

Julia Walks on Stilts

TEN MINUTE PLAY

By Alexis Kozak



Encouraging Creativity Through The Performing Arts

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SYNOPSIS: This stilt walker in *The Lion King* was in the trunk during JFK's assassination. In a solo performance piece presented ten minutes before the Broadway musical starts, she peels away layer after layer of defenses to reveal her connection to celebrity death, her love of Andy Dick, her attraction to stilt walking, and, as honestly as possible, her troubled relationship with her father.

CAST OF CHARACTERS (ONE WOMAN)

JULIA Female, any age. A stilt walker in *The Lion King*.

Time:

The present.

Setting:

Outside the backstage door of the Nederlander Theatre, New York City.

Production History:

Julia Walks on Stilts was originally produced by KoPan Productions at American Theatre of Actors in New York City with the following cast:

Julia.....Barbara Panas
Director.....Alexis Kozak
Stage Manager.....Cara DeCicco

This play is dedicated to

Ms. Julia Perlstein, the original Julia,

*Barbara Panas, who memorized this puppy a week before the wedding,
and Deb Margolin and The Formula for Colored Water crew.*

Lights come up on Julia putting on stage makeup. Her face is half made up in yellow and brown, like a giraffe. She is sitting on a chair at a small makeup table, in the parking lot outside the backstage door of the Nederlander Theatre in New York City. Behind Julia, there are huge elephant doors, the kind used for loading and unloading scenery at the backstage of a major theatre. There are sounds of an orchestra warming up and some music recognized as strains from *The Lion King*.

JULIA: I know that opening a solo piece by getting dressed is so cliché, but you're the ones who paid to be here. Nobody forced you. You expected a show about stilt walking, I know. *Julia Walks on Stilts*. That's what did it, right? Talk to me, so I don't feel so stagey. Just say the first thing that comes into your mind.

Julia does not continue until someone in the audience has said something.

OK. That's better. You're with me. It didn't strike you as odd that the flier said the stage door of the Nederlander Theatre? Nor did you question starting a show at ten to eight. Good. It means you'll trust anything. Let me tell you a true story. This is the truth.

Stilt walking and celebrity have always run in the same circle. Being a stilt walker, as well as being a native New Yorker, I have always been in contact with high profile lives. Having connections to celebrity lives, needless to say, I have also had connections to celebrity deaths. The JFK assassination. I was in the trunk. You could actually see me. Just as the second bullet was coming. I was supposed to pop out of the trunk as we turned the corner and do a stilt walk behind the convertible. But I couldn't get the trunk open. And that film they showed? The Zapruder film? They wouldn't even let me get S.A.G. for it, which they should have, because they used it in a lot of films. True, I was hired as non-union on the gig, but I got my five words in. I said, "Oh, my God!

Holy shit! You know, in the Zapruder film? The very end? You have to look carefully though. You'll see my hand, and then the trunk opens, and my head pops out, and you see my mouth say - and you have to listen really closely, it's right between where they say the first gun shot and the second gun shot go - you know, where they do that sound test to see if there were two gun shots or one.

Julia imitates primitive jumbled radio sounds, street noise, and is very faint on her own words. She is trying to paint an honest picture of the events as they occurred.

It goes, "POW!" "Oh, my God! Holy shit!" "POW!" You can totally hear it. And by rights, because I said five words on film, they should have bumped me up to a S.A.G. day player. I filed a grievance with S.A.G. right away.

Those bastards made so much money from that film. You know Mr. Zapruder? He's a producer. Yeah. Zapruder Films International. He does snuff films. You know somebody somewhere's jerking off to that sick shit right now. Zapruder. What a man. He organized the whole event down there. You know, the bastard wouldn't sign my voucher at the end of the day. There was some brain on it, which I had to wipe off, and it smudged the date. So he said, he couldn't tell for sure whether it was today that I had worked, so he refused to sign it. And it wasn't until later that night, when I got home, when I realized I had this big lump on my leg. I figured it was from the stilts. But, I look down, and there's this piece of metal, like, stuck into my calf. I get a pair of tweezers and I dig it out. What do you think it was? I shit you not. It was the bullet. It was the fucking bullet. It must have gone through those two guys, then gone through the President, and then gone into my leg. That was weird. So, I have my voucher and the bullet displayed together in a shadow box frame.

Because I acted so quickly and filed my grievance with S.A.G. right away, they were only allowed to show the unedited director's cut seventeen times. Right after the assassination. So, they digitally remastered it and wiped me out of it. So now you see JFK fall back onto the trunk and Jackie Kennedy dive over him and then the trunk mysteriously pops open and it looks empty. But it's, like, blacker than it should be. You'll see. It doesn't look right. When they re-released it for the twenty-fifth anniversary, I managed to get a copy of the original, so I have it for my show reel. Too many celebrities I have been in contact with have died. That's where my fear of commitment to celebrities comes from, from the knowledge that they're gonna die, especially if they're around me. It's so hard for me to let myself like anyone. Losing them is just too painful. It's terrible, really, but I can't bandwagon because of it. I can't like who other people like. I wish I could.

My father wanted me to be a tennis pro. One time, when he broke my legs because I wasn't breaking my wrist when I was serving, which was one of only two times when he broke both my legs at the same time, he tied our racquets around my legs to make two splints. Then he told me, if I knew what was good for me, I would get up and walk. And not tell mother what had happened.

I sat there crying for a while, 'cause gosh darn it, it hurt. And then, as if by magic - not magic - but as if it were meant to be - I got up onto those two wooden pegs and got myself off that court and got myself home. Father had gone ahead and already had taken care of the story. Apparently, the circus had been through town, and by the time he got home, he had convinced himself that he had done a good thing. He got it in his head that I should become a professional stilt walker. "There's good money in that, Mother. So don't ask her to take those damn things off. Got it?" He said as he looked at me, "You got it?" I don't know if he really believed himself or not. By the time my legs had healed, the bones had shifted, because I dared not reset the stilts - splints - whatever. So,

the bones were not aligned, and they healed in such a way that a stilt would go almost directly under the bone from the top of my leg and become an organic extension of my leg.

I just fear for whoever they bring into the show. We got a notice today that Andy Dick's joining the cast in two weeks. I just wish they'd tell me these things before they hire me. I'm up front with them. They told me there would be no celebrities brought into this show. I love Andy Dick. He's a comic genius. But I can't just stop my life because of it. What am I supposed to do? Lock myself in a loft somewhere and never come out just to protect celebrity? Celebrity will still find me. Give up stilting? Without stilting, what have I got? The first actors- - the Greeks - wore really big shoes, like "K.I.S.S." shoes, so they'd be larger than life and more god-like. I've always worn stilts to feel like a worthwhile human being.

I don't talk to my father much anymore, considering he's dead. Just once or twice a year, usually while I'm getting ready for a show, he shows up and says we need to talk. Usually, he tells me who's going to die next. He came to talk to me last week. He died of a heart attack. I didn't know he had a heart. My mother told everyone he had been cremated. She let me cut off his legs and fashion myself the most amazing pair of stilts you've ever seen. They were like the Stradivarius of stilts. I mean, I could ballet dance on those stilts. Really, I could. That made me think that maybe my mother didn't believe my father about the circus coming through town. My father hated Andy Dick.

"Circle of Life" from *The Lion King* begins to play inside the stage door.

That's my song. Gotta go. Gotta go.

Julia throws on the finishing touches to her makeup.

Teaches you the value of a minute.

Julia quickly straps two short stilts to her legs. She grabs two longer stilts in her hands. She lifts herself up. She is a giraffe.

Oh! And if you do, literally, want to see Julia walk on stilts, go around the front. Tickets are \$125.00. Tell them you're a friend of mine. Tickets will be \$125.00.

Julia heads into the elephant doors. She turns around.

Oh! I have a show next Tuesday night at Joe's Pub. I'll be telling my RFK story. All true. It's at ten to ten.

She turns back towards the stage door. She turns back to the audience.

Thanks for coming.

She exits. The lights fade, as music from *The Lion King* swells up.
BLACKOUT.

THE END