

Lesa Brown and an Image of Desks

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I heard the familiar whine of Mac, Lesa's golden retriever, as I headed up to the door. Mac and I were good friends when I worked for Lesa; I would come over to her house twice every week. She welcomed me in, giving me a hug despite my backpack, and then led me down to her kitchen—newly renovated, with rustic wood flooring and deep teal cupboards. Then, in classic Lesa fashion, she offered me tea. (While she had been giving me voice lessons, she would always promote drinking mint tea with honey and lemon juice—it tasted horrible but it did wonders for the throat.) I took peach tea and she took peppermint. We sat down and she said, “So, what did you want to talk about?” I thought I only had a few questions concerning her playwriting, her childhood trauma, and her past in the arts.

Boy, was I wrong.

The first day I met Lesa Brown, artist/writer/producer/director powerhouse, I made a fool of myself. Let's just say that, unless the production is *Cinderella*, you don't usually want to lose a shoe during an audition. Fortunately, I was auditioning for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a comedy. Lesa was the producer for the show, and so she was present at auditions. I heard much laughter when my shoe went flying about 15 feet above the stage. The panel was charmed, and I was cast as the comedic role of Puck. And so began a grand friendship.

Although I remember few of my interactions with Lesa during *Midsummer*, we became close over the next year. After such a great experience with *Midsummer*, I wanted to do more with that company: Village Arts of Colorado Springs. Village Arts is a community theatre associated with Village Seven Presbyterian Church. The next Village Arts enterprise was creating the GhostLight Ensemble Theatre Project. It was designed as a devised theatre drama outreach team: a group of people facing problems and asking questions relevant to the community. Lesa was directing the group. In my audition for the project, I performed a

monologue that I had written myself. I believe it brought Lesa to tears. I was cast, and I spent the next five months in close contact with her. The ensemble aspect of the team required that the 13 members be extremely vulnerable with each other, as we were writing an entire show (comprised of smaller sketches) based on the theme of how to understand emotions. Lesa led my spiritual small group within GhostLight, which allowed me to grow deep roots of trust with her. As the director of the group, Lesa felt unsure of herself at times. She always had something on her mind, causing her few peaceful moments during the process. Part of the stress came from Lesa's deep passion for the project. When Lesa gets passionate, you can see it in her as she converses thoughtfully, occasionally takes deep breaths, and laughs her quirky, nervous, excited laugh. Lesa's eyes are usually open wide when she cares about something. She will look intently at you and momentarily drop her smile, making sure that you are tracking with her thought process.

Lesa was my first employer. At GhostLight's last workshop, she approached me to ask if I would be her personal assistant in theatre work. Her current assistant, who was one of my dear friends, was moving, and so she needed a replacement. I worked for her 2-4 hours per week during the summer. My favorite moments with her that summer were helping her solve problems related to her musical. Lesa allows herself to stress during multitasking, thinking about all the tasks pressing on her, which is why we worked well together: I often focus only on the project at hand. My first private voice lessons were with Lesa. I still cannot understand how she dealt with me, but Lesa somehow managed to find the good in my voice, build upon it, and help it grow. Without her vocal instruction at that crucial point in my life, I doubt I would have just been cast as my first musical lead (Beth in *Little Women* at Village Arts).

In September of 2018, Lesa and a few of my GhostLight castmates surprised me at Cold Stone Creamery for my birthday. I had stopped working for Lesa about a month before. Because

of the insanity of my senior year, I hadn't seen her since. We sat there for hours, eating ice cream and catching up on life. One of the things Lesa mentioned to us was that she had been working on a play, and she was looking for actors to read it. This was the first I'd heard of it. In response to her lament for actors, I gestured to the people seated around the table. Lesa responded, "Well, all of the people in my play are in their 40s and 50s." In jest, I retorted, "There's a reason we're called actors, Lesa." It seems she took my advice—one year later, I would read stage notes for the reading, cast mostly with actors in their 20s. The play: *The Teal Secretary*.

Lesla started writing this play three years ago now, when she and her family were driving to Kansas. When she was young, Lesa's grandmother had given her a teal secretary desk—a gift she was skeptical of, since she didn't think of herself as a writer, and teal was not popular at the time. "It was just a—a piece of furniture, to me...It was always stuck in the guest room, or stuck in the basement, back in a corner, cause I could never figure out what to do with it." In 2007, Lesa and her family left for Africa, and they sold much of their furniture before they went. They kept many family heirlooms, whether taking them along or leaving them with family members; however, she sold the teal desk at a garage sale. Fast forward to their return from Kenya, seven years later, and Lesa wants to find her American/family roots (aka heirlooms and antiques) in order to readjust. Suddenly, Lesa finds herself wanting the desk. "I was lamenting the fact that I will never find that desk, and I was imagining, 'I wonder if one could search for a desk'..." This turned into the spark of an idea. The story was where a woman went into an antique shop, and the owner helped her search for her missing desk. This then turned into an image: tons of teal secretary desks in a pile, all on top of each other. Lesa wanted to do more with writing this story, and she wanted to make a play on words with "secretary". She looked up famous secretaries, and Evelyn Lincoln, John F. Kennedy's White House secretary, popped up. "So that's how that

whole story came together; it started with, basically, the seed idea of the teal secretary, the image of the desks together, and then trying to tie it in to Evelyn Lincoln.” Over Christmas 2016, she wrote the first draft of the play. She then tried to get it to a place where other people, like her professional writing friends, could read it and give feedback.

Lesya has had a bit of experience with playwriting before now. Years ago, when she lived in Kenya, she wrote a 45-minute devised piece called “Survivah,” a meaningful play which was also a spoof of the Survivor reality television show. Before she wrote *The Teal Secretary*, however, she had never learned the technical elements of playwriting. I asked Lesya about her experience in the various aspects of theatre. What led her to playwriting? I learned that, as a kid, Lesya wrote a lot of stories; however, she never envisioned herself as a writer. “My heart was in music, really, and that was taking up a lot of my attention; I was doing drawing...visual art, and theatre, and stuff like that, so writing was just kinda something I did that I never wanted to show anybody, I was terribly embarrassed by anything I wrote.” I listened to her story about writing in college. She dated a guy who wrote plays, and Lesya was impressed; he would write skits and full-length plays, wonderful things that easily came out of his brain. Lesya thought she could never do that. After college, she married a different man (her current husband), but she retained the thought that she could not write plays. One Christmas break when she was driving from Kansas to Denver (she tends to get ideas when she’s driving), she had an idea for a musical. So, she went to a playwright friend that she had from church, giving her the premise, the plot, the characters, etc. (Lesya’s extremely good at planning things and plotting them out; she just might not necessarily have the skill to carry them out. That’s one of the reasons why Lesya’s a great director.) Her friend thought it was a great idea, so she wrote the script, while Lesya’s husband, Andy, wrote the music. Lesya inserted herself into the writing process here and there, and she

directed the show. They completed and performed a full-length musical, entitled *Friday Night in Palestine*, by Easter—only a few months after Lesa had the idea. But she hadn't written it.

Writing became a greater part of Lesa's life right after her family got back from Kenya, when she got a job as a curriculum editor. "Through that job, I learned a lot about grammar and editing, and then I got hired by David C Cook and by Compassion to write a bunch of curriculum for them. And that included stories...Because of all that, writing became something that was part of who I am too." It wasn't until Lesa went to University of Northern Colorado to get her masters in theatre that she learned about the devised process. That unlocked a door for her; she was able to write scripts with the help of others. She then wrote "Survivah" and other devised pieces, including GhostLight. "See, I've written other things that have already been staged, but I didn't put as much effort into making it perfect as I did *The Teal Secretary*."

When she had gotten some initial feedback from her friends, Lesa began the revising process on her play. She would sometimes leave it alone for three months; she would then come back and read it as if someone else had written the lines, since she didn't remember writing them. Over this past year, she became determined to get a reading of her play. In May of 2019, she got into reading this book: *Playwriting* by Sam Smiley. "So I took that book, and like, started to dissect my play as far as what this guy said you should be doing. And it was really hard, like, it took me the entire four weeks to do just scene 1 on this super deep stuff that I should have been doing from the very beginning." She did scene 1 highly in-depth and scene 2 slightly less in-depth. She was exhausted. "And then I just was like, 'Oh my gosh, I can't do this anymore, I just need to finish this play.' Cause that would have taken me the rest of my life, I think." She made a few more revisions and committed to reading the play on November 22nd.

Lesla corrected me when I called the upcoming event a “cold read.” I knew that the actors weren’t coming in cold, but the script was new, I thought I could call it “cold.” In any case, Lesla decided to call it a “living room read,” until she realized it wouldn’t be in the living room. The actors would be sitting at a table in the kitchen. So, we declared it a kitchen read.

After reading *The Teal Secretary* for the first time myself (in my own living room), this was what I thought: Lesla...wow. Lesla writes this play with such a simple and normal, small-town atmosphere, but brings it home hard at the intensely emotional moments. Even as a teenager who has not gone through childhood trauma, I feel as if I can relate to the emotions and the characters. I’m hyperventilating with Jackie on the couch; I’m longing for Tom’s clumsy, comforting presence; I’m rejecting help as I go to face Kevin; I’m the bitter homebody, wondering why my family members have to leave; I’m cringing as Aunt Vi’s Alzheimer’s breaks my cousin’s heart. I have been the one sobbing on the couch, screaming, begging for the past to change. I have been the one playing memories over and over like a broken, vivid record. I have been the one heartbroken at my own callousness, realizing that my agenda has gotten in the way. I’m still new to the current theatre world, so I certainly can’t tell what will be a hit and what won’t be—however, I am eager, desperate even, to see *The Teal Secretary* on the stage. I know much of Lesla’s heart for emotional healing, and I am so impressed to see it materialize in this play. This is not some rough draft going into the read-through—this is a careful work of three years, studying theatre conventions and making personal decisions, refining language, discussing dozens of times and explaining why it isn’t published yet. The patience has paid off.

I was curious to know the initial feedback that she got on the play. Lesla talked to me about Stephen, a friend of hers who has very different tastes in theatre than she does. She recruited him because she knew he wouldn’t just tell her what she wanted to hear, so she’d have

valuable and different feedback. Stephen told Lesa that he wanted Jackie to leave the antique shop at the end, so that it didn't "wrap up in this nice, tidy little bow," as Lesa described it. No matter how Lesa did it, Stephen wanted Jackie to walk out the door. This becomes the most crucial point of *The Teal Secretary*. Whatever Jackie does at the end determines the message of the play. She had been running from her past constantly; when she faces it again via the antique shop, she emotionally collapses. Then her cousin is in a dreadful accident, and Jackie swears to stay and help. But she wants to sell the antique shop, still running from the past. She is then betrayed by a man she trusted and has to choose whether or not to stay. Will she forgive Tom and stay home? Will she stride out the door, too angered to return? In the next version of the play, Jackie walked out for good, since her fear was too great. This version lasted for six months, but Lesa needed Jackie to have a greater change than this. Jackie would have had no character arc if she walked out because of fear. Lesa finally changed it to an uncertain ending, where many of Jackie's emotional wrinkles get "ironed out" at the end. But even with this ending, Jackie still walks out the door. The audience may hope for Jackie's return, but they are not sure.

I was curious to know what she wanted to do with Jackie's character and the play as a whole. "Well...the first thing I wanted to raise was the issue of childhood trauma, and that people who experience childhood trauma who don't deal with it, who aren't helped in a professional way or at a younger age...are going to have to face it later, and the ugliness of it is going to come up...probably in their 30s or 40s... And some people, if they never hit that crisis, they're still kind of a mess, clear into their older years." She talked to me about how children, even though they seem resilient, actually live with internal struggle that they don't understand. They may go on to make mistakes in choices and relationships before they realize what's going

on inside of them. Lesa doesn't think she's solved the issue of childhood trauma –not at all. She just wants to raise the issue, cause conversations, and show audiences that they are not alone.

She explained to me her “big, burning question”: when a loved one is dealing with the effects of childhood trauma, how can you best support them? This question came to Lesa in the middle of writing. When she realized this theme, she went through the entire script again to make sure that all of the characters and plotlines point to this question. “Each character is doing that differently in Jackie's life.” Lesa told me that she had to change a bunch of things to hone the script to what she wanted. However, she said, “...the lovely thing about playwriting is that you're the master of that world, and you can change things—it's a world that you own!” This point was personally intriguing to me, as a young author. I've noticed authors stating they don't create their characters—the characters exist in their own right, and the author can't even control them. I was curious about Lesa's perspective on her characters, and I asked her about it.

“Some of them were easier, like, just kinda flew off the pen faster...or the typewriter. Or computer. Yeah, some of them kind of wrote themselves a little bit easier than the rest.” She had a difficult time writing Tom, a lovable jokester. She knew what kind of person she wanted Tom to be, but it was more difficult to write his lines. Joanne and Aunt Vi, Jackie's grandmother and great-aunt, were easy to write, as Lesa merely channeled the older women in her family. Lesa wrote one character, Christina, with a strongly positive attitude; she gets in a dramatic car accident later in the play, and Lesa needed the audience to feel sorry for her. I asked her why certain characters were easier than others, and she explained that it's because she sometimes has a clear picture of a character, and it's therefore easier for the character's words to come to her.

During the process with Lesa in *GhostLight*, I remember her telling us stories of her childhood and the struggles she had. She recapped what I already knew and went more in depth

to her experiences of childhood trauma. Directly after Lesa was born, she switched households multiple times, until she was adopted at 10 months old. A few years later (probably between the ages of 4 and 5), her adopted parents got divorced. “So, just a lot of traumatic experiences... a lot of loss, at an age that I can’t remember. At all.” It may not have been that she was too young to remember the trauma; Lesa thinks that she blocked out the memory of the divorce. When she was somewhere in her 30s or 40s, she started having this odd feeling concerning her children, who were growing up from toddlers into kids. Lesa had a subconscious knowledge that her kids, when they were about 4 or 5 years old, would be highly sensitive if there was family conflict. This helped Lesa realize that the turmoil from her initial trauma had built up over the years, even though she had thought she was okay. Lesa told me that today, people know that kids going through trauma need help, but that doesn’t stop the fact that a whole generation like Lesa is currently processing their trauma without much aid. “There’s this whole world of adults that are still like, ‘I wasn’t fine, actually. And I didn’t know I wasn’t fine.’... And really, by God’s grace, I was a lot more ‘fine’ than I could have been.” Lesa recalled a time when she realized that she needed to get into counseling and get her family on board with helping her. Because she knows a little bit of what many people are going through, she wants to reach out to that group that doesn’t have the help that she did. However, Lesa did only not write the play for people like her. Lesa had attachment disorder; Jackie, however, had very different effects from her trauma.

I asked her if she knew anyone like Jackie, who had not dealt with childhood trauma well. She said yes, but she also explained how Jackie was sort of an extreme case, since that makes for better theatre. However, she wasn’t extreme on the end of committing crimes or doing drugs. Jackie’s extreme was the more universal case of self-isolation. “I think any of the possible roads someone could take could be pushed to that extreme very easily. Or, they could just kinda

be tempered. And I think my story's really different because of God." Lesa is a Christian who is firm in her faith, and she attributes much of her story to God's glory. Lesa has been one of my spiritual mentors, in addition to being a theatre mentor to me. "I met Him at age 19, like really met Him. So, that really changed who I ended up being and how I worked through my trauma."

One of the things that fascinates me is how Lesa's timeline fits so well together, considering her initial reasoning: "They had to be [that age]," Lesa said, "because of Evelyn Lincoln... The whole timeline was formed because of her story; because, everything came out about Evelyn about 2005... and I really, really wanted to set it before the smartphone, which came in 2007. I did not want everyone to just pull out their phone and look things up." So, the timeline for the play worked around several things. Because Evelyn Lincoln was the basis for much of the premise, Jackie had to be researching JFK and have a strong connection to him. That strong connection included Jackie being born on the day JFK was elected, being named for both of the Kennedy's (since she was simply named "Jackie," not "Jacqueline"), and having her parents die in a car crash the day that JFK was assassinated. Combined with Lesa's desire to set it before 2007, and you have a strict timeline for the show. It worked out well because Jackie would be in her 40s, the right age to face childhood trauma. While we were talking, I realized that the kitchen read would be taking place on November 22nd. I assumed that Lesa had picked that date because it was convenient for people. But, lo and behold, that date has loads of significance in the play: it's the date when JFK was assassinated and when Jackie's parents were killed. It's also the date that the play ends: Lesa highly specified each scene to be on a specific date in November, and the last scene takes place on November 22nd. It had been a little while since I'd worked with Lesa directly. I'd forgotten just how much she does intentionally.

We talked a little bit more about the upcoming kitchen read. We were two days out. “Well, first of all, I’m super nervous... Like, I know that I didn’t write the play to be liked. I didn’t write it to please people. But, I still want people to like it, you know?” Lesa laughed her slightly self-conscious, nervous, but incredibly happy laugh. “But, I also recognize that not everybody likes every piece of art... everybody’s opinion, I value.” She explained to me the cause of her nervousness from her past experiences of sharing the play with others. She’s shown it to a few people over the years, over her writing process. One person told her that they didn’t even finish reading it, since it wasn’t their type of play. Because of this, Lesa was scared, “...because I have worked really hard, I don’t want it to be awful...and I’m afraid that it might be.” In some aspects, Lesa was looking forward to kitchen read. Lesa had picked out actors that she knew to read the characters, and she trusted that each actor would do their character justice. She said that the actors would bring something to the play that she couldn’t, that they’d make it come alive. Lesa explained that she was also looking forward to the audience. She had invited 24 people total, including the cast of 8 and myself, the “narrator” (reading stage directions). (As I recall, about 10 people besides the cast showed up.) She explained to me the seating chart, so to speak, for the kitchen read. The kitchen in Lesa’s house opens up into two different rooms, which are not visible from each other. Both rooms, however, have a decent view of the center of the kitchen, where the table is placed. Lesa was able to seat the lead actors where everyone could see and hear them, which I considered quite a feat.

I was curious to know what Lesa was hoping for regarding the actors’ performance and experience at the kitchen read. “Well, I want them to have fun. I want them to all experience the new work development process, because I think everyone in the room will be interested in that

process.” She asked them to take notes in their scripts and give them to her at the end of the reading. She sent a document full of questions she wanted them to answer.

Lesa was concerned that she’d try to direct during the kitchen read. She’s directed plenty of times, so she probably had the internal monologue of directing notes, even if she didn’t say them aloud. I found that interesting. This led us to talk more about directing vs. playwriting in her life. She explained it like this: “I think I’m good at interpreting other people’s art, but I have so many ideas, that always finding somebody else to write it for me was becoming very tedious. And I’m like, ‘you know what, I just need to be the person to make it. But I don’t have that skill set, and I need to gain it.’” Now that she has the skill, playwriting is something she can do anytime, without anyone else’s permission or commission. Writing plays is freeing for Lesa, as she is still creating theatre, but without any of the stress or logistics of being a director.

As I’ve known Lesa for quite a while, I’ve started to see some patterns in her ideas and projects, which I wanted to ask her about. My most impactful experience with her was GhostLight, in which the group decided that we wanted to reach out to young adults concerning emotional health. Lesa’s play seems to be all about emotional health, though focusing on a much different age of people. I was curious to know how Lesa thought the projects connected, since I saw strong correlations between the two. “When I started writing it, I did not have a theme in mind—which is the opposite of what I really did with you guys.” Lesa loves the ability to pick a theme and explore it via art, which is how the GhostLight team wrote scripts. However, that’s not what Lesa did to write *The Teal Secretary*. She actually went the opposite way—she started writing, and the theme had to emerge in the process. “Sometimes, and often, plays or stories are written with a single visual image as your starting point.” That visual image, was the teal secretary desks. Lesa was very aware that she was using a very different writing process with

GhostLight than she was with her own play. But as the theme and questions emerged in *The Teal Secretary*, Lesa went through the play to make sure that she did not answer any questions. This holds to the same principle she told us during GhostLight: Theatre should raise questions, not answer them. Lesa said, “By going back and doing GhostLight in the middle of creating my play, it reminded me what’s important to me, and how I don’t want to just make a story to make a story; that if I’m gonna spend all my time doing that, then I want it to be something that is going to have impact and a purpose in my heart. Why am I doing this? If anyone asks, can I answer that question?” Lesa also has a deep desire to make an impact in the right way. She does not appreciate the work of Christian playwrights who are preachy in their art. She doesn’t think that preaching in that manner is what art is for. Overall, she thinks the GhostLight process informed her playwriting, but that the processes were very different.

We just chatted for a while more, about college and GhostLight. We both really want God to open the door for us to do more with GhostLight, because it was so impactful for us. We really love all that we did with it, and we know there’s so many possibilities for it in the future.

I wanted to read to Lesa my first thoughts about *The Teal Secretary*, because I can often process better via the written word than I can verbally or in person. Thankfully, I had brought my laptop with me, and so I could read her the notes that I took directly after reading the play.

“One of the things that I just adore about *The Teal Secretary* is, um, this is—oh, gosh, I—wait. I did bring my laptop with me! I have the notes. I have the notes that I wrote down! Oh, I’m smart. Oh, I love those moments when I’m smart.”

“You are. You are very smart, I never doubted.” Lesa warmed my heart with that.

One of my favorite moments that night with Lesa was getting to read her what I thought of the play. She shed a tear after hearing me read my thoughts. If I can bless my friend through

words, my heart is happy. The fact is, it was her writing that blessed me first; for a play to be truly good in my book, I have to leave with something of value. I left Lesa's play with a lot of valuables. *The Teal Secretary* is an honest, beautiful, rich, relatable story.

Lesla was glad to hear my words. "That makes me really feel a little bit better about Friday night! ... And I'm really glad... that you felt all the emotions so that, when you're doing your thing on Friday night, you can kinda help keep that emotional tone moving forward, cause I think that would be *huge*." I was glad that she trusted me and was glad to have me to read the directions—but I felt that her expectations were high. That made me start feeling a little nervous.

Friday night came.

There was plenty of playful banter before the read-through. Most people got there early to have dinner with Lesla. She served Indian food, including curry, plenty of naan (yum), samosas (which looked like Kronk's spinach puffs from *The Emperor's New Groove*), and, naturally, rice. It wasn't just food that made me happy that night, as I got to see several of my friends: Megan and Richie from GhostLight; Rinnah, Nancy, and Mary from Village Arts; and, of course, Lesla. Get a bunch of theatre people in a room and you're bound to have laughter.

Things really started getting fun when Brady Bluhm entered the room. Brady has had several roles in film and on TV, including Billy, the blind kid in *Dumb and Dumber*, and Christopher Robin (voice) in *Pooh's Grand Adventure: The Search for Christopher Robin* (and other Winnie the Pooh films). Megan had a sort of calm fangirl attitude when he came in; *Dumb and Dumber* was one of her family's favorite movies when she was a kid. When she mentioned this to Brady, he immediately responded, "Oh, should I get this out of the way?" He proceeded to stare off into the middle distance and pet an imaginary dead bird, saying "Pretty bird...pretty

bird.” His voice has changed drastically—and he can’t imitate his younger voice well—but he looks practically the same, just a few years older and with a beard.

Around that point, I decided to introduce myself to Brady. I explained that I hadn’t seen *Dumb and Dumber*, but that I grew up on Winnie the Pooh. Once again, he said, “Should I get that out of the way, too?” I was all ears as he said, “You’re braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think, Silly Ol’ Bear.” I had a very happy moment during the read-through when Brady, speaking as his character Tom, said “...you’re braver than you think.”

The people who were really the life of the party that night—Richie, Megan, and Brady—were seated next to each other. I overheard a discussion about Richie’s elderly character, Ben:

“Seems like Ben’s having a midlife crisis.”

“Toward the end of his life.”

“An end of life crisis.”

“Yeah, it’s called death.”

Richie promised he would not make Spiderman jokes during the read-through. I was impressed he didn’t, considering Richie loves comedy—and he was reading for “Uncle Ben”.

Lesla was keeping a very good face through the entire night. She said, in her 10-minute schpiel at the beginning, that she couldn’t believe it was happening. She also handed out a sample program for the audience members. Then, it was time for the read-through to begin.

My stomach was full of Indian food, and I felt nervous as heck. I was reading the stage directions, which seems simple—except for the fact that I wasn’t reading all of the stage directions. Lesla had highlighted some and not others—and the actors had no idea which ones I would read and which ones I wouldn’t. I desperately wanted things to go smoothly. Lesla was nervous, and I didn’t want to disappoint. For the first couple of paragraphs of stage notes, my

nervousness crept through my words. I kept changing my “r”s to “l”s, stumbling over my words and putting my hand to my chest to indicate my embarrassment at my fumbling. A page or two into the play, I started calming down. I would occasionally fumble; for the most part, though, I was able to read the lines clearly and calmly, and the actors picked up on most of my cues.

I stuck around for a half an hour after the reading (partially because it was snowy and my parents were picking me up in their 4-wheel drive vehicle) to discuss the play with Lesa. I talked with Lesa, Megan, and Steve during that time. Steve’s character—Steve—was the main topic of discussion. The character is rather antagonistic. Jackie listens to him, however, when he tells her to stay with the family. It’s then Ben’s idea that she should take some time away, as she is emotionally wrecked and needs to sort things out. Jackie takes his advice and, at the end of the play, she walks out the door. Megan and I were discussing Jackie’s second decision with Lesa. “She needs to make that decision herself,” we said, “she needs to have that personal strength.” I hope that my advice was half-decent; I was both tired and talkative that night.

Lesa’s been editing the play since then. I cannot wait to read the finished product. But, in her processing, I asked her a few questions about the read-through. She said, “I was so amazed that people engaged in lively conversations about the characters, motivations, etc. I kept thinking, ‘Everyone knows these people are just figments of my imagination, right?’” Lesa saw this as a sign that the story and characters were realistic, a huge win for her. When I asked her what she was annoyed about, she didn’t say the weather, the feedback, or anything you might expect. Instead, she was annoyed at herself for not writing out what she would say before and after the reading. (Why am I not surprised?) Something I found interesting was that Lesa hadn’t realized the symbolism of the teal secretary desk (being found in the cellar instead of “out there”) until the kitchen read. I think that was what she was referring to here: “I was offered advice that I

hadn't been looking for about a theme I hadn't even realized was prominent. This was important for me because it forced me to analyze my own beliefs about the theme and then decide what I wanted my play to say about it (or not say)... Ultimately I took the feedback and made some significant edits based on my own thought processes on the theme – to make what I wanted to say about it more clear.” I wonder what these significant edits are, since I loved the symbolism the way it was. But I’m looking forward to reading the finished version. Now that Lesa has a hold of the theme, I’m sure it’ll be deeper and clearer than it was during the kitchen read.

I loved what Lesa said when I asked what vivid memories she would take away: “ I think just having so many people I love and respect together in one space, and all helping me and supporting me ... this was pretty exhilarating and humbling!” This paints an excellent picture of Lesa’s true heart for the theatre. She does it, not just because she likes to create theatre; she does it for people. Lesa does theatre in order to help people and develop relationships with people and touch the hearts of people. Lesa loves deeply, and her excitement shows that. I believe that God will use Lesa’s play to touch lives; I’m looking forward to when this play gets to be on stage. I’m looking forward to growing my relationship with Lesa and seeing what she does in the future. When I asked her about her wildest dreams for the play, she said, “I would love for it to be produced by a professional quality regional theatre and ultimately be published. Beyond that, I don't really know how to dream about it, it all seems pretty insurmountable!” I heavily doubt this. Believe me, Lesa’s imagination, passion, and drive are way bigger than she lets on.