carry to take Woody to his room)*

Mmmmmmmmmm!

Dad: Go limp son. Go limp. Relax and let your body go limp. All right?

NOooooooooo nooooo!

Dad: Calm yourself. We love you. (blow kiss and pull door closed)

To Audience: But Woody thrashed and foamed, biting his tongue. I sat on the slate steps to the basement to wait it out and cry. I felt like the tuning fork that Mr. Tingle used to tune our upright piano. And that was really his name. When he plucked it, it looked still on the outside but I knew it was shaking really hard on the inside.

Mother: (whisper looking over LAnn shoulder) Ann, the hardest thing we ever had to do was to leave Brother behind in Birmingham when Daddy got promoted north. But there were no schools right for Woody then. This is good news. This is a blessing.

Little Ann: I don't believe you.

Dad: (crouches) Since Brother can't speak he gets so upset sometimes he explodes. It's The Talman Temper. It'll slow down in time.

Little Ann: I wish I could throw a fit sometimes too.

Dad: (sadly) No you don't, sweetheart.

To Audience: Later I snuck into Woody's room for an Emergency Crawl-in!

Little Ann: Woody, I don't ever want you to leave. It's only nice when you're home. When you're gone, Mommy and Daddy argue and yell. I hide under my dustruffle.

Yes

Little Ann: When you *and* Daddy are gone, and it's just me and my Imaginaries, Mother is mean.

Yes

Little Ann: Do you remember her happy?

Yes, yes , yes!

Little Ann: She pulls when she brushes my hair and yells at me. And she eats foods goofy, like a whole package of pecan swirls from the tin tray she unrolls one by one, and I saw her eat a whole carton of Isaly's and a bag of Fritos once too. She wears the same clothes for days, stays in bed and cries and makes the same thing for dinner over and over.

Yes

Little Ann: No one would believe me but you. I wish Mrs. O'Malley could be "Mom for a Day." Or maybe Donna Reed or Mary Tyler Moore. (serious) But not Lucy, she's too silly for real life.

Yes. (*He motions to his legs and then his back)*

Little Ann: She's sad cause you have CP and her back hurts her real bad?

Yes.

Little Ann: I heard Grandma whisper on the phone to Aunt Mary she's never been the same since you.

Yes

Little Ann: She hates me!

No! No, no, no!

Little Ann: I'm a handful.

Yes… Mooo. Moooo. Mooo.

Little Ann: I love you too. Hey Woody, I have an idea! When I grow up and have my own house, you can come live with me forever. Promise. You'll never have to throw a fit and no one will ever yell or cry. Double promise.

To Audience: That night I had one of my Woody and Me Rescue Dreams. This time we were trapped in a cave-in at one of Dad's coal mines. I tried to save us both, but I couldn't. I tried to tell Woody about it the next day, but he cried so hard he wouldn't let me finish. (*Cue*: *Workin' In a Coal Mine)*

Dad: (clapping) All right now ya'all, time to synchronize watches. In the AM, the ETD is 10:00 sharp, hear?

Little Ann: (carefully) Hey Woody, when we come see you at your new school, Daddy says I'll be allowed *inside* not have to wait outside in the stupid stinky car.

Mmm (so?)

Mother: Sweetheart, it's like grauation to prep-school! New clothes, new nametags and I made you a new baseball scrapbook from the sports pages. The Buccos are gonna go all the way again like in 60. What with Willie Pops pumpin' that bat, Roberto's arm and Maz in the clinch. Beat 'em Bucks!

Mmmmm. (he laughs a little at her trying)

Mother: He's coming round y'all.

Dad: And tomorrow night, Woody, you'll stay with us at The Holiday Inn with a prop-up in a vibratin' bed. You plop a quarter in the metal box, and the bed jiggles to relax you! How about that? (we all wait for him to come on board)

EEE!

Little Ann: Wee Wee Woody!!!!!! OOooo! Watch me perform a vibrating bed! (in vibrating voice.) (*Cue: Lassie into Wonderful World of Disney))*

Interlude

To Audience: Over the years, we called Woody every Sunday night between Lassie and The Wonderful World of Disney. He *loves the phone.* Still does. Now Skype and Facetime too. But back then the orderly held the receiver up to Woody's ear, only he'd get so excited sometimes he couldn't make a sound.

Dad: Well now, he's not there. *Son, are you there? Make some noise, son,* Martha, he's not there.

Mother: Yes he is, Woods. You just have him so riled up he's 'side himself.

Older Ann: (roll eyes like a precocious teen) Let me try you guys. There's a trick! Hey Woody, listen to this. Linda Weed and I had study hall 3rd period and I made her laugh so hard we ***both*** wet our pants! …(silence, then)

EEEhehehe!!

Dad: Martha, he's here now, come say hello.

To Audience: I however, have grown to hate the phone. Tuesday, November 29th, 1977. I was 20 and a theatre major at Penn State. My phone rang around noon.

Ann: Hello?

Mother Ann?

Ann: Oh, hi Mother. Why are *you* calling? Aren't you still mad at me about whatever?

Mother: Well, I just wanted to know if you got back to school from Thanksgiving all right?

Ann: Yeah. I'm fine.

Mother: Is there anything you need?

Ann: No.

Mother: Well, all right, . . . good-bye, dear.

To Audience: And I could hear her putting the phone down when an inexplicable rush of genuine gratitude, over which I had no control, compelled me.

Ann: Mom, mom!

Mother: Yes?

Ann: I just want to thank you for everything you've ever done for me.

Mother: Oh, you're welcome. Good-bye.

To Audience: The next day *my phone rang again*.

Ann: Hi Dad! Why are *you* calling in the middle of the day? You never do that!

Dad: Ann, I don't know how to tell you this. Your mother was killed in a car accident today.

Ann: Dad, don't hang up. I'm gonna put the phone down for a bit but don't hang up OK?

Dad: (gently) All right. (phone dissolves in my hand)

Ann: M-O-TH-ER!!!!!!!!! (Pick up phone again.) Dad, I want to go tell Woody? Can you get me the first flight out in the morning?

Dad: All right. I'll call Allegheny Airlines. If I can't get you on, I'll get a company plane.

Ann: Call the nurse's station. Tell them to give Woody Valium with his morning meds. ***And Dad***, take all the booze in the liquor cabinet and send it away. *Please?* That's what Mother would want.

Dad: Will-do. It'll be a dry house for the duration.

To Audience: My first *official* duty as Woody's Order. Everything to this moment, had been a rehearsal. The next morning as the engines revved and we surged down the runway past that point of no return, I had a full-blown panic attack.

Ann: Waitress! Stewardess! Wait! Stop! I can't breathe! Where are the air bags? Do you have a Valium! ***I'm not ready!!!!!!***

To Audience: I felt like this huge thing was taking off with me in it and there was absolutely nothing I could do about it. …Woody's door was open. I froze in the frame.

Do: He turns and smiles.

Ann: Woody . . . Do you know?

Yes.

Ann: Do you know who?

Yes.

Ann: How?

To Audience: He smiled, looked up - to God, I guess - and then over to the radio.

Ann: KDKA just said there was an accident on Route 19 at The Cloverleaf. And you knew it was Mother?

Yes.

Ann: She even had her seatbelt on. **(***He holds his wrist up shaking it and pretends to feed himself.)*

Ann: Her hands were shaking when she fed you last week at Thanksgiving?

Yes.

Ann: She cried more than ever. They argued more than ever too.

Yes.

Ann: I found alot of pills under her vanity.

Yes.

Ann: Oh, did the Valium help?

(He snickers, spits, then laughs.)

Ann: You spit it out? Next time save it for me! **…** You always knew she'd die young didn't you?

Yes.

Ann: I wonder if she just let go … ?

Mmm (a whimper)

Ann: Woody did you cry enough?

Yes.

To Audience: *(Cue:Christmas music)* That Christmas, Dad did bathroom, bathing, dressing, lifting, and transporting. And I did pretty much everything else. I washed and repaired Woody's wheelchair parts like Mother taught me.

Ann: Dad would you hand me a screwdriver, please?

Dad: Why certainly Martha, I mean Ann. Phillips or flathead?

To Audience: One night over warm milk:

Dad: Ann, I have sworn off liquor for one entire year since your Mother's tragedy. Don't want to turn to it in my grief. You know, for the first time in my life, at 67, I feel old.

Ann: Aw, Dad.

To Audience: When I went back to tuck Woody in, he had been listening and was crying and pointing to Dad's room then the ceiling. Dad's room, the ceiling.

Ann: Woody! Don't cry. He's strong as an ox! Stubborn too! He'll outlive us all! Everything'll be all right.

Ooo.

Ann: Hey, how'm I doin' as Woody's Order? OK?

Yes

Ann: That's good, cause you and I are a team for life, remember?

Yes. (Cue: George Benson's "On Broadway")

Part Two

Ann: Dad, I'm moving to New York.

To Audience: I announced, a week after graduation, 1979.

Dad: All right. When?

Ann: Next week. Can you take me?

Dad: Affirmative. When *I* graduated VMI in '31 there were no jobs to be had, only bread lines. Learn your craft from the bottom up. Pack your own parachute! Woody and I will support you for the duration.

To Audience: I was Holly Go Lightly at The Allerton House For Women. No men allowed past the lobby. And I became a straphanger.

Straphanger: (NY Jewish Old Man) Hey boobie. God forbid I should stare, but anyone ever tell you you look like a young Elizabeth Taylor from National Velvet?

Ann: My mother did once. Was it on again last night?

Straphanger: Yeah. The late show.

To Audience: My career took off. Dad and Woody became my Stage Door Johnnies.

Dad: My, my, my. Plays these days certainly do have an inordinate amount of cussin'. (teasing) But the good-looking young man in the lead was quite convincing as an *Irish pyromaniac*. Awful good at being bad, right, Woody?

Mmmmmmm!

Ann: He's a good actor. (Blush) His name is Bruce.

Mmmmmm.

Ann: Woody, will you please stop teasing me! (flustered)

HAHAHAHA, mmmm.

To Audience: At Christmas I had a big callback so Dad brought Woody and Christmas to me *at The Waldorf*!

Dad: Here she is! Let's have a toast to Sustah and her Broadway callback! Merry Christmas ya'll! Isn't the Waldorf nice!

To Audience: Dad poured champagne into flutes and Woody's sip-cup.

Dad: Tell us about the Broadway callback.

Ann: OK, it's a play called *The Little Foxes* by Lillian Hellman.

Dad: Marvelous writer.

Ann: The director saw me at Williamstown in the cabarets. 'Member, when you guys came up?

Dad: Wasn't easy getting the wheelchair up *that flight of stairs.* Right Woody? As I recall, Christopher Reeve took one side of the chair and he and I carried you up. Now he was *quite* an impressive young man.

Yes, yes!

Ann: Woody he's not my type. Too handsome.

Mmmmm! Haha!

Dad: (playful) Stand down now son. How did the callback go?

Ann: I got it!!

Dad: *What!* Bravo. More champagne!!

Ann: But guess who's playing the mother?

Dad: Tell us!

Ann: Elizabeth Taylor! I'll be the daughter of Elizabeth Taylor on Broadway!

To Audience: It was our Broadway debut. We joined Actors Equity together and when we met at the first read-through, she gave me a huge hug and whispered in my ear: "Oh my God! I feel like I'm looking at myself from National Velvet!"

Ann: Thank you. I've never heard that before.

To Audience: Elizabeth and I were fast friends and kinda lonely on the road. She was between husbands and I was single so we had slumber parties and talked for hours. She loved terrycloth caftans and got us a matching set.

ET: Annie! Pink or blue? Popcorn and Soave Bolla coming up! Ooh I can't wait to meet Woods and Woody!

Ann: *Oh God Elizabeth, I hope they behave.*

To Audience: When the boys came to the show in matching tux, Elizabeth set everything up. The ushers cleared the house and escorted them to the lip of the stage. Elizabeth, in her final-scene, floor-length, silk, *nightgown* floated down the stairs and rushed right to Woody.

Elizabeth: Oh Woody, I'm so glad to meet you!

To Audience: (And Do:) And as she bent down to give his cheek a peck, **his head plopped right into her world famous cleavage.**

Elizabeth: AAAAAAAAHHHHHHH! (cackling)

To Audience: And from then on, she'd say, "And how is that gorgeous, *randy* brother of yours!" *(Cue: Elizabeth Taylor song)*

Bruce

Bruce: (Rhode Island with a cig**) So, um, Annie,** I never met anyone with cerebral palsy before.

To Audience: I had fallen in love with the Irish pyromaniac from the play with all the cussin'.

Elizabeth: Ooh, Annie he looks like a young Marlon Brando and I should know!"

Ann: Just remember the stuff I told you Bruce. You'll be fine. Woody's psyched I have a boyfriend!

Bruce: Yeah? How'd the others do?

Ann: (sincere) What others?

Bruce: Really?

To Audience: Not only would Bruce have to pass muster with The Colonel, he'd have to pass The Woody Test too. Woody had set up surveillance in the lobby of The Good Shepherd Home wearing a T-shirt that said: **My Sister Is A Broadway Babe.** Drool was all down the front.

Ann: Bruce, meet Woody. Woody, meet Bruce.

Do and say: Woody extended his gnarled right hand to shake, watching for *any* hesitation from Bruce. Bruce returned the shake without a flinch. Score one for Bruce!

To Audience: Just then a motor chair zoomed past, did, a 180 and pulled up beside Bruce.

Rachel: HI IM RACHEL YOUR CUTE.

To Audience: Talking computers, called Dynavox, can be male or female. Hers even printed out what she said like a grocery receipt. Her head twisted to one side at the neck like an owl, so, I always twisted mine too when we talked.

Rachel: IM N EAST WING SEE YA!

Ann: (w/ head twisted) Bye Rache!

Bruce: Annie, does she have CP too?

Ann: (head twisted) Yep… And she's in love with you!

Bruce: Really?

To Audience: Woody has a Dynavox now too but he and I mostly use Twenty Questions. It's fastest. Watch!

Do: Woody points to the elevator.

Ann: Elevator?

Yes (Then he motions up with head)

Ann: Woody, you wanna go up to your room?

Yes

Ann: Is JJ there?

Yes.

Ann: Bruce, Woody wants you to meet his room mate JJ. Woody, that's so nice of you.

Yes (Deputy Dog grin.)

To Audience: JJ, a non-verbal, spastic quad like Woody, was in *his wheelchair* near the window leaning over his lap tray sipping from a jumbo sip-cup strapped to his head.

Bruce: Hi JJ, I'm Bruce, Annie's boyfriend…JJ? (Taps on JJ's shoulder)

JJ: (his head suddenly jerks up and back) **AAAAAAAHHHHH!**

Bruce: Oh my God. I KILLED HIM! Fuck what do I do? Annie, what do I do?

Ann: It's OK. Accidents happen.

To Audience: When JJ's head flung up and back, the chocolate milkshake strapped to his head cascaded down into the chair and onto the floor. He was asleep! As Bruce and I cleaned up the mess, and JJ was spelling OK,OK, OK, on his wordboard, I happened to look over at Woody.

Do: Woody grins and chuckles.

Ann: Woody! Was this a set-up? Did you just haze Bruce?

Hmmm. (he grins)

Bruce: Jesus! So, Woody, do I pass?

Mmm. *Yes.*

To Audience: That Thanksgiving, 1983:

Bruce: Mr. Talman, may I speak to you in private?

Dad: Why certainly Son, let's go to my study.

Bruce: Mr. Talman, I'd like your daughter's hand in marriage?

To Audience: Bruce told me later: "Annie your dad stood at attention, this wicked mean look in those blue eyes of his, an' he says real low, '**How soon?**' " (as Ann) He thought it was a shotgun! (Back as Bruce) There's no rush, Mr. Talman, maybe sometime this summer if that's all right?'

Dad: Well, in that case *Son,* let's go get Woody and Sustah, and have us a toast.

Bruce: (smoking furiously) Christ, Annie, I don't ever wanna be on the bad side of your dad, that's for sure. He's the strongest man I ever met in my whole life, inside and out, no shit.

Ann: Yeah, I've heard coal miners say the same thing. He'll outlive us all. Still does 50 chin-ups every day.

To Audience: Dad taught Bruce everything he knew about care giving his son. Bruce wanted to learn.

Dad: Now, Son, I prefer *to pre-tear my toilet paper* into strips 'bout like this, then fold them over and line them up here on the counter. It's easier done in advance. I plug in KDKA on the portable. Helps him relax and gives him privacy. I think we're ready to get The Man himself. Oh, one other thing, Son, when we place him on the commode, we want to be sure to tuck his penis down into the bowl or Lord have mercy we'll have us one heck of a flood on our hands, if you catch my drift. (beat) You're doing mighty fine son.

To Audience: Even a minor bout with pneumonia near the wedding didn't stop The Colonel who went AWOL from Presby, against doctors orders, to give me away-the IV capped but still in his wrist.

Dad: Sorry I missed the reception y'all but least St. Clair Country Club didn't run out of hooch!

To Audience: But Woody had trouble letting me go. As Bruce and I were leaving the reception, Woody ambushed us with a double Mad Arm fit!

Ahhhhhhhhhh!

Ann: Woody! It's only one night at The William Penn. We can't even take a honeymoon with Dad in the hospital! We'll see you tomorrow!

Arrrrrrrrrgh! Arrrrrrrrrrgh! (Mad Arms flying)

Ann: Bruce, help!

Bruce: Jesus Christ! This is fucked up! (Bends down on his knees) **Woody! Woody! Lookit! Listen! I'm not taking your sister away from you. And if anything ever happens to your Dad *OR ANNIE, I'll always take care of you!* I swear. OK? So calm down! Enough!!!! Annie I'm outside havin' a cig. Jesus Christ!**

Ann: Don't yell at me. It's not my fault!

To Audience: And like always, after a Woody Fit, I had a Woody and Me Rescue Dream. On my wedding night. I never told a soul, not even Bruce.

What's Wrong With Dad?

To Audience: A few years later, the Founder of The Good Shepherd Home called me in New York. Dad was supposed to have put Woody on Medicaide back in 1980 but refused. He had also refused to pay the bill.

Ann: How much do we owe? Over 300,000 dollars?

To Audience: I called the family lawyer and flew home to find the house overrun with unopened mail.

Ann: Dad, is everything OK?

Dad: Been having a little trouble concentrating.

Ann: Can I/

Dad: Let's change the subject.

Ann: But/

Dad: (out of no where) **No son of mine will ever be a ward of the state. NEVER!!!!!**

To Audience: I also found a bundle of unopened letters from the IRS in his briefcase. I rigged it so Dad thought ***he*** had arranged a meeting with the lawyers.

Dad: I'd like to thank y'all for comin' today…. (clears his throat)….(awkward silence)

Ann: Um… Dad, besides the nursing home thing, aren't you also a little behind on your taxes?

Dad: Ann! (harsh)

Ann: It's all right.

To Audience: Dad's gaze turned out through the picture window that overlooked Grant Street 20 floors below. The US Steel building was across the way, where until he retired in '75 he had a corner suite on the 58th floor with a view of three states.. His eyes were fixed there, as if looking back to when he ran the coal division of US Steel.

Ann: *Dad,* can you tell us how behind you think you might be with your taxes?

Dad: Oh, bout four years.

To Audience: There were liens on *everything,* penalties, interest. I spent 6 months away from Bruce and theater doing taxes and shuttling Dad to doctors to figure out what was wrong. In no time we went through half a million dollars in cash.

Dr. Reinmuth: Ann, your father has Senile dementia of the Alzheimer's type. He's been compensating brilliantly, for years, by writing down entire phone conversations on legal pads to refer to, keeping index cards, maps, amazing. And, he has anomia.

Ann: What's that Dr. Reunmuth?

Dr. Reinmuth. It's when you know what something is, but you can't name it. I showed him a fountain pen. I said, Mr. Talman what is this? He said, 'That is a stick with ink in it, that you use for writing.' But what do you call it, Mr. Talman? 'That Son, I do not know.' He's astounding. I'm spent.

Ann: Yeah, I know how you feel. What should I do?

Dr. Reinmuth: Keep him at home as long as possible, then find a geriatric facility. The short term goes first, then the long term. At the end, his brain will no longer be able to tell his body what to do. **People think the heart rules the body, Ann, but really it's the brain that:** (Step out of scene)

To Audience: And though the words were coming from the doctor's mouth the voice I heard was our Dad's. As kids, during prayers, I had asked: (angrily) "Daddy, why do people stare at Woody when we go to Forbes Field?"

Dad: Well, sweetheart, there are those in the world who are uncomfortable with infirmity.

Little Ann: What's infirmity?

Dad: That's not the right word. Brother is a boy who was born into a body that doesn't work the way he wants it to. Isn't that right, Son?

Yes Mmmmm!

Dad: He wants his body to do what his thoughts tell it to, but there's a short circuit in his brain and it just can't hear him. **People think the heart rules the body, Ann, but really it's the brain that tells the heart to beat, the lungs to breath, and every organ what to do**.

Little Ann: But why does that make them stare?

Dad: Because they're afraid, sweetheart. Afraid of what they don't understand.

Part Three

(*Theme to One Life To Live***)** (Ann responds to God Booth) (Please slate Miss Talman)

Ann: Hi. I'm Ann Talman testing for the role of Cassie. **(**Where did you grow up?)

Ann: I grew up in Pittsburgh! (How did you get into acting?)

Ann: Well, according to my parents, I've been acting up all my life. (What have you been doing lately?)

Ann: I moved to New York after college and just finished my third Broadway show. I'm here in LA for pilot season and to do more TV. (How do you spend your free time?)

Ann: *How do I spend my free time?* Oh gosh that's easy… in nursing homes …,… shit.

To Audience: I didn't get to be Cassie on *One Life To Live*. Eventually I did play a crazy *nurse* on *General Hospital* for a year. The "misguided Rebecca Chase, who got Monica Quartermain fired, had a cat fight with Brenda and was suspected of killing her evil lover Doctor Dorman, who sold drugs to the middle school kids. She went into Witness Protection. I'm still there!

Vinnie: (on phone) Annie honey it's Vinnie. *Remember me? Your **agent**? Where are you today? Pittsburgh?* (all business) Listen, Gina Lollobrigida, and her director are gonna be in town for one day next week and they wanna meet you to play her daughter in *The Rose Tatoo* on Broadway. So/

Ann: Vinnie. I can't. My dad's too sick.

Vinnie: What?! Do you know what I went through to get this appointment for you? You know honey, when you get to be your age, and you're not a star, people wonder what's wrong with you.

Ann: I'm not even 30. You know what I'm juggling right now.

Vinnie: (softer) I know honey. But no one cares.

Ann: Jesus!

To Audience: "Have a nice day, son." Dad waved to the brand new security guard at his first nursing home, as he wandered into downtown Pittsburgh in his best suit, briefcase and cane. The guard thought he was a doctor. Five miles later he walked into a VA hospital, saw the nurses station and pulled up a chair. "Hello. Doctor." The nurse said, but then she saw his ID bracelet and called his nursing home.

Dad: I really don't see what all the fuss was about. We had a delightful conversation.

To Audience: But his nursing home didn't agree and kicked us out. I had to find a new place ASAP.

Pulling Rank

Bruce: Hey Woody, surprise bro! We're flying to Pittsburgh. Your dad went AWOL Annie's spazzin' out. Sorry, Man. She needs us! Let's suit up!

Agent: Huh, (now look down typing) I'm sorry, the bulkhead is full. You'll have to put *him* further back in the plane.

Bruce: Excuse me, let me explain somethin' here. This is my brother-in-law Woody Talman. He has cerebral palsy. He understands you. Talk directly to him, he'll nod *yes* or *no*.

Grrrrrrrr (Woody grits his teeth.)

Agent: Is *he* going to act like that on the plane?

Bruce: What?

Agent: Is *he* going to act like that, or can *you* control him?

Bruce: Hey, Woody, why don't you tell him?

To Audience and Do: My brother kicked him! His Beetle Boot flew across the concourse.

Bruce: Good one Woody! You're an asshole! (mock his typing) I'm gonna get your fat ass fired like ground glass in a blender.

To Audience: Bruce had just closed in a Mamet play on Broadway with Al Pacino.

Bruce: Now tell the people in the front to move, *please* and we'll board this piece of shit plane and get the FUCK outa here. Capische? (*sound of plane taking off)*

CP Stand-Up

To Audience: I grew lonely, depressed and exhausted the next ten years I was shuttling between New York, LA, Dad's nursing home in Pittsburgh and Woody's nursing home in Allentown. I'd arrive and fall asleep on their hospital beds. (Groucho Marx) I shoulda just picked one and moved in. Woody got so mad at me once he rammed the side of the bed with his motor chair to wake me up. I just rolled over. I stopped auditioning. I stopped singing. Believe it or not, I even stopped speaking. My voice was but a whisper. My weight dropped well below a hundred. (Mother's voice) "Failure to thrive."

Bruce: Annie, are we ever gonna have kids? *That's why I married you.*

Ann: (lovingly) Bruce, my hands are so full with Dad and Woody right now.

To Audience: But when Bruce and I *were* together we drank too much and argued too much. Deep down, I feared having a child like Woody and that it would ruin me the way it had Mother. But I was too ashamed to admit it.

(upbeat) Since I wasn't performing, I needed an outlet. So I did stand-up for the residents in Woody's Mess Hall during meals while wearing a bib and using a spoon as a microphone.

Ann: Remember, tee-shirts are on sale after my set! (I model) **I AM NOT JOE COCKER, I JUST HAVE CEREBRAL PALSY! (Turn) P.S. I'M NOT DRUNK EITHER!** Sal! Sal wants three? Now this guy gets me!

To Audience: Sal was face down, on a gurney atop foam, too twisted with CP even for a wheelchair. He looks like a wet rag rung and left to dry. He's totally with-it and his way of applauding was to use the popsicle-stick-pointer strapped to his head to make his Dynavox loop: **"Go Yankees! Go Yankees! Go Yankees!"** Sal laughed so hard his arm flew up, catching the hem of my skirt.

Ann: *WHOA! Did everyone see that? Next he's gonna claim he has CP and couldn't help it! Hands to yourself Sal you heckler you!* Hey Nurse Tina! Come on in! Pull up a walker! **(**Wave her over)

Ann: Huh? Oh. OK Folks Gotta go!

To Audience: I got written up for creating a disturbance and calling Sal a heckler.

(Joe Cocker sound cue Help From My Friends at Woodstock with Cocker video on the screen.)

Karen

To Audience: I grew up around nursing homes. The residents are like family to me. A visit to a nursing home feels like having gone to church. It *is* my church. *Karen*, sat next to Woody in the dining hall. She *is* as mentally brain-damaged as she is palsied. Her eyes can barely focus. Karen and I are the same age. She was happy to sit there for hours and look out the picture window. But one summer night as I passed by her sitting there, I could feel *her watching me*.

Ann: Hi Karen. Hi honey. How are you today?

To Audience: Suddenly, she reached up, took my hands, pulled me to her, resting her head on my shoulder, then she turned her face toward mine, looking *right into my eyes* and began to cry.

Ann: (patting her back) Oh honey, don't cry. There, there. I love you. Some day you'll be free.

To Audience: I remember thinking, she smells like baby powder, shampoo and Animal Crackers. I love those smells. Wouldn't it be something, if someday when we're both in Heaven, or wherever the Hell it is our souls end up, if her soul were to say to mine, 'Hey, Annie, remember that day, on fourth floor Raker? That was so nice of you? Thanks.' And my soul would say, *Oh no Karen, thank you.*

Wheel Chair Dancing

(DJ plays Village People's YMCA)

To Audience: Woody, Dynavox and all, went to the annual nursing home prom with Rachel. ***Strictly platonic!***

Rachel: AN E WHERZ BRUZ?

Ann: He's not here Rach.

Rach: Y

Ann: He's working.

Rach: BULL

Ann: It's none of your business.

Rach: BULL.

Ann: OK. We're separated and I don't want to talk about it.

Rach: Y?

Ann: Because it upsets me!

Rach: THIS TIME U RELLY BLU IT. BLU IT, BLU IT. BLU IT.

Ann: You know Rach just cause you're in a wheelchair doesn't mean you're perfect!

To Audience: Later as I was giving her intermittent sips of *her* double Vodka Collins from her sequined sip-cup and *trying* to make small-talk, she fired up her Dynavox again and said: **ANN SHUT FUCK UP KEEP POURING!!!!!!!**

To Audience: Dad's nursing home had Friday happy hours. And here's the good news about that. With the dementia, Dad forgot he ever drank and never did again! I however was sipping my second white wine while nibbling Cheese Wiz on a Ritz, when my *Seinfeld* episode came on.

Ann: Dad! Dad! Look! There I am. (I point to myself on the screen.)

Dad: Hush, hush. My daughter'll be on soon. I don't want to miss it.

To Audience: *Why have kids!* I felt like a single mom with two boys anyway. And when I was insane enough to have both boys home "on leave" I had to make binders to keep all the meds straight. (I kneel as in Part One) "World without end. Amen. Goodnight Dad."

Dad: Ann? Who is that boy in there? And why is he all like this?

Ann: That's your son, Woody.

Dad: Is he alright?

Ann: He has cerebral palsy.

Dad: Oh. Would you go in there and check on him for me, please?

Ann: OK. *(Seinfeld cue)*

The Kindness of Strange People

To Audience: Alzheimer's was out of pocket in 93 so I sold the family home for cash. and stayed with *Special John* and his mom. **Special John**, was the thirty-something brother of a friend. What can I say? I attract *special* people. John more than anyone understood how sad I was and kept me company while I packed up the house.

Ann: Let's take a break John. All I want to do is cry.

To Auddience: With paper cups and cranberry sparkler, John was pouring.

John: (Staring at me) Congrajashons, I like your face ANN-**TAL**-MAN. Friend**. More whiskey?**

To Audience: John was my morning wakeup call. I would open my eyes and see him at the foot of the corduroy foldout waiting for me.

John: Seven o'clock, ANN-**TAL**-MAN. Gonna go see your dad today?

Ann: Yes. Goin' to work today, John?

John: Yep, today's Thursday, cheese on the tables, spagetti, down Atrias Café **job.** (proud)

Ambushed

To Audience: Dad fell one night and broke his hip. A week into the hospital stay the phone rang at 4 AM.

Ann: (groggy) Is my Dad dead? Aspirate? Code Blue? I'll be right there.

To Audience: Because his advanced directives hadn't been on file when he was admitted in the middle of the night, they had resusitated him.

Doctor: Miss Talman, if your father survives this crisis, he'll need a temporary tube-feed and then we'll take it out.

Ann: No! Wait! He wouldn't want that.

Doctor: Miss Talman, it's not time to starve your father to death. We need to do it *now.* Once he gets his strength back, we take it out.

To Audience: I didn't know what to do. Woody would have talked me out of it, but I was alone, exhausted and pressured to make a decision. Dad survived. What they hadn't told me was he'd have to pass a series of swallowing tests before we could remove the tube. He failed them all. He never walked or spoke again. But he would point his shaky finger at the damn tube bag as if telling me to remove it!

To Audience: Special John never understood the tube feed either so I just called it soup.

John: What's your dad have for breakfast ANN-**TAL**-MAN?

Ann: Um….Soup.

John: How 'bout lunch, ANN-**TAL**-MAN?

Ann: Soup, John.

John: *Dinner?*

Ann: Soup.

John: Hmm. (chuckle) Sure hope your dad likes soup, ANN-**TAL**-MAN!

To Audience: John waited up every night for me to get home from the hospital.

John: (shouting w Walkman on) You look sad, ANN-**TAL**-MAN.

Ann: (whisper cause it's midnight) I am sad, John. My dad is hurting real bad.

John: (still shouting) Come on, ANN-**TAL**-MAN, let's go upstairs and talk to our mom. (takes my hand)

To Audience: In that moment I missed Mother. Not just my mother, but *a* mother.

Setting Up Camp

To Audience: For ***eighteen months***, Dad lingered. I visited almost weekly from LA on The Red Eye. I rented handicapped vans and brought Woody too. *I needed him.* But the Greentree Marriott was adding up and I kept raiding the mini-bar late at night. So Woody and I had Grown-up Prop-ups and strategized.

Ann: Hey Woody, you awake? I have an idea. Let's *rent* a house. A base camp for the duration. Maybe it'll even have Lucy Beds! We'll live together just like I always promised. Somehow we are gonna end Dad's suffering and I won't do it without you!

Mmmm! *Yes.*

Ann: (now in Dad's nursing home) What do we need to do, to remove the tube, we asked the nursing home. Our father would NEVER have wanted this. If he were a horse, we'd shoot him.

Mrs. F: Miss Talman! As long as your father lives in this nursing home, you would need a court order to remove the tube.

Ann: (exhausted) OK. I'll call the lawyer. Let's go Woody.

Honor Court November 27, 1995

To Audience: November 27, 1995. Our case was a first in Pittsburgh, long before Terry Shivo. (public voice) **"**Miss Talman, this is the hardest decision I have ever made," Judge Wekelsman said. **"**A life could cease to be… May I see you in my chambers please?"...

Judge: (now private) Miss Talman, how do you know in your heart that this is right?

Ann: Your Honor, I have an older brother named Woody. He's extremely bright, non-verbal and severely cerebral palsied. I'm his Guardian now too. When I was in ninth grade, I asked our father: "How long do you think Woody might live?" And he said something I will carry with me always.

Dad: Ann, it's a miracle he's alive at all. If I were to outlive your brother I shall not mourn his death because for the first time in his life, he would be free.

Ann: Your Honor, I believe my father would have felt the same way about himself. Please let him die with dignity, so he will be free. (now on pay phone) Woody, I'm still at the court house. We did it. I'm coming to get you for at least a month! And D-Day is next Tuesday at 2:00PM.

Triage

To Audience: I drove all night and showed up at The Good Shepherd Home the next morning to get Woody and bring him to the rented house. Over the next two days we almost lost him twice! ***Woody, that is!***

December 95 was one of the coldest in Pittsburgh history. I'd turned the heat down, while I was away and when we returned, I wheeled Woody into the house and ran back to the van to fetch my purse. Woody was so cold he was convulsing when I returned. I transferred him onto his Lucy Bed-coat, shoes and all and covered him with my body.

Ann: Woody! Emergency Crawl In! (blowing warm breath into his face) Relax and tell your body the heat is coming. Later I'll light a fire and make you a really nice Hot Rum Toddy. OK?

Mmmmmm *Thank you.(*shivering)

To Audience: Next, he couldn't void! After twenty-four hours, he has to be cathed or his bladder will burst. I called a nurse. After three attempts to cathe him, his poor penis started to bleed and she was ready to call an ambulance. Woody kept staring at me to see if I was going to faint.

Ann: Woody. I'm fine. I'll never faint at the sight of blood again. If this theater thing doesn't work out, I'll get a job as a flibotamist in a blood bank! Just pee already **Please!**! I'm gonna warm up some more towels. Be right back.

To Audience: I was gonna faint!

Ann: (dare self in mirror) **You Are Talman. You Are Strong. You can do this thing.** (to self) Exhale on the exertion, bend with your knees. Woody. I need for you to go limp like Dad taught you, so you can pee. (Like Dad**)** Go limp son. Go limp. Relax and let your body go limp. (sign of the cross)

Ann: (whisper) He's peeing, Yeah! Woody, I swore I'd have you here to help me help Dad to the other side. But I'll kill you if ***you*** get there first!!!! I can't do this without you!

To Audience: Later after the *cathe-arsis,* as I put Woody in his PJ bottoms.

Ann: Hey Woody! Still matching Pjs. Woody, you have a little redness there, prob'ly from the cathe but it almost looks like herp/… never mind.

Hahahahaha (He laughs, lustily.)

Ann: What? You're a virgin.

No.

Ann: Can you have an erection?

Yes.

Ann: Oh. Was this when you were younger?

Yes.

Ann: Someone I know?

No.

Ann: Awww, someone you knew?

No.

Ann: A hooker?!

Yes.

Ann: Did your room mate back then *arrange* things?

Yes.

Ann: Congratulations. Did you use condoms?

No.

Ann: You gotta use condoms.

Do: (Woody looks at me angry and then away in silence)

Ann: OK. Good night Woody. Sweet dreams.

To Audience: I poured myself a fishbowl of white wine,… sat in front of the fire, and cried. *(cue the PSA "It's ten o'clock. Do you know where your children are?)*

Woody's Orders!

Dad: Try to relax dear. Remember, even D-Day was delayed on account of weather.

To Audience: Dad would say when I was nervous. But on our D-Day, The Head of Nursing, Ratched, as we called her, delayed the procedure a week.

Ratchet: (stand at attention with arms behind back like Ratched in the movie) You know Ann, Woody, we've never done this before. Some staff are upset and don't agree with what you are doing. I have to counsel them.

To Audience: So I parked Woody next to Dad's bed so we could explain to him that he would have to wait one more week. I lined the rails with pillows and leaned Woody onto Dad's chest. I put my head on Dad's chest too.

Ann: Hey Woody, still 60 like the clock**.** God, why of all people is this man suffering like this? Why is he even still here after all these months on tube-feed!

AAAH! (a tearful moan)

To Audience: With that, Dad opened his eyes that were bright blue again, and he stared directly at me.

Ann: Dad. I am Woody's Order. I can do this. I will always take care of your son. You can let go now. We're fine. We'll join you again on the other side at our rallying point like you taught us if we got lost in a crowd.

To Audience: He smiled and drifted back to sleep.

To Audience: ***But the night before*** I had made Woody's favorite dinner, while I dined on my usual white wine with Prozac.

Do: (I scoop the first bite)

No.

Ann: *What!* You don't want this?

Noo.

Ann: Woody, I made this nice for you!

Nooo.

Ann: You're a jerk! (slamming spoon down)

Mmmm! (The Mad Arm flies.)

Ann: You know if Dad were here, you would never act like this. Knock it off!

Mmmmmmmmm! (He bangs his kneecap on the table.)

Ann: I hate you. I hate everybody!

Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmm! (He kicks and foams, both Mad Arms swinging.)

To Audience: I ran through the house bellowing like a coal miner.

Ann: I do all this and it's not enough. I feed you. I take you to the bathroom. I bathe you. I dress you. I love you and you don't give a shit. This whole family took a dump in the middle of the room and told me I was born just to clean it up. It's a curse! Woody's Order! You don't know why I was born. I don't know why I was born. And I wish I'd never been born! **So feed yourself asshole**! (fall to knees)

To Audience: (head down) I could feel Woody staring at me with compassion on his chiseled Talman face.

Oooo, ooo, ooo.

Ann: (look down) No!

OOO, ooo.

Ann: What?

Hmmmm.

Do: He tilts his head back, opens his mouth.

To Audience: His rubber mouthguard was still in. I forgot to take it out. He can't eat with it in.

Ann: Woody, I'm sorry about the mouthgard. But I meant the things I said. I'm so tired sometimes. What about me?

Yes.

D-Day December 12, 1995 H-Hour 1400

To Audience: ***Finally-Our D-Day had arrived. December 12th, 1995. A date which will live in infirmity!*** (military salute)

Ann: (On phone) Yep, Bruce, today's the day we take the tube out and then it could be up to a week. Woody says the casket'll be closed but I'll arrange for you to see Dad one last time. Laughlin's Funeral Home thinks we're crazy anyway. Woody and I went casket shopping. It was like buyin a car. Woody wanted me to lower him down into one to see how it handled.

Then he got Mr. Laughlin to give him a tour of the embalming room! And he made Mr. Laughlin show him on his own neck exactly where they make the incision to drain the blood. I drew the line when he wanted up on the gurney? But best of all, Woody wanted to know if we'd get the Frequent Flier miles for the casket! Hold on. A call is coming in, I'm gonna put you on call waiting. (push call waiting) Hello? Oh hi Pat. Listen, we'll be there well before 2/ … What? . . . Thank you. (I forget Bruce and hang up)

To Audience: As I went in to tell Woody, he was looking at me and smiling. A death news de ja vu. And once again I froze in the frame.

Ann: Woody, do you know?

Yes, (smiling and looking up to Heaven)

Ann: He did it on his own. He's free!

Liberation

To Audience: When we got to the nursing home, Mr. Laughlin was waiting outside Dad's door with a gurney and a bodybag.

Laughlin: (very morose) Miss Talman, Woody, when you're ready, if you'll step outside I'll transport your father.

NONONONONO

Ann: Mr. Laughlin, we'll watch.

Laughlin: No, no, no, you don't want to see this.

Mmmmmmmm (Woody's Mad Arm rises.)

Ann: Woody. I got it. *We do.* We never got to see our Mother. Car crash. Know what I mean? We Talmen and women are pretty tough. May we just have a moment please?

To Audience: I placed my head on Dad's chest one last time.

Ann: Hey Woody, no more sixty like the clock. (See clock on wall.) Oh my Gosh! Woody! Look, It's 2:00PM, on the dot. H-Hour. D-Day! (blow kiss as back up pull door)

(*Celtic Irish Wake Music)*

To Audience: And although we aren't Irish, we had ourselves one hell of an old fashioned Irish wake and we didn't even run out of hooch. When I returned Woody to The Good Shepherd Home I made some decisions. I gave up liquor. (As Dad.) "Didn't want to turn to it in *my* grief." And I decided to *re*turn full-time to New York and the stage. Within-in a year I was back on Broadway. I'm singing again and writing too. I wrote this solo show and thank God there was something in it for me! We used Woody's Dynavox *more* but Twenty Questions was always fastest. Woody insisted we re-do *his* advanced directives. **If *he* threw a Code Blue, call Laughlin's Funeral Home and make sure you get the damn frequent flier miles**! He lived to be almost 70. When he was born in 1948, his life expectancy was 12. I was holding him at the end as he was smiling, looking into my eyes. Bruce was on one side and Charlie, my husband on the other. Never ever did I leave my brother. (beat)

I had visited Woody and The Gang at Good Shepherd almost weekly over those years. I'd get my Sunday call from Woody and his favorite caregiver, Donald. They'd give me the scoop. One week they left a message saying, (Pennsylvania Dutch accent.) "Hey Annie, Woody's got a problem with one of the nurses -." But before I could call back, I got another message. "Annie, never mind, Woody took care of it." Seismic shifts had begun for Woody *and* me.

To Audience: My Woody and Me Rescue Dreams shifted too.

Ann: Hey Woody, you awake? I had another one of our Rescue Dreams again last night. This time we were drowning in the ocean. (*Cue: ocean sounds)* I was holding you up but

we were sinking. And when I choose to die with you like always, this time I said, (**now in the dream**) Woody, may I please let go? I need to let go.

NO.

Ann: Woody. We are Talman. We are strong. We can do this thing. (long beat, Woody considers.)

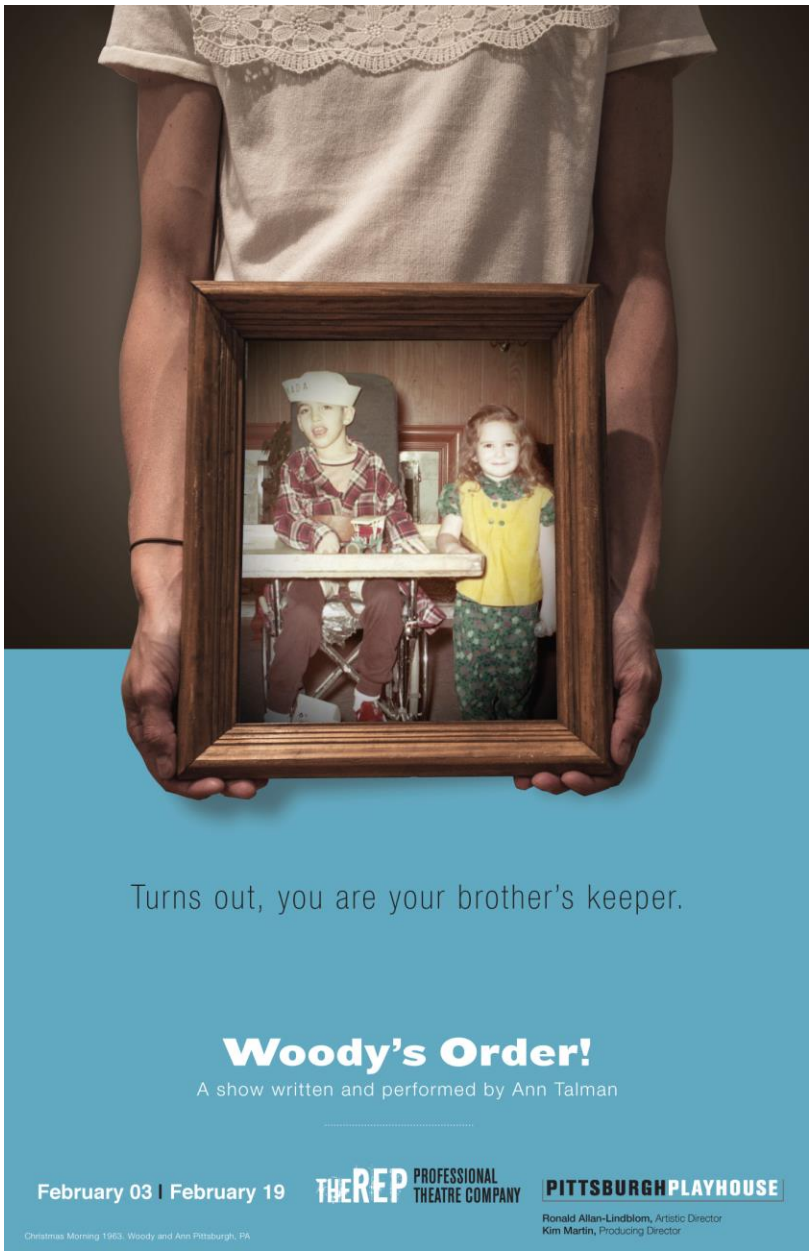
YES. Ooo, ooo. (Finally, painfully, I let go in the dream moment now)

Ann: Oh my Gosh. Woody look! We're each floating on our own. *(Lights fade, sounds of waves and the ocean and Woody coo)*

THE END.

(Curtin call music)

(*Exit music: Ain't No Cure For Love)*


Turns out, you are your brother's keeper.
Woody's Order!
A show written and performed by Ann Talman
February 03 | February 19
THE REP PROFESSIONAL THEATRE COMPANY
PITTSBURGH PLAYHOUSE
Ronald Allan-Lindblom, Artistic Director
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Christmas Morning 1963. Woody and Ann Pittsburgh, PA