

STONEWALL

by Chris Van Strander

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CHARACTERS

12 SPEAKERS Of any age/gender/ethnicity.

Doubled/tripled if needed—but 12 separate individuals are most effective (and affective), if you can swing it.

Twelve chairs in (say) three rows, facing the audience. Looks like both a classroom, and Act III of Our Town. The 12 SPEAKERS are seated (nonconsecutively) in the chairs.

Silence. Enough to reset, create a buffer between this and whatever came before it.

SPEAKER 1 rises.

SPEAKER 1

Cypress, Texas.

A month into school, one of the four who constantly harass him trips him down a flight of stairs. A second kicks him down a second flight. The school turns up no witnesses.

That night, his stepfather asks what's wrong. He says he's fine. Next morning, he tells him he's gay.

4:30 PM, his stepfather finds him, thinks he's fallen asleep reading. He's shot himself. In the closet.

They'd complained for 18 months. Initially, the school denied any reports, but now acknowledge the parents' e-mail, asking them to keep an eye on him. They'd relocated from another district because he was being bullied there.

Being gay. Being small. Being Buddhist. Not wearing designer clothes. Reading instead of listening to an iPod.

The mayor's passing a zero tolerance law in his name.

He enjoys reading, playing outside, and hanging out with his dad.

Asher Brown. 13.

SPEAKER 1 exits. SPEAKER 2 rises.

SPEAKER 2

Tehachapi, California.

Even after the incident, he seems normal. Showers, asks to borrow a pen, says he's going out to play with the dogs.

His mother finds him hanging from their backyard tree.

Police interview the teens who'd taunted him in the park, noting several break into tears.

They conclude no crime's been committed.

By fourth grade, he's getting teased.

His mannerisms. His style of dress.

By seventh, he's afraid to walk home. Twice, he's taken out, homeschooled. Two weeks into this year, he'd been taken out again.

The school had developed a system for avoiding his mother's calls.

The pastor says the memorial's focus "is going to be on his life—not on the bullying, and not on the homosexuality."

He likes Pokémon, fashion, and disco.

Seth Walsh. 13.

SPEAKER 2 exits. SPEAKER 3 rises.

SPEAKER 3

Anoka, Minnesota.

Weeks after finishing freshman year, his mother and brothers find him in his bedroom.

“I touched him—because I just couldn’t believe it.”

After, she starts hearing. How he’d broken up with his boyfriend. How he’d been constantly harassed. “I actually thought out of anybody I knew, that he had the perfect life. But I guess he didn’t think so.”

School policy mandates staff remain neutral on all matters regarding sexual orientation.

A Parents Action League has formed to support the policy: “We don’t know what was going on in the minds of these children. There’s no reason to jump to the conclusion that it’s because of the policies that they took their lives.”

In the past fifteen months, there have been nine student suicides in the district.

He’d come out two years before. He’s an accomplished cellist and composer.

Justin Aaberg. 15.

SPEAKER 3 exits. SPEAKER 4 rises.

SPEAKER 4

Shiocton, Wisconsin.

Nine days into senior year, he’s happy. Comes home for lunch—leftover pasta, sinks his dishes, tells his dad “This shit is amazing.”

Later that day, his mother discovers him in the barn.

The previous summer, she’d been sitting with his friends around their fire pit, when the car pulled up and someone yelled the slur.

The school denies bullying: “Right now everybody’s looking for someone to be the poster child for this issue. As soon as it was announced that this young man was gay, everyone immediately started connecting dots that weren’t there.”

He refused to go to the bathroom between classes, out of fear.

He’d been starting a Gay-Straight Alliance, put up posters announcing it. Kids went around behind him, tearing them down.

The Alliance is moving forward, but they’ve changed the name to “Paradigm 21.”

He’s a World War II aficionado. He loves tending his rose plants. He attends an LGBT youth group at Harmony Café.

Cody J. Barker. 17.

SPEAKER 4 exits. SPEAKER 5 rises.

SPEAKER 5

Mentor, Ohio.

That day, in Math, where most harassment happens, one of the usual three says, in front of the teacher, “Why don’t you go home and shoot yourself? No one will miss you.”

It’s his sister who finds him.

Days before, he’s told his mother: The nonstop taunts. The elbowing into lockers. Knocking things out of his hands on the stairs, “Pick up your books, faggot.” These too, in front of teachers.

Because he wears pink. Because he’s in theater.

Police investigate, find nothing criminal.

His parents' suit seeks no money, only that the school institute an anti-bullying program. The school maintains bullying isn't a problem.

His sister's now training to be a school psychologist.

He's straight. Has a dry wit. Likes his nickname, "Twiggy." He wears a stuffed lemur named Georges on his arm, which all the girls pet.

Eric Mohat. 17.

SPEAKER 5 exits. SPEAKER 6 rises.

SPEAKER 6

Mentor, Ohio, three weeks after.

Her cell phone, found next to the gun, has a photograph: "RIP Eric aka Twiggy." He'd been her friend.

Shortly before, she'd joined the Gay-Straight Alliance. Told her family and friends she thinks she might be. That triggers it: the girls, the name-calling, the "just stupid trivial stuff."

Because she'd come out. Because she didn't fit in.

Her friends see her crying, hear her talk about it, but say they didn't know how deeply it was getting to her.

Again, the school maintains bullying isn't a problem: "There is a very low incidence of violence at the school. Considering its population, it's a relatively serene place." That year, besides her and Eric, two other students in their class do the same.

She's bright, outgoing, a well-liked member of the volleyball team.

Meredith Rezak. 16.

SPEAKER 6 exits. SPEAKER 7 rises.

SPEAKER 7

Mount Pleasant Mills, Pennsylvania.

November 5th, 3:45 AM, his family discovers he's missing.

He walks six miles to a busy intersection. Steps in front of a tractor trailer.

Days before, there'd been an anti-bullying assembly, which no one took seriously. In the note, he hopes this might teach the school, the community, maybe even the world, that it's worth taking seriously. He describes daily bullying going back over five years.

The way he dresses. His assumed sexual preference—which, friends say, they were wrong about.

He's an exceptionally talented violinist, and has just started playing electric fiddle. He transcribes pop songs and performs them for the school at talent shows. He adores Evanescence and Reba.

Brandon Bitner. 14.

To read the rest of this play, please contact me at:

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