

Buffalo Theatre Ensemble



Presents

by Bruce Graham

Directed by Steve Scott

Discover the true meaning of love as a family struggles to find common ground and understanding before the tide goes out.

McAninch Arts Center
Playhouse Theatre
February 1- March 3, 2024

presented by arrangement with Dramatists Play Services, Inc.

Preview: Thursday, February 1, 2024

Chesapeake Bay. Gunner has a plan to safeguard the family's future. Stunned, his wife and son have other plans. Weaving both surprising humor and powerful emotion, this highly relatable story poses thoughtful questions about personal choice, and what it means to truly love someone. *Contains adult themes and language.*

Buffalo Theatre Ensemble sincerely thanks the COD Library for research support for classes studying the script and the production.

Time: Autumn

Place: The Concannon home on the Chesapeake.

There will be a 15 minute intermission for this production

Characters:

Gunner

Jack

Peg

Director's Note

An outgoing tide lowers all boats.

—Ancient sea goers' maxim

Gunner Concannon seems to have had it all: a solid fifty-year marriage to his teenage sweetheart Peg, a successful career forged in the competitive trucking business, a much-deserved retirement to his cherished seaside summer home. Only one thing mars this idyllic scene: a recently diagnosed case of Alzheimer's disease, which is quickly robbing him of his speech, his relationships, and his power to control his own destiny. His high tide is reversing, and its ebbing exposes both the cracks of his past and the terrors of the future.

First seen at Northlight Theatre in 2011, Bruce Graham's powerful drama is easily relatable to anyone who has confronted or observed the uneasy truths of mortality. But beyond that it is a finely-wrought portrait of a family whose current crisis reveals the exuberant highs and debilitating lows of fifty years of life. Laced with bracing humor and emotional confrontation, it captures the "outgoing tide" that we will all face—while showing us the grace, compassion, and abiding love that can ease the tragedy of that journey.

Steve Scott

Director

Q&A With Playwright Bruce Graham



<https://www.playpenn.org/Bruce-Graham>

Bruce Graham is a Philadelphia-based playwright and screenwriter. He lives in South Philly and Elkton, Maryland.

Northlight Theatre was the original producer of *The Outgoing Tide*. Northlight's Dramaturg, Kristin Leahey, interviewed Graham about its commission in 2011.

"Can you tell us how you came to write *The Outgoing Tide*?"

It's kind of funny because I'm actually sitting out on the steps right now looking out to the water. I don't have much of an imagination; I just look at my own life. It's a theme (aging) I dealt with in my first play – 28 years ago in fact – and I just wanted to go back. I'm fascinated with these characters, who are trying to get through the day. And you have to throw in the mayhem and dilemma or, otherwise, people are going to walk out. I just begin to project the future. It's kind of a self-reflective – unfortunately some of it has become rather autobiographical, more than I expected. But I had the idea in my head for a few years. Then BJ called and asked, "Do you have anything for John Mahoney?" And I wrote this while I was rehearsing another play. It's somewhat based on a play I wrote a while back."¹

In 2015, Graham spoke with the Merrimack Repertory Theatre about *The Outgoing Tide*.

"Is there a character you particularly identify with in *The Outgoing Tide*? There's always some of me in every play. I'm from a blue collar background. There's a lot of my father in Gunner, but there's also a lot of me in Gunner. When I was 22, my own mother called me the world's youngest curmudgeon. Everything I write is either firsthand knowledge, or observation.

You've set the play in Maryland, on the Chesapeake Bay... Everybody in Philly goes down the Jersey Shore for vacation. If you want to go to a Philly restaurant on a Saturday night in August, you don't need a reservation. You just go! Everybody's down the shore.

When my wife and I wanted to buy some property, I couldn't afford on-water property down in Jersey. And besides, I said 'no way are we going to Jersey. There's too many damn people.'

¹ Leahey, Kristin. "An interview with Bruce Graham." <https://northlight.org/an-interview-with-bruce-graham/> 12, May, 2011. 30 December, 2023.

So we got a house in Maryland. I got my own beach out here, 'cause it's so cheap.

And it's not about Alzheimer's. To me, the play is about regret. You look back on your life, and you see mistakes you've made, and you try to make up for them. ~ Bruce Graham

The cliché for a family like Gunner's would be to go down the Jersey shore.

Well, in the back of my mind, Gunner's like me. Gunner doesn't like people. Down here on the Chesapeake, it's very secluded, it's very quiet, and I think that's what Gunner would want. Someplace where he wouldn't have to stand in line to go to a restaurant. It kind of defies the cliché...

That's what I like about these characters: They are in your face. They do make jokes about death, where other people would say, 'Oh God, how can you do that??' But we got no problem with it.

In the first scene, Gunner's talking to his son Jack, but doesn't recognize him. It's somehow both heartbreaking and humorous, but also a good way to get in some exposition. Oh absolutely. It's the cheapest exposition you ever saw.

My father had dementia of some sort. Certainly not as bad as Gunner. But I'd be driving him someplace, and suddenly he'd start having a whole conversation with me, as his brother (my uncle). And he'd say "Oh, remember the time when..." and it'd always be some nice reminiscence, always pointing out something that the two of us did as kids. And I would just go along with it. What are you gonna do, you know? I can't say I enjoyed it, but I always found it interesting.

You never use the word 'Alzheimer's' in the play. Any reason? Yeah. Sometimes if you say it, it turns into "Uh-oh! It's an Alzheimer's play!" And it's not about Alzheimer's.

To me, the play is about regret. You look back on your life, and you see mistakes you've made, and you try to make up for them.

But what keeps it from getting maudlin—keeps us from wanting to go home and get a drink or something—is the fact that there's humor in it. Without the laughter, *The Outgoing Tide* would be an absolute disaster. It's important to mix humor with the tragedy.

Parent-child relationships, and spousal relationships, are at the center of the story. How do we see them play out across two different generations? Characters are always rooted in the time in

which they grew up. Twenty years from now, if anybody's doing this play, I hope they do it as a period piece, because someone like Gunner was raised a very different way.

There weren't a lot of nurturing fathers in Gunner's time. My father, when he was 17, was in a foxhole getting shot at in the Philippines. That's really rough. There's this generation of guys who came out of World War II and Korea, who were taught at an early age, 'you don't get in touch with your feelings.' And it's nobody's fault—that's just how they were raised.

But I do think Gunner and Peg have a happy marriage: despite all the sniping and everything, there's a lot of love there.

That's one view.

Then, you look at Jack and his wife. They've just kind of grown apart. And what are they doing? Well, it's 2015, they're children of a different generation: they're getting a divorce. But it's an amicable divorce. They're not fighting, they're not screaming, they still talk on the phone, they're still worried about their kid.”²

Northlight asked Graham: “Your skills as a comedian, actor, and director come to play in your work. How do you feel it manifests in your work?

I think every playwright should be forced to be an actor, onstage, every ten years. I think the fact that I map everything out first, and I don't jump the connections (at least, I don't think I do), and that I willing to make changes happen because of this experience. I saw this play in grad school, and I thought to myself, ‘This author has never been onstage in his life.’ He had characters do things he wanted them to do, not because of motivation or some action or reaction to the story. I think being a comedian is the best training I ever had as a writer. I was constantly writing new material. And there's nothing more subjective than comedy or on-the-level than comedy, being on your own on stage and hoping you get hired the next week. All these things influenced me. Sometimes I start directing in the script, blocking an intention. And then I tell actors and directors to just forget those; that's just me playing with it. You want to move here? Fine. There's no specific action; I had been directing in my head.”³

² Merrimack Repertory Theatre, “Q&A with Bruce Graham.” MRT.org. April 2015. 30 December 2023.

³ Leahey, Kristin. “An interview with Bruce Graham.” 2011. 30 December, 2023.

MRT asked Graham: “What do you like about writing for the stage, specifically? Funny you should ask that, ‘cause I’m writing a lot of television right now.

The reason I write for the theatre is that you have control. And I’m not a control freak, I’m always open to listening to actors. Smart actors are a huge help. And directors. It’s a collaborative art, but at the end of the day, I have the final say on the words. I used to write a lot of movies, and I had no control; there’d be a lot of stuff up there that I did not write, but my name was on it, and I just wanted to scream.

If it’s gonna be crap, I want it to be my crap. If it stinks, it’s my fault, and nobody else’s. And if it’s brilliant, it’s my fault, and nobody else’s.”⁴

About the Author

“**Bruce Graham** began his career as a playwright at the Philadelphia Festival Theatre for New Plays (PFT) in 1984 with *Burkie*. Graham became playwright-in-residence at PFT and later served two years as Artistic Director. He has received grants from the Pew Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and was a past winner of the Princess Grace Foundation Statuette. He won the Rosenthal Prize for *Coyote On A Fence*, two Barrymore Awards for *Something Intangible* and *Any Given Monday*, and the Joseph Jefferson Award for *The Outgoing Tide*.

An ex-high school teacher, Graham still teaches play-writing and film courses at Drexel University. In the past he has taught graduate level play-writing at University of Pennsylvania, Villanova University and Rutgers. He has conducted play-writing workshops in high schools and colleges across the country.

His textbook, *The Collaborative Playwright, A Practical Guide to Getting Your Play Written* (co-written with Michele Volansky) is published by Heinemann.

Graham recently returned to acting and has appeared as the Black Cat Husband in *Haunted Poe* (Brat Productions), Lenny in *Any Given Monday* (Act II), Richard in *Time Stands Still* (Delaware Theatre Company/Act II), Artie in *Hurlyburly* (New City Stage), Milt in *Laughter on the 23rd Floor*, Eddie in *Lost in Yonkers*, Ernie in *Rumors* (all for Bristol Riverside Theater), and Ben Hecht in *Moonlight and Magnolias* (Eagle Theater).”⁵

⁴ Merrimack Repertory Theatre, “Q&A with Bruce Graham.” MRT.org. April 2015. 30 December 2023.

⁵ <https://bruce-graham.org/about/bio/>

Who are the Teamsters



“The Teamsters are America’s largest, most diverse union. In 1903, the Teamsters started as a merger of the two leading team driver associations. These drivers were the backbone of America’s robust economic growth, but they needed to organize to wrest their fair share from greedy corporations. Today, the union’s task is exactly the same.

The Teamsters are known as the champion of freight drivers and warehouse workers, but have organized workers in virtually every occupation imaginable, both professional and non-professional, private sector and public sector.

Our 1.3 million members are public defenders in Minnesota; vegetable workers in California; sanitation workers in New York; brewers in St. Louis; newspaper workers in Seattle; construction workers in Las Vegas; zoo keepers in Pennsylvania; health care workers in Rhode Island; bakery workers in Maine; airline pilots, secretaries and police officers. Name the occupation and chances are we represent those workers somewhere.

Teamsters stand ready to organize workers who want to bargain collectively. Once a contract is negotiated and signed, the union works to enforce it—holding management’s feet to the fire and invoking contract grievance procedures if management chooses not to. Wages and benefits under Teamster contracts are markedly better than those of non-union employees in similar jobs. Teamster contracts are the guarantors of decent wages, fair promotion, health coverage, job security, paid time-off, and retirement income.

The Teamsters Union also performs vital tasks in such areas as pension management, safety & health, community outreach, governmental affairs and communications. For more than a century, the Teamsters have been a public voice for the rights and aspirations of working men and women and a key player in securing them.”⁶

Setting

Chesapeake Bay: Facts and Formation

“The Chesapeake Bay watershed stretches from Cooperstown, New York, to Norfolk, Virginia, and includes parts of six states—Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia—and the entire District of Columbia. The Chesapeake Bay watershed is about

⁶<https://teamster.org/about/who-are-teamsters/>. January 12, 2024.

seven times larger than the state of New Hampshire, encompassing approximately 64,000 square miles (166,000 sq km). It takes six days for water to flow from the farthest corner of the watershed—the head or source waters of the Susquehanna River in New York—to Havre de Grace, Maryland, where it empties into the Chesapeake. Each year, the Susquehanna River transports more than a million tons of sediment to the Bay. See a map of the Chesapeake Bay watershed.”⁷

Map of Chesapeake Bay ⁸



Memory Care

What Is Memory Care?

“Memory care is a unique subset of assisted living and nursing home care. These facilities have smaller staff-to-patient ratios and are designed to meet the specific social, medical and safety needs of people who have dementia or some form of cognitive impairment.

Effective memory care takes a holistic look at the needs of people with dementia.

⁷ “Chesapeake Bay: Facts and Formation.” National Parks Service, www.nps.gov/chba/learn/nature/facts-and-formation.htm#:~:text=The%20Chesapeake%20Bay%20watershed%20stretches,the%20entire%20District%20of%20Columbia.

⁸ “Explore the Chesapeake.” BayDreaming.Com, www.baydreaming.com/about-the-chesapeake-bay/explore/.

‘Oftentimes, people think of treating the disease, and that’s the wrong framing—we focus on providing care for the patient who has the disease,’ says Alvaro Pascual-Leone, M.D., medical director of the Deanna and Sidney Wolk Center for Memory Health, senior scientist at the Hinda and Arthur Marcus Institute for Aging Research at Hebrew SeniorLife, and professor of neurology at Harvard Medical School.

‘It’s hard to take care of someone with cognitive problems,’ he says. ‘If you get to the point where the caregiver is having trouble coping, there’s a significantly increased risk of morbidity and mortality for the patient. So we know that good memory care has to include care for the family, too.’

Memory Care Services

The overall goal of memory care is to maintain the safety, dignity and independence of the people it serves. Good memory care, with empathetic and specially trained staff, is targeted to the specific needs of its residents.

The amount and type of care needed depends on each person and the stage of their dementia. In early stages of the disease, some people can still live somewhat independently in a memory care-assisted living hybrid situation. In the middle stages of the disease, round-the-clock supervision becomes necessary. And in the final stages, that care may become more intensive. To meet these needs, in-home care, adult day centers and residential memory care programs are available.

There’s no cookie-cutter approach to memory care, but programs that promote engagement and brain health are most effective. Such elements include physical activity, cognitive training, sleep hygiene and an appropriate diet. And because about 60% of people with dementia are prone to wandering, memory care facilities have thoughtful security. Alarmed doors and enclosed outdoor spaces help keep residents safe.

Benefits of Memory Care

Specialized care can help people with dementia live fuller lives.

‘Some people think that memory care is like a parking lot, a dead-end street that you want to stay away from as long as possible,’ says Pascual-Leone. ‘But that’s simply not true. It’s a way to maintain function for the longest possible time.’

‘On the other end, some people think it’s like rehab—you go there to get better,’ he adds. ‘But it’s about learning and adapting to living with a disease you’re never going to get rid of. You can still live with joy, enjoyment and dignity. Memory care helps you relate to those you love in the best possible way. It’s not a cure or a miracle, but it maintains you and helps you function as long as possible.’”⁹

⁹ Hall, Alena. Forbes Health. <https://www.forbes.com/health/senior-living/what-is-memory-care/>

About Alzheimer's and Dementia

“What is Alzheimer's Disease?”

Alzheimer's is a type of dementia that affects memory, thinking and behavior. Symptoms eventually grow severe enough to interfere with daily tasks.

Alzheimer's is the most common cause of dementia, a general term for memory loss and other cognitive abilities serious enough to interfere with daily life. Alzheimer's disease accounts for 60-80% of dementia cases.

Alzheimer's is not a normal part of aging. The greatest known risk factor is increasing age, and the majority of people with Alzheimer's are 65 and older. Alzheimer's disease is considered to be younger-onset Alzheimer's if it affects a person under 65. Younger-onset can also be referred to as early-onset Alzheimer's. People with younger-onset Alzheimer's can be in the early, middle or late stage of the disease.

Alzheimer's worsens over time. Alzheimer's is a progressive disease, where dementia symptoms gradually worsen over a number of years. In its early stages, memory loss is mild, but with late-stage Alzheimer's, individuals lose the ability to carry on a conversation and respond to their environment. On average, a person with Alzheimer's lives 4 to 8 years after diagnosis but can live as long as 20 years, depending on other factors.

Alzheimer's has no cure, but two treatments — aducanumab (Aduhelm™) and lecanemab (Leqembi™) — demonstrate that removing beta-amyloid, one of the hallmarks of Alzheimer's disease, from the brain reduces cognitive and functional decline in people living with early Alzheimer's. Other treatments can temporarily slow the worsening of dementia symptoms and improve quality of life for those with Alzheimer's and their caregivers. Today, there is a worldwide effort underway to find better ways to treat the disease, delay its onset and prevent it from developing.

Symptoms of Alzheimer's

The most common early symptom of Alzheimer's is difficulty remembering newly learned information.

Just like the rest of our bodies, our brains change as we age. Most of us eventually notice some slowed thinking and occasional problems with remembering certain things. However, serious

memory loss, confusion and other major changes in the way our minds work may be a sign that brain cells are failing.

Alzheimer's changes typically begin in the part of the brain that affects learning. As Alzheimer's advances through the brain it leads to increasingly severe symptoms, including disorientation, mood and behavior changes; deepening confusion about events, time and place; unfounded suspicions about family, friends and professional caregivers; more serious memory loss and behavior changes; and difficulty speaking, swallowing and walking.”¹⁰

How Alzheimer’s Disease Affects Family Dynamics

“What Are Common Changes That May Affect Dynamics?”

Knowing which changes to expect and the effects of them can help you and your family to navigate the changes in dynamics better when the time comes. The following changes have been known to disrupt structure and impact families.

Reversal of Roles. When someone we love is diagnosed with Alzheimer’s and you or another family member will be serving as the primary caregiver, it’s important to realize that there will be a period of grief and loss. This usually occurs as a result of feeling like you are losing the person you used to know or the relationship you used to share. This can affect caregivers and family members, as well as your loved one, who sees the effect their diagnosis has on everyday life.

Increase in Guilt. Many caregivers and families tend to feel guilty about any number of things. They may feel guilty that they aren’t sure what they are doing or that they aren’t doing enough. They may simply feel guilty that they are tired and need a break and can’t provide the care their loved one needs.

A Shift in Priorities. Because of the changes that Alzheimer’s disease causes, priorities will shift from everyday activities and move to your loved one’s care. This means that a caregiver potentially may need to give up their full-time job, free time and hobbies.

Changes in Emotions. Caregivers are not the only ones who face difficult feelings. Consider how other family members are feeling. Are they being kept in the loop enough? Do they know what’s going on? Do children and teens understand why their loved one is acting this way? How are they feeling through all of these changes?

¹⁰“What Is Alzheimer’s?” Alzheimer’s Disease and Dementia, www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/what-is-alzheimers.

A Growth in Uncertainty. As if life wasn't uncertain enough, Alzheimer's steps in to make it worse. You may find that plans you had may have to change and that you won't know what each day will bring, which will make planning in everyday life much more difficult.

More Disagreements. If you and your family members don't quite see eye-to-eye on how to best care for your loved one, it's important to work those disagreements out and try to see each other's point of view. It may be helpful to seek assistance from a professional if you cannot get past certain conflicts.

These feelings are normal and it's important to realize that you are not alone in this. If you need help – ask. Whether that means talking to friends and family, taking a break to do something for yourself, or asking family members to do a few things for you . . . anything can help.”¹¹

Things to discuss

Things to think about, prior to the performance:

- What is your expectation of this story after reading the promotional material?
- Do you have any experience with someone who shows signs of dementia?
- What is your relationship with your spouse/parent/child? How has it evolved over time?

Things to watch for in performance:

- Notice the set, its texture and shape. What do the colors and shape make you feel?
- Notice the layering of sound, both before the performance begins and during the production.
- Notice the effect of the light on the different scenic elements. What are the different spaces established by the set and how does the light effect your experience?
- Notice the relationship between the characters. What is the effect of family on one or all of them? Are these people so very different from one another? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Notice the shared habits within the play: sigh, a whistle. What does it make you think about?
- Why are there “flash-backs” in this play? Why did the playwright choose to illustrate these moments?
- What is your reaction to the end of the production? What does this say about human relationships?
- Why are some things realistic in the production and some others non-realistic?

¹¹“How Alzheimer's Disease Affects Family Dynamics: Lions Gate.” *Lions Gate*, 12 Feb. 2018, lionsgateccrc.org/how-alzheimers-disease-affects-family-dynamics/.

Things to think about after the performance:

- What do you think the similarities between Jack and Gunner and Jack and Tim might be?
- Why is family so important to the characters in this play?
- Why is permission important in this play?
- What does “taking care of your family” really mean?
- Why is the skipping of the stones important to this relationship, to the future, to the characters?
- What do you think this story is REALLY about?

Other tools after the performance:

- What happens in the very last moments of the play? Certainly, the last few minutes, but, more importantly, the last thirty seconds? In that time, WHAT happens or is said, and what does that say about what the play is ‘about?’
- And what is the significance of the title? Why did the playwright decide that this was the most quintessential title for their work?

The running time for this production is approximately 2 hours, including intermission.

Please note the **pre-show** discussion will take place prior to the preview performance, **Thursday, February 1, in MAC 140 from 6:45 pm – 7:15 pm.** The pre-show discussion will include the director and designers, and will be a discussion of the approach to this production.

The **post-show discussion** will take place on **Friday, February 9, following the performance.** The post-show will include the director, cast and crew who will answer questions from the audience.



ASL Performance: Thursday, February 22

ASL interpreters will be located near the stage for patrons who are deaf or hard of hearing, seated in an area of the theater that gives the best sight lines to follow the interpretation and the action on stage. To access reserved seating in view of the interpreters for a signed performance, call the box office at [630.942.4000](tel:630.942.4000) or [630.858.9692](tel:630.858.9692) (TDD).