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# The Amish Project

by Jessica Dickey

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



**SAMUEL  
FRENCH**

FOUNDED 1830

NEW YORK HOLLYWOOD LONDON TORONTO

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***The Amish Project* was originally presented in the New York International Fringe Festival in association with Nora Productions, and further developed and produced by Cherry Lane Theater, Angelina Fiordellisi, Artistic Director.**

**World premiere produced by Rattlestick Playwrights Theater in association with Nora Productions.**

**These productions were directed by Sarah Cameron Sunde.**

*The Amish Project* was first produced at the New York International Fringe Festival on August 8, 2008 in the Players Loft. The performance was directed by Sarah Cameron Sunde, assisted by Lillian Vince, with sets by Lauren Helpern and sound by Austin Bunn. The production stage manager was Emily Ballou. The cast was as follows:

**VELDA, ANNA, CAROL STUCKEY, BILL NORTH, SHERRY LOCAL,**  
**AMERICA, EDDIE STUCKEY** ..... Jessica Dickey

*The Amish Project* recieved its Off Broadway premiere produced by the Rattlestick Playwrights at the Rattlestick Playwrights Theater on June 10, 2009. The performance was directed by Sarah Cameron Sunde, assisted by Lillian Vince, with sets and costume by Lauren Helpern, lights by Nicole Pearce, and sound by Jill BC Du Boff. The production manager was Natalie Robin and the stage manager was Kelly Schaffer. The cast was as follows:

**VELDA, ANNA, CAROL STUCKEY, BILL NORTH, SHERRY LOCAL,**  
**AMERICA, EDDIE STUCKEY** ..... Jessica Dickey

## CHARACTERS

**ANNA** – Amish girl, age 14. Victim of the shooting.

**CAROL STUCKEY** – Widow of the gunman, age 31. English/non-Amish.

**VELDA** – Amish girl, age 6. Sister of Anna. Victim of the shooting.

**BILL NORTH** – English/non-Amish man, 50s. Scholar and professor on Amish culture, as well as friend and spokesman to several Amish families affected by the shooting.

**AMERICA** – Hispanic girl, age 16. Pregnant. Works in the local grocery store.

**EDDIE STUCKEY** – The gunman of schoolhouse shooting, age 33. English/non-Amish. Killed himself at the end of the schoolhouse attack.

**SHERRY LOCAL** – English/non-Amish woman, age 53. Resident of Nickel Mines, PA.

A single actress performs all of the roles in the play. Distinctions between characters are made by changes in the tonal qualities and pitch of the actress' voice; through her stance, posture, and gesture. She glides fluidly from one personality to the next.

**This play is a fictional exploration of a real event that took place on October 2, 2006 in Nickel Mines, PA. Characters are entirely fictional and are not meant to represent real people.**

## SETTING

The set should be very sparse; it should represent the natural beauty and simplicity of the Amish country of rural Pennsylvania.

## COSTUMING

The basic costume is that of a traditional, Old Order Amish girl – a blue cotton dress that falls just below the knee, a white apron, stockings, and functional, black walking shoes. She should wear her hair in a neat bun beneath the traditional white bonnet. This clothing is constant throughout the play and is the primary uniform. Every character in *The Amish Project* wears the ethnic garb of the Amish girls murdered in the Nickel Mines schoolhouse shooting.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

Several transitions have been listed throughout the script. These are simply moments when a sound cue or pause in the action may enhance the storytelling.

The character of Eddie should feel present onstage before his actual entrance in the text, and I encourage you to find the moments he is there. Additionally, Aaron, the invisible Amish father, is a powerful presence in the play, particularly for Bill North; the more the audience can feel him too, the better.

In general, I have chosen not to include any blocking from the original production. My hope is that the text will enable each production to discover its own vocabulary for the telling of the story.

And finally, each character of *The Amish Project* has a very good sense of humor. I hope you will struggle valiantly to let that be with them on stage.

## A NOTE FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

I have learned through the making of *The Amish Project* that the boundary between fact and fiction is a fraught one; it feels appropriate to open a window into my negotiation with that boundary.

The facts: *The Amish Project* is a fictional exploration of a true event. I absorbed a great deal about the Nickel Mines shooting just from watching the news when it occurred, and so in preparation for writing the play, I focused my attention on researching the Amish themselves. Once the play was written and the characters firmly established, I included details about the shooting that I felt would strengthen the texture of the play.

The fiction: I was highly aware through the entire process that somewhere out there are the real people who went through this event – the widow of the Nickel Mines gunman and her children, the Amish families of the girls who were targeted in the shooting...In an effort to balance the conflicting desires to remain sensitive to the real people who were affected by the shooting, while giving myself creative license to write an unflinching play, I purposefully did not research the gunman or his widow, nor did I conduct any interviews of any kind. The characters in *The Amish Project* are fictional, and should not be misconstrued as the real people.

The play: July 28th, 2008, my director and I traveled to Nickel Mines to find the location of the shooting. We had read that without an informed guide, it was nearly impossible to find, as shortly after the event the Amish tore down the school and replanted the area so that it is now a simple field where animals graze. The only indications of where the shooting occurred are three maple trees.

As we drove through the small intersection of farmland that is Nickel Mines, I realized that every person we saw, gardening or hanging clothes on the line, had likely grieved the loss of a child or the children of friends...As the sun was setting and we stood quietly looking at the three maple trees and the vacant space where they used to shade the one room schoolhouse, I could feel the tragedy that had occurred here, but even more I could feel the presence of those we had passed en route, the people who carry the memory of that day with them....

It is my private prayer that this play, should they ever know about it, would not hurt them further, but somehow honor the goodness they forged in the face of such tragedy. In my mind, that is the legacy of the Nickel Mines shooting.

–Jessica Dickey

**A very special thank you is due to the following individuals:**

To Jerry Richardson and my family (especially my parents Barry and Sarie Dickey), whose support cannot be measured; my tireless champion Morgan Jenness, and her assistant Micah Bucey; David Van Asselt, Brian Long, Daniel Talbott, Denis Butkus, Julie Kline, and all the rockstars at Rattlestick; Angelina Fiordellissi and the Cherry Lane Theatre; Elena Holy and the New York International Fringe Festival; Ben Sands and David Krasner of The Mine; The New Harmony Project; New Georges; Wendy Vanden Heuval; Geoff and Teresa Needham; Howard Leggett; Drs. Greg and Diana Lyon-Loftus and the members of Waynesboro Trinity Church; Willy Holtzman; Cameron and Einar Sunde; The Spiegler Trust; Jeff McCloud; Dr. Gladys Foxe. Also to my talented production team, Sarah Cameron Sunde, Lauren Helpert, Eugenia Furneaux-Arends, Nicole Pearce, Jill BC DuBoff, Dustin O'Neill, Lillian Vince, Kelly Schaffer, Natalie Robin, photographer Geoff Green; also Emily Ballou, Austin Bunn, and Emily Bohannon. And finally, to the many who donated to *The Amish Project*— it could never have been done without you.

Thank you!

*—Jessica Dickey*

*(From the darkness:)*

**CAROL.** Man Enters Amish Schoolhouse And Opens Fire.

*(Lights up to reveal VELDA, a young Amish girl in the ethnic garb of her people – blue cotton dress, black stockings and shoes, a white apron and white bonnet.)*

**VELDA.** The best letter to write is lowercase f.

The long swirls.

Capital Gs are hard.

And capital Is.

I like lowercase f...and lowercase k.

Wanna hear a trick my teacher Miss Emma taught us?

Lowercase k actually looks like a kangaroo.

*(She draws a very large lowercase k into the air with her finger.)*

See, this is the mommy's body, and this is the baby in her pouch.

She's a marsupial.

And these are her long feet that help her jump.

And this is her big long tail...

Here, let's draw a hat on her, like Papa's.

*(She draws the hat on the kangaroo and smiles.)*

I'm always adding hats.

This is where I lost a tooth last week.

Guess what this is...

*(She draws.)*

Um, this is my Mama, and this is my Papa.

He really wears a hat.

My Mama wears a bonnet, like this.

*(She draws the bonnet.)*

Like this!

*(She points to her own bonnet on her head.*

*She continues drawing.)*

**VELDA.** *(cont.)* And this is our horse Cisco, he pulls the buggy,  
and this is our cat Beesley,  
and this is my brother Jacob,  
and my little brother Elam...

And this is my sister Anna.

She has long hair the color of corn, and pink finger-  
nails.

And stinky feet.

And pretty pink lips.

**ANNA.** The first thing I see is flowers.

Flowers in the bright day yard behind our house.

And then my Papa working in the field, over and  
beyond the hill.

I'm like a bird.

I can see where his shirt is a darker blue from his sweat.

And the dark circle of his hat.

Then suddenly I'm in the kitchen with my Mama.  
She's sewing.

And she's humming.

Mama only hums when she doesn't know you're there,  
but she has a nice voice.

The shadow in the room casts a long, brown blanket  
over her,

hiding the little mole on her neck, right where her  
dress starts.

I always touch it when I stand next to her at the table.

She is sewing the final squares on a quilt,  
maybe for the new baby in the Zook family.

Blue squares with black and white triangles, rows and  
rows of stitches.

She shifts in her chair and I see her little mole.

I reach out to touch it and she gasps.  
And then suddenly I'm in the fields again,  
but it's dark.  
The moon is out.  
I recognize the pump next to the schoolhouse by our  
farm,  
but the school isn't there.  
Just a dark square.

*(Transition: CAROL, early thirties, smoking a cigarette.  
She stares at the audience, watching them watch her,  
then...)*

**CAROL.** TV sucks.

I mean, really, it sucks.  
Sometimes in the afternoon I'll turn it on, just for a  
change, you know,  
and all the colors and fake people are like a rope  
around my neck.  
There's men talking about cars  
and women talking about women,  
and someone is wiping a countertop,  
and someone is eating bugs with a helmet on,  
and a middle-aged couple is taking a pill  
so "the moment" lasts  
but go to the emergency room if  
"the moment" lasts  
more than four hours.  
Literally my airway tightens.  
The news is the worst.  
Something bad happens and you can see them salivat-  
ing.  
Literally, the newscasters, frothing at the mouth.  
"This just in!"  
We don't watch TV anymore.

CAROL. (*cont.*) I was in the grocery store this morning and  
It occurred to me for the first time...  
I was in the hygiene aisle or whatever,  
trying to find a moisturizer with the um, SPF or what-  
ever...  
No one tells you that even when you're mourning, you  
still worry about wrinkles.  
So now you know.  
So I'm reading the labels about the UVA and the UVB  
and  
wham.  
Just like that.  
I think,  
Just because it's written on this label,  
*doesn't mean it's true.*  
Something can be written down,  
FDA approved,  
FBI protected,  
and that don't make it *true*.  
And I'm standing there suddenly aware of the thou-  
sands of promises all around me,  
on every little bottle and box, usually in some bright  
color,  
"Reduces wrinkles,"  
"Prevents tartar,"  
"Gives stronger bones" –  
and I think, it's all bullshit.  
You can put your hand on a Bible and swear to tell the  
truth, and still lie.  
The *Bible*.  
And then you think, well what is the Bible?  
How is that any different from the bright yellow words  
on the cover of my Advil that says  
"Eliminates pain"?  
The Bible: "Proof of God."

Really?

Is that where we got this whole God thing?

The Bible?

And then there's things that *are true*.

Now *that* is some sick shit.

The Bible has some true stuff in it...

people bein' nailed to crosses?!!

What the f – ?!!

Think of the sickest thing you've ever read.

Right now, do it.

It was *true*, wasn't it?

It was something that really happened.

What happens to a person when you live in a world  
where you can't believe anything,  
and the things you don't want to believe  
are actually true?

You can swear in front of everyone you have ever known  
that this person –  
this person before you –  
is The One.

You promise to stand by them and love them,  
and nurse them and give them pleasure,  
and let them nurse you and give you pleasure...

Right there – cheap tux, white dress, *swear*  
in front of your family and friends.

Don't make it true.

**VELDA.** Soon will be Anna's Rumspringa.

That's when she has to decide whether or not to join  
the Church.

Some don't, but most do, and if they don't,  
we don't speak to them.

During Anna's Rumspringa

She's allowed to wear make-up and say cuss words and  
kiss boys.

And she can't get in trouble for it.  
 I ask Anna everyday if she'll go far away for Rumspringa  
 and she says she won't,  
 but I'm not sure.  
 For MY Rumspringa I'm going to go to the beach  
 because I'm going to wear a bathing suit.  
 A red one with flowers on it.  
 It will show my breasts a little  
 but not too much.  
 And a boy will fall in love with me, and I'll let him kiss  
 me,  
 And eventually, like after a month, the boy will ask me  
 to marry him and I'll say,  
 "I can't marry you because you're not Amish."  
 And he'll say, "Oh please please please!"  
 and I'll say (*with great flirtation*) "No no no!"  
 And he'll say "Oh please please please!"  
 and I'll say "Okay, but you have to become Amish,"  
 and he'll say "Okay."  
 And then I'll bring him home to meet my family and  
 my friends  
 and he'll play with my brothers  
 and he'll meet Anna (but he won't talk to her that  
 much),  
 and then he'll become Amish.  
 I can't wait to have breasts!  
 Cows have breasts with milk in them,  
 but that's not the same thing.  
 (*Transition: BILL NORTH, English scholar and friend  
 of the Amish, leads a press conference.*)

**BILL.** Well, I guess we're about ready to get started here,  
 If everyone wants to grab their coffee and settle in.  
 I'd like to offer a special thanks to the folks here at the  
 firehouse for having us,  
 For letting their place here be Grand Central this  
 whole week.

We won't be here too long tonight,  
 it's been a long day for everyone,  
 So if everyone wants to grab their coffee and settle in  
 We'll get this, uh, press conference underway.

**CAROL.** (*As newscaster*) This just in!

Widow of crazed schoolhouse gunman  
 buys a lotion with an SPF.

Here at the BS Channel we have the exclusive interview.  
 Now Carol Stuckey, why did you choose a lotion with  
 an SPF?

(*As herself*) Well Craig,

I realized if I'd taken better care of my skin and pre-  
 vented wrinkles from my face,  
 maybe my husband wouldn't have tried to molest little  
 Amish girls.

(*Pause*)

(*As newscaster*) Uh huh, and how do you like the SPF  
 lotion so far?

(*As herself*) Oh, it's awesome.

My fine lines are significantly reduced,  
 and I love the smooth, greaseless finish.

**BILL.** You're probably wondering who the heck I am.

My name is Bill North.

I'm a professor of American religion at the local uni-  
 versity here,

and a friend of Aaron Yoder here,

and many of the Amish families affected by this, uh,  
 tragic event.

Aaron asked me to speak for them here today  
 about their ways

and naturally I accepted.

I've been studying and teaching Amish culture for over  
 25 years,

And I'm very grateful for the opportunity to help in  
 any way that I can right now.

**BILL.** *(cont.)* We hope that by gathering here together in this private way,  
and talking a little bit about the Amish and their uh, culture...

It'll answer some of your questions,  
Like— how could the Amish forgive such a thing...  
And more importantly it'll help us all to understand their need,  
especially now,  
for privacy.

Uh, Aaron,  
Is there anything you want to add?  
No?... Okay.

I've had the privilege of knowing Aaron here for many...

Well, over 30 years now...

So. Let's dive in, shall we?

You know,  
This tragedy happened to a private people.  
So you came here to help the Amish  
or to print their story –  
But see, that's a complicated thing right there.  
You may or may not know this,  
But while the Amish themselves are pacifists,  
As a *people* they are certainly no strangers to violence.  
The original Amish, the Anabaptists, fled to America from Europe in the 1700s.  
This was to escape harsh persecution for their beliefs.  
There are many stories of torture and executions –  
And they've pretty much been tryin' to keep to themselves ever since.

**VELDA.** Guess what this is.

*(She draws a large cross with a body on it, adding nails in the hands and feet.)*

Can you guess?

It's Jesus.

**BILL.** I've spent a lot of time with Aaron's family over the years –

I've known both of his daughters, Anna and Velda, since they were born,

And both – exceptional little girls.

Anna – very bright in her studies, often talked of becoming a teacher one day.

Velda – also bright, often delightfully precocious.

Uh, Aaron, do you mind if I share that little anecdote that Velda taught me last time?

Velda taught me

*(He draws each letter.)*

That J stands for Jesus, who comes first.

Y stands for You, who comes last,

and the O stands for Others,

who connect the two.

Giving you JOY.

*(He chuckles gently.)*

I like that.

Giving you JOY.

**VELDA.** It's Jesus.

See,

This is the cross, and these are his hands and his feet.

He has nails in them.

Um, one time I got a nail in my hand because I was playing with the wood by the barn.

I was trying to make a pen so my brother could be my piggy

and I got a nail in my hand.

We had to clean it.

It hurt so much.

It was right in the middle of my hand like Jesus.

I said to my Mama, it's like Jesus.

And she said,

*(her mother's voice)*

**VELDA.** (*cont.*) Ja, verletze er.

(*Returns to her own voice*)

Jesus hurt for us.

(**VELDA** *adds a thorny crown.*)

And this is his hat.

Only Jesus really had a hat.

A very special one.

**BILL.** I'm assuming

You are all by and large strangers to this area...

You'll see that it is a very peaceful, beautiful countryside.

I hope you'll spend time in our local restaurants,

See some of the local sights...

I'm sure you'll also spend time learning about

What happened here this week,

But I hope you'll look for more than that.

There is more to here

Than what happened on October 2nd.

(*Transition: SHERRY LOCAL, Non-Amish woman in her 50s*)

**SHERRY LOCAL.** We moved to Nickel Mines about 20 years ago,

Me and m' husband Ray.

We have a little farm 'bout 4 miles out of town,

And I work at the church part time in the office there.

On October 2nd, 2006, I was in m' basement,

Walkin' on our treadmill.

We keep it in the basement and

I usually watch the news while I

"walk it out"...

I read the headline across CNN –

Man Enters Amish Schoolhouse And Opens Fire.

I lost my footing on the treadmill and fell off,  
 Like something you'd see in a Jim Carey movie.  
 They kept showing these images over and over again –  
 It was a birds eye view:  
 Amish families gathering in a green field,  
 Clusters of men and women, boys and girls, separate,  
 but close.  
 The white ambulances with red lights,  
 Circled around the white schoolhouse.  
 Tiny rectangles of bodies covered in sheets.  
 The ticker tape running below –  
 Man Enters Amish Schoolhouse And Opens Fire  
 Man Enters Amish Schoolhouse And Opens Fire  
 Then the shocking details began to emerge.  
 This just in:  
 He was the local milkman.  
 He only shot the girls.  
 At least three dead.  
 Then the images again –  
 A birds eye  
 Amish families.  
 Separate, but close.  
 White ambulances.  
 White schoolhouse.  
 Bodies covered in sheets.  
 Man Enters Amish Schoolhouse And Opens Fire  
 Man Enters Amish Schoolhouse And Opens Fire  
 This just in:  
 He intended to molest them.  
 He shot himself.  
 Death toll now six.  
 Birds eye  
 Amish families.

**SHERRY LOCAL.** (*cont.*) Separate, but close.

White ambulances.

White schoolhouse.

Bodies covered in sheets.

Man Enters Amish Schoolhouse And Opens Fire.

This just in:

The Amish request that the medical condition of the remaining girls be withheld.

They extend **forgiveness** to the gunman.

They extend **condolences** to the gunman's family.

Birds eye.

Green field.

Separate, but

Close.

White. Red.

White.

I thought –

What kind of SICKO could do this?!!

**CAROL.** The boys seem kind of numb.

I sometimes think *they're* the ones who are dead.

They move around the house so quiet, sort of half-lit.

The way they sit at the table, slumped over, spooning their cereal.

Little ghosts.

And then suddenly I'm painfully aware of how *alive* they are.

I can see the veins beneath their skin,

picture their little lungs, their little hearts,

pumping blood, oxygen, every moment,

right inside their little chests, right across the table.

They've learned to trust only each other now.

They don't dare cling to me the way they used to.

Maybe *I'm* the ghost.

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